

Forskningsstrategi för institutionen för kulturgeografi och ekonomisk geografi *(Fastställd av institutionsstyrelsen 2014 03 04)*

Introduction

The past two decades, and perhaps especially the period since the early 2000s, has involved a set of shifts in the research carried out at the Department. In short there has been a move away from intra-disciplinary, in-house, small-scale projects involving relatively small groups of researchers towards a broadened scope and scale of research projects. These changes can in turn be traced to a number of modifications in external as well as internal structures for research as well as teaching.

Where do we stand?

The emphasis increasingly given to external funding and international peer-review publications has resulted in a significant internationalisation of research at the department, with all research groups being strongly involved in international networks. The spill overs from such networks and the strong interdisciplinary potential of human geography and human ecology has moreover resulted in the emergence of several interdisciplinary research environments in which researchers from the department take a lead role. The two subjects, given their capacity to approach social and economic processes at a variety of geographical scales, have in these research environments provided vital analytical approaches to address the growing complexity of social, economic, political and environmental phenomena at the global level. The Department at present has four major research environments (economic geography, cities environment and landscape, development geography and human ecology) all of which are embedded in national and international, interdisciplinary research conglomerates.

During the same period a number of advanced level programs have also been established, both at the Department itself and in collaboration with other Departments, within as well as outside the Faculty of Social Sciences. A strong research base is clearly a prerequisite for the success of these programmes.

Research strategy goals

Goals can be divided into input as well as output-related goals, which in many respects go hand in hand. The overarching priority of the Department with respect to input is to ensure sufficient and predictable external funding. Roughly half of the research budget needs to consist of external funding. The increased share of faculty funding for research for professors (up to 50%) and associate professors has resulted in more financial stability for research carried out by senior staff. One important implication of this is that the share of external funds devoted to funding Ph. D candidates and post doc positions needs to increase relative to senior staff.

Output goals can be subdivided into scientific and policy related goals. Intellectually the Department strives to be part of shaping the international research frontier within the four sub-disciplines housed by the Department as well as within the broader, interdisciplinary research contexts that its researchers engage in. Research should also provide empirical and

analytical input into policy making and politics at the regional, national, European and global scales.

Finally, in terms of staff resources the Department needs to ensure a sufficient number of researchers to secure the endurance of the various research platforms as well as the participation in research intensive teaching programmes human geography, development studies and human ecology.

How to achieve these goals?

External funding

Securing external funding is perhaps the most critical aspect of reaching the strategic goals, since funding provides possibilities for hiring staff, collecting data and engaging in international research networks, while attracting external funds also positions the department, as well as the Faculty more broadly in relation to the University as a whole. The funding environment has changed from an early focus on individually focused projects, towards large scale centres of excellence and collaborative projects, while new (primarily international) funding possibilities have significantly widened over the past few decades. The Department at present maintains a mix of international and national funding, spread across the different research groups. While the Department has been relatively successful in raising external funds, mechanisms for obtaining such funds in the future could include an internal vetting mechanism for improving applications at the Department level, and accessing funds for critical readers of application available at the Faculty level. Fundamentally, however, the responsibility for external funding and the engagement in the networks that promote success rates in competition for such funds must rest with individual researchers and research groups. Promoting a culture of applying for external funds starts at the Ph. D. level with candidates being encouraged to source external funds to finance field work and conferences. The active role of supervisors in reading and commenting on proposals for funding is crucial.

Shaping the international research frontier

While contributing to the international research frontier principally rests on internationalizing and spreading research results in written form (mainly through publication in international peer-reviewed journals and books with an international reach) the need for engagement in research collaboration and dissemination of results in other fora needs to be acknowledged. This type of dissemination, whether through conferences, guest lectures or specialist meetings, requires time especially when it involves international travel. Importantly, opportunities in connection with such activities can also provide for future collaboration on funding applications. Time demands for these activities are however sometimes at odds with teaching obligations, while measurement standards put heavy emphasis on peer-reviewed work. At the Department level, coordinating courses and teaching responsibilities so that they enable relatively long periods of undisturbed research time, would enhance the possibilities for producing written work as well as participating in relevant international events. Ultimately, this is a matter of managing staff resources in a competent way. Internal visibility of the Faculty could also be strengthened through showcasing research results from different Departments to the University centrally, possibly through a Science fair.

Providing empirical and analytical input into policy making

As the University's main interpreters of social processes and events, it is clearly crucial that social science research engages not only with intellectual issues, but also strives to identify and address real life problems deemed to be relevant to society at large. As such research should aim to provide empirical and analytical input into policy making and politics at the regional, national, European and global scales. In the context of the Department there are clear end users to much of the research that is being carried out at present, including for instance local level municipalities, national ministries, regional bodies, the EU and the UN agencies. The engagement with civil society and end users must however be the responsibility of individual research groups, rather than the Department as a whole. Consolidating and expanding existing institutional linkages with relevant organisations, in this sense falls within the ambit of "tredje uppgiften", but in the context of such linkages it is important to have the symbolic support of the faculty and Lund University centrally. Popularising research results through policy briefs and articles in the popular press can be aided through setting aside funds or staff at the Faculty level.

How to assess the goals?

The present model for distributing funds among the Departments at the Faculty in many respects assesses the goals identified above, at least indirectly. Reaching the goals also involves a triumvirate of international peer reviewed publications, external funds and participating in international research networks. These are interconnected –successful applications rests on solid publication records and documented participation in international networks. In the process contribution is made to the international research frontier. In this sense, there is no real need to assess the goals as such (aside from the types of indicators already collected, such as international peer reviewed publications, external funds, etc.). The continuous benchmarking in relation to national and international standards is an integral part of assessing the goals.

Possible drawbacks?

While the ambitions towards securing higher levels of external funds increasingly are an unquestionable part of the funding architecture for Swedish Universities, the system also contains (at least) two potential challenges. While new (primarily international) funding possibilities have opened up in recent years, the volatility of funding and the sometimes substantial budgetary shifts from one year to the next leads to unpredictability and poses considerable complications in staffing. This situation in turn threatens to create a two tier system, where one segment of staff is involved primarily in teaching (sometimes on short term contracts) and the other is engaged in more or less full time research. To resolve this inherent conflict in the system, the importance of researchers that teach needs to be strongly underscored both by the Department and the Faculty level. Moreover, funding and time for basic research needs to be ensure to avoid short term opportunism in relation to research agendas formulated by funding agencies and political concerns. Basic research in this sense needs to be safeguarded through funds that are not dependent on external sources.

Operational implications

Fostering a dynamic research environment, in the context of increasing pressure for publication and the need for securing external funding, *without* splitting the senior staff into teachers versus researchers, fundamentally rests on mechanisms that ensure a steady (and high) success rate in funding and publication while coupling teaching and research responsibilities.

The Department has identified a set of mechanisms and interventions as particularly critical in this regard:

- The internal Research Seminar Series provides a platform for presenting on-going research and also new research projects.
- A maximum of 75% of senior research staff time should as a rule be devoted to research.
- Ph. D candidates should be recruited in relation to existing research groups, to consolidate these groups while ensuring the generational shift within these groups.
- Preparation for Post Doc strategies will be part of career development talks with doctoral candidates during the two final years of their Ph. D cycles.
- Course structures will be assessed to provide uninterrupted periods of research for teaching staff.
- Assistant supervisors for Ph. D supervision will be recruited among recent Ph. D graduates to ensure a rapid transition into research responsibilities.
- The research groups will be encouraged to set up internal vetting mechanisms for preparing research applications.