

Shifts in Swedish research and higher education policy in the global research economy (0085)

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Main characteristics in the present European higher education policy and research policy are the increased demand for a more practical and economic profitable output from research and education along with an increased demand for obtaining external funding in competition between and within European universities. Nevertheless the efforts of formulating a common platform for a European policy on higher education and research in the global research economy, the organisation of research is often implicated by country based policies and politics. This paper will briefly present shifts in the Swedish research and higher education policy landscape that are particularly interesting to discuss in relation to the above mentioned tendencies from which the implications in practice is still largely a question for research. For the conference an analysis on how research is formulated in recent policy document such as Bill 2008/0950 and Bill: 2009/10:149 will be presented. These documents are selected since they indicate a shift that raises research questions on potentially important changes that may have consequences for the content of research and research organisation in practice.

Theoretical points of departure

Numerous studies have shown that the emergence of the global market has increased pressure on university researchers, who are expected to increase the socioeconomic usefulness of their research (Elzinga 1993, Gibbons et al 1994, Hayrinen -Alestalo 1999, Gumport 2000, Slaughter and Leslie 1997). The two most influential models developed for understanding these changes are probably “The New Production of Knowledge” (NPK) (Gibbons et al 1994) and “The Entrepreneurial University” (Etzkowitz, Webster and Heleay 1998) and Etzkowitz et al (2000). According to these two models scientific production has changed from Mode 1 to Mode 2 (problem-solving research orientation, the involvement of economic and political actors in the definition of research priorities, transdisciplinarity and an increasing number of research sites outside universities) and according to the Entrepreneurial University model; from knowledge production for peers to knowledge production for economic growth “*The capitalisation of knowledge appears to be taking increasing precedence over disinterestedness as a norm of science*” (Etzkowitz et al 2000 p 315).

Despite their influence on the field these analytical models have been criticised for not being empirically grounded enough and more importantly, for providing a misleading image of academic research by ascribing a commonality of characteristics to all disciplines that they do not necessarily share, while neglecting the specificities of each.

However, researchers and research students do not act in a social vacuum but in the context of specific institutions, such as universities, research centres and academic departments that have been shown to be gendered, ethnicised and classed (Mama 1995, Leathwood and Read 2009, Morley 2003, 2007a, 2007b). The specific impact of gender, ethnicity, class and age relations and how these are mutually constituted in the aforementioned analytical model of the systemic changes of knowledge production is a less researched area but nevertheless crucial for understanding the gendered, ethnicised and classed dimensions of knowledge production at

an organisational level and thus, avoiding individualised explanations (Ducklin & Ozaga 2007, Mählck 2003, Mählck and Thaver 2009).

Recent tendencies in Swedish research policy and higher education landscape: more autonomy, strategic research and increased external funding

The Swedish HE system with its close connection to a long tradition of social democratic state regulation has gone through considerable changes over the previous decade. Notably, the sector has expanded during the 1990's. Importantly, the growth of the student and staff population has not been in parity to the growth of the research budget, implying a higher a degree of competition for research funding (VR rapportserie 1:2008:33).

The period is also characterised by an increased decentralization of the sector from the state to the different HE institutions. HE institutions are now directly responsible for fulfilling the goals the government has set up, indicating: a greater financial freedom aimed to result in increased productivity and efficiency (Bill 1992/93:170; Bill 1992/93:1). More recently the Bill: 2009/10:149 on the autonomy of higher education institutions suggests a higher autonomy for Rektors in decision making at the same time rendering faculty committees optional. So called 'closed calls' in recruitment processes are also suggested (ibid). The consequences for the democratic processes at universities is still a question for research.

But the decentralisation trend has not been uniform during the last decade and particularly in relation to gender equality a strong state intervention has occurred. In 1995, following the recommendations from Bill:110, earmarked positions for female researchers and professors was created, as well as the implementation of gender perspective on the social organisation of research, and when appropriate, the cognitive content of research and teaching. In 2010 the number of women in higher education has increased markedly at all levels. The bill has been less successful in other areas. However, in the recent Bill on research policy (2008/0950) gender research and gender equality plays a more withdrawn role as compared to previous years. In practice we can see that also very established gender research milieus are faced with cut downs to the point of dissolution, particularly at older universities (Liinasson 2010:43).

Following international trends, more recent policy imperatives in Sweden now include a greater focus on the internationalization of research the commercialization of research results, and resource allocation based on 'quality indicators' such as external research funding, publications and citations and strategic research (Benner and Sandström 2000, Bill 2008/09:50).

To summarise; Despite the decentralization of the sector in terms of decision-making and organizational matters during the 1990's, the trends above suggest increased state regulation and concentration of funding to strategic research. To what extent this will affect the outcome of research processes, the social profiles of research staff and the differentiation of HE institutions is still a question for research.