

Scientific Excellence and Gender Research: Experiences from the Nordic Countries

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Nordic countries: top performers in gender equality

- ▶ Global gender gap report (World Economic Forum): Nordic region has smallest societal gender gap
- ▶ UNDP Gender Inequality index: all Nordic countries in top-10
- ▶ EU GE Index: Sweden, Finland, Denmark at the top
- ▶ High share of women in politics (parliaments 32-47%, national governments ca 50% in all countries)
- ▶ Female Head of State: Iceland, Finland (presidents)
- ▶ Female Prime Minister: Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway

Top performers in research and innovation

- ▶ High level of investing on Research and Development as share of GDP: Denmark, Finland, Sweden in global top-10
- ▶ Global innovation index 2015: Sweden 3rd, Finland 6th, Denmark 10th
- ▶ Large share of highly educated in population; especially women

Nordic paradoxes

- ▶ Global leaders both in overall gender equality and in R&D intensity but *not* when it comes to gender balance in academia and science
- ▶ Gender equality on the national higher education and research agenda since the late 1970s
- ▶ Many rapid changes in governance, research funding systems, career structures, technology, internationalization etc.
- ▶ But: slow change or no change in **horizontal gender segregation of disciplines**
- ▶ Slow change in gender balance among **full professors**

...paradoxes

- ▶ Intensive, long-term positive actions and **interventions** to promote GE in academia and science (less in DK) during the last **30-40 years vs. slow change** in gender segregation, academic culture or in the gender composition of the professoriate
- ▶ **Decision-making positions:** University Rectorates, scientific boards: clearly improved gender balance
- ▶ **Excellence-marked resource allocations** in the Nordic region show **gendered outcomes** in men's favour despite progressive gender policies and gender awareness in the sector (centres of excellence, distinguished professorships, research professorships etc.)

State feminism and Nordic gender research

- ▶ **Early support since 1970s** from the state to emerging women's studies and gender research
- ▶ **Norway:** Research Council's secretariat for women's studies est. 1975
- ▶ **Finland:** The Council for Equality & Academy of Finland: national coordinator for women's studies 1981-; Council for Equality subcommittee on research 1981-
- ▶ **Sweden:** Swedish HE Authority (UHÄ) allocated funding for Fora for female researchers and women's studies in universities starting late 1970s
- ▶ **Denmark:** KVINFO information centre on women's studies and gender research est. 1982 by support of several Ministries and funds from Lottery

The Swedish context

- ▶ **Political will** to support gender research and women's studies in various ways, for nearly four decades
- ▶ **Earmarking** public funding for women's studies & gender research since the 1980s
- ▶ Major **funding and HE agencies** engaged in promoting gender research since late 1970s – early 1980s (expert groups, committees)
- ▶ **National committees** on promotion of gender research
- ▶ Relatively strong (if not unproblematic) position of gender studies **inside universities – departments, units, professorships**
- ▶ **National secretariat for gender research** est. 1998 funded by the state budget

Centres of Excellence

- ▶ European, global, Nordic research policy trend in the 2000s
- ▶ Sweden: increased national funding for “strong research environments”, mostly in natural sciences, technology and medicine
- ▶ One goal of excellence funding to promote women researchers
- ▶ Sandström, Wold & Jordansson (2010): Hans excellens (His excellence): Detailed analysis of allocation of excellence funding and gender in Sweden during the first decade of the 2000s

Characteristics of excellent research environments (SwMinEdu 2004)

- ▶ high quality research from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective
- ▶ extensive recruitment, teaching, and mentoring of Ph.D. students
- ▶ attractiveness to students, young researchers, and international research users
- ▶ high visibility both nationally and internationally
- ▶ renown outside of academia
- ▶ the existence within the excellent research environment, typically, of a leading and influential individual with high status in the research community

Hans excellens (Sandström et al. 2010)

- ▶ Female researchers have benefited in a very modest degree of excellence funding in Sweden
- ▶ Every other Swedish researcher is female but **only 12.7 % of excellence funding** has been allocated to female researchers
- ▶ Women have received ca 0,7 billion SEK compared to 4,7 billion SEK to men in the studied period

2006 Call for Centres of Gender Excellence

- ▶ In 2006, the Swedish Research Council issued a call for the Centres of Gender Excellence (CGEx) grant. The call was directed towards research environments with the potential to become international leaders in their field of research.
- ▶ The grant was to be given to support “strong research environments” characterized by:
 - ▶ exclusive research activities
 - ▶ well-qualified research leaders with international support
 - ▶ an attractive research environment for postdocs and guest researchers
 - ▶ potential for renewal and solid anchoring in neighbouring research areas
 - ▶ researchers that have high and shared ambitions for the research environment
 - ▶ an ability to accommodate different types of research and disciplines that stimulate each other
 - ▶ enhanced skills in research communication

...Centres of Gender Excellence

- ▶ 10 applications
- ▶ International evaluation panel
- ▶ 3 centres funded:
- ▶ Uppsala: Nature/Culture Boundaries and Transgressive Encounters (GenNa)
- ▶ Umeå: Challenging Gender
- ▶ Linköping-Örebro: GEXcel Gendering Excellence
- ▶ Internationalization approached in different ways
- ▶ 5 year funding, interim evaluation
- ▶ No built-in promise for continuation of funding on the basis of evaluation of performance

GEXcel: Centre of Gender Excellence


- Initially 5 year, collegium-like excellence centre for Advanced Gender Studies
- Based at joint-university Institute of Thematic Gender Studies, Linköping & Örebro Universities, Sweden
- Funded by Swedish Research Council (20 million SEK), co-funded by Linköping & Örebro Universities (8 million SEK) = 28 million SEK

Aim of GEXcel: to develop innovative research on

- **changing gender relations**
 - **intersectionalities & embodiment**
- from
- **transnational** and
 - **transdisciplinary** perspectives
-
- A **core activity** of GEXcel was a **Visiting Scholarship Programme** organized & defined by thematic foci
 - Selection of visiting scholars competitive, applying peer review

Research Themes

1. Gender, Sexuality and Global Change
2. Deconstructing the Hegemony of Men & Masculinities: Contradictions of Absence
3. Distinctions and Authorizations
- 4 -5. Sexual Health, Embodiment & Empowerment: Bridging Epistemological Gaps
6. Gender, Class and the Power over Immaterial Production
- 7-8. Teaching Normcritical Sex: Getting Rid of Violence: Transdisciplinary, Transnational, Transformative Feminist Dialogues on Embodiment, Emotions & Ethics

- 
- 9.** Gendered Sexualed Transnationalisations, Deconstructing the Dominant: Transforming Men, “Centres” & Knowledge/policy/practice
 - 10.** Love in Our Time – a Question for Feminism
 - 11-12.** Gender Paradoxes in Changing Academic and Scientific Organisation(s)

Cross-cutting themes

- i. Combining Virtual and Physical Co-Presence in doing joint Gender Research
- ii. Organizing a European Excellence Centre – Exploring Models
- iii. Theories and Methodologies in Transnational and Transdisciplinary Studies of Gender Relations, Intersectionalities and Embodiment

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Outcomes & spin-offs

- ▶ **Around 100 visiting scholars** > creating collaborations
- ▶ **Conferences and workshops with wide international participation**
- ▶ **Networking**
 - ▶ **initiative for an international network of Centres of gender excellence RINGS**
 - ▶ **creating large international interdisciplinary researcher network**
- ▶ **Publications**
 - ▶ **Routledge Advances in Feminist Studies and Intersectionality**
 - ▶ **Work-in-Progress publications on each research theme**
 - ▶ **Journal articles, book chapters, conference papers...**
- ▶ **Mentoring**
 - ▶ **Doctoral students, postdocs and senior scholars working together in residence and before and after around innovative research themes**

GEXcel Work in Progress Report Volume VIII

Proceedings from GEXcel Theme 10:
**Love in Our Time
– A Question for Feminism**
Spring 2010

Edited by
Sofía Strid and Anna G. Jónasdóttir

Centre of Gender Excellence – GEXcel

Towards a European Centre of Excellence in
Transnational and Transdisciplinary Studies of

- Changing Gender Relations
- Intersectionalities
- Embodiment



Challenges

- ▶ Demanding major administrative workload – underestimated in the planning phase
- ▶ The two-university structure
- ▶ Generational differences in arrangements of Visiting Scholars – overbusy but more autonomous seniors, heavy teaching loads of postdocs, doctoral students more easily mobile
- ▶ Guaranteeing funding after the RC grant

International evaluation

- ▶ “The overall quality of the research from the “Centres of Gender Excellence” was assessed in the evaluation as ranging from very good to outstanding, and the Expert Panel recognizes that the Centres have established both new and internationally recognized gender research. The Evaluation Panel identifies that the CGEx grants have facilitated research at a higher level of quality and greater international impact than would have been possible through individual research grants. ”
- ▶ Moreover, the Expert Panel recognizes that the CGEx grants have also had an added value in that they have
 - ▶ • enabled the recruitment and appointment of relevant support staff
 - ▶ • enabled funding of Ph.D. and postdoctoral students
 - ▶ • enabled Centre staff to attend major national and international conferences
 - ▶ • enabled the research environments to host visiting researchers and conferences
 - ▶ • enabled the Centres to improve their research dissemination especially internationally
 - ▶ • enabled the Centres to build strong research communities

...evaluation

- ▶ "The panel would like to state that the evaluation has yielded clear evidence that the grants have been crucial for developing the Centres to the level of excellence that they hold today. Each of the Centres started in a different context and with different conditions, but all three Centres have reached the goals they set by establishing both nationally and internationally renowned environments for gender research. At the same time the panel would like to recognize that **five years is a rather short period to achieve a sustainable and international attractive research environment for post-docs and guest scholars.** The Centres have done a remarkable job to become established locally, nationally, and internationally. The most immediate and significant challenge for the Centres after the CGEx grant period is most likely to be able to maintain the same level of capability in recruiting Ph.D. students and excellence that they hold today. “

... evaluation

- ▶ “It should be noted, however, that the panel did not get any clear indication of any increased competitiveness in terms of the research environments’ seeking foreign research grants, perhaps with the exception of the GEXcel research environment at Linköping and Örebro University, which has attained a notable position in the international context of gender research. “
- ▶ Evaluation report:
- ▶ <https://publikationer.vr.se/produkt/evaluation-of-centres-of-gender-excellence/>

After the excellence funding period

- ▶ GEXcel International Collegium for Advanced Transdisciplinary Gender Studies
- ▶ www.gexcel.org
- ▶ A third university joined the consortium - Karlstad University
- ▶ Strategic infrastructure funding from the three Universities until 2017
- ▶ International reference group (ca 50 scholars)
- ▶ Nine research fields, under these several research strands
- ▶ Initiative to RINGS, a global association of centres of advanced gender research - first conference in November 5-6, 2015 in Prague
- ▶ Several EU-funded projects (GenPort, GEDII, FATIMA)
- ▶ Permanent flow of visiting scholars and doctoral students (mainly self-funded)
- ▶ Routledge book Series

Finland: the Minna Canth Academy Professorship

- ▶ Academy Professor the most prestigious research position in the Finnish academic system (targeting researchers who are "international top")
- ▶ Funded by the National Research Council (the Academy of Finland), 5 year research professorship - 44 positions
- ▶ AP position has been heavily male-dominated but in 2014 over half of the appointments to women

...Minna Canth professorship

- ▶ In mid-1990s proposal from the Finnish women's studies community & Council for Equality to establish *an annual guest professorship in women's studies* named Minna Canth professorship (Minna Canth: early pioneer author on women's rights)
- ▶ Key gatekeeper: The Chair of Social Science and Humanities Research Council in 1999: Professor of Women's Studies at University of Helsinki, Aili Nenola
- ▶ Since 1999, one Academy Professorship targeted to women's studies and gender research, and named Minna Canth Academy Professor
- ▶ Appointed every five years
- ▶ Two "ordinary" Academy Professorships also allocated to gender studies scholars (feminist philosophy, liberation theology) in recent years

- ▶ Thank you!
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