

Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Center

Evaluation of Estonian Sociological Research

Institutes evaluated:

**Institute for European Studies
University of Tartu:
Department of Sociology and Social Policy
Department of Journalism and Communication
Institute for International and Social Studies, Tallinn Pedagogical University:
Department of Social Stratification
Department of Family Sociology
Estonian Institute of Humanities: Department of Social Theory**

Evaluation dates:

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Expert team:

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Part I

General overview

Introduction

The evaluation team consisted of Prof. A.H. (Chelly) Halsey (Oxford), a veteran sociologist, an experienced inspector for OECD of educational systems in Finland, Yugoslavia, France, Sweden and California, an international authority on sociology, honoured by Fellowship of the British Academy, foreign membership of the American Academy, membership of the European Academy, senior fellowship of the London School of Economics, honorary fellowship of the Royal Statistical Society, and honorary doctorates of the Open University and the Universities of Birmingham, Leicester, Warwick and Glamorgan.

Associate Prof. Anders Holm of the University of Copenhagen is an associate professor at the department of sociology. He teaches quantitative methods both at the undergraduate and post graduate level and his main research topics are educational choice and treatment effects of labour market measures.

Kaj Ilmonen is professor of Sociology (since 1994) and Vicechair in the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. His main fields of interests are: Sociology of Consumption (vice chair of the International Cooperative Research 1983-1991 and Chair of ESA stream Sociology of Consumption 1992-2000); Sociology of Work Life, mainly industrial relations and Social Capital, especially trust relations within Finnish society and economic life. He has published on these topics something over 180 books and articles in Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, English and Polish.

Associate Prof. Soile Veijola, PhD in Sociology, has worked as a researcher at the Department of Sociology at the University of Helsinki and is currently developing a curriculum of Cultural Studies of tourism at the faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Lapland. Previously she has explored the issues of gender orders and sexed subjectivities, by means of narrative, modal, textual and conversation analysis, in the research fields of sports, tourism and social production of knowledge.

The evaluation was organised by the Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre (EHEAC). The evaluation was carried out through an examination of documents and a series of visits, interviews and consultations with research staff and students over the period March 4th - March 10th, 2002. Each evaluator had previously received self-assessment reports from the Institutes listed above. Additional material was provided by the evaluated institutes, research groups and individual sociologists during the visit.

The visits to institutes started with a general introduction of institute organization, financing, and main research topics given by the directors of each institute. The second stage consisted of leaders of research teams, or alternatively department heads, describing the research activities topic by topic. Finally, the evaluators met the individual researchers and interviewed them. During these meetings the researchers were also asked to give a few representative publications for a closer inspection.

Approach to the evaluation

The evaluators were asked to

- 1) judge the activities of research and development institutions and the research topics implemented by them to ensure a state funding for internationally recognized research and development;
- 2) identify deficiencies in the activities of research and development institutions;
- 3) give recommendations of development concerning research and development and research areas necessary to the state of Estonia.

The team was given the following materials: a working schedule, principles and criteria for evaluation of research and development institutions, guidelines to experts for the research evaluation, and self-evaluation reports created by the Institutes listed above.

The team arrived on March 4, 2002 in Tallinn, was shortly briefed visited the Institute for European Studies and transferred to Tartu during the same evening. The team visited University of Tartu on March 5th. On March 5th the team returned to Tallinn and visited both departments of the Tallinn Pedagogical University the next day (March 6th) and the Estonian Institute of Humanities on the following day (March 7th).

Each unit was evaluated using the following criteria on a four-point scale (excellent, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory):

- 1) the novelty of the results of research and development;
- 2) the quality of research and development, including publication record;
- 3) the strategy and perspective of research;
- 4) the competence of research groups and their capability for development;
- 5) success in applying for funds and grants;
- 6) national and international co-operation;
- 7) the implementation opportunities for the research results and their importance for the Estonian society;
- 8) the correspondence of research and development to the international level.

These criteria were divided into two groups: quality of research and capability of a research unit according to the guidelines to experts for research evaluation. In addition to these criteria, written comments were given according to the guidelines. In the following the research institutes and departments are briefly discussed, followed by more specific comments and recommendations.

Part II

General Remarks on Estonian sociological research

The expert team is aware of and sympathetic to the fact that Estonia is a very small country with limited resources and a history of much suffering from enforced emigration and imposed immigration. It is properly described as a transitional society seeking a future of wealth and contentment for its people under circumstances of perhaps historically unprecedented risk, uncertainty and challenge. The possibility is open to a successful 'return to the west' with a new balance of public and private sector economy, a new balance of state and civil society, a new stage of democratic policy. Yet the challenges involved to new forms of entrepreneurship, to new experiments with multi-culturality and new structures of government, both within the nation and in an emerging European Union are as dangerous as they are exciting. Some say that Estonia is entering a stage of disintegration from its rising conflicts between classes, ethnic groups, genders and generations. Certainly, as we see it, a tremendous effort of sociological imagination is needed to overcome these obstacles of economy, politics and culture. Most particularly and urgently we should advise Estonia to put investment in the political education of its youth at the top or near the top of its agenda.

The advice is, as it happens, not without precedents. Modern sociology was born in the aftermath of the French revolution, when intellectuals were preoccupied with the large question of what could replace the social order and progress of the nation after the collapse of the ancien regime, and later in the rise of Durkheim, the questions were again raised in the light of the German military victory over France in 1870. In both convulsions there was a popularisation of the slogan 'Egalité, Liberté, Fraternité'. Sociology is a prime intellectual means to find answers. We should now think of this revolutionary/traditional aim of western society as equity, freedom and community. These are the contemporary normative aspirations which Estonia has to interpret and strive to put into practice. The social as well as the natural sciences must play their part. But the obstacles are many. Sociology is a late comer to Estonia. Sovietisation in the 1940's delayed the development of the profession and left a legacy in the shape of a small community of scholars still struggling to make adequate contacts with their colleagues in the West where different theoretical approaches are taken for granted along with multiple opportunities for publication and professional debate. Until 1989 sociology could only be studied in Estonia by aspirants to the Soviet Candidate of Science Degree (the equivalent of a Ph.D) and was dominated if not monopolised by Marxist/Leninist doctrines. In consequence the older leaders of sociology migrated from training in other disciplines and had limited contact with countries outside the Soviet Union. Free research as distinct from official opinion did not come naturally to them.

However, with the restoration of Estonian independence in 1991, the atmosphere began to change and a new generation of sociologists began to appear, eager for foreign experience, responsive to new ideas and willing to serve their country through the application of novel concepts learned in the West if tempered by tradition from the East. Estonia embarked on rapid economic and social change – a process already begun during the period of perestroika from 1987 and exemplified by price liberation, currency reform, privatisation of property, decentralisation of agriculture etc etc.

The universities were encouraged by government to take over central responsibilities for social research. Thus, for example the Institute of International and

Social Studies was absorbed into the pedagogical University of Tallinn in 1998. The funding of research was reformed. There was a shift towards project funding with reduced security for the researcher by comparison with his or her neighbouring university teacher. The formal teaching of sociology began and now adds to 60 a year beginning studies for sociology degrees. Up to 2001 no dissertations for the PhD degree has been presented though we gather that several will reach graduation this year (2002).

Altogether, we have found the arrangements for social research in a rapid state of transition, like Estonian society itself.

PART III

COMMENTS ON PARTICULAR UNITS

The results of our evaluation of the several research groups and departments specified are as follows:

RATING OF UNITS IN UNIVERSITIES AND INSTITUTES

ACTIVITIES	CAPABILITIES	SCORE	
Institute of European Studies	Good to Satisfactory	Satisfactory	6
Tartu University:			
Sociology	Good	Good	7
Social Policy	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	6
Journalism & Communication	Satisfactory	Good	7
Tallinn Pedagogical University:			
Family	Good to Satisfactory	Satisfactory	6
Stratification	Good	Good	8
Institute of Humanities, Department of Social Theory	Good to Satisfactory	Good	7

Institute of European Studies

This institution is very small, too small for its purpose. It is led by Dr. Juhan Sillaste and supported by Dr. Aksel Kirch. Professor Rein Ruutsoo is attached but holds the chair of Political Science at Tartu University. We deemed it **good to satisfactory** on its research activities and **satisfactory** with a score of 6 on its capability or potential.

Clearly the opportunities for implementation of its research results are of immense importance for the future of Estonia as it seeks entry into the European Union. In this context we are puzzled by the self-evaluation report (p. 14) where it is asserted that, “taking account of the underfinancing of social science in Estonia, the permanent staff of the IES probably cannot be bigger.” On the contrary we advise the opposite. Moreover we cannot agree with the further statement on the same page that the IES is now entering a second period of its development – “its period of full-fledged research institution in sociology of European Studies.” The ‘minimun kit’ (8-10 staff) argument surely applies in this case. We have judged that the IES is applying successfully for grants and funds and we hope that its current application to the European Commission will be successful. The decision is expected in June 2002.

Sociology
Department of sociology and social policy
University of Tartu

The unit consists currently of the equivalent of seven full time staff members (one left during 2001) and is led by Professor Mikk Titma. The staff is composed of one professor, 3 assistant professors and 5 other staff members. The unit works mainly in the field of social stratification but has also recently introduced other areas into its research fields.

Together with welfare and social policy studies the unit has managed a successful replacement of decreasing state contributions by targeted research grants and grants from the ministry of education. The unit has also been successful in attracting international financing.

The unit is built very much around the two rather unique longitudinal data-sets that have emerged as a result of the work of scholars within and from this unit. These data sets are the Estonian longitudinal study and the “path of a generation” study, which together cover the entire period of transformation of Estonian society from the soviet era into a free market economy. The data sets seems very powerful, in that they contain not only information on educational and occupational variables, but also information on values and attitudes. This makes them ideal for studying the effects of the dramatic changes to Estonian society during the last two decades.

As a whole the department is very much devoted to quantitative analysis of these two studies, however the department also publishes in other fields and has begun work on suicidal behaviour.

Through the head of the unit, the department publishes some of its work internationally with well-known international scholars and, also through the head of the unit, has strong links with Stanford University. Therefore we assess the research activity as **good**. However, we do recommend that other researchers be encouraged to try to publish more internationally as well.

In very crude quantitative terms the productivity of the unit together with the unit of welfare and social policy in the period 1996-2001 amounts to approximately to 0,2 international refereed publications per year per staff member and 1,5 publications in total per year per staff member. Some caution to this number has to be taken into consideration because it is not straightforward to deduce the size of the staff for the entire period.

Many of the members of the department have good qualifications in quantitative analysis and analysis in stratification and thus from a methodological stand point, they have good opportunities to further explore the interesting potential of the two data sets that is available to the unit.

It is a notable contribution to the scientific community as well as to the understanding of the transformation of the Estonian society, that the unit has been able to continue the collection of the two longitudinal data sets through the period of Estonian independence. This leaves the unit, as well as other similar Estonian research units, in a unique position to contribute to understanding of the effects of the transformation of eastern European nations from the period of the soviet era into free market economies. Therefore we assess the research capability of the unit as **good**.

Having said this, some notable weakness of the way the unit conducts its research has also become clear to the expert team. First, it seems that the potential of the two longitudinal data sets are not yet fully utilised in terms of getting the research published internationally. Although some international publications have emerged

from members of the unit, notably the head of the unit, it seems to the expert team that there is scope for trying to get to even more important scientific journals. This could perhaps be achieved by trying to address issues of a more internationally perspective e.g. the general case of transforming societies, hence trying to loosen the attachment to the particular Estonian case.

Also, it appeared to the expert team, that there was too strong attachment of the younger scholars, to the head of the unit. The expert team got the impression that this strong attachment of the younger researchers to the head of the unit could prevent them from fully developing their own research interest and abilities. While a strong focus of research strategies is fully recognised by the expert team, it is also important to the expert team to stress the importance of developing young researchers to be able to fully pursue new research methods and issues from an independent mind. Thus the expert team suggest that the unit try to relax the way co-operation between the senior and junior staff is carried out. In future one could imagine that the role of the head of the unit should be more in terms of a supervisor and a source of inspiration and less as a research manager. In order to ensure that there is a future supply of senior researchers capable of continuing the type of research carried out by the unit, it is likewise important, that part of the young researchers training comes in terms of independent choice of research topics and methods.

Finally the expert team would also like to emphasise that the unit could benefit from increased research into more theoretically founded studies of stratification. Thus it appeared that a lot of the current research is very empirically founded and could benefit from a closer relation with current theoretical work of stratification and life course analysis.

Social policy
Department of sociology
University of Tartu.

The unit consists currently of the equivalent of seven and a half full-time staff members and is led by Professor Dagmar Kutsar. One professor, one assistant professor and eight other staff member compose the staff. The unit works in many areas. Broadly, the headings of the research conducted by the unit, are socio-political issues, family, childhood and comparative issues and gender studies. However, under these areas, the researchers of the unit follow many different research topics.

Together with sociology, the unit has managed a successful replacement of decreasing state contributions by targeted research grants and grants from the ministry of education.

The unit has a varied composition of seniority and age. This is generally considered to be favourable. However, some of the current PhD students are somewhat beyond the usual age of PhD students, meaning that they will have less time left for their careers as full blown researchers.

The scientific publications are somewhat scattered in subjects, reflecting the diversity of research areas. The main bulk of scientific publications are also shared between a limited number of individuals within the unit. The unit has made some international publications, but in general we find that the unit should try to get more international publications. Hence we assess the research activities as **satisfactory**.

In very crude quantitative terms the productivity of the unit, together with the unit of sociology, during the period of 1996-2001, amounts to approximately 0,2 international refereed publication per year per staff member and 1,5 publications in total per year per staff member. One should note here that the unit has published a smaller fraction of the international publications, than has the unit of life course and stratification studies. Also some caution to the average number of publications has to be taken into consideration because it is not straightforward from the self-evaluation report to deduce the size of the staff of the unit for the entire period.

The unit has followed an increasingly diversified research strategy, partly in response to the demand from the Estonian society. This has also led to an emphasis on publications with a rather applied approach and targeted at a somewhat narrow Estonian audience.

The unit seems to be truly multidisciplinary. The members of the staff both seem to master qualitative as well as quantitative methods and there also seems to be some devotion to theory. Although the number of international publications seems somewhat few and placed on a limited number of staff members, it seems that different members of the staff contribute independently to these publications of the unit. Hence the competence to work truly independently and contribute innovatively to the scientific community seems to present among several staff members. Hence we assess the research capability of the unit as **good**.

Having said this, the expert team finds that the unit needs to strengthen its research strategy in order to be able to contribute more to the international research community. This does not necessarily mean to change or remove any of the three main research topics mentioned above. However, the unit could try to ensure that younger researchers specialise in areas where the senior staff have a safe and well established research experience. It is important that young researchers are supervised

by senior staff with high qualifications, not only in general, but also within the field of which the junior researcher conducts his or her research.

Department of Journalism and communication University of Tartu

Professor Peeter Vihalemm, Epp Lauk and Marju Lauristin head the department. The department consists of the equivalent of 16 full time researchers. The staff is distributed as 3 professors, one assistant professor and 13 other different staff members. A substantial part of the researchers holds only MA-degrees and are studying for a Ph.D., while working at the department. The expertise of the senior staff of the department lies in the areas of civil society, public sphere and media in transition, new media, mass media and the history of journalism and publishing in Estonia.

The department has received eight targeted grants, 23 research grants and seven applied research grants during the period of 1996 to 2002. Thus the department seems very successful in obtaining external funding.

The department is a large one by Estonians standards, and also has lively international relations. Many of the young researchers are taking courses abroad, especially in Finland as part of the preparation of their doctoral thesis.

The department has published 1,8 research reports per staff member in 2001, and 0,4 international refereed publications per staff member in the same period.

In general the expert team find that the department has only a limited number of publications. However, there seems to be two notable successes, which we shall return to later. In summary the expert team finds the research activity **satisfactory**. The work of the department is very applied and lacks more theoretical work.

The research topics of the different researchers, including the topics of the Ph.D. are very diversified including consumer culture, broadcast media analysis, mass-communication and transition, media and gender, The European Union and Estonia, perception of the European Union in Estonia, Russian language in Estonia, social identity etc.

It is a stated policy of the department to support young researchers in communication. However the expert team find that it is perhaps difficult for the senior staff to sufficiently support the wide range of topics pursued by its Ph.D. students and young researchers. Some specialization is properly needed in the future.

In general we find that the motivation among both the junior as well as the senior staff to be high and capability of the senior staff in the areas of their expertise to be good. Therefore the overall research capability of the department is **good**.

The department is much devoted to the demand for knowledge from Estonian society and is very responsive in trying to accommodate these needs within its research. However, the expert team find that this strategy, while fruitful to the relationship between research and society in the short term, might harm the possibility of directing research in more specialised directions, in order to obtain a sufficient international level of research within some pre-defined areas. An example of this is the apparent success the department has had with the publications “return to the western world” and “towards a civic society”. Both these publications received international attention at the time when they were published. However, the expert team found that this success has not resulted in any further international scientific spin-off. The department has received a new grant, enabling the department to pursue the results from the two publications. However, it is stated in the description of this grant, that the intended publication from this new project is supposed to be in Estonian. The impression of the expert team was to expect some further international oriented research as part of continuing the work of these publications. Perhaps an

explanation of this finding is that the department lacks a clear research strategy that enables it to follow promising avenues of current research. In formulating such a strategy the department should try to emphasis on more theoretical work to support the more applied work that is currently carried out.

Finally the expert team would like to make a minor comment as to the clarity of the self-assessment report of the department. The publications of the various members of the department were only listed under each individual CV. Hence is was somewhat difficult to assess the overall production of publications of the department.

**Department of Social Stratification
Institute for International and Social studies
Tallinn Pedagogical University**

This unit has existed since 1989. From its establishment it has shrunk by nearly a half. Its staff comprises three senior researchers and two assistants. Since 1995 they have received 8 targeted grants, 12 grants from ESF and 10 additional grants. In the framework of the Estonian social sciences the unit has been fairly successful in its financing, but its economy has been rather scarce in an international perspective. The department's topics vary from the life course of generations to ascriptive stratification. Thus, its field of research is rather narrow, but this can also be considered as its strength. However, the unit hopes to broaden the scope and also to focus on social mobility. This can be recommended as the unit participates in the production of the Estonian Human Development Report that is published by the Statistical Office of Estonia.

That the unit is involved in the work of the Statistical Office can be considered as one aspect of its strength, but a collaboration with some ministries and the Department of Sociology at Tallinn Pedagogical University can be seen in this fashion as well. To its weaknesses, on the other hand, may be added that its connections abroad do not reach further than mostly to the neighboring countries. The department seems, thus, to be mostly locally oriented.

The unit has produced a considerable number of articles, books and reports considering its funding. The research carried out is mainly descriptive, but it has been conducted in a sophisticated manner. It shows that researchers in the department are skilled in quantitative analysis. Thanks to that the research conducted by the unit includes some novelties. It has also succeeded in producing a fairly detailed overall picture of the main structural changes in the Estonian labor market and a differentiation process that has taken place there. Therefore the research activities of the department can be assessed as **good**.

The descriptive nature of research is partly due to the fact that it is responsive to ministries, which are inclined towards pragmatic and applied research. This is, however, not the whole truth. The unit is relatively weak in social theory. This means that researchers have difficulties in interpreting its findings. Obviously this weakens researcher's capability to transform results to sound recommendations.

In order to improve their ability to serve, for example, the needs of ministries the unit should reorient itself towards the international sociological community and participate in annual workshops and congresses. It should also aim at clarifying the main concepts (like what is meant by "institution"). This would also improve the quality of its research results. To increase its knowledge in qualitative research would certainly have the same impact.

In spite of some defects the staff of the unit seems to be a good mix of applied social science and quantitative methodology. It masters fairly well the research field where it is certainly the best in Estonia. It has also organized its research activities effectively by making weekly teamwork. Our ranking of its overall capability is **good**.

Although the unit has managed to cope with its research tasks well it could in future deepen its knowledge by focusing especially on growing inequality among the Estonians. This is strongly recommended especially, because large inequality is always a threat to social stability. If Estonia end up in a very unstable societal situation it would be considered as one of the main hindrances on Estonia's way to

EU. Therefore, it would also be recommended that the department should collaborate with Estonian political scientists.

Moreover, while family matters are tightly bound to the restructuring of the Estonian society, we also recommend the unit to work more closely with the Department of the Sociology of Family and the Department of Sociology at Tallinn Pedagogical University. This would even be necessary in order to attain continuity in critical mass considering the instability of the staff of the unit. This should be said although the unit has been effective in recruiting new staff members by supervising students in Department of Sociology at Tallinn Pedagogical University and by adopting them to research projects.

Department of Family Sociology
Institute for International and Social studies
Tallinn Pedagogical University

This department comprises three regular researchers and two affiliated scholars in the beginning of the 2002. It has got 8 target financed grants, 15 grants from ESF and three additional grants which makes 26 grants altogether. Received resources have increased steadily and they have mainly been aimed at research of the every day life of Estonian families. Practically research varies from family dynamics and changing values to adolescents with risk profiles. Besides that the unit will also start to make inquiries on regional differences in family dynamics.

One of the strengths of the department has been that it has analyzed developments in Estonian families both from long term and comparative perspectives. It has made some dramatic findings considering family pattern, birth and divorce rates, and a growing number of single parent families that are obviously worst off among the Estonian families, the real “miserables” both in economic and social terms. The researchers of the department have also got some interesting, but enigmatic results, for instance, that cohabitation is more common in the countryside than in cities. That is against Western experiences.

Another strength of the unit is that it has been very effective (providing the level of its financing) in publishing its research results, some even abroad. Besides that it has also participated together with the Statistical Office and Department of Stratification studies in the production of the Estonian Human Development Report. Moreover, the unit does much collaboration with many ministries.

In addition, the unit can take as its credit that the researchers master both quantitative and qualitative methods and are able to combine them in one and the same research report. They also supervise students of the Department of Sociology at Tallinn Pedagogical University and adopt them accordingly to research projects. Besides that, they have also their research work rather well organized. We rate the overall capability of the unit as **satisfactory**.

However, research includes hardly any novelty while it is mostly descriptive by its nature. That relates partly to the demands of ministries. They stress usually the pragmatic aspect of research that they finance and expect that research is quickly applicable. This is, however, very seldom the case. On the contrary, in order to be applicable results should be such that they are easily interpreted. This, in turn, demands that research should be supported by a sound theoretical frame of reference.

Theoretical thinking is not the strongest point of the department. It has mainly leaned on rational choice theory, but it is not very applicable in a situation where very rapid changes are taking place. In such a societal phase some crucial terms like “family” and “gender” should not be taken as granted. “Family” in Estonia is rather in the phase of reconstruction than some given social entity. Moreover, in a quickly changing environment “families” try to make sense of the surrounding world and adapt themselves accordingly. This, in turn, implies that some sort of mild constructivism would apply to emerging family problems than a rational choice theory. The same goes for the concept of “gender”, which implies that international feminist research should be taken into account.

More generally speaking, one of the main weaknesses of the unit is that it is a bit old fashioned in its view of society. In concrete terms this means, firstly, that it defines problems as “troubles” rather than as intellectual challenges for the whole

Estonian society. Secondly, although it is understandable that an overall material scarcity that prevail in Estonian society tempts researchers to emphasize all aspects of inequality, they should also pay attention to aspects of the recognition (dignity) of minorities (like single parent families). Like stress on inequality also emphasis on recognition would be relevant from political points of view.

Although they have already close contacts with the Nordic family sociology, it would be very probable that the researchers of the department would be able to correct the situation in their research by getting more in touch with a larger international sociological community. In order to promote this it is recommended that the unit will get an extra grant that helps them to invite international scholars at least once in a year.

Perhaps also a clarifying of research strategy would help to improve their research activities. We have the impression that the unit's strategy is largely based on wishes of external institutions (like ministries) that are financing its activities.

Because of the above mentioned weaknesses our evaluation of the research activities of the department is **good to satisfactory**.

Lastly, it should be pinpointed that in the long term, the department seems to too be too small to run research effectively. That is also admitted among the researchers of the unit. One solution to this problem could be to form more tight ties to the Department of Social Stratification and the Department of Sociology at Tallinn Pedagogical University providing, of course, that they all keep their autonomous financial bases.

Institute of Humanities
Department of Social Theory

The research unit was founded in 1992 and organised from the beginning by Dr. Mikko Lagerspetz. The unit got its second full-time position six years later, in 1998 (Erle Rikmann). Today the permanent staff consists of one professor, a research fellow and a part-time assistant (Meril Umarik). In addition, six teachers are employed on a part-time basis. This year the unit caters for 55 undergraduate and graduate students; eight of which study for MA degree and four for PhD degree. Apart from Lagerspetz and Rikmann, the core group of researchers includes Airi-Alina Allaste and Sofia Joons -- all members being born between 1963 and 1974. The main research areas of the unit have so far been – according to the self-evaluation report -- social problems, civil society and ideology and identity. These are covered by eight research projects of which one is still carried out in 2002. (Funding had ended for all other projects listed in the report.)

We have rated the research activities of the unit as **good to satisfactory** and the overall capability and potential as **good**, with a score of seven.

The strengths of the research unit are easy to point out. The leader of the unit, Mikko Lagerspetz, produces on his own approximately as many publications as does each other unit (with more staff) of social research. His publications have come out in both international and national academic forums. He might be the most theoretically oriented individual sociologist we met during the evaluation period, and in this sense a truly international academic person. In our view he is an essential figure for the future development of Estonian social sciences. Moreover, according to the statements of the students who are under his supervision, he also seems to create a theoretically and intellectually inspiring climate for studying sociology as a theoretically based rather than governmentally guided discipline. That is, the students are encouraged to produce good questions, and knowledge, rather than correct answers to ready-made questions. The high level of reflexivity as well as capability to move smoothly between different frames and levels of discussing sociology in Estonia in the self-evaluation report also confirms our previous opinion.

However, the weaknesses of the unit stem from the same source as the strengths. There is a tendency for the leader to dominate and this could be modified if there were more senior researchers – to create a richer sound of sociology. This, we find, is the main obstacle to future development: with only one senior member at a unit devoted to both research, teaching and educating new generations of researchers, there is no possibility for sabbatical leaves nor recycling administrative duties. This predicts a burn-out of the staff (at worst) rather than a national or international breakthrough. It also leads to a restricted field of sociological expertise and vision for the future since no one person, however bright she or he may be, can master all or even a sufficient number of theoretical fields and developments in social theory and sociology. In short, we have here a proper size of an individual research team but not of an entire department.

What we found slightly alarming was the fact that the previous was not seen as a problem among the members of the staff, rather the reverse. The impression was given to us, in the discussions, that there were no potential co-partners in the current field of Estonian sociology who would share the same criteria for conducting research -- with the exception of Rein Ruutsoo with whom there had been co-operation.

It was also striking that “social theory” was defined in sociological terms only. Surely political sciences, economics, and political economy would be needed to

construct a fuller picture of society. (This said, we acknowledge the interdisciplinary environment Estonian Institute of Humanities provides for the department, with philosophy, history and cultural theory.)

Another issue we were puzzled by, when thinking of the future of the department, was the evident lack of initiative and enthusiasm among the staff in attracting internationally established, well-known scholars to Estonia as guest lecturers and, as such, to provide local sociologists with alternative and fresh perspectives from international sociology. The professor, along with his disciples, seemed to be intellectually satisfied, so to say, in what they had, where they were, and which theoretical premises (social constructivism) and methodologies (mainly qualitative) they mastered. International connections were maintained mainly with Nordic (Uppsala, Helsinki) and Eastern European colleagues (University of Central Europe in Budapest) and in the form of joint seminars. As far as we could tell, students were not particularly encouraged to spend a term or two abroad. Evidently, given the small number of Ph.D students in the unit, all absences would have an effect on the research community.

The more general question of academic generations, and the exchange of both heritage and the “newest” news between them, seems to be an issue to be dealt with for this research unit. Instead of consisting of two generations only, of “grandparents” and “grandchildren”, which is the case in most other Estonian units of social research, this unit has a (rare) member of the “mid-generation” as their professor, age 38, but he is on his own without help from generations senior to his own. One could also add that the relative number of women and men is not balanced, with a leading man and all-female staff.

All this said, we praise the department of social theory for its high theoretical profile but at the same time strongly advise it to consider the benefits of joining intellectual and administrative forces with other research units in the country. This would result in a more mixed sociological community of different generations and genders, representing various research interests and methodological competencies. This would lead the way to critical and skilled social sciences, worthy of both international academic attention and national as well as international governmental recognition -- perhaps also to money from the business market.

Part IV

Conclusions

Our stay was short, our interviews brief, and our time for reflection strictly limited. Nevertheless we would offer the following advice:

1. The working conditions of social research need to be improved for all participants at all levels, senior and junior, if talented young people are to be attracted to and retained in their profession. In particular libraries, computers and office space needs to improve by extension and renewal.
2. Opportunities must be found for post-doctoral researchers and post-graduates to undertake trips, visits and attendance at international conferences abroad so as to enlarge the flow of foreign news, multiply international contacts, allow sabbatical leave, and attract foreign luminaries to come to and live in Estonia for short periods.
3. In general the units we have visited are too small. None, except Journalism and Communication at Tartu would be regarded by observers in UK, France and Germany as adding up to the 'minimum kit' (8 to 10 staff) required for efficient and innovative operation.
4. Nevertheless, given the rapidity of change already in progress, we would advise caution in making further mergers, though the long-run ideal would be two centres of research and teaching – one at Tallinn and the other at Tartu.
5. Grants from the Ministry of Education should be made more transparent and circulated to all applicants.
6. Meetings should be arranged on an annual basis at which researchers, civil servants and representatives of employers and employees and the media could exchange views on an equal footing as to the priorities to be given to research into social problems of long term and short term interest to Estonian society.

We finally wish Estonia well in a transitional future of exciting possibilities for further development. We have been critical of all the units/institutes, which we have visited but we also wish them well. And we are grateful for the hospitality and kindness with which they have received us.

Tallinn, March 10th 2002

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