

Research programme for the Department of History 2009-2015: “Long-term historical changes: organisations, institutions and culture”

This research programme was approved at a Departmental Board meeting on May 26, 2009.

The research programme *Long-term historical changes: organisations, institutions and culture* provides a general framework and theoretical foundation for current and future research in the Department of History. For many years the research in the department has been extensive, with some fields in leading positions nationally and prominent positions internationally. Along with Archaeology, History has been designated as one of fifteen leading fields of research at Stockholm University since 2007. In 2008 the University Board decided to allocate special new research funds to these fields within the Faculty of Humanities in the years 2009-2014.

The research programme focuses on explaining and problematising long-term historical change, which makes it necessary to use expertise from several different research areas within one framework. The programme thus creates a joint profile which enables the department to be in a leading position nationally and prominent internationally, in accordance with Stockholm University's vision for 2015. The research in the department is distinctly profiled in a number of fields: medieval history, early modern state formation, urban history, the Nordic welfare society, gender history, modern political history, and history of sport. In this programme, researchers specialised in different fields will work together to study changes over long periods of time, which are beyond the capability of the individual researcher. Consequently, the results of the research can attain a higher level of generalisation. The purpose of the programme is both to investigate how organisations, institutions and culture affect each other and push change, and to use this knowledge as a foundation to theoretically problematise temporality (time, time-boundedness and change).

Background

The Department of History at Stockholm University provides an excellent academic environment for research on organisations, institutions and culture. It is a well-established and functioning academic environment where extensive research on precisely such topics has been conducted for many years, even if they have been referred to by different names.

Our research policy in relation to new appointments has long been to prioritise quality and originality over specialised recruitments. Over the years we have created a broad and multifaceted research environment and produced a great number of doctoral dissertations of high quality. This broad profile has made the Department of History a welcoming research environment. Our seminars are visited regularly by doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers from other departments. Several cooperative projects are in progress within the Faculty of Humanities and other environments at Stockholm University, as well as nationally and internationally. Examples of such projects are to be found at the Institute of Urban History (which also has a large international network), the History of Sport Seminar, and at the Centre for Medieval Studies which has a fruitful cooperation with several other departments at the Faculty of Humanities. All of these are located in the Department of History. Also notable among the other cooperative projects is the department's participation in the programme *Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel: the Nordic Welfare State – Historical Foundations and Future Challenges*. Possibilities of further cooperative projects are opened with the new research funds.

The research-strategic thought behind this greater concentration on *Long-term historical changes: organisations, institutions and culture* is twofold. First, we believe that there are excellent opportunities to derive benefits from the department's broad profile and focus on what historians do best: analysing long-term historical changes and time-bound contexts. Second, through this effort we want to make sure that the high research expertise (in fields such as medieval studies, the early modern state, gender history, modern political history, history of sport and urban history) is preserved and passed on to a new generation of researchers. The department is currently in a state of transition, as several of our professors have retired or are about to face retirement. It is of utmost importance that we handle this generation transition in a way that looks after the existing expertise but also opens up new paths.

The Research Programme

History deals with change over time, both in the short and the long term. Because the dynamics of change put their mark on history, historians object to social theories that not only underestimate change, but also neglect to problematise the broader contexts within whose framework the phenomena we are studying reside. Historians like to view disciplines such as Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Literature and Art History as specialising in each of their own aspects of society and the lives and actions of people, while the historical field per definition transcends many different dimensions. A research programme for a history department should thus be based on change, contextualisation and breadth.

There are several different historical theories on how to analyse change. In certain areas of historical research, e.g. social, economic and mentality history, long-term change of an evolutionary character is often the most central issue. In the history of political events, the emphasis is instead put on short-term changes, the game of chance, the unforeseen outcome of power struggles and conflicts. If one is interested in historical change in a thousand-year perspective, it is the *meeting* between long trends and slow movements on the one hand, and sudden, unforeseen changes on the other that become the core of an historical understanding of the past. There is a big span between evolutionary processes and temporary breaks in the development, and one of the goals of this programme is for the research projects to place themselves at different points between these two poles.

The programme's general framework is based on the concepts of *organisations*, *institutions* and *culture*, which are often used in international social and cultural research. *Organisations* refer both to states, municipalities and the Church, as well as companies, interest groups, popular movements and political parties. All of these—through specialisation, long-term activity, development of expertise, etc.—can achieve greater and qualitatively different results than individuals and small groups. Organisations involve concentration of power, but also require that broad groups show them enough confidence to entrust them with important social functions. *Institutions* refer to rules and formalised norms for human interaction. They may be formal, such as laws, regulations and decrees; or informal, such as norms, traditions and habits. Institutions shape conditions, frames and incentives for people's actions. They contribute to slowness and continuity in the development, and significant power resources are often required to change them.

Culture concerns how people create meaning in the society they live in. Culture is both a structure of ideas, ideals, notions and values, as well as an everyday practice where human actions meet and, in some cases, change the structure in a dialectical process. Cultural practices are to a great extent concentrated around powerful institutions and organisations such as churches/free churches, markets, states, etc. Institutions and organisations are also cultural agents and culture can therefore never be studied independently of them. *Culture* is thus the broadest of the three key concepts in the programme, followed by the more formalised *institutions*, while *organisations* is the most concrete and definite.

An important point of having a more extensive programme concerned with organisations, institutions and culture in a long-term historical perspective is that we can find out more about how these foci are changing and, most importantly, how these changes occur in their interaction. The development of today's large organisations can be explained by the fact that some parts of the world have seen a significant change in their institutions. In such cases, trust first existed solely between individuals and groups that individuals could meet with face to face, and it then

shifted to anonymous, large-scale organisations that individuals were required to trust, despite the fact that the possibility of direct influence was practically non-existent. In this way, people have become more willing to give the organisations resources, because they trust that the organisations can use them more effectively: taxes to the state and big municipalities, fees to interest groups, purchasing of products from corporations instead of local production/self-subsistent households. The obstacle to development and economic growth is, according to this view, mostly institutional. But the development can also go the opposite way: the organisations may lose their legitimacy because they no longer live up to the expectations of their surroundings. Organisations must always adapt to the surrounding norms and values (culture), while they also affect these in a longer perspective.

To historians it is striking that this process began with the rise of states with far-reaching power over society; monopoly of violence, the ability to exercise effective power over a larger territory, coercive power over individuals. In Sweden and Europe, it is possible to study the development of large organisations in a very long-term perspective. One can then ask the question whether it was the organisations' development and ability to show results that changed the institutions (and made many people accept the organisations and give them access to resources), or if it was the institutional changes (pushed by external factors) that created the demand for organisations? The study of institutional changes also leaves room for cultural-theoretical perspectives on how organisations develop and change: what is the nature of the connection between norms, institutions and organisational renewal? Under what circumstances can changing values in society affect organisational structures and the shape of institutions? A great deal of research needs to be carried out in this area, which is of key importance to humanity.

An example of how the programme's main issue is relevant to the fields of research in which the department has traditionally been strong can be drawn from the gender-historical research. The relationship between the genders is an order that has marked history and placed men and women into different positions in society, with different levels of resources and power. Thus gender has made its mark on cultural and institutional changes (ideas, normative systems, etc.) and also permeated organisations. What importance have institutions such as laws, rights, regulations and informal norms had for the division of the sexes into two kinds of subjects or citizens? How did the change towards a more equal citizenship happen? In what ways have the gender relations manifested themselves in organisations such as the Church, the educational system, military, politics, traditions or ceremonies? What gender norms control historical processes such as urbanisation, professionalisation, social mobilisation or individualisation? Gender (alongside other important analytical categories) should thus be given a meaning-constitutive role in the formation of states, nations, markets and other organisations and institutions. One may also ask the question how large organisations have affected (maintained or changed) the relationship between the

genders? Just as relevant is the question of whether ideological changes have repercussions on the organisations – perhaps a breakthrough for feminism should, for example, mean a return to small-scale forms of organisation?

In the medieval historical research conducted at the department, the focus has been on finding large general, structural patterns leading up to the present day, in the coincidences that grow out of thought patterns, rules and values. When it comes to early political history, the focus has been all the more directed toward the tension between the growth and power claim of the state on the one hand, and the demand to legitimise the current order for broad population groups on the other (institutional obstacles). Researchers have also focused on issues of the temporary in the organisations. Urban History has traditionally focused on the structural and on the long lines through the study of the urbanisation process, but more recently the interplay between the temporary and the structurally long-term has attracted attention. Thus there are clear common points with the political modern historical research being conducted in the department, which deals with the change generated by general structural lines of development (gender structures, class structures, etc.) interacting with rules, values, norms, organisations and thought patterns. In the broad research within the history of sport in the department, there is a special interest in the role of organisations in the process of change, and for the meeting/intersection between voluntary organisations on the one hand, and state and society on the other. Modern political history has been of central importance in the department for a very long time. In the welfare state research, the organisations' role in the development of new institutions is a central theme, as is the tension between the rights of the individual and the state's claim and exercise of power. This theme also reoccurs in a new directed effort on research on refugees and refugee policy. The cultural specialisation is now strongly represented both in the medieval research (with claims to draw out long lines of development) and in the 19th and 20th century research, in which our researchers use a cultural analytical perspective on basic institutions and typical organisations, such as religion, economy or large corporations.

This programme was developed in February 2009 by a strategy group in the Department of History (Klas Åmark, Christina Florin, Mats Hallenberg, Hossein Sheiban and Orsi Husz) on the basis of a programme outline written by Jan Glete. The text was adjusted and discussed in April and May 2009 by a special work group for the planning of the new economic investment from the Faculty, comprised of Pär Frohnert, Gabriela Bjarne Larsson, Mats Hallenberg, Orsi Husz and Klas Åmark.