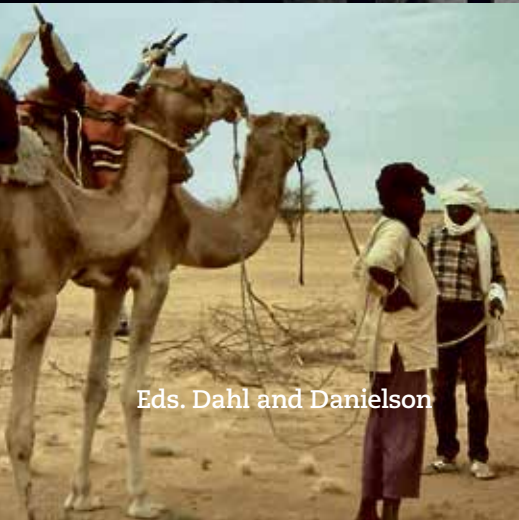




Faculty of Social Sciences
Stockholm University
1964 – 2014



Eds. Dahl and Danielson



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Department of Sociology

Göran Ahrne

IMMEDIATELY AFTER the Second World War, sociology was in the air. The Swedish government had set up a committee to investigate the position of the social sciences in higher education and research. In its report, the committee especially emphasised sociology as one of the most important disciplines in the strengthening of education and research in the social sciences. Several academics and influential writers, among them Herbert Tingsten and Gunnar Myrdal, had also pointed out the underdevelopment of and bad conditions for the social sciences at the universities in Sweden. The reasons for the uneasiness about the lack of research on contemporary social conditions were of course experiences from the 1930s and the war. In order to avoid similar social disasters in the future, many politicians as well as the general public felt a strong need for more knowledge about how the citizens could be adjusted to the modern life: from life in country villages and farm work to a life in the suburbs

of big cities and monotonous work in industry. Torgny Segerstedt, a professor of practical philosophy at Uppsala University, was one of the most outspoken representatives of such thoughts. He wrote about how the mobility from the countryside to cities had split up the primary groups that previously created togetherness and a strong social identity. In this way, modern man was exposed to impulses from different social fields that created an uncertainty about social norms. Segerstedt was also a member of the committee for the investigation of the social sciences. In 1947 he chose to leave his chair in practical philosophy in favour of a new chair in sociology.

Also, at Stockholm University College (*Stockholms högskola*), sociology developed within the discipline of philosophy and in 1949 sociology was taught for the first time within the Department of Philosophy. The professor of practical philosophy, Einar Tegen, had spent several years in the United States and returned to Swe-

den with a great interest in sociology and social psychology. His Friday night seminars at Odengatan 61 became a meeting point for future sociologists in Stockholm. One topic discussed at the seminars was the origin of Nazism. Among those participating in Tegen's seminars were several future professors of sociology, and not only in Stockholm (Jansson 1995a).

Gunnar Boalt, who became the first holder of the chair in sociology in Stockholm in 1954, had got a little ahead of the others. In many respects he was an autodidact. His first academic degree was in the natural sciences (biology, chemistry and zoology). He has himself described how he started his career as a sociologist when he worked as a teacher in a secondary school in Hallsberg in the 1930s (Boalt 1995). He became curious about the correlation between the home conditions of the pupils and their marks in school. His means of investigating this was to compare the food-packs the pupils had brought to school, for instance how heavy they were, with their marks. He also discovered how far from the school they lived and their father's profession. When Boalt had to return to Stockholm at the outbreak of the war, he also returned to the academia, but this time to the pedagogical seminar where he also got in touch with practical philosophy. He was encouraged to write a licentiate thesis based on his results. After he had received his exam in



Professor Gunnar Boalt, 1910–2000.

1943, he was able to continue his research on social background and school results, but this time through a survey supported by the Stockholm School Board. In the meantime, he attended Tegen's seminar and studied the required literature at the Stockholm Library for the Social Sciences (*Socialvetenskapliga biblioteket*). In the autumn of 1947, he put forward his doctoral dissertation on school results for children of different social groups in Stock-

holm (Boalt 1947). Boalt's research laid the foundation for the internationally well-known sociological research in Stockholm concerning social selection and social mobility with followers such as Gösta Carlsson, Robert Eriksson and Jan O. Jonsson. The dissertation made him a docent of practical philosophy, and after a while he deputized for Tegen and started to give lectures in sociology and social psychology.

Sociology as an academic discipline was established in Sweden as a somewhat peculiar mix of philosophy and statistics. The kind of sociology that was expected by representatives of the new discipline was a scientific sociology based on statistics (Olsson 1997:227). The mission of sociology was to find the quantitative indicators required to measure and compare social phenomena and processes. There was indeed some opposition against this view of sociology, but the different views were seen as a division between continental (European) and American sociology, and at this time there was no doubt about what variant was the one preferred.

At this time American sociology was first and foremost represented in Sweden by George Lundberg. Boalt writes that Lundberg's book *Foundations of Sociology* published in 1939 had become like a bible for him and several others of those who participated in Tegen's seminars (Boalt 1995: 44). Lundberg had also been invited by the newly established Research Council for the Social Sciences to lecture in Sweden.

The Swedish idea of American sociology was, however, somewhat distorted. It has later been brought forward that Lundberg had become pleasantly surprised by the attention and status he received in Sweden, since he had hardly had the same recognition in the United States (Törnqvist 1997:251, Platt 1996:98). This is confirmed by the American sociologist Alvin Gouldner, who made friends with Gunnar Boalt around 1965 and wrote an introduction to Boalt's book on sociology of research. Gouldner mentions his surprise at the methodological consensus among sociologists in Sweden. He points out that the methodological subculture in the US is far more varied and multifaceted (Gouldner 1969:xxvii). This is how Gouldner describes the Swedish methodological subculture: "It was my impression that there is no group of sociologists anywhere in the world today who, more than those in Sweden, have a clearer and more agreed-upon view of the standards and values to which good sociology should conform. Swedish sociologists seemed to me to be the people of, by and for a formal methodology" (1969: xxviii). This statement was more accurate for the sociology department in Stockholm than for other departments in Sweden. Gouldner adds that his description does not necessarily state what sociologists in Sweden do but above all their culture and morals.

The background of the interest in quantitative methods was the development of survey methodology seen in the US. Sending out



Restrictive policies against changing the intentions of the architect leave little room for the creativity of interior decoration in the many identical corridors of Södra huset. (Photo: Mats Danielson)

questionnaires and getting relevant answers from a representative sample of the population was a sensational innovation that raised hopes of being able to investigate people's attitudes in an entirely new way. Such surveys

had never been done on a greater scale before (Platt 1996).

Although sociology had been established within practical philosophy, the new-born discipline dissociated itself quickly from the hu-

manities in general and looked towards the sciences. There was a tension within the discipline of sociology between the philosophical and humanistic roots, and the scientific ideal affects the subject even today.

Sociology differed from the already established disciplines within social science such as political science, economics and pedagogics. Sociology deals with the entire society and not with a particular part of society. Sociology does not have any other object than society itself and the relations between man and society in general. The new discipline could offer a number of concepts to analyse relations between individuals and society such as roles, norms and status groups. Sociologists talk about social stratification, social classes and social mobility, but in order to develop these concepts much theoretical work is required. The expectations of the new sociologists were, however, to produce empirical results as a basis for social planning and the solving of various social problems. Looking back at this period, Gunnar Boalt has written that the expectations of the sociologists were high but the resources given were very limited (Boalt 1969:83).

The development of sociological research in Stockholm

In order to give an overview of the development of the discipline of sociology at Stock-

holm University College, it is not enough to look at the Department of Sociology. Since sociology does not have a particular part of society as its object of research, and from the start was strongly identified with a special type of research method, the boundaries of the discipline are quite vague. Sociology can be applied through a number of different analyses of society. The titles of the text-books that Gunnar Boalt started to write as a new professor can illustrate the span of what sociologists do: sociology of the family, sociology of religion, sociology of work and sociology of illness. But these are just some examples.

Gunnar Boalt once pointed out that the Stockholm sociologists often cooperated with other academic institutions within and outside the university, and several of the professorships at the Department of Sociology in the 1960s were shared with other departments or research institutes (Boalt 1970:107).

In order to give a correct picture of sociology at Stockholm University, it is necessary to take up the shifts that have taken place in the organisation of sociological research at the University. I would like to emphasise three such tendencies that also illustrate what sociological research at the University has been about. First of all, several fields of study have hived off from sociology. The most obvious case is criminology. The first chair in criminology was established at the Department of So-

ciology in 1964. In 1970, criminology became an independent division within the Department and it was turned into a department of its own in 1987. When social work was set up as a doctoral programme at the School of Social Studies in 1977, the first professor, Hans Berglind, came from the Department of Sociology. Several other sociologists soon moved to the Department of Social Work (Ulla Pettersson, Annika Puide). Yet another sociologist from the Department became professor of social work, Sune Sunesson, but this time in Lund. Second, there is a long history of the establishment of sociological research within specialized research institutes at the Faculty of Social Sciences. The earliest was the Institute for Social Research (SOFI) established in 1972 with professorships in sociology as well as economics. The first two professors of sociology at SOFI were Walter Korpi (social politics) and Sten Johansson (level of living studies). Korpi had his PhD from Stockholm University in 1966. Johansson moved from the Department of Sociology in Uppsala where he had been the director of the first Level of Living Study. In 1985, Johansson was succeeded by Robert Eriksson.

By the end of the 1990s, two new research institutes with professorships in sociology were established. The Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs (SoRAD) was

set up as a cooperation between sociology, psychology and social work. Eckart Köhler, who held the chair in sociological research on alcohol, moved to this institute as well as several other researchers from the Department of Sociology. This professorship had been instituted by the government in the early 1980s. There had been some research within the field already in the 1960s, but this new chair was held by the prominent Finnish alcohol researcher Kettil Bruun, who died already in 1985. The Centre for Health Equity Studies (CHESS) was established in 2000 as a joint venture between Stockholm University and *Karolinska Institutet*. A professorship of medical sociology held by Denny Vågerö was transferred to CHESS, and several other sociologists joined.

Some years earlier in 1992, the Stockholm Centre for Organizational Research (Score) was established as a result of an initiative from the Swedish Parliament to support research on organisation of the public sector. Score is a joint venture between the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Stockholm School of Economics. Score is organised in a different way compared to other research institutes. There is only one permanent position at Score, a professorship in one of its core subjects, currently political science. All other researchers at Score are expected to share their time between their home department and Score. The disciplines represented at Score have above all been business administra-

tion, political science, sociology and social anthropology. In 1995 I was engaged at Score, which meant new interesting opportunities for research across disciplinary boundaries. My engagement at Score also gave opportunities for several PhD students as well as some post doc positions.

Sociology has many interfaces with other disciplines and sociology is represented in many multidisciplinary co-operations. This is more or less a typical feature of sociological research, and multidisciplinary research is necessary and important. Nevertheless, this is also a problem for sociology. In the long run it is a threat against sociological competence if researchers become specialists in multidisciplinary fields. In order to be able to contribute something to a multidisciplinary environment, sociologists also have to maintain and develop their sociological competence. This competence has to be acquired together with sociologists working in other research fields. It is only in this way we can develop social explanations of human behaviour as a complement to cultural, economic, and psychological explanations.

There is a decided risk that the independent research institutes will exploit the departments. I believe it is important to develop organisational forms in order to facilitate the cooperation between research institutes and departments. Departments often have to pull the heaviest load with less rewarding tasks and

they are also disadvantaged when applying for research grants.

One can also note that sociological theories, concepts and methods have spread to many other social science disciplines. Today, sociology as a research practice is pursued within many academic disciplines other than sociology proper, both within the humanities, medicine and social sciences (cf. Allardt 1995:19). I cannot develop this idea further within this context.

The Department of Sociology

In 1954, sociology became an independent discipline at Stockholm University College, and Gunnar Boalt was appointed the first professor. Another two new professorships of sociology were created in Sweden in the 1950s and the incumbents were both former participants of Einar Tegen's seminars: Gösta Carlsson in Lund and Edmund Dahlström in Gothenburg. To the new professorship in Stockholm was attached an assistant position held by Carl-Gunnar Jansson, who succeeded Boalt in 1977.

The largest and most dominating research project at the Department during this time was a project led by Jansson. Project Metropolitan, which was its early name, was originally conceived as a comparative Nordic project. The initiative came from the Danish sociologist Kaare Svalastoga in the early 1960s. The aim was to compare the impact of socio-economic

background on education and future living conditions among children in Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki through non-retrospective longitudinal data. The project was in line with previous studies at the Department by Boalt, among others. This project, however, was much more extensive and one was aware that it would take at least twenty years before there were any interesting results (Jansson 1995b). Helsinki and Oslo disappeared early from the picture, but the work had started in Stockholm and was supported already from the beginning by *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* (The Tercentenary Fund of Sweden's Central Bank).

The sample for Project Metropolitan in Stockholm consisted of 15,117 children living in Stockholm in 1963 and born in 1953. The investigation started in 1966 with a survey distributed to all children in schools. Two years later their families received a survey. Apart from these surveys, data were collected from various public registers. In 1985 a new survey was conducted that was sent out to all 15,000. This survey dealt especially with recreational activities. Following this survey, a huge public debate broke out. It started with a long article in *Dagens Nyheter* on the 10th of February 1986. Headlines shouted that 15,000 Swedes had been secretly investigated for 20 years. The debate that followed in the spring of 1986 was absurd and can only be explained by the spirit

of the times and the criticism of bureaucracy and authorities that was prevalent, but it was also easy for those who were involved in the investigation to recognise each other and mobilise resistance. Referring to the Data Protection Act, thousands of them demanded information about what data that had been collected about them. The result of the debate was that the data had to be anonymised, which made further investigations impossible. However, in later years it has been possible to complete the material with recent data from public registers, which has made some new analyses possible. The whole story about the project and its results has recently been excellently documented in a book by Sten-Åke Stenberg, professor at SOFI and himself included in the sample of the investigation (Stenberg 2013).

The critique against Project Metropolitan in 1986 was misdirected and incorrect and has to be understood in connection with a general scepticism of much of the social science that was formulated in the 1980s. Yet, it is also obvious that Project Metropolitan was an impossible project in many ways. Nobody would come up with the idea of starting such a project today and it would hardly be possible. Just as the criticism of the project can be understood as an expression of the political climate and the spirit of the times, one can also understand the start of the project as an expression of the totally different spirit of the early 1960s.

Since its beginning in 1954, the development at the Department has been intermittent. From the beginning up until 1979 there was a steady expansion, and in the 1960s the number of students exploded. In the spring term 1970 the Department employed around 60 teachers and there were 3,000 students. The Department has never before or after been bigger, neither in terms of the number of students nor number of teachers. At the beginning of the 1970s, the number of students decreased, first of all because of university reforms but also because of smaller age groups.

Most of the teachers were not permanently employed and had to leave. However, during the expansion years, a number of younger teachers had been hired on a permanent basis, but most of them did not have a PhD. Their teaching loads had been very heavy, which had prevented them from being able to pursue careers as researchers. Moreover, some teachers and researchers moved to other neighbouring disciplines. For many years after 1970, hardly any new teachers were hired at the Department.

The situation was similar at all the old sociology departments at the undergraduate level during the 1970s and 1980s. The difference between the Stockholm department and the rest was at the graduate level. When the PhD education was reformed in 1969, the effect was a fast increase in the number of dissertations, es-

pecially at the departments in Uppsala and Lund. In Stockholm, however, the number of “new” sociology dissertations was very low for a long time. The department in Stockholm had produced twice as many “old” dissertations as the next department (Uppsala), but at the end of the 1980s the number of “new” dissertations was far behind the rest (especially Lund and Uppsala) (Wennemo 1995).

In many sociology departments in Sweden and elsewhere the discipline itself was in a state of turbulence: new theories were brought forward and there was above all a heavy dispute over sociological methods. The strong consensus that Alvin Gouldner had observed was quickly being broken. The critique against the dominance of quantitative methods was generally formulated as a critique of a positivistic research tradition, but concerning alternatives there were many ideas such as soft data, “*verstehen*”, hermeneutics or phenomenology. Unfortunately, the positions soon became fairly locked and unnecessarily polarised. In many departments qualitative methods became dominant, not least because most students find soft data more interesting.

The Stockholm department was relatively quiet during this period, however, and work with quantitative methods continued as before. For sociology in Sweden at large it has been a good thing that the sociologists in Stockholm defended and developed quantitative methods during these

years. In several other departments they were almost disappearing. Today there is a rather strong consensus and awareness that sociological research requires both quantitative and qualitative methods and that they can be combined.

In 1985 I received an appointment as docent at the Department of Sociology in Stockholm. I had then been a graduate student and been employed at the Department of Sociology in

Uppsala since the beginning of the 1970s. In 1976 I received my PhD there. My first employment as a sociologist was as an assistant within the Level of Living investigation led by Sten Johansson. After my PhD, I had worked as a research assistant to Ulf Himmelstrand in his big project on the future of the welfare state in Sweden. I also had a couple of other projects. One was in cooperation with the



From the time of the first student boom, when the Department of Sociology was housed in the city centre. Lots of teachers had been recruited but still, lots and lots of examination papers had to be marked by everyone.

American sociologist Erik Olin Wright in his ‘Comparative Class Structure’ project. The other was a project about bureaucracy and the welfare state. Since there were no open positions at the department in Uppsala I was very happy to get the opportunity to move to Stockholm. I had studied my first semester of sociology in Stockholm in 1964 where I had read several of Boalt’s books. In the first half of 1971, I worked at the Institute for Labour Market Research at Stockholm University, which was the predecessor of SOFI, with analysis of data from the Level of Living survey. Methodologically, I had used both quantitative and qualitative data in my research, and I had actively conducted several surveys. I have always been convinced that there is no contradiction between using different kinds of data and methods of analysis. When moving to the department in Stockholm in 1985, I immediately felt at home, and from the middle of the 1980s the research environment at the Department was slowly changing through a number of new recruitments.

Already in 1983 a professorship in demography, funded by the Social Science Research Council, was placed at the Department. Jan Hoem, who had held professorships in Oslo as well as Copenhagen, was appointed. It was on his initiative that the chair came to the Department of Sociology. From the outset, demography became a separate division within the De-

partment with between 5 and 10 researchers and PhD students.

In 1987, Richard Swedberg became an assistant professor at the Department. He had obtained his PhD in the United States (from Boston College). After returning to Sweden he had been working together with Ulf Himmelstrand in Uppsala. Two years later, Peter Hedström was appointed professor. He had previously worked as a researcher at SOFI, had obtained his PhD from Harvard and later worked at University of Chicago where he had collaborated with James Coleman, among others. A few years later Barbara Hobson, who had a PhD from the United States, was employed.

These new recruitments gave many new impulses to the research at the Department. Swedberg was internationally active in the development of the “new economic sociology” and was an outstanding editor of anthologies and a biographer. He also developed his own theoretical contributions, for instance a theory of interests. With Hedström he had a project on social mechanisms in which they cooperated with Jon Elster and some other internationally prominent sociologists. Through the research in this project, Hedström developed the foundations for an analytical sociology. Hobson launched the gender research at the Department. This research had above all a comparative and social political direction. From 1994 to 2002, Hobson was the head of CGS, an interdisciplinary

graduate school for comparative gender studies funded by *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond*. This school had graduate students from disciplines such as political science, anthropology, history and law. Many international scholars were invited to give mini-courses.

When I succeeded Carl-Gunnar Jansson on the chair in sociology, my possibilities of developing research in the field of organisation theory improved considerably. My aim was to connect organisation theory and general social theory. One of my projects dealt with organisational and social change. Other projects concerned the organisation of service work or new voluntary associations.

The graduate education changed as well. In the middle of the 1980s, the graduate education did not function very well and the postgraduate environment was experienced as poor (Wennebo 1995:173). From the early 1990s, we had opportunities to build up a new graduate education with an extensive supply of courses in sociological theories and methods as well as many special fields. We also had the opportunity to invite Thomas Coniavitis as a guest professor to teach theory. He was a professor in Athens, but had graduated from Uppsala University in 1977. Later, a professorship in sociological theory was established, which from 2004 was held by Lars Udéhn, who has a PhD from Uppsala.

In the first years of the new century, the Department got several new professors who fur-

ther strengthened the research environment: Karin Bergmark, Carl le Grand, Arni Sverrisson and Ryszard Szulkin. By that, the number of graduate students increased, not least because of the new projects initiated by the new professors. Many graduate students were also employed at the research institutes. The number of dissertations increased considerably during these years. During the 1980s, 19 dissertations were produced, but during the 1990s there were 33 dissertations and most of them during the last years. The largest increase happened in the years 2000 and 2001 with 8 and 13 dissertations, respectively. Since then the number of dissertations has varied between 5 and 12 a year. As a matter of fact, more than half of the dissertations at the Department of Sociology have been produced during the 21st century (even if one includes 'old' dissertations). In the last few years new graduate students have been recruited internationally to an increasing extent.

From the early 1990s the number of undergraduate students started to increase again: from a couple of hundred each term in the beginning of the 1990s to more than five hundred at the middle and the end of the decennium. This figure has remained relatively constant since then. The increased amount of teaching at the undergraduate level made it possible to engage graduate students and post docs in teaching, which often has provided a bridge to continued academic work.



Much information is conveyed at the central notice board opposite the elevators.
(Photo: Mats Danielson)

In the last ten years there has been a marked change of generations at the Department. In 2002 Richard Swedberg moved to the United States and a position at Cornell University. Peter Hedström obtained a professorship in sociology at the University of Oxford. Both of them have, however, maintained contact with the Department. Many of the lecturers who were employed at the end of the 1960s had retired. Of those lecturers who were employed at

the Department in the last ten years, many were relatively new PhDs. Most of them are now docents and one of them, Fredrik Liljeros, is now a professor. Today the Department is not, as before, split between a group of teachers at the undergraduate level and another group of researchers, but research and teaching are integrated to a much larger extent than earlier.

In 2009, Jens Rydgren was appointed to the chair in sociology after Boalt and Jansson,

which I had held since 1994. Rydgren is a political sociologist who has done excellent research on ethnic relations and on networks. Proof of the graduate education's vitality at the Department is that many of the sociologists that obtained their PhD at the Department since 1995 have been appointed to professorships at several other universities in Sweden: Patrik Aspers at Uppsala University, Christoffer Edling at Lund University, Magnus Boström at Örebro University, as well as Apostolis Pakostas at Södertörn University College.

The organisation of demographic research has fluctuated, too. At the end of the 1990s, Jan Hoem moved to a professorship at the Max Planck institute for demography in Rostock, followed by some of the other demographers. A couple of years later, the activities at the division of demography had decreased dramatically and the remaining researchers were integrated into the Department of Sociology. When a new professorship in demography was announced, the chair went to the internationally well-known demographer Elisabeth Thomson at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She had previously been guest researcher at the division and chose to place the professorship at the Department of Sociology. After her arrival in 2004, the demographic research group grew rapidly when they received several large research grants. Today, demographic research is a considerable part of the research at

the Department of Sociology. Thomson was in 2013 succeeded by Gunnar Andersson, who has a PhD from the Division of Demography and after that had spent some time in Rostock.

In spite of the somewhat uneven development, there is at the same time an apparent continuity in the sociological research at the Department. It is still known as the Swedish department where quantitative methods dominate and where competence in this area is the most developed. In several respects, quantitative methods have developed enormously in the last fifty years when it comes to the possibilities to analyse large data. The survey technique itself, however, and methods to make people answer questions, are at a standstill. Today there are real problems in getting enough people to participate in survey research (cf. Eriksson 2014:46). Moreover, sociology is not as dependent on its methods as it once was: not as strongly identified with a particular method. There is a greater awareness of the advantages and limitations of various methods. Today both quantitative and qualitative methods are taught in Stockholm, and quite a few successful researchers at the Department work with qualitative methods.

The competence and breadth developed in Stockholm sociology through cooperation between the Department and the research institutes in quantitative analyses has been a main reason for their increased external fund-

ing. Sociological research in Stockholm has a marked international circulation and the Department usually does well in international rankings of publications and citations.

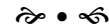
For sociology to be able to contribute to interdisciplinary cooperation in the long run, I hope that the Department will continue to be the arena where sociologists can develop their competence in confrontations and interchange with different kinds of sociological research. For this to be possible a strong competence in general sociological theory is also required. Different theories and methods must be able to meet and be tested against each other. Only in this way can sociology and our understanding of society increase.

So far has this been an embarrassingly male story. Of those mentioned in this overview the vast majority have been men; only a few women appear. This is a mirror of how it has been. Although the absolute majority of the students at the undergraduate level since the 1970s have been women, the proportion of women on higher positions has remained very low. Are there no signs that the male dominance on higher positions will be broken? One can on the one hand look at dissertations, and on the other newly hired lecturers.

When it comes to dissertations there has been a tangible change in the last 15 years. If we go far back we can notice that only one of the ‘old’ dissertations had a female author. Up until the year 2000 about one third of the

‘new’ dissertations had a female author. From 2000, however, a majority of new PhDs are women: 60 women and 42 men from 2000 to 2012.

Among the 10 most recently employed lecturers, six are women, five of which are docents. In all likelihood, this indicates that the Department in the near future will finally have far more female than male professors.



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The Department of Sociology has been located in Building B of Södra huset since it moved to Frescati in 1971. (Photo: Mats Danielson)



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