



What is the Nordic approach to the IAS model and interdisciplinary research?

or

Mission Impossible?

Camilla Serck-Hanssen,
Director CAS



Three parts

IAS models in the Nordic
Countries

Shared premises, assumptions
and values

Are we on the right track?



Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS)

Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS) in Denmark opened in 2012 as part of Aarhus University. **Curiosity-driven and independent research** for excellent **scholars from all disciplines** is the hallmark of AIAS.

Focus is on research excellence and research training, and the individual research projects are all **initiated and defined by the fellows themselves.**

AIAS hosts 40 international fellows (junior and senior) in all areas of research.



Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS)

The institute is situated in the middle of the university park in Aarhus. The unique architecture, the permanent exhibition of more than 50 examples of contemporary Danish art donated by the New Carlsberg Foundation, and the location of the institute provide a **free and inspiring playground** for research excellence and interdisciplinary for our fellows.



Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS), Uppsala

The Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS) aims to provide optimal research conditions for **curiosity-driven research**.

The Collegium is a scholarly community where Fellows pursue **research of their own choosing** in a context of interdisciplinary dialogue and cooperation.

Governmental support and support from major research foundations allow the invited Fellows to **freely decide on their study** and to engage in focused research.



Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS), Uppsala

Since its foundation in 1985, SCAS has striven to protect and nurture **independent inquiry**, collaborative and deep thinking, and to emphasize the importance of academic freedom worldwide.

The Collegium is open to applications from **scholars across the range of the human and social sciences, as well as from the natural sciences.**



Centre for Advanced Study (CAS), Oslo

The Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) in Oslo is an independent foundation funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The centre furthers excellent, **fundamental, curiosity-driven research**.

Each year, following an application process that includes an international peer review CAS selects three research groups working on projects **within and across the fields of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences**



Centre for Advanced Study (CAS), Oslo

All scholars who hold permanent research positions at CAS' partner institutions in Norway are eligible to submit a project proposal and assemble and lead the corresponding research group at CAS. Project leaders can invite **researchers from around the world at any stage of their careers** to participate in the project.

CAS provides a generous budget (NOK 3.5 million pr. project), excellent infrastructure, quality housing and **uninterrupted time for research**. Since its opening in 1992, the Centre has hosted more than a thousand researchers.



Turku Institute for Advanced Studies (TIAS)

Turku Institute for Advanced Studies (TIAS) was founded in 2008 and works across the faculties of Economics, Education, Humanities, Law and Social Sciences at the University of Turku.

TIAS provides its Fellows with three years funding for **self-determined research projects** based on academic excellence. The Institute funds Fellows at two career levels: Postdoctoral (within five years of competing a PhD) and Collegium (mid career, up to twelve years from PhD).



Turku Institute for Advanced Studies (TIAS)

TIAS issues annual Calls for Fellows to join us, with an application process based on the Academy of Finland's criteria for **research excellence** and featuring an international peer review process.

We receive around 50 applications for every position on offer. The Institute's annual running costs of around €2M are largely covered by the University, with some project funding from the Academy of Finland, the Kone Foundation and NOS-HS. On average around 25 Fellows are present in TIAS at any one time.



*curiosity-driven
and
independent
research*

*initiated and defined by the fellows
themselves.*

free and inspiring playground

International

*protect and nurture independent inquiry,
collaborative and deep thinking*

*within and across the fields
of the humanities, social
sciences, and natural
sciences*

uninterrupted time for research

*across the range of the human and
social sciences, as well as from the
natural sciences*

academic freedom

Shared premisses

Research projects should be initiated and freely defined by the fellows themselves

The researchers should engage in basic research

The researchers should be uninterrupted by other tasks

The research environment should be international

Humanities and social sciences (in the wide sense) are as important as natural science and mathematics.

Shared assumptions

Undirected research and scholarship turn out to be remarkably successful

Bringing scientists and scholars from different fields together in a center or institute will foster interdisciplinarity

The unity of science and knowledge

Shared values

Trust

Internationalization

Academic freedom (in a strong sense)



“The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge”
(Harpers Magazine, 1937)

The Heritage from Abraham Flexner

“Throughout the whole history of science most of the really great discoveries which had ultimately proved to be beneficial to mankind had been made by men and women who were driven not by the desire to be useful but merely the desire to satisfy their curiosity.” (p. 545)

“We make ourselves no promises, but we cherish the hope that the unobstructed pursuit of useless knowledge will prove to have consequences in the future as in the past. Not for a moment, however, do we defend the Institute on that ground. It exists as a paradise for scholars who, like poets and musicians, have won the right to do as they please and who accomplish most when they are able to do so.” (p.552)

Flexner's Arguments

- Arguments for usefulness is based on examples from mathematics and natural science. What about the rest? Very different approach:

I have spoken of mathematics; but what I say is equally true of music and art and of every other expression of the untrammelled human spirit. The mere fact that they bring satisfaction to an individual soul bent upon its own purification and elevation is all the justification that they need (p.549).

- Academic freedom implies tolerance and universally shared values and standards:

The fundamental importance of absolute untrammelled academic freedom...[It] implies tolerance throughout the range of human dissimilarities (p.550).

- Science need not be directed because knowledge is beyond (negative) moral evaluation and the scientists must be free from responsibility:

Scientists are, however, no more to blame [for new and more destructive arms] than they are to blame for an earthquake or a flood (p.546).

- Geniuses should not be controlled and deserve full freedom.
- Technological innovation is far less admirable than basic science:

“Marconi, an inventor, who, while a benefactor to the human race, as a matter of fact merely "picked other men's brains." Edison belongs to the same category (p.549)”

Should We Argue Like Flexner?

Most of the research at the Nordic IASs is not in mathematics and experimental sciences but in the humanities and social sciences. Flexner's best argument is not easy to extend to these domains.

The argument that the geniuses are fit to "do as they please" is not likely to cover many of our fellows.

The argument that undirected research equals academic freedom which again implies tolerance and democracy is questionable. Possibly the conditional goes (only) the other way.

The argument that knowledge is morally neutral is questionable and does not imply that research should be undirected.

The devaluation of technological innovations is silly.

What Arguments Should We Use?

Our centers are suited to further projects (in whatever field) that disclose problems and questions which are not already on the agenda everywhere else. In particular, SSH are sources for conceptual critique and a special use of imagination.

Need not host geniuses but very strong researchers who are allowed to focus and take risk.

The center model enables and furthers intellectual dialogue across disciplines, career stages and nationalities.

But...

I think we should try to expand the dialogue. To “see” new and surprising problems one also needs to be subject to new input. If we still believe in the center model, why not expand the domain of possible dialogue?

Exploring Transdisciplinarity



WHERE SCIENCE MEETS BUSINESS

Oslo Science Park - a meeting place and community where 3,000 people from business, research and academia have their workplace in offices and laboratories. The mission of Oslo Science Park is value creation for growth companies and commercialisation of research.

Two Recent Success Stories from CAS

Modelling Human Happiness (RCN)

Ancient Philosophy
and Experimental Psychology

(CAS 2009-10)

Construction in the Formal Sciences (ERC)

Philosophy, Mathematics, Formal
Ontology

Application in the programming
industry

(CAS 2015-16)