



# Friends with benefits?

Researcher's relationships with industry, government and not-for-profit

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**INVEST**

#NewWelfareState



UNIVERSITY  
OF TURKU



Finnish institute for  
health and welfare

# A **bit** of personal history

# I have considered jumping from **academia** to **a public sector research career** twice:

After Master's degree and a trainee period in the Legal policy institute in 1997

After my 1-year project stint in THL (the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare) in 2009

## In **both** cases:

The offers were **competitive** - e.g. clearly better pay than what I would get at the University

I really liked the **working atmosphere** and the people in research centers!

In the end, I chose "**academic freedom**" instead

**However, what does the  
academic freedom mean  
in this case?**

# In both cases, the **non-academic** host institutes:

...had better resources than Uni dept I was heading at

...encouraged dialogue between research and civil society even more than University

...were methodologically top-notch / hard-core and were publishing a lot in high-quality venues

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= freedom has a **price!**

**So definitely**  
after choosing twice

**academic research career over  
non-academic research career**

I contrast myself with  
**industry, government and not-for-profit**  
sides of research activities

# Relationships with the industry

**My first reaction:**

**Personally, none  
whatsoever!**

**Not really true for the  
most of us,**

**even in**

**humanities and social  
sciences**

**We work with publishing industry,  
regularly**

**We are maybe even part of it**

# A **second** bit of personal history



# My stint as an editor of **Acta Sociologica**, 2015-18

The editorial team worked closely with **SAGE Publishing**

Even if many see publishers greedy, this was not at all how  
it felt!

**Mutual respect** - both needing each others input

**A lot of tolerance** towards academic oddities

A very **generous** publishing deal with Nordic Sociological  
Association that owns the journal

**Much of the **Open science movement** critique towards publishing industry is valid**

...but it is not true that academics and academic communities have not benefitted from the relationship with them

**Funders' interests** do not necessary align here with **researchers' interests**

I still have not met a scholar who does not want ones research to be read as widely as possible

We *definitely* are a part of the **research and development, education and teaching industries**

And often work in **close collaboration** with many other public sector industries

## To conclude

Researchers are a **part of the industries** themselves

We regularly collaborate with many other industries,  
especially when it is **mutually beneficial**

# Relationships with the government

**A **third** (and fourth) bit of  
personal history**

**My Master's thesis on credit defaulters, 1997**

VS.

**Our study on daycare attendance and educational attainment  
(Karhula et al, 2017)**

# Thesis on **credit defaulters**, 1997

Published by Stakes, the predecessor of THL

A huge **public interest**, also had an **impact on the legislation** on credit defaulting

An early experience that **you can make a difference with research** - even if the piece of research itself is not that spectacular!

**Perfect (historical) time** for choosing that topic!



# Daycare attendance and educational attainment (Karhula et al, 2017)

**Motivation:** personal frustration on the contrasts between Finnish and wider European discussion on the long-term effects of daycare on children

Invitation to write a book chapter a good excuse to do **the first Finnish study** on the topic!

Showing results => minister's assistant calls...

# What followed

In the end, **huge fuss** but the study became a **political tool**, no change in legislation etc

Fights with **economists** and **developmental psychologists**, on surface on causality, in reality on **topic ownership**

MAYBE a positive result: *"Changed the way daycare is framed in public discourse in Finland"* (prof. Anneli Anttonen)

# To conclude:

With government research institutes we collaborate on research,  
highly successfully (THL is part of INVEST)

But with government we collaborate to make changes that need  
**political decisions**

Can sometimes lead to **huge successes**, in a **small** country  
easier than in big countries

But be aware: **most politicians** are interested in your research  
only as long as it fits with their political agenda

# Relationships with the **not-for-profits**

# Small non-profits

Often have **a huge interest** towards research -- with a hope of that confirming their issue of concern

Sometimes concerns are real, but small size of a non-profit also often signals for a **limited social relevancy of the concern**

**Not always true** (e.g., my study on credit defaulters)

The big question for **an emphatic researcher**: how a study can be financed?

# **Smallish but *rich* non-profits**

Usually backed up by a **big donor** or few

Can pay a **professorship** - but not on any topic

**The interests of the donors** can be pretty directly expressed - and can also **change**

# Big non-profits

Often also do research on their own -- unfortunately sometimes **agenda-driven**

Can support research but do not have **research infrastructures**, so in need of university collaborators

However, sometimes manage to do **excellent independent research!**

(Although I have a plenty of opposite examples)

## To conclude:

Non-profits can be **enthusiastic** partners for research

However, the reason for their existence is that they **always have an agenda!**



# Summary

**Do not be afraid** of the industry collaboration - you are yourself part of some industries

To change society through research you need to be **friends with politicians** - but remember they often lose their interest fast if your findings do not fit with their agenda, so only one is not enough

Not-for-profits can be enthusiastic partners - but they **always also have an agenda**

**Thank you!**