



# STRUGGLES OVER LEGITIMATE SCIENCE:

## *Science Policy Ideals of Excellence within the Field of Sociology*

by Johanna Hokka

*In several countries, national governments have implemented science policy reforms to elevate research excellence and to promote managerialist principles with an aim to gain success in the global knowledge-based economy. This qualitative study explores discursive responses to the current science policy reforms in Finnish and Swedish sociology. Drawing on a Bourdieusian perspective and a two-country research context, the research scrutinises the dynamics between the field of sociology and science policy paying particular attention to how the science policy ideals on excellence appear in the internal discursive struggles surrounding legitimate science among professors of sociology, who are conceived as a scientific elite. The results show that the excellence ideals are met in various, conflicting ways in sociology. Furthermore, there are national differences as Finnish sociology expresses more compliance towards science policy reforms than its Swedish counterpart, which seems more able to distance itself from these ideals and cherish traditional academic values. These findings evince that although science policy trends are becoming increasingly global, national university traditions and political cultures entail a slightly different national shape to seemingly similar reforms, which again, shapes the way the science policy incentives are made sense of at the grassroots level of academia, even within this particular discipline.*

**Keywords:** Science policy, excellence, sociology, legitimate science, scientific capital

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## Introduction

Global competition has increased European universities' commitment to excellence as an all-embracing objective. The promotion of excellence discourse has been accelerated by the policy convergence prompted by supranational organisations such as the OECD and European Union (EU). At the EU-level, the Bologna Process ensuring high-quality standards and facilitating the comparability of qualifications throughout Europe and the establishment of the new funding mechanism, the European Research Council (ERC), have played a crucial role in defining the notions of excellence in the European context. The ERC has promoted competition as a core mechanism to distribute funding for the most excellent research and the use of international peer review as a criterion for evaluating excellence. At the national level, excellence rhetoric has guided reforms in funding allocation systems and the construction of research evaluation systems in order to achieve 'world-class' research. (Wedlin and Hedmo 2015.) Also, the rise of New Public Management (NPM) doctrines in recent decades has increased the use of steering mechanisms, especially performance-based funding to ensure the productivity and efficiency of universities (Elzinga 2012; Slaughter and Leslie 1997). These reforms have aimed to enhance competitiveness, improve academic performance and increase the internationalisation of national science systems (Pinheiro et al. 2014; Sørensen et al. 2016). However, despite the stated policy convergence, the different national governance models and different university traditions generate national variations in the ways in which NPM reforms are put into practice (Bleiklie et al. 2017).

The concept of excellence and attempts to implement and operationalise it have been the object of considerable criticism. The performance measures are seen to cause unintended consequences (Weingart 2005); they are blamed for focusing too much on quantity rather than quality of research (Gläser et al. 2002) leading to a reification of individual performance measures (Burrows 2003). Additionally, since research excellence is often paralleled with English-language publications and the indicators are calculated for journals indexed in the mostly English-language Web of Science (WoS), these measures are considered inadequate for addressing the social sciences and humanities (SSH), which produce more native-language publications for national audiences (Hicks et al. 2015). Furthermore, whilst policy declarations have promoted excellence, they have also highlighted the need to foster social relevance in research, which in turn, has created tensions in universities as they struggle to find a balance between global academic excellence and direct contributions to local and national economic development and relevance (Pinheiro et al. 2014). Notwithstanding these criticisms, some scholars argue that the current indicators, while providing transparent rules, democratised the previous, potentially more 'nepotistic' method of evaluating scholars (Fochler and de Rijcke 2017).

Despite strong interest in the influence of science policy reforms in academic contexts, less attention is paid to how the science policy incentives are made sense of at the grassroots level of academia. The existing body of literature has shown that academics in general either support, comply with or resist the reforms by appealing to traditional academic values (Santiago and Carvalho 2012; Ylijoki 2014). Additionally, few studies examining the epistemic effects of performance metrics from the micro-level perspective have focused on analysing life sciences (Fochler et al. 2016; Müller and de Rijcke 2017) and arts and humanities (Hammarfelt and de Rijcke 2016). These studies demonstrate that the performance measures have become a dominant way of ascribing worth to academic practices in life sciences, and the development of publication patterns have followed the formal policy measures in humanities. However, previous studies have not taken into account the internal variance of disciplines and conflicts in terms of what is conceived as 'good' science. Drawing on a Bourdieusian perspective, this study zooms in on the complex dynamics between the disciplinary field and science policy by examining how the science policy ideals on excellence appear in the internal struggles surrounding legitimate science among the scientific elite of sociology in Finland and in Sweden. As alluded to before, although science policy trends are becoming increasingly global, national university traditions and political cultures still give slightly different national shapes to seemingly similar reforms, which makes national contrasting important. This study, by combining a Bourdieusian framework and a two-country research context, contributes to a deeper understanding of the sense-making at the grassroots level by showing the various, conflicting ways of receiving the excellence discourse within sociology, and the apparent differences between the dynamics of sociology and science policy in these two national contexts.

Sociology serves as an especially interesting case to analyse since, in recent years, it has gone through a process of fragmentation, which is often discussed under the rubric of 'crisis' because it is seen to erode the disciplinary coherence of sociology. Some scholars say that this fragmentation makes sociology especially vulnerable to the current metric culture making it unable to sustain its critical sensibility (Holmwood 2010). According to Burawoy (2005), today's competitive university context forces sociologists to focus only on earning academic credentials through highly-ranked scientific journals for peers at the expense of disseminating the ideas of democracy and humanism to lay society. This, in turn, marginalises the core mission of sociology, that is, the defence of humanity. However, Burawoy's (2005) contention represents only one of the many visions of the mission of sociology. Previous studies have shown that there is no shared understanding of legitimate sociology inside the field but multiple, even conflicting views on what 'good' sociology ought to be (Abend 2006; Hokka 2018).



By focusing on the identification of discursive responses to conditions and dynamics in the current science policy regime, the research questions guiding the study are: What kinds of discourses on legitimate science are used among the scientific elite of sociology in Finland and in Sweden? What kind of stance is

taken towards science policy ideals related to excellence? How do the discourses differ between the Finnish and Swedish contexts?

Next, I will expand on the Bourdieusian perspective applied in the study before considering the cases themselves and discussing my findings.

## The Theoretical Frame

For Bourdieu (1988, 1999), the social space is composed of hierarchically structured, semiautonomous fields that function in accordance with their own internal logic, rules and practices. A field is an arena in which actors struggle for power. Since the struggles usually take the form of competition regulated by field-specific rules, Bourdieu uses a game metaphor to illustrate the actions in a field. In a scientific field, the struggles surround power to determine what is conceived of as legitimate science. Thus, the struggles also determine the conditions under which the actors will be accepted in the field, as well as the dominant forms of scientific capital associated with the production of 'good' science. Any property of knowledge production or dissemination, professional trajectory or other aspect of scientific practice can become a form of capital if it is widely valued. Whether a given property gains a high or low volume of capital depends on the recognised value it obtains in the scientific struggle. In these struggles, distinctions serve as practice to separate properties with high capital volume from those with low capital volume (Bourdieu 1984, 1993).

As the fields are only relatively autonomous, the more autonomy a field has, the more capacity it has to establish and uphold its rules. With regard to the scientific field, science policy, by managing resources and institutions of the academic domain, extends its power over the scientific field; therefore, the degree of autonomy of the scientific field is in the hands of science policy. According to Bourdieu, when the autonomous functioning of a field is defied by an external field, struggles within the field grow even more ferocious. Then, those actors who are comfortable with the emerging rules clash with those who are attached to the past. Through strategies, the actors either oppose or embrace the new rules of the game and simultaneously strive to discredit the forms

of capital upon which their opponents rest to valorise the species of capital that they possess in greater measure. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992.)

Previously, the Bourdieusian perspective has been applied in analysing sociology in the face of science policy demands concerning the social utility of academic research. Albert (2003) demonstrated that despite the increasing science policy demands, field-specific internal dynamics still determine what is conceived of as legitimate in Canadian sociology. Conversely, Kropp and Blok (2011) demonstrated that scientific practices in Danish sociology have been strongly imposed upon by science policy. In this study, Bourdieu's theory serves as a 'hermeneutic tool' to analyse what kind of discursive strategies the field of sociology occupied with different visions of legitimate science adopts to address science policy ideals of excellence. The interest lays in how the ideals of excellence shape the symbolic value of the various forms of scientific capital, and how, through distinctions, the actors strive to accumulate the recognized value of those forms of scientific capital that mesh with their vision of legitimate science. In addition, I will scrutinise whether the strategies used in sociology have national particularities. Considering a two-country research context provides the opportunity of attending to and making some claims about the autonomy of the field in two distinct national contexts.

Next, I will present the higher education systems and recent science policy incentives in Finland and in Sweden to illuminate which properties hold symbolic value in the current science policy regime and what rules science policy invites or compels sociology to adopt.

## Finnish and Swedish Science Policy Context

Finnish and Swedish higher education (HE) systems are often described as being part of a single 'Nordic model' founded on a strong welfare state and the emphasis it places on equality and democratic values (Elken et al. 2016). With both countries becoming increasingly positioned in the international context, these values have, however, given way to the ideals of competitiveness, efficiency and excellence (Pinheiro et al. 2014). In fact, due to the great share of competitive, external funding, Finland with fifty-eight percent and Sweden with fifty-five percent (in 2015), these

two countries represent one of the most competitive funding systems in Europe (Jacob 2015; Saarnivaara 2015).

When taking a more detailed look at the HE systems in the two countries, Finland has a dual system, consisting of universities and twenty-four universities of applied sciences, whereas Swedish HE is composed of forty institutions in which twelve are older and four are newer universities, five are university colleges, and the rest are private higher education institutions. The older



universities receive about ninety percent of all research funding, while the rest focus on education, which makes the Swedish system stratified (Ljungberg et al. 2010).

In both countries, the funding systems have been renewed to better measure scientific performance and to support excellence. In 2013, the Finnish government introduced a funding formula that aimed to create 'high-quality, profiled and effective international university' (MEC 2011). The model highlights scientific output and external funding as core indicators since scientific publications account for thirteen percent and external funding, nine percent of the model. The renewed model also introduced 'internationalisation' as a new indicator that includes international teaching and research personnel and PhD degrees awarded to foreign nationals. (Kivistö et al. 2017.) The share of funding based on publications has constantly increased, being 0.3 percent in 2007–2009 and 1.7 percent in 2010–2012, but in 2013, the share increased considerably, to thirteen percent. Also, a new way of calculating scientific publications was implemented in 2013. The funding of scientific publications has been tied to the scheme known as the 'Publication Forum' in which peer-reviewed publications are divided into a three-level categorisation based to their evaluated scientific relevance with level three representing the 'top', level two 'leading' and level one representing 'basic'. Publications are also awarded points based on publication channels so that monographs in the third level receive the highest score. The Publication Forum has been frequently criticised for not taking into account SSH fields since Finnish language publications are mostly ranked at levels one or two; level three includes only international outlets. According to critiques, the SSH fields are undervalued and are in a disadvantaged position in the funding model. (Pölönen et al. 2018.)

In Sweden, the goal of the renewed funding model, introduced in 2009, was to 'work more actively with research quality' (Government Bill 2008–2009) and to enhance the internationalisation of research. Previously, the institutional block grant was allocated on a historical basis, that is, the government subsidised each domain. The current model is based on two quality indicators, research publications/citations and external funding, each accounting for ten percent. The research publications and citations are calculated on the basis of bibliometric indicators gathered via the WoS. Also in Sweden, the system of calculating publications was found disadvantageous for SSH because less than ten percent of the publications from the SSH fields are visible in WoS. Therefore, a sophisticated field-weighted measurement system was launched. (Jacob 2015.)

## Data and Methods

Two datasets constitute the study's empirical base: ten interviews with Finnish professors of sociology and ten with Swedish professors.

In both countries, declarations of science policy have cited issues of social relevance and the utility of academic research as important, but during the time when the interviews were gathered, the national funding models in both countries lacked policy instruments that support social relevance.<sup>1</sup> However, the public funding bodies (the Academy of Finland and the Swedish Research Council, which allocate grant money on competitive basis for the research of the 'highest quality'), besides emphasising scientific quality, innovativeness, international visibility, international collaboration and mobility, also highlight the social relevance of research in their funding criteria (Aksnes et al. 2012).

Despite similarities, some national differences exist. The clear difference between Finland and Sweden is that Sweden has not carried the national funding model over as-is into universities' internal allocation schemes (Hammarfelt and Åström 2015), whereas in Finland, universities have proactively copied the funding model's fundamental principles into their own allocation systems (Kallio and Kallio 2014). According to Auranen and Nieminen (2010), this makes the Finnish system more competitive than its Swedish counterpart. In fact, it is argued that the Finnish model is one of the most performance-oriented funding models in Europe (de Boer et al. 2015). Furthermore, Finland has been more radical in modernising its HE according to NPM principle than Sweden, and the shift towards market-oriented HE was exceptionally rapid and profound. In Finland, the reforms have been strongly politically steered and state-led, whereas in Sweden, the shift towards NPM principles has been more moderate (Auranen and Nieminen 2010; Pelkonen and Teräväinen-Litardo 2013). This is illustrated, for instance, by the change in the legal statuses of universities in Finland and Sweden. In Finland, the status of universities changed from state administrations to public corporations strengthening their financial and administrative autonomy and abolishing the status of employees as civil servants in 2010. In Sweden, however, despite the government's efforts to invite universities to apply to leave the civil service and reconstitute themselves as public foundations, the majority of universities refused, and they remained government agencies with their staff retaining their status as civil servants. (Jacob 2015; Pinheiro et al. 2014.)

When discussing the study's results, I will examine the place of these policy incentives, the reforms in funding allocation systems and the internationalisation targets motivated by excellence in the sense-making of Finnish and Swedish sociology.

The interviewees, all in their fifties and sixties, represented a wide array of research orientations and epistemological styles. Only

<sup>1</sup> In Sweden from 2018, allocation is based on three criteria: performance in attracting project funding, publications and co-operation with companies and society.



three of the interviewees were women (two Swedish, one Finnish), reflecting the male dominance of Finnish and Swedish sociology in general. Finland has forty-four professors of sociology, less than a third of whom are women (Vipunen 2016); the corresponding number in Sweden is nearly double that at eighty, with about one-quarter being women (UKÄ 2011). The sociology departments chosen for this study are nationally leading departments located in established and research-intensive universities.

The purpose was to trace the discursive responses of sociology to the science policy reforms from the point of view of informants with a very special speaker positions in the field (Alasuutari 1995), not to capture the sense-making of the field in general. The informants were selected for their standing in the field. They are full-time professors with permanent positions and eminent scholars having attained scientific renown nationally and internationally through their research. Furthermore, they hold major positions in decision-making bodies through which they control internal reproduction and serve as gatekeepers to knowledge and reputation in the field (Bourdieu 1988). Hence, they can be conceptualised as scientific elite. From this elite position, they have the power to 'delineate and embody the values of [their] discipline[s]' (Becher 1989: 3) and to make decisions about what constitutes legitimate science in the field (Bourdieu 1988). This renders the sense-making of these carefully selected informants especially relevant.

The interview themes ranged from daily work practices and personal career trajectory to broader themes related to the transformation of the university sector and its effects on the status of sociology. As for the analysis, I used discursive reading

to trace the relatively coherent cultural sense-making structures that captured the distinct visions of legitimate science in sociology (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). In the analysis process, I first read through all of the data several times and then selected all extracts that pertained to the relevant aspects of science policy in one way or another. From these selected extracts, I inductively generated data-driven classifications denoted as discourses. Besides manifesting a certain kind of vision of legitimate sociology, the discourses also serve as discursive strategies to respond to the science policy ideals on excellence. To unravel the internal dynamics in each national context, I examined relationships among the discourses in each nation's data through a context-sensitive close reading. I also paid close attention to the pervasiveness of the discourses in the sense that if some discourse penetrated the whole data, it served as dominant discourse. The discourses are named on the basis of the stance towards the science policy ideals (supporting, opposing and complying). Each discourse was utilized by more than one professor, and individual professors could commit to multiple discourses.

To assure anonymity, neither personal identifiers nor institutional backgrounds are exposed. The interviewees are represented with a code composed of a country indicator (FIN for Finland and SWE for Sweden) plus a unique distinguishing number. In the analysis section, I have indented longer quotations, while shorter extracts have been enclosed in quotation marks. In the following section, I will scrutinise the discourses through four dimensions: publishing, internationalisation, competition for funding and socialisation of PhD students. These dimensions are data-driven since they were frequently brought up by the interviewees.

## The Supporting Discourse

In this discourse, the recent science policy reforms are portrayed as a clear improvement over the 'old' logic of the field, that is, they are supported. This discourse is grounded in a vision in which research that meets international scientific standards and is internationally competitive represents legitimate science. Furthermore, an efficient, determined and competitive approach to research work is deemed valuable. Hence, the current science policy incentives, which bring productivity, internationalization and competitiveness, are embraced. This discourse is frequently used in the Finnish data but only rarely, if at all, in the Swedish data.

With regard to publishing, today's performance indicators, with their tallying of publications in highly-ranked journals, are deemed favourable for research quality since they encourage striving to be 'at the top' internationally. According to this discourse, the international scientific community is the arena where 'real' science takes place. Earning one's spurs and winning prestige among one's peers occur through international publishing as 'certainly international publishing is the most... appreciation comes namely through that' (FIN4). Thus, scientific capital is displayed via international top-tier articles, and they

possess high symbolic value, which is brought out through a distinction against monographs written in the author's native language:

Before, there was a strong idea of sociology as national discipline with [a] national mission. The studies were written in Finnish, and the most valued form of publication was monograph. It was a strong way of thinking then but not anymore. At least it does not prevent writing in English for an international audience. (FIN1)

This distinction presents a conception of monographs as an out-of-date publication format that belongs to the sociology of times gone by. This statement implies that times have changed; sociology has cut its ties to the nation state and simultaneously the dominance of books written in the native language has diminished.

Not only international publishing but also the demands of science policy for productivity and efficiency in terms of publishing are seen as increasing the quality of research. Efficiency is depicted as going hand in hand with research quality:



Research rarely becomes better if you just keep harping on it. (FIN3)

If there are no criteria for anything, then...I saw that many of my older colleagues spent time on futile rumination and dawdling and the results were still not so good. (FIN1)

According to this discourse, academia enjoyed a far too privileged position previously since there were no clearly-defined targets set for scholars. This lack of systematic steering is seen as having caused irresponsibility since 'everyone did what they felt like' (FIN1). Because the current system calls for a determined, well-directed way of conducting research, it 'lops off the slackness that once was called academic freedom' (FIN3). To highlight the virtue of efficiency, academic freedom is expressed here in terms of looseness and laxity, even laziness.

Internationalisation as a science policy aim is supported since participating in the international arena raises evaluation standards and thereby improves research quality. Previously, it was 'enough' to operate in the national sphere, but today scholars are expected to be active on the international stage. According to this discourse, the value of internationalisation does not, however, seem evident to everyone in the field. Some are presented as reluctant to accept that the game now calls for internationalisation. This can be seen in the data in characterisations of obstructionists who must be 'dragged' or 'pushed' into the international arena:

Internationality forces one to put one's own work into perspective so that one does not get stuck in a rut of a single national theme and write about it for decades. Instead, it forces thinking about its significance in a broader sense and forces to create networks. (FIN1)

Probably there are those who think that it is not nice to write in English for the international publication forums, and they do not want to do that on principle. While we have been planning to establish a new journal, there have been those who ask, 'Aren't there enough international journals? Why can't we publish in [the] publication series of the department?' So there occurs that kind of critique and suspicion of the prevailing publication trend and the properties through which to gain merits. (FIN2)

By pointing the finger at those who must be forced to step out of their comfort zone in the national sphere onto the international level or those 'suspicious' scholars who reject the features now determining one's professional trajectory as 'unpleasant', this discourse creates a distinction from actors who do not dare or care to become international. The expressions used suggest that 'those others' are too comfort-loving, even cowardly, whereas the actors who are involved with internationalisation are brave enough to expose themselves internationally. Above all, according to this discourse, those who withdraw from internationalisation will not be recognised as competent players in the field.

Similarly, to the demand for productivity in publishing, the competitive funding system is presented as sharpening and boosting activity in sociology:

There is always competition for funding, and it really pisses me off when all sorts of lousy scholars get money for all sorts of silly projects. So there is constant complaint about that: 'Oh, he/she got it, and we didn't.' But that kind of jealousy only keeps up the pace. (FIN3)

Those who oppose the competitive funding system are portrayed as complainers who do not seem to understand reality. 'People are complaining; [there's] too much competition. Why can't I have funding?' (SWE3). Besides 'keeping the wheels turning', competition separates the wheat from the chaff and hence represents a rational tool to ensure that the most qualified research gets funding; otherwise, the distribution of funding would be arbitrary and ineffective:

I find the competitive funding system good because then we do not have lazy money in the sense that there would be money for all the silly ideas. So in terms of quality assurance and in sifting the 'top' from the rest, the competitive funding system is an excellent way to allocate money. (FIN4)

According to this discourse, competition encourages scholars to put forth more effort, which, in turn, leads to better research. While funding represents scientific capital, it becomes evident that not any kind of funding will do; some funding sources carry a higher volume of scientific capital than others, as is evident in this comment: 'With my level of ambition, it is miserable that I do not have an EU project. I should absolutely have an EU project' (FIN10). This reflects science policy's push to apply for money from the EU. The reference to 'ambition' implies that getting an EU grant is associated with scholarly proficiency and, thereby, represents a high volume of scientific capital.

The determined, competitive and effective orientation towards research that is valued in this discourse becomes most apparent with regard to PhD students. Those doctoral students who are active and alert in adopting the prevailing assessment criteria are seen as competent players. They are the kind 'you do not have to push and pull along' (FIN1), and they are familiar with today's productivity demands:

PhD students should publish regularly. It is not enough [to say] 'okay; at the moment, I'm doing my thesis'. Instead, while writing their theses, they should also make plans for the future so that there won't be any breaks in their research work. (FIN1)

I have PhD students who have created international networks for themselves. That is very respectable. (FIN10)



To succeed in the game, PhD students must be prepared to construct their scientific careers determinedly and ambitiously from the very early stages. They should write solely in English and create international networks right from the beginning. The target, then, is to ensure that the next generation is at ease in the international arena, is internationally mobile and has built credible international networks.

In sum, in drawing a distinction from actors who still operate with the 'old' logic of the field of sociology, this discourse advocates

science policy ideals of excellence. It depicts them as revising and upgrading the prior rules and logic. According to this discourse, previously sociology did not strive to be at the forefront internationally. Today, in contrast, prevailing science policy incentives are transforming sociology into something more upright, determined and ambitious. It is evident that international activity in the form of international publishing, international networks and international funding are desirable. These features are critical if the actor is to be recognised as a competent player in the field.

## The Opposing Discourse

In this discourse, the current science policy incentives are expressed as putting research quality under threat by interfering with the practices of knowledge production in sociology. This discourse grounds its vision of legitimate science in traditional academic values associated with Humboldtian principles, which emphasise extensive freedom in academic research. In this view, a university should act as an alma mater, a collegial space for cultivating the human mind and dedicating one's time to deep reflection and civilisation. Furthermore, the fruits of intellectual endeavours should not be restricted to the academic sphere; they ought to be distributed to an extra-scientific audience with enlightenment shared with laypersons as well. Although concerns about science policy ideals related to excellence are expressed in both datasets, the Finnish and Swedish data differ in the space depicted as existing in relation to these ideals.

The prevailing performance indicators for scientific publishing are criticised greatly for prioritising international peer-reviewed articles at the expense of books. Carrying a 'personal, intellectual style' and exerting 'a long-lasting influence' (SWE4), books represent a high volume of scientific capital in this discourse while today's performance indicators are likely to render books 'an underrated form of publication'. To boost books' symbolic value, the opposing discourse draws a distinction between books and articles wherein 'writing a book is much more demanding and is much more difficult than writing four articles' (SWE2). The strict structure of article format compels the scholar to present studies in a simplified, less rich way, making them 'boring' and 'foreseeable' and rendering in-depth discussion of the phenomena impossible.

Besides performance indicators favouring articles, the science policy demands for productivity and efficiency in publishing are presented as having detrimental effects on the knowledge-production practices of sociology. In the opposing discourse, this 'quantitative spirit' leads academics to strive merely to maximise the number of articles they produce. That can lead to foul play and unethical research practices, as evidenced for instance, in recycling work or 'slicing' a research topic into smaller and smaller parts to generate more articles:

You do one article. Then you change a heading and some variables and do another article. In that way, you can produce five or six articles. You can notice it in the doctoral students by observing how narrow the area they are dealing with. This leads to knowledge that is trivial. (FIN1)

Well, what we laughed about earlier, that 'publish or perish', I... joke about it; nowadays there isn't one single article where you have more than one table, because if you have two tables, you can make two articles of it. (SWE7)

According to this discourse, since an article is designed to deal with a tiny and very specific part of a research phenomenon, knowledge is depicted as becoming detached from the wider historical and contextual background. The current system leads to 'article-milling' and tends to create a kind of ethos in which 'it is not important to understand the world and phenomena, but it is important to have these articles published because otherwise you don't rank so high' (SWE4). Accordingly, here it is only quantity that matters, not thorough reflection and truth-seeking. Unlike the supporting discourse, wherein efficiency is depicted as enhancing the quality of research, in this discourse an ostentatious emphasis on productivity tends to de-intellectualise academia.

Since this discourse is focused on enlightening people, including laymen and political decision-makers, the books that contribute to the extra-scientific audiences possess a high volume of scientific capital. Writing books in one's native language is presented as problematic, however, because of the strong science policy push for international publishing:

There has been a downsizing of the importance of sociology for a while. This demand comes very much from the political sphere to publish in so-called international journals. And those politicians, they never read those journals. This makes us more and more uninteresting for national politics. It is mainly political scientists and economists who are publicly relevant as regards to political issues. (SWE5)

I think it is bad that we are not writing in Finnish. If we are



writing increasingly in English and less in Finnish, that will increase alienation. The social sciences, however, are national disciplines that have a national mission. They say that you may treat research themes related to the Finnish context in the international articles, but that is not true. And if we look at the social discussions, it is the economists who dominate there, and the influence of sociology is rather small. (FIN7)

Because the current reward system prioritises international scientific peer-reviewed articles, communication with the political decision-makers and a lay audience is rendered difficult. Through this lack of communication, sociology is cast as losing its social relevance. According to this discourse, sociologists once had great influence on socio-political discussions, but now economists have unseated them as the social experts. On one hand, there seems to be some sort of ambivalence in science policy declarations; while preaching the importance of the social impact of research, science policy with its actual incentives puts strong emphasis on international publishing. At the same time, the argument that economics dominates current socio-political discussions brings out the power dynamics among the various disciplines. It is argued that the ruling governmental power favours economics since knowledge from that domain meshes better into their political agenda whereas 'the social demand for sociological knowledge has decreased' (FIN6).

Science policy's push for internationalisation, at least with regard to publishing, is depicted as having gone too far, with writing in English becoming an end in itself:

If you are writing in Swedish, it is not especially valued. But if you write [the] same thing in English, it is [a] good international publication. [laughs] (SWE3)

The common conception seems to be that everything written in English for an international forum is inevitably considered valuable and qualified, irrespective of how solid the research is in reality; whereas research reported upon in Finnish/Swedish is disregarded. According to the opposing discourse, the attitude towards internationalisation is thus presented as naïve; science policy overemphasises the value of internationalisation thereby encouraging pretence and artifice in sociology.

With respect to the competition for funding, this discourse presents the competitive funding system as reducing diversity in science. The peer-review panels of the research-funding agencies tend to be conservative in their funding decisions since they are not willing to provide grants for research that go beyond the existing trend. At the level of individual scholars, this means that it is more lucrative for scholars to prove their expertise in a very narrow area of research and specialise heavily rather than delve into whole new research areas. It is stated that no space remains for 'brave, new openings or individuals who challenge the normative science' (FIN8) or for ground-breaking research.

In general, this discourse presents the all-encompassing competition as corrupting academic practices. To manage well in the competitive research environment, everyone must concentrate on his or her personal reputation-building and profit-seeking. The competitive spirit calls for 'calculation' and 'opportunism'. Scholars begin to manoeuvre, picking peers with whom it seems worthwhile to co-operate and determining which tasks are profitable to engage in and which are not. Hence, increasing competition feeds greedy and egoistic work practices, which act against Humboldtian values of collegiality. This concern about competition and a 'fistfight' for positions and funding is expressed most visibly among PhD students, since they are put under heavy pressure in relation to competition. It is argued that PhD students 'have very limited freedom, and they must take up a very serious attitude towards their work' (FIN6). Because of the tight competition, present-day doctoral students do not have space to conduct research carefully, engage in profound enquiry or set ambitious targets such as creating far-reaching knowledge for the ages:

When I was a new researcher thirty years ago, it was still uncertain but I could say, 'I write for the library. If my text has any worth, the next generations will find it'. You can't do that if you are young today. You will have your first research project but [you] won't have anything else if you try to say something like that. I think that the mature individual should have time and resources for reflection. (SWE7)

Because of the performance indicators, the worst possible idea at the moment is to create a sophisticated monograph in Finnish about a topic that would be extremely important for the development of Finnish society. If you want to build a career in academia, do not write a sophisticated monograph in Finnish. Do not dig into the topic profoundly. It would be a terrible mistake. Instead, you must write three or four articles promptly and publish them in esteemed journals that are classified in the political system called Publication Forum. (FIN8)

To become mature, highly civilised intellectuals and to find new paths of thinking, PhD students should go through a trial-and-error process. This process would necessitate academic freedom in terms of space and time to reflect on things at one's leisure, but the competitive research environment and productivity expectations does not allow that.

In both datasets, this discourse displays anxiety surrounding science policy and how it tends to alter the logic of the field of sociology, but the Finnish and Swedish data differ in how much leeway exists in relation to science policy instruments. In the Finnish data, politically-loaded expressions such as 'capitalism comes and vandalises' (FIN6) and 'the tyranny of international academic arbitrariness' (FIN7) reflect anger and bitterness toward the policy incentives. Instead of being an alma mater, the university is described as a greedy employer that, in response to strict profit targets, forces one to carry out research 'half-arsed'





or 'not so properly', implying that sociology is under the yoke of market forces:

When I was recruited for university, sociology was associated with positive openness. There was more variety in what sociology could be. That was then. Today, 'caterpillar sociology'—a kind of sociology that is extremely serious, very discipline-respectful, and focused on internationality—rules. Of course, now I'm in a position where I must participate in the decision making where money is involved. Maybe therefore I see more severity and rigidity in relation to what sociology ought to be. (FIN10)

Here, strictly-set profit targets erode diversity in sociological thinking and thereby narrow the spectrum of legitimate sociology. Extracts such as these suggest that there is nothing to be done in the face of current regulations, since 'money talks', and the current system does not really leave any space for the autonomous functioning of sociology.

In the Swedish data, irrespective of the concerns expressed in relation to science policy incentives, some space seems to remain for acting in line with Humboldtian values. In the extreme form, a department or a unit's well-established position allows liberty from current demands:

Being at this institution is a privilege. Of course, we have to apply for research money, but we are not heavily dependent on external money. We have an opportunity here to sit half a year

and just read and look into things and to understand things in new ways. So if I want, I can sit here as I do right now and then maybe publish two books at the same time almost. (SWE5)

A financially secure position enables some distance from the policy instruments and provides an opportunity to do research 'as usual'. While the Swedish data do present the policy incentives as 'in the air' and affecting one's work in some sense, they show the actors as successfully ignoring them:

We have a conference on how [the] changed university system means changed sociology. It probably means a lot that it could be good to bring up those points of criticism. A sort of neoliberal kind of ranking, effective instrumental, non-intellectual. But I feel I can be intellectual still. (SWE4)

In conclusion, the opposing discourse is based on a vision of legitimate science that is rooted in traditional academic values. By blaming the science policy incentives for reducing research quality in sociology, the opposing discourse takes a stance completely antithetical to the supporting one. The prevailing performance indicators are depicted as decreasing the symbolic value of those properties (such as book writing, deep reflection and devotion to research) that afford conducting legitimate science and accord value instead to properties such as producing scientific journal articles, which are inadequate for meeting the criteria for real quality. Furthermore, this discourse depicts current science policy aims to boost efficiency and productivity as feeding unethical practices.

## The Complying Discourse

The final discourse supports traditional academic values, as manifested in the opposing discourse, but it also acknowledges that one who wishes to keep up in the game must adjust to the science policy ideals. Thus, this discourse articulates a balance between the other two. In essence, the complying discourse expresses the view that, since most scholars are following the new rules of the game, opposition to those rules would mean academic suicide and exclusion from the field. To be recognised as a competent player, one must learn to play by the prevailing rules, even if those rules are not always consistent with one's personal vision of legitimate science. The complying discourse is manifested rather similarly in the two national contexts, but some differences between the Finnish and Swedish versions are evident in terms of the degree of manoeuvring room in upholding the rules of the game.

The change in the publication practices of sociology, the shift from writing books to writing articles as the most favourable format, is referred to in a rather neutral manner:

Since these indicators for quality and productivity give preference to international publications, I have focused on writing them. If there weren't that kind of steering, I would publish more in Finnish.

Then again, it would be stupid to assume...[that] since people are substantially reading books and articles in English, why wouldn't they participate in the discussions that they draw from? (FIN2)

When I wrote my PhD degree, not many of my elderly colleagues were publishing in English. They wrote monographs. All of my fellow PhD students also wrote monographs. This has been a dramatic change in favour of writing a compilation of articles. You are expected to publish in English since the university counts publications. So we need to publish internationally, and sociology is indeed an international subject. (SWE3)

These expressions imply that a book written in the native language is still seen as a potentially viable publishing format. Hence, in contrast both to the supporting discourse, which paints scientific capital as displayed solely through articles, and to the opposing discourse, in which books hold high symbolic value, this discourse values articles and books alike. However, writing international peer-reviewed articles in English is a 'rational' thing to do, since 'everyone' is writing them. This implies that the recognised symbolic value of articles is higher than that of books and that they possess a higher volume of scientific capital than books. Under the prevailing rules



of the game, being recognised as a competent player demands that one must focus on writing international peer-reviewed articles rather than books.

As for the science policy push for internationalisation, this discourse depicts internationalisation as something that has always been part of the research work:

International publishing is emphasised. On the other hand, I have always published internationally even before these changes. The research work as such has not changed. For instance, the international projects I've been involved in, started before these reforms. (FIN9)

According to this discourse, scholars have always participated in international conferences, carried out international projects, and published in international forums, so nothing new is wrought by science policy incentives that promote internationalisation. Instead, the complying discourse seems to present a sense of continuity in terms of internationalisation.

The competition for funding is regarded as a thing that 'has to be done' to ensure sufficient financial resources even if that competition may be burdensome:

We as the majority are engaging in this system. We just must engage in it so that we can get money for the PhD students, that we will keep up in internationalisation and that we can be part of this and that. We have put ourselves on this treadmill. If one opts out of the competition, one simultaneously opts out of many other things too. (FIN4)

No, I don't think that we have any counter-strategies. Conversely, the strategy is that you must be active, you must apply for money. We are [an] old, traditional university. We must keep the pace. I think it would be very unwise to have some kind of protest strategy because that would be kind of [an] isolated, marginal thing to do. (SWE3)

Refusal to engage in the competition would be risky, even irrational, since those in opposition may be discriminated against and eventually excluded from the field. Accordingly, the complying discourse articulates that actors who wish to ensure their legitimate position in the field must participate in the competition for funding as 'everyone is participating in it' (SWE3). Success in the competition for funding is essential for earning recognition among peers. Thus, funding is assigned a high volume of scientific capital. Failing to secure funding would mean that 'you end up being a loser' (SWE1). That said, the intensified competition for funding does not mean that scholars should adopt ready-made research problems set by the funders or abandon their personal research interests for the sake of funding:

Before, I tried to adjust to whatever I thought that the research foundation was funding. But I wasn't successful. I just came to

a point where I thought 'I'm going to do what I really want to do'. I decided to learn the skill of writing funding applications in [such a] way that it links up with policy and whatever. So I wouldn't say that I have done certain kind of research only to attract funding. (SWE2)

I have somewhat tuned the applications, but I haven't engaged in anything that I would not find interesting simply to get money. (FIN8)

Mastery of writing funding applications consists of knowing and using the right words, that is, the vocabulary used by the funding bodies for appealing to them effectively while still representing one's own, unique research interests in the application. The art of grant writing enables a scholar to gain material resources while simultaneously staying loyal to traditional academic principles such as practising curiosity-driven research and thereby gaining prestige in the field.

As for PhD students, in the complying discourse, they must 'construct their career more consciously in terms of international merits' (FIN10) than previous generations did. This, however, is denoted concisely by stating that times have changed and the rules of the game have altered:

I am a professor, so I don't have to fight for new positions anymore and care about the new rules, but the younger colleagues have to be more conformant to the NPM rules. (SWE10)

The terms of the competition have changed. I wrote my thesis in Finnish. It was rational then and politically important. But now I do not recommend writing the thesis in Finnish to anyone. If you want to stay in academia, you must write international peer-reviewed articles. (FIN10)

Since this is the name of the game, PhD students must be prepared for the new rules—whether those rules are good or not. Writing an article-based doctoral dissertation in English is a must if one wants to build a career in academia. It would be 'unwise' and irresponsible to direct a PhD student to do otherwise.

Although the complying discourse is very much the same across the Finnish and Swedish data, there are slight differences in the range admitted for compliance and in the extent to which the changes in science policy are characterised as having altered the rules of the field. This is most apparent in the context of publishing. In the Finnish data, the expressions imply that the conditions of today's competition are fundamentally changing the scientific practices in sociology:

The superficial spirit of the present-day university shows in such a way that the scholar who cobbles together a paper on the stuff that is in the air and is productive is the one who succeeds. That is not what we really value here, but that is what is rewarded. (FIN10)



Of course, the current evaluation criteria have an effect. Because of them, I deal with much smaller pieces of themes than [I did] ten years ago. Before, I did not pay any attention to the language of publications, but now I have been trying to write in both Finnish and English. And the prevailing market-like ideology...of course has an effect on everyone's life—whether you want it to or not. (FIN7)

These quotations specify that in-depth reflection and writing in the native language would still be valued were it not for the harsh reality of the current system, which makes the actors adopt those scientific practices that are required. Thus, this discourse acknowledges that the current rules are here to stay, and they simply have to be accepted if one wants to be part of the game.

In the Swedish version, although the science policy incentives are seen just as clearly as exerting effects on the knowledge-production practices of sociology, the complying discourse seems to delineate some space and looseness in terms of the existing evaluation criteria:

In between, there are lot of papers and they I cannot care less. They are like ideas going out in various directions. But the book is the main thing. That's the kind of result, the 'amen'. The rest

is there to feed into that. (SWE6)

It seems like you are supposed to publish in peer-reviewed journals with the big impact. But I've been doing that to some extent anyway, so I don't care about it very much. Now I'm working on two books and I have [a] third one coming out in two months. (SWE10)

The articles are defined as a necessary evil that must be endured if one is to reach the main target, which is writing a book. The greatest difference here is that, besides books still seeming to possess a high volume of scientific capital in the Swedish data, there appears to be more space to choose between publishing books and articles than in the Finnish setting.

The complying discourse can be summarised as taking a rather pragmatic stance on the science policy incentives, regarding them as a factor to which one must adapt. Though it reproduces the view that participating in the game necessitates accepting the new rules, it does not reject the field's 'old' logic. In a way, this discourse serves as an articulation of common sense, a balance between the other, conflicting discourses. While not completely enraptured with the science policy ideals, as the supporting discourse is, it recognises a compulsion to comply with them.

## Conclusion

This study set out to explore how the ideals of science policy related to excellence are made sense of among the scientific elite in the field of sociology in Finland and in Sweden. The three discursive strategies found in this study are very much in line with the previous studies in which the current science policy regime is either supported, resisted or complied with (Santiago and Carvalho 2012; Ylijoki 2014). This study, however, shows the existence of these different stances within one discipline, even within this limited group of eminent professors, and makes the conflicting and tentional relations between these discursive strategies visible. The most conspicuous was the juxtaposition of the supporting discourse and the opposing discourse. For the supporting discourse, science that meets today's international standards and is internationally competitive is legitimate. While this discourse assigns a high volume of scientific capital to such elements as top-tier articles, global networks and EU grants, through distinctions, it aims at showing the lack of ambition and quality within the 'old' rules of the game manifested in the opposing discourse. In contrast, the opposing discourse proceeds from a vision of legitimate science as aligned with traditional academic values. Scientific capital is accorded to books written in one's native language, on enlightenment of the wider public and on deep devotion to one's research work, whereas a distinction is drawn from scientific practices and orientation valued in the supporting discourse by deeming them unintellectual and deprived. Finally, the complying discourse strikes a balance between the

two by upholding traditional academic values and simultaneously providing a pragmatic stance towards external demands.

As for the dynamics between the inner scientific struggles of sociology and science policy, the supporting discourse and the complying discourse, while adopting the current excellence rhetoric, are playing the game in a way that goes along with the demands of science policy. Certainly, it could be argued that professors, within their position of being in charge of accumulating financial resources for their research units, do not have any other option than to follow the current rules. Conversely, the resistance raised by the opposing discourse could be interpreted as an attempt to conserve the old order, that is, the values and distribution of capital that has ensured the professors' dominant position in the field (Bourdieu 1999). According to Hammarfelt and de Rijcke (2015), current evaluation standards have been beneficial for the less powerful actors in the field since, due to the international peer-reviewed evaluation system, these actors are less dependent on the national elite who have previously controlled the national reward systems. From this standpoint, the opposition could be seen to embody the nostalgic yearning of the 'good old times' when the professors enjoyed rather sovereign status in the field, which is now challenged by external demands (Ylijoki 2005). On the other hand, the resistance expressed by the well-established professors may as well convey that while holding a dominant position, they



have more leeway in terms of the prevailing rules than scholars in subordinate positions (e.g., early-career researchers or scholars with teaching positions). In that sense, the internal dynamic of sociology could have been rather different if the data being used had also included other ranks.

When contrasting the internal dynamics of sociology in these two national contexts in more detail, the complying discourse was dominant in both countries. It also became evident that the opposing and compiling expressions frequently occurred simultaneously. Thus, it can be argued that while articulating the current science policy regime, neither Finnish nor Swedish sociology scholars can completely ignore the prevailing rules, and participation in the game requires at least some kind of adoption of the excellence incentives.

However, striking national differences were observed. In the Swedish data, the opposing expressions had a stronger presence than in Finland where compliance penetrated the entire data set. The most conspicuous finding was, however, that in the Finnish data, the supporting discourse was robust, whereas the Swedish data displayed almost no signs of the supporting discourse. The insignificance of the supporting discourse and the strong foothold given for the traditional academic values in the Swedish data may evince the well-established stratification of the Swedish HE system. Hallonsten and Holmberg (2013) state that irrespective of the extensive restructuring of academia, classic academic norms and ideals have remained strong in Sweden, namely because of the dominance of the old universities. According to Pinheiro et al. (2014) as well, in Sweden, not only are academic freedom and collegiality constantly discussed, they are also fiercely protected by the old universities. By contrast, in Finland, there are hardly any status hierarchies between the universities, and the universities are rather equalitarian (Kivistö and Tirronen 2012). However, in Finland, the shift towards NPM practices has been more pronounced (Pinheiro et al. 2014). Despite the increase in the procedural autonomy of Finnish universities, this has not led to a reduction in state control regarding substantive autonomy (Pinheiro et al. 2014); in fact, the reforms have been strongly state-led and politically steered (Pelkonen

and Teräväinen-Litardo 2013). Furthermore, the national funding allocation model that penetrates institutional and departmental levels, makes the Finnish system highly competitive (Auranen and Nieminen 2010). Hence, the findings of this study imply that regardless of the seemingly similar reforms, due to the differences in governance models and national university traditions, there seem to be national differences in how much power and autonomy the scientific elite in sociology have, and consequently, how much power they possess to express resistance or to distance themselves from the excellence objectives. As Naidoo (2004) points out, the elite research-intensive institutions, holding a dominant position in the HE system, have a better position from which to resist the pressures of the science policy. In the light of this study, it seems that the scientific elite of sociology in Sweden 'can afford' to sustain a certain kind of distance towards the science policy incentives and thus, possess more autonomy than its Finnish counterpart.

Despite the differences, the common feature in the Finnish and Swedish data is that the PhD students are said to be strongly affected by the excellence rhetoric. As in previous studies (Fochler et al. 2016; Müller and de Rijcke 2017), which showed that the performance metrics have narrowed the assessment criteria of junior researchers, a narrowing seemed visible in this data. Müller and de Rijcke (2017) argue that, in the context of performance indicators, the societal or community relevance of research in valuing academic work is becoming harder to maintain or introduce. If one of sociology's missions has been engagement in democratic and humanist endeavours by distributing emancipatory knowledge to wider audiences (Hokka 2018; Burawoy 2004), how shall the next generation, who are expected to publish in top-tier scientific journals and to communicate solely with the international scientific community, uphold this calling? In light of these concerns, a worthy goal for future research would be to examine further how junior academics experience the excellence ideals. Overall, as this study focused on capturing the sense-making of the scientific elite, it would be important to examine how other ranks, for instance scholars in teaching positions, make sense of the excellence objectives.

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