

Evaluation of the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs (SoRAD)

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Evaluation of the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs (SoRAD) – An International Perspective¹

by

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A. Introduction

The establishment of the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs (SoRAD) in Sweden in 1997 made an important contribution to the international alcohol and other drug research field. While some jurisdictions have only small scale and fragmented research activities in the alcohol and drug field and others with previously coordinated programmes of research have allowed these to dissipate somewhat, the experience of Sweden provides an important initiative. The success of this research centre is therefore important for not only Sweden but for the alcohol and drug field more widely.

B. SoRAD's Mission

No detailed and clear cut mission statement is available for the Institute, however, the 1995 report can be used as a first reference. It stresses most of all the Institute's *national* character and *network* aspects: It should promote national accessibility of research, establish national and international programs for guest researchers (also mentioned in the section on, *Strengthening of Financial Resources*, p.85), enable alcohol researchers from all over Sweden to participate in the building of the Institute and collaborate with alcohol researchers in the whole country. Furthermore the potential function of the Institute as a service provider and data archive is underlined: „A central task for an alcohol research Institute is the creation and maintenance of the different data bases needed for the development of research on alcohol consumption „(p.80). As to the scope of the research activities ‚consumption research ‘and ‚direct significance for alcohol policy’ are considered of high importance. With the revision of the new statutes (2001-05-23) the national focus of the Institute has been emphasized by adding the second sentence to the following ‘purpose’ statement: “SoRAD should be an interdisciplinary research Institute with the task to initiate, conduct as well as inform on social

¹ Report based on the SoRAD Self-Review (May 22, 2002) and seminar held in Stockholm, September 19, 2002

science research and drugs. *According to its mission SoRAD should also constitute a national knowledge Institute for alcohol and drug research*" (e-mail communication 8/27/2002).

This evaluation can also be based on the aims and lines of research reported under 1.2 (p.3) in the Self-Review.

- Social science research on alcohol and drugs (no indication of their relative importance)
- A contribution to the research infrastructure of Sweden in terms of stimulating research on alcohol and drugs, serving as a focal point for national and international collaboration and providing a nexus for interdisciplinary research.
- A research program which improves methods, increases theoretical understanding and enhances links to policy.

C. Self Review Report

The self review report provided to the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS) by SoRAD suggests significant progress has been made since the Centre's inception.

The report provides a clear and concise overview of the six specific topic areas under which the Centre's research activities have been grouped. The self-reflection sections provide an opportunity for the researchers to acknowledge the relative stages of research development. The seminar held on September 19, 2002 complemented the self review report and gave a good indication of the progress made in the first three years of the Centre.

It was apparent to the reviewers that considerable progress has been made in establishing a world class centre of excellence in the area of alcohol and other drug research. In the first three years of its existence the Centre has undertaken no less than fifty three projects. The research activities of the Centre have covered a broad area and included both investigator initiated research and research commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. This broad range of activity is in keeping with the wide brief provided for the establishment of the Centre by the Swedish government and the funding agency FAS.

The six areas of research cover the alcohol and other drugs (and gambling field) quite broadly. Comments on each area follow:

Trends and patterns in alcohol and drug use and problems

Youth cultural research: The study of *youth-cultures* and youth subcultures is a very promising one. The combination of methods (e.g. diary studies, focus groups, surveys) helps with the basic problem to interpret the *meaning* of changes in trends and epidemiological data. The know-how of the numerous staff members with training in criminology is well invested in this field. Finally, high on the rank order of objectives, the various projects could inform drug policy in Sweden. The researchers acknowledge that there has been a relative lack of utilisation of qualitative research methods in Swedish drug research. Ensuring the research is theoretically grounded and methodologically excellent will be important. Linkages to social scientists in the University of Stockholm and elsewhere, outside of the alcohol and drugs field may be useful here. It seems that SoRAD does not participate in the international comparative youth studies (HBSC) and the interface/synergies between the Swedish Council for Informa-

tion on Alcohol and other Drugs (CAN) with respect to the ESPAD project are not well developed.

Adult populations: With respect to *adult populations* the Alcohol Monitoring Project (B2) could develop into a most interesting long-term service function for policy makers, the scientific community and possibly other user groups. Additional modular sub-studies based on this data bank - such as mentioned on top of page 25 – can provide in-depth knowledge about the various theoretically interesting aspects and attract other researchers. The utility for policy makers could be increased by complementing this long-term data collection by an ‘early warning system’ on group-specific changes and alcohol-related problems (possible links to project B1). This would create connections with the prevention and treatment community. Finally, methodological advice for new projects and other research groups could be part of this ‘service catalogue’. The idea of SoRAD as an expert Institute – possibly with commercial implications for the funding situation - is mentioned in the self-reflection (p.32) and should be definitely strengthened in the future. It is very much in line with the objectives of the Institute discussed earlier in this review. Co-operations with existing National data archives should be considered and studied in detail.

The focus of Professor Romelsjo on the role of socio economic status in relation to alcohol use and its effects reflects an area of work under represented in alcohol research and if he is unable to continue on due to other commitments it would be useful for SoRAD to consider this area for future development.

The surveys are clearly providing data of direct relevance to Swedish policy makers and should also provide new knowledge for the international community. The follow up of heavier drinkers is unusual and an appropriate way to research the relationship between drinking and alcohol-related problems.

The social response to alcohol and drug problems

Treatment research: The study of the Swedish *treatment* system as part of a bigger political system is both theoretically and with regard to practice needs very relevant. It caters to international and national needs. The change in the structure of the treatment system mid way through the main research project is not unusual for this kind of research but raises the question of the relationship between the research and the treatment provider sector and whether the end users of the information were sufficiently involved in the planning of the studies.

The study of treatment *modalities* and their evaluation plays only a minor role. However, from a commercial point of view, mandated evaluation studies might produce additional revenues for the Institute.

Prevention and policy research: The self reflection section acknowledges a relative lack of development in this area and a certain incoherence (p.51) due to projects ‘inherited’ at the start of the Institute. However, it is particularly useful to see the revisiting of data on the impact of alcohol policy from the Nordic countries since this is, in international terms, a particularly rich data base; to see it reanalysed in terms of current theoretical perspectives will be very interesting. The Stockholm municipal intervention focused on availability to youth also provides unique information internationally. Useful insights are provided into the need

to understand the changes in power relations between national, local and global levels and the role of non-democratic actors. As specific projects are developed in this area there will be a need to develop links with the potential end users of the information gained.

Further investments in this area would be very much in line with the mission of the Institute to inform Swedish drug and alcohol policy. The interdisciplinary profile of the staff should be complemented by senior *political scientists* who could create the basis for a more consistent theoretical framework

Alcohol and drug problems in an international and comparative perspective

The level of international collaboration is high, both in terms of the presence within the programme of research activities which are part of international comparative studies and by means of the individual researcher's linkages to international research networks. The presentation of these projects in a separate section, because of the methodological approach, is problematic. It is quite rightly mentioned in the introduction, that "most projects are of relevance also in other research areas. (p.53). Consequently it would aid the development of a cohesive research program to integrate them into the substantive research areas with a clear reasoning of their specific functions and use in these areas.

The approach has the potential to act as a research design which allows understandings of cultural differences and evaluations of natural experiments which happen in one jurisdiction and not another. However, to reach its full potential the questions posed must be theoretically interesting and avoid simply demonstrating that macro relationships exist, with minor variations, in several jurisdictions.

Gambling research

This is a relatively new and under developed area for SoRAD. The stage at which gambling is in Swedish society suggests there is the possibility for this area of work to become a major one if SoRAD decides to go in that direction. Whether or not the Institute decides to do so should be considered in the context of the development of a strategic plan. The proposal for research into the role of marketing of gambling seems innovative and has a useful policy focus.

D. Content/cohesion of the research programme

At this stage of the Centre's development there is an understandable lack of cohesion in the research programme overall. It is acknowledged in the self review report that the current research activities have inevitably been influenced by the contributions made by projects already underway by researchers who have become part of SoRAD. Similarly, the desire to have a considerable breadth in the research programme and the Centre's responsiveness to the Ministry's research needs have all militated against a clearly cohesive programme operating at this stage.

Cohesion will be enhanced during the next three years if interaction between the researchers working in the six topic areas within the Centre can be increased. There is the potential for what is happening in one topic area to better inform the work of other areas. This would apply to both the framing of research questions and the use of complementary methodologies

to address substantive research questions. A chart showing the involvement of researchers in each of the projects would have assisted the reviewers' understanding of the extent to which researchers work across projects and topic areas but it appeared from what was presented to be possible and valuable to improve the linkages.

To achieve greater cohesion may also require a reduction in scope of the research activities being undertaken by the Centre. In the reviewers' opinion the self review document could serve as a useful start point for the Centre's staff to use in an internal process of staff involvement in strategic planning of future research activities. More precisely, the *process* by which the Institute selects topics should be clarified. The four criteria mentioned in section '3.' (p.64) are too broad content wise and leave out the concrete *process* used. More specifically, the lines of research presented in a detailed manner in the report certainly represent a very ambitious research program and has produced within a short time span promising results. An evaluation of these research areas could proceed from various *criteria* such as 'scientific potential and innovative character', 'relative importance in the light of fixed objectives' (difficult because of their vagueness), 'financial and political importance for the survival of the Institute', 'existing know-how and interest of the staff members' and 'covered or not covered by other organizations on the national research market' (difficult to assess with detailed knowledge of the Swedish situation) to mention just a few.

The need to deal with issues of consolidation of the research portfolio in conjunction with the possible areas of expansion highlighted by the Director (tobacco, drinking and driving and medications) and those areas of work noted as gaps by the reviewers (eg evaluation of treatment modalities) suggests the need for a strategic planning process to be undertaken. This process could include stakeholder consultations throughout Sweden with practitioners, researchers, NGOs and local and central government (including the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare which is currently a major funder) to enable the development of a strategic plan for SoRAD research which ensures continued complementarity with other research providers, development of collaborative links with all stakeholders and enables end user needs are considered. The stakeholder consultation and the development of collaborative work with practitioners will enhance the utilization of the research findings.

Other information which could be valuable to assist development of the strategic plan would be an investigation of the use of SoRAD's current research findings by various end users (eg hits on web site which provides alcohol consumption data).

Such a national consultation process will provide the opportunity for the development of collaborative projects within Sweden allowing involvement in networks of competence, and linkages with relevant projects such as the ESPAD project and building a consensual basis of cooperation with the National Focal Point.

E. Developing a Dynamic Responsive Research Centre

Funding

The funding situation during the first three years of the Centre has been very positive and the Director and staff have taken good advantage of this. The current diversification of the funding is satisfactory given the early stage of development of the Centre and the Swedish tradition of public funding of research. The proportion of funds coming from any one source was less than 30% with the exception of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

The disproportionate Ministry funding in part reflects the funding of large scale data collection exercises. Ideally such data collection has some medium term assurance of continued funding. In other jurisdictions such data collection is integrated into national health and social surveys and data is made available for analysis by researchers. This may be a model worth exploring with the Ministry. Similarly data archiving by SoRAD and facilitating access to the data sets by other researchers might facilitate national network building.

The Centre is encouraged to maintain current levels of diversification of funding (and monitor any future opportunities for new funding sources including private ones). Such diversification will facilitate the ability of the centre to maintain an independent stance on research question in politically charged areas.

Possible resources available to the Centre from the University and covered by the contribution the Centre makes to the University should be explored. These might, for example, include requesting the University library to take key journals and therefore allow SoRAD to reduce its expenditure in that area. The availability of media and public relations experts to assist the researchers with dissemination of the research findings could also be explored.

More market oriented ideas could also be studied and pursued to broaden the funding base such as outsourcing fund raising campaigns or looking for sponsors other than the industry. A survey among partners and potential partner of SoRAD measuring the image and perceived competence profile of the Institute could provide an empirical data base for the elaboration of new strategies.

The *Swiss Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and other Drug Problems* (Lausanne) might be an interesting example for a NGO changing successfully from public to private funding over the decades. Reducing the dependency from state money may increase autonomy when it comes to potential conflicts in politically sensitive areas. The importance of ethical issues was raised during the seminar presentation.

Finally, costing of commissioned research should include adequate costing of administrative, dissemination, and staff development components so that these are not subsidised by FAS and from other core monies.

Research output – productivity

Research output has been defined in terms of the publication record only, even though a broader definition including knowledge transfer and other spin-offs of the regular project work should be seen together as measures of scientific productivity (and have been discussed in other sections). It is difficult to draw any conclusions about the adequacy of the publication record of SoRAD at this early stage of the research institute. It is acknowledged in the review that many of the publications are based on work carried out by the SoRAD researchers before joining the Centre. The report gives the number and type of publications from 1999 to 2001; a rough calculation shows an average of approximately two publications per staff member and year including all publication categories. Given that most projects are still in the field work phase during the first three years, this is very much acceptable. The numerous multiple authorship of senior and junior researchers can be seen as positive signs of a good collaboration in the research teams. On a more critical stance, the publication productivity (as it is generally the case) is highly skewed, meaning that few researchers publish the bulk of the

material. Approximately 45 % of the total number of publications can be attributed to three SoRAD collaborators (R.Room, E. Kühlhorn and H.Leifman). The quality of the publications is good. Finally the report praises the balance between Swedish and English publications. This seems reasonable but can only be evaluated in the light of a clear *mission statement*, which defines the relative importance of, serving Sweden in Swedish 'or ,contributing to the international scientific discourse'. This is a political decision because the scientific reward system would clearly favor the latter channels of knowledge diffusion.

Dissemination of research – knowledge transfer

'Knowledge transfer' from research to practice and/or the general public is a challenge which has become central in many countries and is also an issue in addiction research. The report lists under the title '*community service*' interesting national and international examples along these lines such as news stories based on the monitoring survey (see also bottom of page 5) and recommendations on the development of local treatment systems. So far, the Institute has not allocated resources to organize knowledge transfer to interested specialists and the general public more systematically. The assignment of a specialists to these functions would help to legitimize the Institute's research also in the public arena. This could be complemented by the production of a newsletter or topical brochures. An analysis of the user profile of SoRAD's web sites would provide valuable information.

A strategic plan could allow for consideration of the way dissemination other than academic publications will be handled by SoRAD in the future. This may become of considerable relevance in relation to the importance for SoRAD's future funding (acknowledged by the report's authors) of the understanding Swedish society has of alcohol and the value of research.

Succession of director and other staffing issues

The Swedish tradition of appointments made at the professorial level is looked upon with envy by colleagues elsewhere. However, the corresponding lack of middle level staff is acknowledged to be an important issue for the future of SoRAD. FAS currently funds two post doc alcohol researchers (one in SoRAD and one elsewhere). An additional two post doc positions would assist in the development of the middle level research area.

The documentation did not make clear the allocation of core money but it is assumed that this primarily covers the professorial staff. Employment of research staff to carry out short term contracts such as those funded by the Ministry will be inevitable. However, this can create difficulties in recruitment and retention and will need to be managed carefully to ensure that the most capable of these staff are, if possible, entered into a career development path. This is not possible when young researchers are employed with 6 to 12 months contracts and the uncertainty of contract renewal until the last minute.

The reviewers noted an apparent lack of support staff within the Centre. This is not cost efficient and it is not appropriate for the Director or other research staff to have to deal with organisational matters.

The issue of succession for the Director of the Centre was raised as an issue which will require future planning given the retirement date of both Professor Room and Professor Kühlhorn. The development of a strategic plan would facilitate the recruitment of a new director

and the transition from a situation where the Institute depends in many ways on few leading scientists to a broader more balanced situation with well defined policies.

The present Director has considerable international connections which are of value to SoRAD and the involvement of other staff including the middle level staff yet to be recruited in the international work will assist future transition in this area.

Size of Centre and other structural issues

The issue was raised as to the appropriate size of the Centre. The reviewers agreed with the Director that remaining at the present size, with the practical implications for remaining in the present location, was desirable. Remaining at the present size will allow for consolidation of the research programme and development of existing research staff.

The Institute needs better monitoring and documentation personnel turnover; staff work satisfaction, training and promotion of collaborators, the implementation of gender policies, formalized detailed job assignments and decisional power.

It would be useful to specify communication channels, regular meetings and feed-back policies which have an impact on the overall functioning of the Institute: This is related to the role of collaborators when choosing research topics, their participation in the drafting of proposals and the provision of organizational incentives which are essential for work satisfaction and might help to optimize organizational processes and planning.

The Institute would profit from the implementation of explicit quality control and quality management measures.

The introduction of analytical accounting which allows the attribution of input and costs to specific projects would ensure the cost efficient implementation of research priorities. The report does not provide an overview of the project-specific work time attribution of the various staff members. In other words: which collaborators contribute by what percentage of their work time to which research project? What is the percentage of 'productive hours' for each position?

F. Reviewers' Comments and Recommendations

In conclusion the reviewers acknowledge their incomplete understanding of the Swedish academic and research context and that the reviewers are inevitably influenced by their own cultures and research environments and can only offer a view from the outside. The comments provided above deal largely with issues raised by the Board, Director and staff of SoRAD. They provide suggestions for the next three years of the Centre's development as follows:

- The reviewers believe that the Centre has already demonstrated the capacity to carry out excellent research, as evidenced by the quality of the staff and the publications already produced
- Priorities need to be set to define the relative weight of 'drug vs. alcohol research' as well as 'national work vs. international work' in times of more and more limited resources.

- The results and various elements of this mid-term evaluation should be used to formulate a mission statement with clear objectives which can be measured and operationalized. This may facilitate the recruitment of a new director and senior staff members in the future.
- Organizational processes could be more formalized and transparent, such as the allocation of resources to specific projects over time, analytic accounting and long-term written planning which is reviewed and approved by the steering committee.
- The National service functions of the Institute in terms of monitoring activities and knowledge transfer as well as national network building merit high priority in the light of the various mission statements
- Co-operation with the existing Swedish data archives should be enhanced to allow for the diffusion of research results to the scientific community and other interested groups.
- International co-operation should be promoted seeking funding for the visiting scholar program.
- A clear definition of the future core funding and regularizing funding for large fieldwork projects is necessary for the survival of the Institute. At the same time, the Institute should become more pro-active and consider strategies to broaden the financial support e.g. by selling services for market prices.
- It was felt by the reviewers that the core funding was best continued through the FAS contestable funding system to ensure the funds were utilised for the research purposes intended and to allow the Centre to develop its full potential as Sweden's 'interdisciplinary national knowledge centre for alcohol and drug research'.

Evaluation of the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs (SoRAD) – Comments from a Finnish perspective

by

Research Professor Marja Holmila
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The establishment of the SoRAD in 1999 was an important step for alcohol and drug-research not only for Sweden but also for all of the Nordic countries, as well as for the field world-wide. In a short time the centre has managed to create an impressive research programme. The centre has also been able to recruit a highly competent staff. The evaluation process is based on the Self Review provided to the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS) as well as on the presentations of a day-long seminar on September 19th 2002, where the centre's work and its various projects were presented and discussed.

Comments on the research programme

The crucial question for any national research unit is the difficult balance between "size and comprehensiveness", that is, wide coverage of the important topics and the need to keep the group from expanding too much. At present the programme seems to have most of the relevant areas of alcohol and drug research covered. The following areas are especially well covered: the trends and patterns in alcohol and drug use and problems, the treatment systems and modality studies and alcohol and drug problems in an international and comparative perspective.

Trends and patterns in alcohol and drug use and problems, studied both nationally and in international perspective, seems to be one of the strongest fields in the centre's research programme. This work has also high relevance for alcohol policy. There are interesting qualitative studies on young people and extensive monitoring of drinking habits by using surveys and registers.

The project on treatment systems and modality studies is of great importance for both Sweden and the whole of Scandinavia. The study will give important knowledge of treatment systems in the Nordic municipalities, and in addition, more widely relevant information of the particular Nordic way of organising the public services. In the future it would be important to look at the municipalities' and districts' role not only in treatment services, but in prevention and alcohol policy as well, as is actually mentioned in the self-report's future plans.

The centre has interesting qualitative studies on e.g. treatment, youth culture, gambling and media. All these are of good quality and on important areas, some very innovative, and based on good theoretical thinking.

The centre's studies following alcohol and drug policy and monitoring their impact on alcohol and drug use and problems are important for prevention of this problem. There is, however, less work on other forms of prevention, other than the ESAPP project on 18 districts in Stockholm, and a study on prevention at work places. In the future plans of the centre's work it

could be useful to clarify the centre's role in the Swedish prevention research as a whole and how it is co-operating with other research institutes in this field.

Comments on international and national collaboration

The centre's role in international comparative projects is extensive. Also in Scandinavia, during the few years of its existence, SoRAD has become a stimulus and a leading partner for researchers in all the other Nordic countries. In particular, the work on trends and patterns in alcohol and drug use and problems and the treatment study has been important for the other countries, too. There are also several plans for future Nordic co-operation e.g. on restaurant culture. Given the similarity of structures and traditions in these countries and the growing internationalisation in the decision making on alcohol and drugs, the importance of joint Scandinavian research is of primary importance.

The centre was established to be a national centre for Sweden, to be perceived as a national resource. Close contacts and continuous collaboration with alcohol researchers in the whole country is consequently one of the centre's tasks. The Self-review mentions collaborative links with Stockholm University and several other Swedish institutions of higher education, and mentions university teaching as one of its important fields, but does not discuss its relationship with the other research centres in more detail. There is little on national collaborative projects and national interdisciplinary networks, as well. It could be useful if the centre was able to analyse the overall situation in Swedish research on alcohol and drugs and specify more clearly its division of labour and collaboration with the other major research institutions.

Policy relevance and dissemination

The self-review as well as the seminar brought out only little on collaboration with other types of relevant institutions or actors, other than research centres or universities (which of course are the most important). At least in Finland, the national research centre's lively and many-sided contacts with all types of public institutions, research groups as well as prevention and treatment agencies aiming at reducing the harm of alcohol and drug use, has been very useful. Being "grounded" in the society's networks has been considered to be a very important element, both in the sense of community service as in the sense of being able to formulate a well-balanced policy-relevant research programme.

This type of collaboration is essential also from the point of view of dissemination of the research results. Media coverage is also good, but it is selective, sporadic and follows its own logic, which is not always the best way of disseminating relevant knowledge to the municipalities, political decision makers, citizens or the professionals working in the welfare and health sector. The centre should develop a plan of non-scientific publication, ideally so that the researchers could get support from specialist editors in other organisations.

Comments on staffing and in-house administration

The leadership of the group has been of high calibre and the selection and deployment of staff appears impressive. However, the lack of funding for mid-career positions and career prospects for young researchers is a problem, which should be solved in the future so that the centre can build a sustainable collective working tradition. The group has 24 members and a vast number of projects. It is not clear how these projects are administered and how the in-house decision making takes place, what kinds of regular meetings are arranged etc. It might be useful to develop these processes in the future in order to further consolidate the group.

Future

The centre has within a short period of time managed to create an impressive research programme with high quality personnel. For the future, it will be important to develop the programme so that it prioritises and focuses on those areas, which seem most important for this centre, taking into account the research carried out in other Swedish research groups. It is also useful to build up the relevant networks to support the chosen focus areas.

The future organisation and funding should be such that it successfully combines both the need for innovative high-quality academic research and provides possibilities of creating national data banks on alcohol and drug use and related harms and maintaining the policy-relevance of the work. As one part of it, the Self-review mentions as one of its future challenges the regularising the funding of recurring large fieldwork projects and creating data banks.

Evaluation of the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs (SoRAD) – Comments from a Norwegian perspective

by

Research Director Sturla Nordlund
Norwegian Institute for Alcohol and Drug Research (SIRUS)

The task for the "Nordic experts" in the evaluation of SoRAD is formulated by the board of the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS), first in a letter (e-mail) of 29th May. It is to "give comments on the international report and give their view on SoRAD's national role". In a later letter the task was specified to give comments on "SoRAD's self-evaluation, the preliminary reports from the international experts, and your impressions from the seminar/ site visit". It is also to "comment both on the scientific quality of the SoRAD research as well as on the relevance of SoRAD's work on the national scene".

SoRAD's self-review

The self-review gives an overwhelming impression of very fast growth, an impressive productivity right from the start, high scientific quality in the published work, a lot of scientifically relevant activities (meetings, conferences, etc.), and highly relevant projects for the Swedish as well as for the international society. The style of the review is sober and seems to give a realistic view of their own work, of future plans, of funding and other framework conditions.

The establishment of SoRAD was partly based on assembling resources already used in this field of research, for instance positions from other departments of the University, bringing with them already established projects and at least some funding. This explains both the rapid establishment of a core staff and the high productivity right from the start. Even if this necessarily had to result in a more or less arbitrary project portfolio, with an unclear profile, I still think this is a very good and cost-effective way to establish a centre like this. Research must always have a character of "let hundred flowers flourish". That is a result of the scientific requirements of creativity and independence. There are, however, also certain advantages in a more coherent strategic thinking about research projects and plans. I agree with the international experts (Casswell and Klingemann) that this should be developed in the coming years. I don't think it will be of much importance to the actual daily work or the quality of publications, but the internal process of producing a strategic plan can be of some importance in creating a common philosophy in the staff and the board about research priorities, project acquisition, funding possibilities, etc. It can also be helpful in the external presentation of the institute, for instance to possible funding sources. I think the self-review already contains several parts that could be included in such a strategic document.

Judged from the list of publications, the publications that were sent to us, other publications that I have read, and from a general knowledge of the work of several of the researchers, as well as from the presentations at the meeting in Stockholm 19th September, I have no doubts in saying that the scientific quality of the research work is generally high. A large number of the publications were, however, initiated, completed and sent to journals or editors before SoRAD was established, and it is therefore difficult to say that SoRAD in itself has been of importance for the quality of these publications. I still think the existence of an integrated

research centre, such as SoRAD, with (I suppose) internal discussions and criticism, is beneficial for the scientific quality in the long run, although this is difficult to prove.

The relevance ("on the national scene") is a little more difficult to ascertain. As I see it quality and relevance are not concepts of an equal level. I see quality as superior to relevance, because a bad research report can never be relevant, while a good research report, which no one has asked for, can prove highly relevant, at the publishing date or later. Relevance is something which is defined in a market, and not inherent in the research output itself. Therefore relevance can best be achieved by following, and sometimes taking part in, the general public debate, as well as by competing for projects from the relevant (and relevance-defining) market. Judged from the publication list and the self-review the researchers at SoRAD have been quite active in publications, meetings, discussions in the media, etc. which have brought out results to the general public, as well as to various kinds of users which demand this type of information, i.e. the government, administration, various organisations, etc. Results have also been actively transferred to international organisations like the WHO, EMCDDA, and the EU-Commission. A general impression of the titles in the publication list also confirms that SoRAD to a relatively high degree responds to the demands from the society within this field, on the national scene as well as internationally.

The fraction of publications in Swedish vs. English can also be seen in the context of relevance. It is quite obvious that administrators, politicians, organisational leaders, etc. very seldom read scientific articles in international journals. It is very seldom that such articles are noticed in the public debate in the Nordic countries at all. To publish in Swedish is therefore necessary to make the results known and relevant on the national scene. On the other hand, every research centre is to a large extent judged by its publication in international, peer-reviewed, journals. All research centres in non-english speaking countries are therefore in a situation of conflicting interests, where some forces, like e.g. the scientific board or the national research councils draw in one direction (more international publication), while politicians, administrators and others will draw in another (more in Swedish, more popularized). So far the publication list contains just over one fourth (26%) of publications in Swedish. Whether this is a good or bad balance depends on who you ask. There is no clear answer to this question, but I would guess that parts of the Swedish "users" of the output from the institute would prefer more in Swedish.

A feature that is obvious from the publication list is the highly skewed productivity, which also Klingemann comments on. I think this is natural in a pioneering phase of an institute, where the experienced researchers with a long career bring with them work and publications from their pre-SoRAD period, while younger researchers start more or less from scratch, and have been attached to SoRAD for a shorter time. I suppose this will level out during the years ahead, and the first years of production obviously point in that direction: In 1999 Robin Room alone stood for 62 per cent of the publications (titles, not pages), in 2000 the percentage was 41, in 2001 it was 39, and so far in 2002 he is responsible for "only" 29 per cent of the publications. So the productivity of the rest of the staff is obviously increasing. On the other hand, Robin Room's productivity is known worldwide, and of course this is very positive for the institute, but I don't think it is fair to expect every member of the scientific staff to compete with him on that point. I actually don't expect his share to drop very much further.

I agree with Klingemann that the numerous multiple authorship of senior and junior researchers can be seen as an indication of good collaboration in the research team. However, what is also striking in the publication list is that Robin Room, who has a long list of collaborative

work with other researchers worldwide, has no publication with a common authorship with any other member of the SoRAD institute. However, with my experience of Robin Room (he was engaged at the Norwegian institute for about half a year) I would be very surprised if this means that his collaboration with the rest of the staff is insufficient. Probably it is a result of long publication time of earlier work, and that forthcoming publications will change this picture. On the other hand, SoRAD should be very satisfied to have a leader with such a central position in the international research in this field, and there is of course nothing negative in having much collaboration and multiple authorships with international colleagues.

The staff has grown rapidly and the composition in terms of gender, age and academic background probably has been more or less accidental. Still the gender and age balance is quite good. The academic background of the researchers seems however relatively skewed, at least relative to the Norwegian institute (SIRUS). Nearly half of the staff are sociologists, and if we include social work and criminology as professions closely related to sociology, this group of professions constitutes 87 per cent of the staff. Further there is one psychologist, one ethnographer and one with a background from social medicine. There is for instance no one with a background from economy, political science, statistics or epidemiology. If this is good or bad depends on how one interprets the rather wide and unspecified aims of the centre. The aims do however state that the centre should "provide a nexus for interdisciplinary research training, research networks and collaborative studies in Sweden", and "serve as an interdisciplinary focal point in Sweden for collaboration on comparative and international projects". I think the relatively one-sided background of the research staff could be seen as conflicting with the emphasize on interdisciplinarity in the aims.

On the other hand, sociology might be seen as a very wide discipline, which uses a lot of methods from all kinds of disciplines, qualitative as well as quantitative, and sociologists can of course obtain high expertise in all such related or helpful disciplines. This has obviously been the case for several of the members of the SoRAD staff, and the methodological and thematic approach might not be very different from what is done in other comparable institutes. As an example I will mention the expertise in time series analysis achieved by some members of the staff, and used extensively in some of the projects. It is also a common experience for researchers in all comparable institutes that they over time achieve a certain general competence in this field of research, they become "alcohol- and drug researchers", irrespective of their initial academic background. However, I think, like the international experts, that there are fields of research, for instance on the economic side, that are missing in the project portfolio. This probably means that SoRAD, with a little broader background in the staff, could have a better possibility to achieve the general aim in the research program: "to identify and work on filling gaps in Swedish research which are of potential and practical importance and intellectual significance" (p. 6).

The organisational connection to the University of Stockholm is different from the situation for the "model" institutes in Finland and Norway, but this has its pros and cons. The benefits might be a closer contact to basic research in several relevant disciplines, and perhaps a better possibility to recruit promising students. The disadvantage might be a more uncertain funding situation. At least the Norwegian and Finnish institutes have a basically more stable funding situation since they both are, to a large extent, funded directly over the state budget. In addition we compete with other institutes for project funding from other sources, like the Norwegian Research Council, various state departments, communities, organisations, etc. This gives a relatively good predictability and possibility of long-term planning. Theoretically this situation might have negative implications on the autonomy of the institute, for instance on

research priorities, and even on the quality of the research work ("Staatsforschung" as Harald Klingemann ironically called it). In practice, however, this has not been a problem in Norway. The possibility of political influence on the research activity is prohibited by a specific formulation in the by-laws of the Norwegian institute. The problems arising from "too close contact" with the clients and funding sources can in fact be much more difficult in institutes which are largely dependent on market funding. A recent TV-program threw some revealing and unpleasant light on this problem as regards a certain institute in Norway (not in the alcohol and drug field).

Comments on the preliminary reports from the international experts

Both the reports are thoroughly evaluating the organisational set-up, the specific lines of research, the scientific output, the composition of the staff, and the impact of the institute on the national as well as the international level. Klingemann is, more than Casswell, very specific in his search for evaluation criteria, which he seeks in written material like early proposals, plans and reports from the planning period of the Centre and in the official aims and lines of research that the Board has adopted. This is of course a traditional and generally a good approach for evaluation work. However, I think it is a little unfair to judge a research centre on the basis of such criteria just after a pioneer period of three years. I even think the different criteria that have been proposed could be discussed.

I think a research centre first and foremost should be evaluated by the quantity and quality of its scientific output, and therefore the focus should be more on what has actually been achieved in this short period, rather than what has not, according to some formulations of what ideally should have been done. Filling gaps in a more specified strategic research plan is in my opinion a later step.

Both of these preliminary expert reports raise several interesting questions, some of which were answered during the meeting in Stockholm. This will obviously have an impact on the final report. Other questions must find its solutions in the relatively near future. One such question, which might be essential for the further existence and development of the centre, is the recruitment of successors for Room and Köhlhorn. Another is the urgent question of future funding. Harald Klingemann advocates a very market oriented approach to this question. This might of course be a solution if all other sources become impossible, but on the basis of my discussion above, I definitely think a better solution would be a quite large basic funding from public money, for instance from the relevant state department(s).

Conclusion

SoRAD is the result of a long history of discussions, planning and preparations. From the Swedish researchers in this field I have the impression that SoRAD has been a long desired and very welcomed organisational move, and I think the resources used in this field of research will be better and more efficiently used after the establishing of this centre.

It is actually quite impressive what has been achieved during its 3 years of existence. I think the centre has developed very rapidly and in a clearly positive direction. That is my main conclusion, and I think it would be a very sad situation if this development for some reason should be stopped.