



STRÖMSTAD AKADEMI

Nordiskt institut för avancerade studier

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2020

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Anders Gustavsson: Editors corner

Editor's corner: Anders Gustavsson: Editor's Corner

Vice-Chancellor and physicist Lars Broman reports on current news in Strömstad Academy.

Surgeon and Chairman of the Board Peter Fritzell also reports on current news in Strömstad Academy.

November's chronicle in Strömstads Tidning on 21 November was written by **historian Bode Janzon**. He emphasizes the importance of expanded research on Bohuslän's history.

Editor: Anders Gustavsson
Layout: Per Flensburg

Proposals for new chronicles in Strömstads Tidning should be sent to **Mariana Back** mariana.back@tekniskamuseet.se.

Economist John Fletcher discusses in the article "How do I work, really?" different views on human beings. This applies to the unlimited or optimistic view and the limited or tragic view, respectively. Fletcher also continues his article series with the theme "What Happens to Our Welfare?" This time the theme is "What tools do we have?"

Historian KG Hammarlund comments on and criticizes John Fletcher's post. He emphasizes the limitations and risks of explanatory models, which Fletcher uses.

Educator Åsa Morberg presents the new book "Professionalisation of teacher education", 2020. It shows major differences in teacher education in Sweden and Finland. The pace of reform has been much higher in Sweden than in Finland. Morberg's own

contribution in the book is about methodology. In a special contribution, Morberg argues for the maintenance of schools in rural areas.

Business economist Rune Wigblad has published an article in Ny Teknik on 28 October where he argues for magnetic cars instead of trams across the Göta River in Gothenburg. <https://www.nyteknik.se/opinion/satsa-pa-magnetvagnar-i-stallet-for-sparvagnar-over-alven-i-goteborg-7003937>. A short version is published in the present newsletter.

Bioenergy researcher Björn Zethraeus invites members of the Academy to participate in global distance education.

Pediatrician Gudmund Bergqvist is responsible for the new pre-publication series, PPS, where number 1 has been published with the title *Increased concentration of extracellular vesicles exposing aquaporin 4 in cerebrospinal fluid in patients with bipolar disorder*. The author is **Psychiatrist Lennart Wetterberg**. Instructions for the PPS series can be found on Strömstad Academy's website. **Bergqvist** has also written a call for views on his and **educator Carl Olivestam's** article on measuring scales.

Physicist Eugen Ungethum sheds light on how aerosols are not visible but are still everywhere. Problems arise if they carry viruses, e.g. coronavirus.

Psychologist Gunnar Windahl discusses American presidential elections from a democracy perspective. He points to some dangers.

The elected new Vice-Chancellor for 2021 and Information System Scientist Per Flensburg is responsible for the Academy's Free Series. The latest article is no 15 Peter Währborg: KRÖNIKEBOKEN – snälla, elaka och småroliga tidningskrönikor i Göteborgs Posten

I want to urge a previous call for all members to verify and complete their personal information on the Academy website. Also

try to recruit newmembers to the Academy, not least young scholars. Please, send suggestions to:

lars.broman@stromstadakademi.se

I wish new contributions to the December issue of the Newsletter sent to my e-mail address with deadline on 27 December 2020: anders.gustavsson@ikos.uio.no. Send short articles, opinion articles and/or reviews of new scientific literature. Swedish contributions should have an English translation.

Please, also send contributions to the Academy's publication series Acta Academiae Strömstadiensis, AAS, and the video series to the e-mail address:

gudmundbergqvist@hotmail.com

Anders Gustavsson

Vice-Chancellor's report

Also this message is written by a Vice-Chancellor in quarantine – much better than written in a hospital bed. Plans are to celebrate Yule just me and my wife and –hopefully – a little chatting with children and grandchildren using Skype. I just hope that the 2021 Academic Festival will take place in Strömstad 21-24 June. IRL!

As Fellows of Strömstad Academy, I hope that you use your rights as you can. Firstly, please use your affiliation with the Academy whenever suited. If you have another affiliation, may I suggest that you mention both? A good example is Rune Wigblad, who always includes Strömstad Academy when he publishes his debate articles. Myself, I always sign what I write as Lars Broman, Strömstad Academy. For one more month I will be careful not to publish something that is too controversial since being the Academy's Vice-Chancellor, readers might believe I express the view of Strömstad Academy. But just wait until January ...!

Secondly, I remind you that as a Fellow you can apply for grants as such. You will sign the application as project manager but it also has to be signed by our Chair Peter Fritzell. As with universities, you have to add an overhead, but much lower than they usually require, 30%.

Thirdly, I would like to encourage you to host an international meeting in the name of Strömstad Academy. In June 2017, we hosted the 12th International Symposium on Renewable Energy Education in Strömstad, which gave as good credits, locally as well as internationally (plus, it was great fun!).

Strömstad Academy and Politics

Science won in the US Presidential election!

Lars Broman

Chairman's report

Colleagues,

November has generally meant a lot of focus on Corona/covid-19 and the continued increasing spread of the virus in society. Most public physical meetings have been cancelled, and Webinars are used more and more by all organizations.

Webinars via Strömstad Academy. Here I mean that the Academy has a great potential to participate with its own series of lectures that can be made publicly available. Making this possible will serve the interest of the Academy, and some members have already offered their contributions. I would like to encourage anyone who has their own material that may be of interest to contact the Editorial Committee. All videos that are accepted will thus be marketed via the Academy and presented via our Website. AU will discuss this via meetings in the near future, and we will return to all members with information. I also refer to my article in the previous Newsletter for an expanded reasoning.

Interdisciplinary scientific projects. These projects are discussed internally in the groups, and we will come back with more information. Please see the previous Newsletter.

The Future Group has submitted a final report, and AU is working on interpreting/commenting on this in order to present recommendations on how we can use the Group's insights/recommendations to the Board in December. We will return with this regularly and in the Newsletter in December.

AU, working groups and local chapters. I want to say a big thank you to everyone who works hard with all the Academy's ongoing issues!

Finally, I would like to inform you that on Wednesday 25/11 I received a call from Vice/Deputy Chairman Christina Hultman, where she described that she, with the help of rehabilitation teams, is on the road to improvement, and that she also presented several ideas for future projects in line with how Strömstad Academy thinks/works. This is genuinely great news!

I wish everyone a happy December.

Peter Fritzell

Debate

"Invest in magnetic cars instead of trams across the river in Gothenburg"

<https://tekdeeps.com/invest-in-magnetic-cars-instead-of-trams-across-the-river-in-gothenburg/>

A new connection across the Göta River is being investigated, to effectively connect Hisingen with central Gothenburg with a new crossing over the river. This is very important, among other things a way to relieve traffic around the central station.

The planned bridge is bending in a C-shape because trams do not manage to climb to the top, 27 meter. A straight bridge would



27-meter high bridge according to the City Office Gothenburg

be possible with magnetic cars, because these can handle climbs with a relatively steep slope, which trams cannot handle.

Why is the best alternative not listed among those being investigated, writes Rune Wigblad.

Rune Wigblad

How do I function?

How do I really function?

John Fletcher

There are two different descriptions of how we, you and I, function as human beings. Both have been given several different labels, among others:

One has been called the **'unlimited'**, or the **'optimistic'** or **'romantic'** view. This view is enticing. It states that we can be educated to become better, thus making promises about a better future.

The other is called the **'limited'**, or the **'tragic'** view. It states that we humans carry a genetically inherited selfishness. I will be exploited by people in power who misuse that power – unless I can gain enough power for myself. The only alternative is to ensure that all of us are forced to play by the same fair rules.

The optimistic view is based upon a belief held by certain people that they (and only they) know what is 'good for others' – regardless of what those 'others' think themselves. The goal is to create a paradisiac world where individuals are trained to be good citizens. The individual person is an object which needs to be worked on and shaped to fit into that future paradise.

This view might be summarized as: *"I know what is good for you!"*

This causes a lot of trouble. The elite which holds the Truth believes that it is possible to 'construct' a good society based on how individuals function – as a statistical average. They miss out on the fantastic diversity offered by all of us as individuals. The members of this educating elite (whatever their political views) tend to worry about changes which might upset the order (and their own positions) in this well-constructed society. They become conservative.

And worse, those who hold the Truth are tempted to become fanatics, and to use violence to make sure that individual wishes and desires are subordinated to the 'collective good'. Some examples:

- The socialist dictatorship which is expected to be sublimated into a true communism where everybody "contributes according to ability and takes according to need".
- The fascist dictatorship that would result in a 'thousand-year state'
- Religions which offer paradise and eternal life (but only after Armageddon),

These ideologies focus on the human collective, not individuals. Maintaining control is made easier if there is a common enemy, a capitalist upper class which exploits the proletariat, a Jewish conspiracy, a devil, false gods, . . . If a Capitalist, a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim . . . causes trouble for others, this is seen as symptomatic of that entire group – and that justifies more violence against the entire group.

This view has caused huge human tragedies. The Soviet leadership killed 60 million of its own subjects, Mao's China 75 million, and Hitler's Germany 21 millions, all in order to create the desired paradise. And let's not forget the role of religion! Inquisition, witch burnings, wars. Here, too, the numbers are terrible.

The **tragic** view sees man as basically rational and explorable – and thus understandable.

The focus is on the individual. There are no defined goals (no future paradises) because it is the process of development that is central.

The individual needs to have the greatest possible freedom to develop his/her own solutions to the problems which they meet. These solutions will interfere with those of others around him/her, forcing a continuous development of compromises (this is how Adam Smith describes our world). This process will work only if there are clear rules which protect individuals against misuse of powers by others – and those rules are obeyed.

This places great and decisive demands upon our politicians. The need to dare to 'lose control'. They need to spend more time listening than talking.

Using a very great simplification, the theme of this view might be summarized as follows: *"If I am allowed to make mistakes and to learn from them, I will learn a lot – and that creates worthwhile contributions to society!"*.

This focus on the individual is an important factor in the process towards democratic values such as equality before the law, the right to vote, property right, freedom of speech – the values which we have included in our Swedish constitution. These values have been established in the democracies in a long and winding process with a lot of missteps along the road (the United States probably is the only nation where the con-

stitution was written practically before the nation was established).

This image of the rational human being has come under a lot of fire over the recent decades. We rarely are fully rational and when we try to get organized as if we were, we risk losing other important abilities such as judgement and wisdom.

You will have noticed that I believe the tragic view to be closer to reality. And yet, a lot of intelligent and knowledgeable people accept the optimistic view of the same reality – so what am I missing?

Comments from KG Hammarlund

To see, and to choose to see - about the limitations and risks of explanatory models

KG Hammarlund

As a possible answer to your question "What do I not see?" Words such as "variation", "diversity", "shades of grey" present themselves as possible alternatives. And why do you not see this? Or rather: why have you chosen not to see it?

One explanation may be the premise you have chosen as an introduction to your article: "There are two different descriptions of how we, you and I, work." That premise can be questioned. How we – you, I, all people through different times and cultures – can be described, and have been described, in far more than two ways. Each such description is, of course, a simplification, a generalization, which consciously or unconsciously hides aspects of the human. This does not mean that the description has no value – as a heuristic explanatory model, it can highlight significant, previously overlooked aspects. But all such models must, at least in the humanities, be applied with humility and without claims to present a truth.

What we know, or think we know, about man and the human being is largely based on our knowledge of human action in the past – that is, of history. The historian Eva

Österberg has (in her book *Folk förr*, Stockholm 1995) pointed out four central problems regarding the role of humankind in history, where the stance can have great significance for how we perceive history, how we interpret it:

What is the relationship between *structure* and *actor/subject*? On the one hand, humans can be perceived as puppets, fettered by heritage, by economic constraints, social patterns or norms with validity over longer periods. On the other hand, maybe we are autonomous, with freedom to choose, power to become creators instead of just bearers of ingrained habits?

What is it that gives us *identity* and in what way does this identity then control our actions? How do social roles relate to identity, how can different identities coexist within the same person?

To what extent do humans actually act *rationality*, i.e. thoughtfully, consciously, logically in relation to specific goals?

Have humans always acted on the basis of an experience of *individuality*, self-consciousness, self-reflectivity? This question, in turn, is often linked to the larger question of whether we have basically been the same through the centuries or whether it is the “modern man” who has achieved the potential of individualism and self-reflection.

There is no definitive answer to any of these questions, they are still open. And different choices of explanatory models give different, more or less fruitful answers.

Your two alternative human views can be seen as representing extreme endpoints on a scale. Through that choice you ignore all other, potential or actual, descriptions of (and attitudes toward) humans and the human. It is easy to mock those who want to educate “us” (others) to “better” people, and it is also easy to find deterrent examples. But what do we say about those who want to educate others to be good people – an ambition that most parents probably have towards their children?

The highly polarized description you present suggests that such parents are potential fanatics, willing to resort to violence to achieve their goals. The alternative then becomes to affirm the tragic view of man as bearer of inherited selfishness – another extreme position and also weakly substantiated. I do not know of any evidence of inherited selfishness. Also, as far as I know, no gene for selfishness has ever been identified. History certainly provides a lot of evidence for man’s ability to act selfishly, but we can also find a lot of evidence for man’s ability for altruism. We can find evidence of man’s ability for both cruelty and mercy, both courage and cowardice, both consequence and contradictions – even in the same individual.

KG Hammarlund

What happens to our welfare?

What tools do we have?

John Fletcher

Many Swedes live paycheck-to-paycheck, and have no economic buffer.

The Swedish Government has made promises to their voters about welfare that they will most likely not be able to keep. Taxes would need to be raised to unthinkable levels and/or the number of tax-paying employees in the private sphere would need to rise by hundreds of thousands to generate the needed extra tax revenues. This, in turn, requires that the number of such jobs be increased drastically.

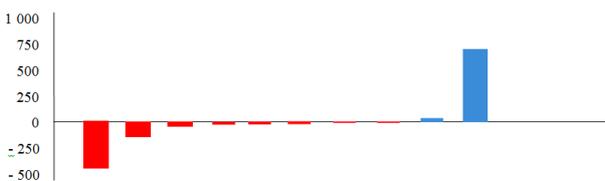
We need to recognize that businesses (large and small) need to work on terms that allows, encourages, them to grow – and pay more taxes.

The Swedish government has made promises to its inhabitants which it won’t be able to meet in the future – unless the taxes are raised a lot and/or the welfare is cut back.

According to a report issued in 2010 by SKR, which represents local and regional

municipalities in Sweden, Swedish welfare will be facing a shortage in financing in the order of SEK 200 billion by 2035. If that shortfall were to be covered by tax increases, it would require a local municipal tax rate of SEK 45, compared to the current SEK 32. The difference corresponds to the entire food budget for the average family.

Most Swedes live paycheck-to-paycheck. The bar graph below shows the situation in 2004 (SCB ceased publishing these figures in 2007). The left-most bar shows that the 'poorest' 10 % of the Swedish households had debts of in average SEK 400.000 (excluding real estate). The right-most bar shows that the 'richest' 10% had assets of roughly SEK 700.000, also excluding real estate. I am convinced that the same pattern exists today.



Only one household in five has enough savings to pay the home rent for the coming month if they did not get their regular paycheck. Where would they find the extra SEK 4.000 to 5.000 to pay such a **tax increase?**

Another option might be to raise the number of taxpayers. For tax revenues to increase by SEK 200 billion, Sweden would need (very roughly estimated) 800.000 new jobs – and 800.000 persons to fill those jobs. And those jobs would have to come in the private sector, since public sector salaries are paid out of the insufficient tax revenues. Do we have 800.000 persons available to take those jobs? Very uncertain! Sweden does have about 2 million persons 65 and older. A growing number of those are still working, but 800.000 jobs is a lot to fill.

And equally important, where are these new jobs? Many high-tech companies are started in Sweden – only to be sold abroad when

they succeed. The Bloomberg Innovation Index places Sweden as the second most innovative nation in the world (after South Korea). Where do we see a future Volvo, Ericson, SKF, Sandvik, IKEA, . . . ?

What needs to change to encourage the new companies to stay in Sweden?

It is easy to think 'venture capital', but I will raise a few other aspects.

Many employers – maybe most of all the small and medium-sized – hesitate when facing the many rules and agreements that contribute to a heavy administrative burden which are associated with taking on new employees. They need to see stable opportunities to grow and to increase profits before accepting new risks.

And more important:

Entrepreneurs need to feel that they are seen as important and valuable contributors to our welfare. Without those entrepreneurs, no money for welfare. But what do they hear? All too often: *"They have stolen those profits from their employees!"*.

Entrepreneurs need to feel a trust in stable rules.

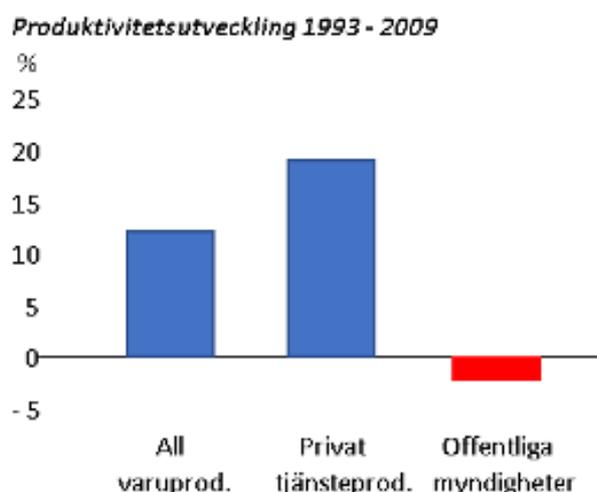
Entrepreneurs need to be able to offer low educated people an opportunity to get into the labor market at cost levels which make it attractive to employ them. Sweden has a lower share (5%) of 'simple jobs' than most other EU members. I wouldn't be surprised to find that a lot of 'simple jobs' are being done by higher paid employees.

But even more important, entrepreneurs need to have trust in those who govern (and those who can influence those people). They need to feel confident that the rules will not be changed at short notice, maybe due to deals struck between different political parties.

It is not a matter merely of money, but about the entrepreneurs' role in society. Many laws and agreements seem to aim at preventing greedy, exploiting individuals from rob-

bing others – or cheating on their taxes. Such individuals certainly exist in corporations, just like they do in trade unions and all other situations where humans are active – and yes, they should be brought to justice as and when needed. But the large majority of people in business work very hard to develop their companies more efficiently (more profitable), thus contributing to tax revenues.

There is another factor. The public sector has shown an inability to increase its productivity. The bar graph below shows the productivity development for different sectors of society:



This problem is seen practically everywhere. Is it possible to change the situation?

It is also possible, of course, to limit the accessibility to the welfare system. One might raise fees and/or reduce the benefits and/or increase the check-ups. That does not seem to be a very good idea.

John Fletcher

Book review

New book on Professionalisation of teacher education: Reforms in Sweden and Finland, provide explanations for the differences.

Written by Åsa Morberg, Docent and Ass professor in Curriculum studies and professional research

The school is assumed to shape students who in turn shape society in the long term. The teaching staff is therefore often a target for political reforms, which it has also been in Sweden for a long time. Virtually every new government has reformed teacher education. But how is teacher education then shaped by reforms, by whom and with what focus? The new book analyses Swedish teacher education, how it has changed over time and which ideals and actors are behind the development. The Swedish teacher education is compared with the Finnish.

At a quick and superficial glance, the teacher educations appear almost identical, but as shown in the book, they are diametrically different in a wide range of respects. The book is part of a new series called INSIGHT. The series is scientifically reviewed research literature, focused on organization, management and governance. The books focus on key issues and is aimed at researchers and students, as well as practitioners.

The editors of the book "Professionalization of teacher education" are Eva Bejerot and Hans Hasselblad, both from the Örebro School of Business. The authors of the anthology are both Swedish and Finnish researchers.

The differences between Swedish and Finnish teacher education have historical roots that are made visible in the new anthology. In Sweden, teacher education has a fairly low status. Evaluations give scathing criticism and show major shortcomings. Swedish teacher education has been reformed a number of rounds since the Second World War: 1968, 1977, 1988, 1992, 2001 and 2011. Another reform is on the way.

In Finland, the situation is the opposite. Teacher education has a high status. In Finland, it is difficult to get a study place in the teacher-training program. Following a fundamental reform in the late 1970s, the

changes have been minor and have taken place within the framework of the existing educational structure.

The book gives the reader an opportunity to learn about the history of Swedish and Finnish teacher education. It is interesting to see in the book that teacher education in Sweden has not really improved due its being redone. On the contrary, the reader can see that it will be problematic with many reforms.

The quality and status of Finnish teacher education has benefited from the fact that it has not been fundamentally changed. Changes have been made, of course, but within the existing framework and in the greatest possible consensus. For Swedish teacher education, it is almost the opposite, ie. there have been problems with the frequent reforms and, above all, the conflicts surrounding them. In Sweden, there has never been a consensus in teacher education development.

The Swedish high pace of reform appears to be a problem in the book. But we still have another reform underway. In the January agreement, the government has stated that teacher education will be reformed. Now the requirements will be tightened again and the admission requirements will be raised again. Several teacher-led hours will be introduced again. The connection between theory and practice will be strengthened and there will be a focus on methodology.

My contribution in the book is about the methodology, which will now return to teacher education. Very interesting development.

Åsa Morberg

The village school can be developed into a village center

The village school can be developed into a village center

by Åsa Morberg, Associate professor and Assistant professor. Professor of Didactics, Strömstad Academy

"School in the middle of the village" is an expression that was often used earlier, and the expression emphasized the school's central role. If the school "in the middle of the village" is closed, it means the first step towards the dismantling of the whole community. First the school disappears, then the shop and the gas station close down. No families with children move in and the elderly are forced to move to the central town.

A school is central in the countryside, for association activities, for cultural activities, for parent collaboration, for libraries, for sports and for the transmission of knowledge between generations. Investing in the school is the most important future investment that can be made. The school lays the foundation for a stronger society. There is a need for a different way of looking at schools, school buildings and the importance of schools for an overall activity.

School closures are about saving money, without this being linked to a broader socio-economic analysis. Decision makers, politicians and officials need to rethink and think new. It is about developing a sustainable living environment, for children, young people, and others, that is in every way necessary and financially profitable.

Use the schools as powerful, modern and open village centers. Make better and more efficient use of school premises for savings purposes. A school should be flexible in different ways: it should facilitate shared use during school hours and be available for other activities after school hours. Village schools should be renovated and adapted to a sustainable development. "Opinion build-

ding school", a network of architects can be hired for innovative modern solutions. The village schools can be developed into living and attractive village centers and the school premises can then be used optimally. Operating costs such as heating, electricity, water and ventilation cost around the clock and all year round, but school premises are empty for large parts of the day and it is uneconomical.

Think outside the box and open up the school premises. It can be about the gymnasium that is used during evenings and weekends, but it can also be about the school cafeteria that becomes a restaurant for seniors or that becomes meeting rooms for local association activities or teaching halls that are used for adult education in the evening. The new thing is that the school as a village center is accessible to everyone.

Disability adaptation is needed, if it has not already been done. School premises can be used for study circles, meetings and other activities. It is an economical and sustainable solution. The school premises are empty most of the day and most of the school year and this is financially unprofitable. Today there are new ways to organize the classrooms and the storage of teaching materials can be arranged so that the classrooms can be used by others without disturbing the school's activities. The school's gym facilities provide good training opportunities for everyone. There are good examples within the EU.

The school library is being developed into a public library. Adults meet children and young people in a common environment. Children do the right thing when there are adults who support and set boundaries. The school library / public library serves the whole area.

The school's health care team can be used by the village's elderly for medical sampling. School health care can collaborate with both municipalities and regions. The school nurse can handle easier medical

sampling and the village elderly do not have to travel far to have this done.

The school canteen opens for seniors and serves as a nice restaurant for older villagers who can get a nutritious and well-cooked meal. The service is often deficient for the elderly in sparsely populated areas. The school's cafeteria means that the elderly can stay and do not have to move to the central town. The eating environment becomes calmer if adults eat with the students. A meal is more than the food on the plate. The meal also includes the room, the party and the mood.

Another way to save money is to move several businesses into the school premises. Among other things, parts of the social services and nursing. Making the most of the school's premises is a great gain financially, in terms of sustainability but also socially. The school as a village center becomes a place where the local community can gather. A school that is full of life over several hours of the day and the days of the year adds increased security and a sense of belonging. An open school creates participation, interest and commitment and becomes something you cherish and take care of.

In this way, we can create a positive societal development on several levels where the school can become an important meeting point, a village center.

Åsa Morberg

Call

Call

Gudmund Bergqvist

Carl Olivestam and I published an essay/debate article on measuring scales in the Free Series in September. We attacked there, among other things, the GAL-TAN scale, which we pointed out had no dimension around development in technology and bio medicine, i.e. activities that drive development forward.

We also had a reprint of an article in the daily press where we touched on the need of measuring.

We have ideas but want more of them in our proposal for a new scale.

Dear friends, read our article! Give us more clues! Join as a co-author in the next article. Reply to gudmundbergqvist@hotmail.com

Gudmund Bergqvist

Invitation

Invitation!

Björn Zethraeus

There are many factors making the higher education worldwide face new challenges but also new opportunities. An increasing population demands an increase in volume and an accelerating development increases the need for specialisation, just to mention two. At the same time, new means of communication facilitates new opportunities to teach at a distance.

On a basically non-profit basis I do participate in a project aiming to establish a master's degree in engineering in Sri Lanka. The focus is on sustainable energy technology. The concept is that we, who are involved around the world, each develop short, independent, teaching elements, "nuggets", in our respective special areas. The nuggets must have well-defined learning objectives and a well-defined content. Preferably, they should last between ten and twenty minutes. The concept also includes that these nuggets should not require the student to have a specific textbook. Either all the necessary facts must be supplied within the nugget or they must be freely available online. Within each nugget, there must also be a self-test so the student can check their understanding.

As a developer, you choose the level of ambition yourself. As an example, I have chosen to first produce an entire master's course divided into five sections with 7 + 7 + 8 + 9

+ 1 nuggets. By doing so, I have been able to build a progression while each nugget is still an independent entity. But others have chosen to do otherwise.

The underlying philosophy for the project is based on three fundamental pillars:

1. Since we, an international collective of experienced academic researchers and teachers, each develop short teaching packages in our respective special areas, the scientific quality of the material is guaranteed. To some extent this will hold true also for the pedagogical quality.
2. The material consists of independent, short teaching blocks and is made freely available over the internet. This gives anyone, any student who is capable to assimilate the material, the opportunity to take part in it at any time, in any order. The same applies to professional engineers who feel the need to refresh old knowledge.
3. As an established university, in the present case in Sri Lanka, launches a curriculum largely based on these nuggets including requirements that they be read in a certain order and including formal examinations, the Lankesian students are given the opportunity to obtain a formal degree. At the same time, Lankesian colleagues are given access to an almost unlimited number of short "guest lectures" from an international collective of experienced academic staff. This provides new pedagogical opportunities such as viewing the recorded lecture in plenary and then giving a supplementary lesson on the specific local conditions or something similar.

By this I would like to invite the members of the Academy to participate in the development work. Those who want to see how I have worked with the course development can do so by downloading the course document about the master's course from my website: <http://bioenergyprof.eu/courses/courses.html>

Those who are interested in participating in development of new such educational material are welcome to contact me at:

Bjorn_Z@bioenergyprof.eu

Björn Zethraeus

Free words

Reflections on the US Election: Tribal Loyalties and the State of Democracy.

Gunnar Windahl

“Rarely in American history has so much happened and still changed so little. In the past year alone, the House impeached the President; a pandemic killed more than 232,000 Americans and seriously sickened countless more; we endured a historic economic collapse; and a shocking act of police brutality in Minneapolis ripped the scabs off America’s racial divisions, leading to protests and civil unrest in cities and towns from coast to coast.” (TIME, November 16, 2020).

Sure, any one of those events would be historic and traumatic. All of them together have made 2020 uniquely painful for all the Americans. Yet, politically, it’s remarkable how these seismic events have led to very little change.

Once again, the polls were wrong. America remains deeply polarized, few voters are truly persuadable. They are by and large entrenched in their political and cultural tribes, and practically nothing can budge them

In the conventional view, democracy begins with the voters. Ordinary people have preferences about what their government should do. They chose leaders who will do those things, or they show their preferences directly in referendums. In either case, what the majority wants becomes government policy. Democracy makes the people the rulers, and legitimacy derives from their consent. This way of thinking about democracy has become everyday wisdom, not just in

the United States but in a great many other countries around the world. It constitutes a kind of “folk theory” of democracy, a set of accessible, appealing ideas assuring people that they live under an ethically defensible form of government that has their interest at heart.

Unfortunately, while the folk theory has flourished as an ideal, its credibility has been severely undercut by a growing body of scientific evidence presenting a different and considerably darker view of democratic politics. That evidence demonstrates that the great majority of citizens pay little attention to politics. At election time, they are swayed by how they feel about “the nature of the times”, especially the current state of the economy, and by political loyalties typically acquired in childhood. Those loyalties, not the facts of political life and government policy, are the primary drivers of political behavior. Election outcomes turn out to be largely random events from the viewpoint of contemporary democratic theory. That is, elections are well determined by powerful forces, but those forces are not the ones that current theories of democracy believe should determine how elections come out. Hence the old framework will no longer do.

According to the ideal of the folk theory of democracy voters are attending to the political debate, weighing the competing candidates’ policy platforms, and formulating their vote intentions accordingly. Alas, this is not the case. In the 2000 presidential campaign, for example, candidate George W. Bush advocated allowing individual citizens to invest Social Security funds in the stock market, thereby catapulting a previously obscure policy proposal into the political limelight. Much of the news coverage and advertising in the final month of the campaign focused on the candidates’ contrasting stands on the issue; in a typical “battle-ground” media market, the two candidates together ran about 200 ads touching on Social Security privatization just in the final week before Election Day. And sure enough,

the statistical relationship between the voters' views on Social Security privatization and their preferences for Bush or Al Gore more than doubled over the course of the campaign.

This is exactly the sort of shift we might expect if voters were attending to the political debate, weighing the competing candidates' policy platforms, and formulating their vote intentions accordingly. However, the political scientist Gabriel Lenz's more detailed analysis employing interviews with the same people demonstrated that substantial increase in the apparent electoral impact of views about Social Security privatization was almost entirely illusory – due not to changes in vote intentions, but to Bush and Gore supporters learning their preferred candidate's position on the issue and then adopting it as their own. As Lenz (2012, 59) put it, "the increase in media and campaign attention to this issue did almost nothing to make people whose position was the same as Bush's more likely to vote for Bush than they already were."

Conclusion

Numerous studies have shown that real people are not much like the citizens imagined by the folk theory. Most residents of democratic countries have little interest in politics and do not follow news of public affairs beyond browsing the headlines. They do not know the details of even salient policy debates, they do not have a firm understanding of what the political parties stand for, and they often vote for parties whose long standing issue positions are at odds with their own. Mostly, they identify with ethnic, racial, occupational, religious, or other sorts of groups, and often – whether through group ties or hereditary loyalties – with a political party. Even the most attentive citizens mostly adopt the policy positions of the parties as their own: they are mirrors of the parties, not masters. For most of the time, party and group loyalties are the primary drivers of vote choices.

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