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Foreword

This web-publication embraces written accounts stemming from a series of weekly luncheon seminars at the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS). Here, the fellows were invited to present their respective specialties for the purpose of fostering multi- and interdisciplinary dialogue between research cultures of partly different origins. Three scientific groups were in operation throughout the 2008/2009 academic year. The humanists addressed the topic of *Early Networking in Northern Fennoscandia*, the social scientists concentrated on *Understanding the Role of Water in History and Development*, whereas the natural scientists focused on *Nonlinear Partial Differential Equations*. The two first groups were multidisciplinary in composition, whereas the mathematicians worked to enhance the multidisciplinary applicability of mathematics by building "... connections and bridges between aspects and topics which appear at first sight unrelated."¹ Thus, the themes and objectives of research were diverse, making up a setting for challenging academic interchange and discussion. Throughout the academic year world views and scientific approaches were contrasted, compared and supplemented highlighting their pros and cons, weaknesses and strengths, individuality and similarities.

The blend of interacting specialists and the variety of themes and approaches resulted in unexpected outcomes in terms of *broad interdisciplinarity* and not planned inter-group-collaboration spanning the assumed gorge of the soft and hard sciences. Stimulated by their respective presentations mathematician Nils Henrik Risebro and political geographer Graham Chapman found common ground and wrote two joint articles for publication not only on the CAS web site but also in international peer review journals. By sharing ideas and skills across disciplinary borders the two authors turned professional differences into supplementary measures of integration. Political geography gained explanatory power by mathematics and mathematics proved applicable to political geography.

The seminars also added extra inputs and scrutiny to humanist and social science groups in their endeavours to achieve *narrow interdisciplinarity* within their respective fields. Among other things, this came about because issue areas like *art, architecture, medicine* and *nature* were used interchangeably across group delineations. In this way, certain issue areas became familiar and joint focal points to many individuals. In his contribution, Terje Tvedt puts it this way: "There is a need to reject those social science traditions that has been disinterested in the role of nature (water) when reconstructing and analysing historical development processes."² The archaeologist, Charlotte Damm applies social science pluralistic theory when stating that "...archaeology has had a tendency to focus on cultural dualism breaking the issues down to contacts between for example foragers and farmers,..., between north and south,..., and between ethnic groups.....Recent research do, to a much greater extent, take into consideration that no groups are internal homogenous, that interaction often takes place between various factions within each group, and that there may be many different types of interaction taking place within and between groups and sub-groups."³ Issue

¹ See Konstantina Trivisa in this web-publication

² See Terje Tvedt in this web-publication

³ See Charlotte Damm in this web-publication

areas and approaches are to a certain extent discipline-neutral – the common property of multiple research fields – a venue for minds to meet and disciplines to interact.

All the articles presented on this web site have been peer-reviewed and adopted to preserve a reasonable standard of popularization without compromising the high standards of sound scientific and scholarly research and reporting. Altogether, specialists from seven countries took part in the evaluation process, adding critical elements and constructive criticism to the interdisciplinary objective and quality of the individual papers.

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