



Changing the narratives of university history

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This article discusses the methodology of university history in relation to the field of history of science. Many university histories contain parallel chronicles of the scientific and institutional development within different disciplines and faculties. Such histories can be both informative and analytical, yet they tend to compartmentalize the disciplines. In this article, we problematize traditional methodologies and call for new approaches to study the creation, reception and dissemination of academic knowledge at universities. Using an ongoing research project on the history of Åbo Akademi University in the twentieth century as a case study, we explore the possibilities and difficulties of an approach structured around a set of transverse social phenomena, characteristic of knowledge formation at universities.

Introduction

How could the production and reproduction of academic knowledge at universities in the past be studied in a more analytical and coherent manner? At least in Scandinavia, university history is still dominated by jubilee histories. These larger works usually form “general biographies” of a single university (Rothblatt 1997) with the ambition to present a comprehensive oversight of its history. They tend to focus on organizational developments, management and interactions between the university, its sponsors and higher education policy-makers. Yet the core activities of the university, the everyday practices of research, teaching and learning, often seem strangely obscured from view in such studies. This is somewhat paradoxical, as these histories usually contain major sections that dutifully and faculty by faculty account for institutional developments and the emergence of new disciplines and research fields.

It has become evident over the past decade that university historians are looking for new approaches. Alternatives are sought to jubilee histories that largely make out a repetitive series of “local histories” of each and every faculty area and academic discipline (Thue & Helsvig 2011, 11–16). However, these efforts have mainly targeted other topics than the basic operations of research and learning. Joining this search, we want to call attention to the need for new approaches to the history of science at higher education institutions. Although the organization of academic practice into disciplines and departments is certainly an important topic, university histories should not be pinioned by this institutional structure. In this article, we discuss an alternative, ‘transverse’ approach. It is structured around

phenomena that are characteristic of the production and reproduction of academic knowledge across academic fields.

The field of university history displays a fair share of reluctance towards theorization and the unflinching belief in the sufficiency of ‘sources and common sense’, which have traditionally been characteristic of the discipline of history. In order to accomplish more question-driven and conceptually advanced historical studies of knowledge creation and academic practices, university history would do well to enter into a closer dialogue with neighbouring fields such as history of science, science studies, and sociology of scientific knowledge. A bolder theorization of the social structures and processes of scientific activity in knowledge creation can provide university history with new narratives to carry forward and structure the presentation. Such analytical narratives are needed to replace the old storylines of ‘scientific progress’ and ‘disciplinary proliferation’.

As pointed out by Pieter Dhondt, university history has traditionally focussed mainly on the level of structures, dealing primarily with questions of social and political history. These have been studied within a national context, university by university. Epistemic questions about the nature and development of academic knowledge, as well as the social phenomena surrounding the creation of such knowledge, have principally been the domain of more internationally oriented historians of science (Dhondt 2014, 5). At first sight this division of labour might appear logical. One might well argue that the characteristics of scientific practices are general phenomena that should be studied beyond the confines of a single university. And vice versa, what makes each university unique and particular in comparison to other institutions is precisely its specific organization and interaction with the local societal and political context. In our opinion, however, the further development of university history as a field requires that we overcome this traditional disconnection between on the one hand the ‘structural’ history of universities and on the other hand the history of science and scholarship (Asche & Gerber 2008, 179, 186). We certainly admit that it is crucial to study the history of science across institutional and national boundaries. Yet we propound that the critical study of academic practice and knowledge production should also be included in the history of separate institutions. Why? Let us point to three important reasons:

1. At least since the mid-nineteenth century, universities have been central arenas and actors in the history of science and scholarship. Much of their societal impact at the local, national and international level has been intimately connected with the creation and propagation of ideas and knowledge. It would therefore be strange indeed if university history would not inquire into how knowledge is received and created, applied and disseminated at universities.

2. Historians often study the university from above or even from the outside as an institutional entity in interaction with the surrounding society. If we want to study the university ‘from below’, as an everyday environment for its hundreds or thousands of researchers, teachers and students, then research, teaching and learning must be given a more prominent place in university history.

3. The prominence of structural, social and political issues in university history as a sub-discipline reflects the character of the most readily available source material, namely the documents produced by administrative decision-making bodies. As pointed out by Kustaa H.J. Vilkkuna, one explanation for the relative invisibility of teaching and research in university history is that the documents produced by university bureaucracy seldom reach into the basic activities of the institution (Vilkkuna 2009, 141). The structure of the archives and

the administrative structure of the university thus have had too much influence on how historical studies have been structured, and what topics have been dealt with.

In this paper, we first sketch some traditional traits and new directions in university historiography in the Nordic countries. We focus in particular on how the production and dissemination of academic knowledge have been studied and presented in jubilee university histories. In the next section, we present an alternative methodological model that does not follow the departmental structure of the university, but instead focusses on social phenomena that are characteristic of academic practice across departments and academic fields. Our model was constructed within the ongoing research project on the history of Åbo Akademi University 1918–2018. We use some examples from the history of this institution in order to illustrate how our methodology can be realized and what could potentially be achieved. In the last section, we assess some drawbacks and limitations to this approach and discuss possible future developments.

Parting with the encyclopaedic tradition

The field of university history, not least in the Nordic countries, has largely been shaped by the simple fact that a large share of funding and scholarly interest has been connected to university jubilees (Dhondt 2014, 9). Therefore, research results in this area have often been presented in the form of large multivolume works. Each of them has attempted to offer a more or less comprehensive historical overview of all essential aspects of the institution in question. They partly assume an encyclopaedic character or even resemble a catalogue, disintegrating into parallel and disconnected histories of the central administration and each of the faculties and individual disciplines, institutes and departments.

The traditional point of departure in the field has been that the complexity of the subject demands a broad and composite treatment. There is admittedly much truth to the claim that for most of its history, the European university has consisted of little more than “a loose conglomerate” of its faculties, professors and students (Thue & Helsvig 2011). This traditional form of university history writing, which might be called ‘encyclopaedic’, has the benefit of producing a certain likeness to the fragmented, heterogenous and often loosely connected activities within nineteenth- and twentieth-century universities. Yet this methodological approach runs the risk of resulting in chronicles that are neither driven by the historians’ selection of analytical questions, nor by the problematization of historical phenomena. Instead, the trope of progress and expansion becomes the narrative carrying the text. Moreover, it seems obvious that behind most encyclopaedic university histories looms the necessity, felt by their authors, to meet the expectations of their readership, which includes academic and administrative staff, as well as alumni from all branches of the university. In result, everyone and everything must be mentioned and included; *all* important people and their research topics, the emergence of *all* new disciplines, institutes and specialities, every statute and curriculum reform must be duly covered.

However, there are indications that ‘the encyclopaedic tradition’ is in a state of decomposition and that university historians, even when working within the genre of jubilee histories, have for some time been looking for new topics and approaches. The social history of academic and administrative staff, as well as the students’ campus and classroom experience have gained ground. Yet historians seem loath to abandon the ambition at completeness that lies at the core of the encyclopaedic tradition. For example, the history of Jyväskylä University 1966–2006 (Einonen et al. 2009), pays attention to less traditional ques-

tions such as the university as a place of work, the students' everyday life, the university as a built environment and a regional player. The section dedicated to the development of teaching and research provides a good analysis of the societal and political context conditioning academic activities. What follows is nonetheless a survey of organizational developments discipline by discipline in a traditional manner. In another recent work, a two-volume history of Uppsala University 1852–1916, Carl Frängsmyr justifies his focus on individual professors by pointing out that personal networks and even kinship relationships between academics were of paramount importance to academic recruitment in the period (Frängsmyr 2010, 17). As demonstrated by Frängsmyr, this is both illuminating and feasible for the relatively small nineteenth-century university. Subsequently, however, extensive chapters on the various faculties provide the framework for accounts of the development of scientific and scholarly ideas, disciplines and undergraduate studies. The resulting volumes partially resemble reference books with entries for each of the disciplines.

When applied to the twentieth century, this approach can result in massive works, as demonstrated by the eleven-volume bicentennial history of Oslo University 1811–2011. Its team of authors stake out an interesting new approach, explicitly aiming to avoid the traditional compartmentalization and dissolution of the history of the university into a series of parallel histories of sciences and disciplines. Instead, the Oslo historians attempted to write an “integrated” history of their institution, where all its different parts were to be studied “in context” (Thue & Helsing 2011, 11–16). The numerous authors present different interpretations of what this exactly means. In the introduction to their volume on the period 1945–1975, Fredrik W. Thue and Kim G. Helsing point out that there are at least as many understandings of science and scholarship as there are faculties at a university. To them, an integrated history therefore means emphasizing the various ideas about the university and notions of its unity and manifoldness in different disciplinary environments (Thue & Helsing 2011, 11–16).

This “integrated” approach is a laudable advance in the genre, resulting in unusually analytical studies with more emphasis on overarching questions and more attention for interconnections and contexts than in most of the existing literature. The trope of perpetual progress is replaced by a perspective highlighting crises, dissension and fundamental heterogeneity. Yet in several of the Oslo volumes, separate chapters are still dedicated to recounting the institutional development of each faculty, discipline and institute. Only in the last two volumes, dealing with developments since 1970, the traditional approach is completely abandoned in favour of fascinating thematic approaches, such as chapters on the ecological “awakening” within the academic community (Anker 2011) or new topics of social scientific study that have resulted from the general affluence in Norwegian society in recent decades (Tranøy 2011).

These works demonstrate that historians still gravitate towards a traditional structure of their university history, especially when dealing with older periods. Concerning the period from the 1970s onwards, however, the immense expansion and complexity of universities increasingly shatter the linear chronology and force historians to adopt more innovative thematic problematizations. This begs for the following question: is the thematic approach a surrender in front of the impossibility of doing the desired, ‘complete’, and encyclopaedic history of contemporary multiversities – or is it actually a more interesting and analytical way of approaching university history, and if so, why not apply it then to older periods as well? The Oslo university history project points the way, yet its approach, basing analysis

on overarching questions, could be taken further. This would, however, mean abandoning conventional notions of what ‘must’ be included in the history of a university.

Looking for thematic points of entry: Åbo Akademi University 1918–2018

The creation of academic knowledge at a university is a complex process. Within disciplines such as science studies, and science and technology studies, the role of social structures and processes of scientific activity in knowledge creation is recognized. Knowledge is seen as constantly being created and re-created (Golinski 1998, Jasanoff 2006). The task of the historian of science, hence, is to trace in an empirical way the social and political processes that have contributed to the creation of new knowledge. If we want to study the creation and reproduction of academic knowledge we must therefore investigate such processes within the academic world, as well as in its interactions with other agents and institutions.

How could these processes of knowledge creation best be mapped and analysed through the course of a single institution’s history? This question guided the research design for a collaborative volume on the creation and reproduction of academic knowledge at Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU) over the past century (1918–2018). It seemed evident that parallel investigations into these processes within each of the dozens of academic departments or even its increasing number of faculties would result in a tediously repetitive account. This seemed particularly pointless as the previous jubilee history, published in 1993, had been a collection of mini-histories of each department, written by the professors of each particular subject (Widén 1993). In consequence, the decision was taken to sacrifice comprehensiveness and abandon the conventional enumerative approach in favour of an attempt to present in-depth analyses of a limited number of topics. These were selected to offer the readers broad insights into the complex functions and tasks of a modern research university: academic networks, paradigm shifts, the transformation of vocational training programmes into academic research-based disciplines, epistemic cultures in technical sciences as compared to ‘pure’ science, and academic processes of socialization, selection and exclusion. Since the story of Åbo Akademi University is also that of an ethnic minority university, language and language politics must be addressed as well, as being important factors in knowledge production throughout the topics that we explore.

The research project on the centennial history of Åbo Akademi University is designed to accommodate different interests and actually represents a compromise between convention and innovation. The volume on the history of knowledge that we present here is accompanied by another collaborative volume on the interactions between university and society. This second volume covers topics such as regional politics, university funding, student culture, the changing meanings of university autonomy, as well as the interplay between labour markets and higher education. In order to provide coherence to the project as a whole, a third volume will offer a more traditionally and chronologically structured, comprehensive, yet concise history of the university.

Within the scope of limited time and resources, the approach chosen for the history of knowledge creation at ÅAU can only be realized through a set of selected case studies. In this section, we present three of these themes: academic networks, paradigm shifts and academic socialization. These are phenomena that could be investigated across the whole academic field. Yet as our case studies demonstrate, it is neither practicable, nor worthwhile to pursue the inquiry of such phenomena through the whole range of a modern university. Rather, selected academic fields and individuals are studied to provide empirical instances

of general phenomena that are essential to the understanding of knowledge creation at ÅAU.

Networks

The role of networks in the dissemination of knowledge has been acknowledged already for a long time within history of science (Collins 1974, Bourdieu 1988, Autant-Bernard et al. 2007). In the past two decades the importance of networks in the creation and dissemination of knowledge has been increasingly recognized as well. The importance of networks in today's academia has obviously inspired this historical research interest in academic networks.

A network of academics takes time to build. The result can be named a scholarly community, an academic tribe or, as Nonaka and Konno describe it, Ba, a shared space, either in the literal sense of the word or metaphorically, as shared ideals or experiences (Nonaka & Konno 1998, 40–41). Such a network provides a creative environment for knowledge creation. A relevant question to explore is how such networks come into existence in a newly founded university without previous academic traditions and connections to fall back on. How does a new university attract competent teachers and researchers?

In order to investigate the academic networks that professors in the early period of Åbo Akademi University were engaged in, it is of interest to study their existing networks preceding their appointment. Almost all professors who came to ÅAU had held academic posts previously and arrived with an existing academic network. Most of them came from the University of Helsinki and many had been educated there as well. Seven of the professors recruited in the early days of ÅAU came from Sweden, mainly theologians. Seven professors were recruited from other European countries, some of them being “academic refugees” who had fled from Russia, Germany or Austria-Hungary after the collapse of those empires in 1917-1919 (Nordström 1968, Santonen 2015). All of the professors had had the opportunity to create their own academic networks prior to their professorship at Åbo Akademi University. Most of them had studied in other European countries, particularly in Germany. After the Second World War, the United States became the preferred country for study or research visits. Several of the ÅAU professors also published their research in German or English.

Through these academic networks international research arrived at Åbo Akademi University. Since a comprehensive study of such networks across disciplines and periods would be a massive undertaking, we demonstrate their importance through a case study focussing on only one academic and his personal network: the sociologist and anthropologist Edward Westermarck (1862–1939), professor of philosophy at ÅAU (1918–1932) and its first rector (1918–1921). Westermarck stands out as the scholar who had created and cultivated the most extensive national and international academic network when he accepted a professorship at ÅAU (Lagerspetz & Suolinna 2014). A study of his network enables us to connect the academic activities of ÅAU with those at other universities. It demonstrates how knowledge is created and schools of thought are formed in academic networks that more often than not transcend disciplinary and national borders. In addition, it casts light on the recruitment processes surrounding the establishment of a new university.

Paradigm shifts and epistemological breaks

An important factor governing the process of knowledge creation is the change in the perception of what kind of knowledge might be important during a certain period. Each discipline at a university undergoes changes and these are often described in terms of paradigm shifts. The changes in academic disciplines mostly have a gradual character, but at times sudden shifts in scientific or scholarly paradigms can be noticed as well (Kuhn, 1962). Since paradigms are initiated through networks of likeminded researchers who either promote or oppose a new paradigm, the question of paradigms is closely linked to that of academic networks. As a consequence of shifts in scientific paradigms, old and new paradigms exist side by side during a transition period and researchers have to decide which one they will follow. In the history of Åbo Akademi University both modes of responding to new paradigms can be found: resistance and adoption. We selectively examine the reception of a number of important shifts influencing certain academic disciplines. On the one hand, we study some fundamental changes in natural sciences, such as the theory of relativity, the emergence of quantum physics and the development of set theory, popularly known as ‘new math’. On the other hand, we study ways in which social constructivism influenced various disciplines within the humanities and social sciences.

We have chosen certain professors of physics and mathematics as case studies, in order to investigate how the theory of relativity, quantum physics and new mathematics were received at Åbo Akademi University. We examine their teaching curriculum, their scientific and popular publications, their textbooks and their correspondence. University professors of the 1920s and 1930s participated actively in the general debate and regarded it as their duty to educate the reading public on the latest scientific discoveries. This makes it possible to trace the debates between proponents and opponents of new paradigms in physics in both the academic arena and the public media. Furthermore, their students’ theses give a view on the occurrence and pace of these paradigm shifts.

The emergence of a new paradigm has been described by the physicist Max Planck as a process in which the proponents of the old paradigm will eventually die and be replaced by a new generation that is familiar with the new ideas (Kuhn 1970, 150). The reception of Einstein’s theory of relativity, one of the foremost examples of such a paradigm shift, illustrates this observation. Although some Finnish physicists started off as sceptics yet eventually came to embrace the theory of relativity, the development at Åbo Akademi University largely corresponded to the pattern suggested by Planck. The first professor of physics at the university, Karl Ferdinand Lindman (1874–1952), belonged to those experimental physicists who criticized the increasing abstraction and “mathematification” of modern physics. He continued to oppose the general theory of relativity at least until the 1940s (Lindman 1922, 1924, 1933). It appears that his scientific network consisted of other physicists who were either opposed or at least skeptical towards it. By contrast, the professors of physics who succeeded Lindman had no doubts about the theory of relativity. In result, by the 1960s no one questioned it any longer.

The final example in our chapter on paradigm shifts concerns theories of social constructivism, the theory of knowledge that studies jointly constructed understandings of the world. The introduction and reception of social constructivism at ÅAU can be studied not least through observing its emergence in masters’ and doctoral theses over time and across different disciplines in social sciences, humanities, education, as well as business and economics. The cases that we examine include the disciplines of sociology and women’s studies (later known as gender studies). Within these disciplines, as in the previous examples,

certain individuals learned about the new theories through their academic networks. Although this study is still at an early stage, it appears that the arrival of social constructivist theory initially led to a multi-paradigmatic state in sociology at ÅAU, before becoming more or less mainstream. This pattern more or less reflects the developments at other Finnish universities (Pirttilä & Nuotio 2000, 58).

The choice of paradigms as an analytic tool is not without problems. Taking paradigm shifts as a point of departure creates a dichotomy between progressive scholars who embraced the new thinking, and their more conservative colleagues who clung to the old ways of making science. This perspective easily reinforces a narrative marked by development and progress, familiar from traditional history of science. The challenge here is to approach the studied academics with an open mind, without an anachronistic “besserwisser” attitude. These academics acted, taught and did their research in a time when old and new paradigms still existed side by side, and when a cautious view on new ground-breaking research could mean scientific integrity in the face of something not yet completely digested, rather than backwardness.

Academic socialization, selection and exclusion

The social processes of selection and socialization into the academic community significantly shape the creation of academic knowledge. *Who* is given the opportunity to do the research and *whose* research interests are recognized as legitimate, interesting and innovative? Such issues have a significant impact on what is taught within university courses and what new knowledge is produced at university departments (Harding 1991). Obviously on the other side of the coin, a number of mechanisms of exclusion exist along the strenuous path from university admission to obtaining a proper academic position.

The academic cultures that prevent women from advancing towards the higher levels of academia have received most attention in this respect (e.g. Hausen & Nowotny 1986, Harding 1986, Husu 2001). Sociologists of science have been persistently intrigued by the so-called “leaking pipeline” (Angier 1995), referring to the fact that the share of women drops at each intermediate level along the academic career path (Etzkowitz, Kemelgor & Uzzi 2000, 5–14, Henningsen 2003). Yet the processes of selection, socialization and exclusion arguably also apply to the ways in which students and junior researchers are trained into academic and often discipline-specific “ways of thinking and practising” (Hounsell & McCune 2005). The erratic mix of tradition, habit and the individual professor’s personality that governed teaching practices for centuries served as a mechanism of selection and exclusion in itself. Those students who lacked not only the intellectual ability, but also the cultural capital and social background needed to successfully navigate the academic system, simply dropped out. Ideally, the study of the social reproduction of academic knowledge should include the level of university admission and classroom experiences at undergraduate level, as well as the formal and informal practices surrounding the recruitment and training of doctoral students. University histories usually do not pay a lot of attention to drop-outs, although an examination of such experiences and fates would illuminate central characteristics of academic culture.

Academic processes of selection and exclusion might appear difficult to grasp for a historian, especially when older periods are concerned. They have left few documentary traces, due to their informal character and the fact that they often contradict the persuasive narrative of the modern university as a purely meritocratic system based on scientific neut-

rality (Søndergaard 2003). As pointed out by Liisa Husu, discriminatory mechanisms in academia are often a matter of “non-occurrence”: silence, dismissal, discreet exclusion, invisibility or lacking support and encouragement (Husu 2005, 30). Husu has mainly studied gender discrimination, but the same mechanisms apply to other academic processes of selection and exclusion. The increasing critique of male gender bias in the recruitment to doctoral studies and university appointments, which in Finland occurred in the late 1970s and was salient in the 1980s, nonetheless offers the university historian some points of departure for contemporary critical perceptions of such informal processes.

From the 1970s onwards, emerging debates on deficient pedagogical methods and competences in university education provide the university historian with new kinds of sources. Although these debates centred on curricula and the pedagogical methods that were used, they prompted both university students and professors to express their views upon and experiences of teaching practices and selection processes. In the case of Åbo Akademi University, public critique of pedagogical practices by either students or state authorities was almost completely absent until the late 1960s. From then on, however, the previous reverence for professorial authority in matters of university education rapidly eroded. Reform projects, such as the ambitious reform of university education that was set in motion by social democratic officials at the Ministry of Education in the late 1970s (for a national overview, see Jalava 2012), provide useful documentary evidence about new challenges to traditional academic socialization mechanisms. A string of critical reports on students’ classroom experiences, commissioned by the Students’ Union in the 1980s, shed some light on teaching practices and how they were perceived at Åbo Akademi University. As we follow the developments into the 1990s and 2000s, the increasing pressure from the Ministry of Education to streamline university education gives rise to a flurry of reports and discussions that offer valuable, albeit unsatisfactory pieces of insight into the prevailing practices of teaching, selection and socialization practices.

A topic that would deserve more attention in university history is ‘homosociality’ in academic communities. By this term, gender scholars refer to how men of certain elites or professions seek the company of their peers and equals. They actively exclude women and men of inferior rank from the social settings where they network, exchange information and mutually confirm each others’ social prestige. Obviously university settings often allow for homosocial tendencies and clientelism. Only those recognized by the professor as ‘the right kind of fellow’ are recruited and promoted to academic careers. Indicating or proving the effects of homosociality and exclusion is certainly challenging for the university historian. However, certain documentary points of departure to study the impact of exclusionary mechanisms at universities are available: the historian can analyse the selection of students and staff on a statistical level; study protests over academic appointments; examine the rhetorical construction of meritocracy and neutrality as core components in the university’s public image; trace processes of selection and socialization through autobiographical materials, such as personal letters and memoirs; and conduct interviews concerning events in recent decades. Such personal narratives are valuable sources to explore how the university environment was subjectively experienced (Portelli 1991, 50–53, Thomson 1994, 8–11).

Potentials and challenges of transverse approaches

In order for university history to develop into a more sophisticated sub-discipline and generate research that is of larger scholarly interest, in our opinion it is necessary and important

that university historians dare to part from the encyclopaedic tradition and its anxious ambition to write 'total histories' of single universities. Most probably, a large share of university history will continue to be funded in connection with university jubilees. Historians writing these jubilee histories should nonetheless have the courage to be more selective and focus on a limited and more coherent set of relevant research questions.

The analytic points of departure that we have chosen for our study of the history of ÅAU aim to link up university history closer to history of science and science studies. These links would be strengthened if university historians paid more attention to the core activities of universities, namely the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Even if our case studies are confined to single disciplines or small groups of adjacent disciplines, they cast light on processes of academic knowledge creation in a more general sense, beyond the scope of a single discipline or faculty.

The transverse approach bears its own difficulties. The academic phenomena that we have identified and selected to focus on are extensive and challenging to study. The university, even a small one such as ÅAU, is a large and complex institution, made up of dozens of disciplines and departmental cultures, hosting hundreds of individual scholars. It is impossible, for instance, to examine the academic networks created by all of the professors, or even those of one professor from each discipline. Even studying one representative of each faculty in depth would be laborious. Our solution has been to study various phenomena by focussing on different levels as required by the phenomenon under scrutiny: sometimes analysing larger fields, sometimes narrowing the scope to particular disciplines or even single individuals.

Moreover, there are specific problems following from our decision to write two separate anthologies, one focussing on the interactions between Åbo Akademi University and its social and political environment, the other concentrating on scientific ideas and practices. This division sometimes restricts the treatment of the important question concerning the core activities of the university. The relationships between the university and the society of which it is part should also be taken into account. Factors such as the needs and demands of the state, external control mechanisms, as well as university financing strongly condition the creation of academic knowledge. Treating these interrelated spheres separately will unavoidably cause both gaps and overlaps between the two volumes.

Our approach obviously runs the risk of initially disappointing parts of the readership. Many people open a work of this kind in the first place in order to find their own department's history, and to situate their own local history within the larger picture of the university. Yet we are hopeful that precisely because they have been active in this environment they will, after the first surprise, experience another kind of recognition. Moreover, the potential problem of a too narrow treatment of the university as a whole will to some extent be remedied by the third, chronologically structured volume, which covers general developments.

A final observation concerns the nature of university histories. Jubilees are recurring events and it is a well-known fact among historians that each generation writes its own history. It goes without saying that the same applies to university histories. If our predecessors favoured an encyclopaedic treatment of our university, our own generation of historians is prone to embrace multi-disciplinary perspectives, regarding borders between disciplines and themes as constraints to overcome. Our particular way of writing university history is presumably a reflection of that view. Without a doubt coming generations of historians will

again apply other methodologies and write their own versions of the history of Åbo Akademi University.

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FT Laura Hollsten on yleisen historian yliopistonopettaja Åbo Akademiassa.