

BOOK REVIEW

Kropp: Danish Sociology

John Scott

scottj@essex.ac.uk

Kristoffer Kropp, *A Historical Account of Danish Sociology. A Troubled Sociology*
Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015
ISBN 978-1-137-40341-4
Price: \$67,50 (Hardcover)

In this contribution to a series of histories on national sociologies, Kristoffer Kropp holds that disciplines are not to be seen as ‘natural’ or logical divisions of a unified intellectual framework but as sociological constructions. Adopting ideas from Bourdieu, he depicts established scientific disciplines as bounded social spaces that exist alongside and interwoven with other social spaces, and most particularly fields of action. Kropp understands a discipline to be a social formation that organises frameworks of cognition and communication geared to the production of knowledge.

A disciplinary space comprises norms that constitute it as a field of power and struggle: struggles with other disciplines and external bodies to establish its autonomy and informal struggles between advocates of different conceptions of its specific forms of knowledge. Across the world, disciplines have been introduced in state structures and private-controlled organisations, as universities and research institutes, in response to changing economic and political demands. In consequence, the general process of institutionalising scientific knowledge in a system of disciplinary practices has taken various different forms that reflect variations in trajectories of economic and political development.

In Denmark, Kropp argues, the political project of building a social democratic welfare state has conditioned the ways in which sociological knowledge has been pursued and institutionalised. What came to be called ‘sociology’ originated in distinct strands of philosophical and statistical explorations of social issues. During the 1870s and into the 1920s, a sociological approach based on British empiricism and the evolutionary thought of Herbert Spencer was developed in work by Høffding, Wilkens, and Starcke. This became the basis of teaching programmes that, however, did not outlive their founders, who did not secure the financial requirements for a lasting base for the subject. The work of statisticians in building on survey methods proved no more successful.

Not until 1936 was a full professorship established, at Aarhus, when German émigré Theodor Geiger was appointed to a post in the Business School. Despite his classic work on social stratification, the chair ended with his sudden death in 1952. At Copenhagen, economists had successfully established a chair of sociology in 1950 and appointed the Norwegian quantitative researcher Kaare Svalastoga, who built a Department of Sociology to which a number of teaching assistants and assistant professors were appointed during the 1950s and 1960s. A rival Department of Organisation and Industrial Sociology was formed within the Copenhagen Business School (not then part of the

university) and the government established the Institute for Social research, both of these undertaking commissioned research independently of the University Department.

This tripartite structure was not to be a secure base for the discipline because of intellectual differences between the units. Svalastoga's commitments were to American-style functionalism and survey research, while the DOIS adopted a more critical approach, inspired by C. Wright Mills's visit to Copenhagen in 1957. This diversity was further stretched when the Faculty of Humanities in Copenhagen University established a new professorship to train school teachers in sociology and formalised this as a Department of Cultural Sociology in 1967. Thus, there were two rival Departments of Sociology within the same university. Kropp, unfortunately, does not explore the reasons why Svalastoga was, apparently, so opposed to broadening the remit of his Department and what university politics lay behind the formation of two rival Departments in separate Faculties.

The growth of student discontent after 1968 proved fateful, with the Department of Cultural Sociology supporting student participation and the Department of Sociology opposing it. Discontent was furthered by the growth of a Marxist commitment among some younger members of Svalastoga's Department. The return of a right-wing government in 1982 led to cutbacks in sociology programs at the new universities of Roskilde and Ålborg and both Departments in Copenhagen were closed down in 1986. Not until 1992 was a new, single Department of Sociology re-established on a pluralistic and more policy-oriented basis.

Sociology in Denmark is now institutionalised as a discipline and is well-embedded in interdisciplinary programmes and structures. It is organised in relation to the Danish welfare state as professional strategies have taken advantage of funding sources available. Danish sociologists have, however, been seeking to recast their activities in line with more detached academic concerns. The subject's institutionalisation is, therefore, weak: Kropp finds it to be as weak as it was 100 years ago as it lacks academic autonomy.

This is an interesting and thoughtful analysis of the development and current state of sociology in Denmark and it will be a useful resource for many. What is missing from Kropp's analysis is any conception of what sociology 'ought' to look like as a discipline. A socially constructed 'discipline' becomes the carrier for intellectual idea, but is there an intellectual space that needs to be occupied by a particular kind of sociology? What is the *intellectual space* of sociology in scientific culture and what ought to be the relationship between this and the departmental structures that define the *social spaces* of the discipline? Should there be a one-to-one relationship between these in *all* cases, in *some* leading cases, or in *none*? The fundamental question is whether sociology can survive as an intellectual project without such disciplinary organisation.