

# Strategic plan – Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University 2022 – 2024

Adopted by the Department Board at the Department of Human Geography, 22-02-17.

## A The situation today

The total working hours for the department's employees are divided into research (approx. 35%), education at the bachelor's and master's levels (approx. 40%) and doctoral studies (approx. 25%).

### Education

At the bachelor's and master's levels, the large student groups are found within the department's three main areas; urban and regional planning, human geography and geography. The Department of Human Geography has 400–500 students each year, including students in geography, who are registered at the Department of Physical Geography. We also participate in the Bachelor's Programme in Global Development with a residency at the Department of Social Anthropology and participate in the International Master's Programme in Environmental Social Science Studies at the Department of Political Science. The master's programmes account for about 20–25% of the scope of the education.

The education in geography has for a long time been conducted in cooperation with the Department of Physical Geography. The Bachelor's Programme in Urban and Regional Planning has also since its inception had a broad base in the steering committee for the Bachelor's Programme in Urban and Regional Planning with representatives from a number of different departments in the social sciences and humanities. The Bachelor's programme in Global Development, the Master's Programme in Globalization, Environment and Social Change and the International Master's Programme in Social Science Environmental Studies are further examples of the fact that there are also collaborations with both social science and natural science subjects.

The bachelor programmes in Human Geography and Urban and Regional Planning were reformed in 2019–2021 and are now being implemented in their new form, where a connection to research conducted at the department has been ensured. In 2020 and 2021, we had a particularly high throughput of new students, mainly at the bachelor's level. This resulted in an overperformance in relation to the funding cap received, a level that we believe will be relatively constant.

## Research

Research in the department is organised into four research profiles, SURE (The Stockholm Urban and Regional Research Environment); Population geography, migration and GIS; Historical geography and landscape studies as well as Urban Africa where the latter was previously included in the SURE profile but now forms its own profile. Each research profile has obtained a number of research council-funded projects that will continue over the next three-year period.

### The Stockholm Urban and Regional Research Environment (SURE)

SURE is the academic home of a number of internationally successful researchers who work together in research projects related to contemporary social and spatial processes. Empirically, the projects concern challenges in urban and regional contexts, especially in Sweden and Europe.

### Population geography, migration and GIS

Population geography is a field of research where societal changes are seen as a result of human action in time and space. Population geographic research uses qualitative and quantitative methodologies to understand how people's life paths are shaped in neighbourhoods and to analyse how individual life paths affect local and regional development patterns. The research profile pays particular attention to the role that migration and housing conditions play in people's lives. The research is based on interviews in combination with GIS-based analysis of longitudinal population databases.

The research is conducted in three overlapping areas: (1) Population geography (2) Migration studies (3) Geography and digital resources.

### Historical geography and landscape

The research focus of this profile is a leading research area within the Faculty of Social Sciences at Stockholm University. Knowledge of cultivation systems, property rights and leases at different times has been a key to an in-depth understanding of the role of institutions in changes in land use. Together with studies of financial markets' interest in agriculture and the effects of globalisation, a theoretical in-depth study has begun that points to how the geographical location, scale and distance are to be understood in a new era. The organisation of agricultural work and the contribution of agriculture to creating conditions for future sustainable food supply are now in focus. Researchers are particularly interested in; agriculture as a practice including the farmer's knowledge and work, the landscape as a meeting place between nature and culture, its history and questions about place and space and society where, among other things, political economy and ecology are highlighted. By relating places and geographical change processes to each other and critical analyses to these, agricultural regimes are studied and

compared. These studies also have applications in analyses of species, forestry, nature conservation, and in cultural conservation. In addition to global syntheses and projects in Europe, studies are currently being carried out in Sweden, Israel, Italy, Ethiopia and Tanzania.

## Urban Africa

The research group examines how social, economic and political processes shape cities in Africa, in the meeting between the global and the local. The research sheds light on how urban ideals are expressed and implemented and how citizens create opportunities in the city. Thematic areas include: informal livelihoods, the social impact of COVID-19, large-scale infrastructure projects, access to basic services and housing, transformation of public space and land use, and urban planning practices today and under colonial rule. The group currently has five externally funded research projects and one doctoral project. It consists of seven researchers.

## Collaboration

Through our research in all four profiles and our educational programmes, we have contact with the labour market and our alumni in various ways. The alumni have acted as mentors for our students and these also constitute an entrance for the students' internships and assignment projects, within companies and authorities in the Greater Stockholm area. Several of the researchers work in collaboration with actors outside the university in Sweden as well as internationally and also contribute as experts in investigations and activities, for example with government Investigations, at Statistics Sweden, Delmi, the Stockholm Region, in different municipalities and in collaboration with civil society. The research that is conducted is also disseminated through different channels, and researchers are invited to panel discussions and talks, and such initiatives are also taken within the research projects in order to convey research results to society as a whole.

## B Goals

The basis for being able to carry out our assignment is to create good conditions. Our overall goal is to continuously improve the working environment for both employees and our students within the available resources.

The goals can be described as follows:

- To maintain a good working environment for the employees and students at the department, where there is participation, gender equality and equal treatment.
- To conduct high quality education and be close to research at all levels.
- To conduct high quality research, to further strengthen it in order for research to be nationally leading and internationally prominent.
- To ascertain good collaboration with the surrounding society.

- That education is designed so that students can become an asset at all levels of society.

## C Resources

### Staff

About 45 people are employed by the department. This number has been relatively stable over a longer period of time. We have a good composition of staff, with lecturers, all of whom are active in research, publish and apply for research funding. About 15 people are professors and senior lecturers and, in the department, currently about ten people are employed as researchers and about the same number of doctoral students.

The department has a well-functioning administration that handles student and staff administration, finance, study guidance, computers and IT systems. In 2022 six staff work in administration together with the Head of administration. They provide support for both education and research.

Our department, together with four other departments at the Faculty of Social Sciences collaborate in regard to temporary needs for support regarding study administration, financial management and staff matters. This way our vulnerability in administration is reduced. We also share a caretaker position with the science departments in the Geo-Science Building. However, we have identified a need to increase administrative staff to cover a need resulting from an increase in staff and financial administration.

### Economy

Over a longer period, our economy has been strong providing good conditions for conducting our work in education as well as research. External funding requires enduring work from our researchers. In the most recent years, 2019–2021, the outcome has been relatively successful with several projects having received funding. An average of SEK 15 million per year was granted during the last three-year period. Here we have an opportunity to expand and maintain a high level. In the coming period, particular focus will be on finding funds to recruit doctoral students. Over the course of years, the number of doctoral students has decreased and such a downward spiral, needs to be broken as doctoral students are an important group for the department's activities and development.

The funding cap for bachelor's and master's levels studies has remained at approximately the same level and is not expected to increase more than marginally in the near future. This will lead to a gradual decrease due to wage increases. In the long run, this can have an effect on the hours spent on teaching. After the revision of the programmes in human geography and urban and regional planning at the bachelor's level, we have had relatively balanced costs for teaching and premises. During the period, costs for premises will increase, which may affect

the costs of teaching, which may then need to be adjusted. The goal is to have a balance in terms of expenses and incomes for our teaching at the bachelor's and master's levels.

## Premises

We have appropriate premises with close access to the Department of Physical Geography, with which we collaborate closely within teaching at the bachelor's and master's levels. We have good opportunities for teaching with computer halls and a mix of small and larger lecture halls. During the previous period, smaller lecture rooms for seminars and smaller groups were increasingly administered by our own department, which has led to more cost-effective utilisation of these premises. As the staff situation has been relatively stable for a long time, there is currently no major need for additional office space.

## D Action plan

One way to create good working conditions is to increase stability both for teaching, researching and technical and administrative staff. Still we need to maintain a flexible environment as when, for example, research funding is obtained or ended staff will need to move between research and teaching. Guiding this work are two key concepts: open conversation and respect.

Open conversation means that we must maintain a collegial discussion that includes all staff in the department. A prerequisite is that information must reach all employees. To increase the exchange of knowledge and information, the mentor programme that has been in place at the department will be resumed. As regard research, we will have active seminars and increase collaboration between research groups. Respect means that we must have respect for our mission as an educational and research institution. We must also have respect for students and staff and their different conditions, background, language, culture, etc. This means that we must:

- Maintain a well-functioning physical work environment for employees and ensure that each individual employee has a satisfactory workplace.
- Actively work with equality and diversity issues.
- Regularly follow up equality between men and women.
- Maintain balance in economics with regard to the core activities teaching and research.
- Ascertain that we have suitable premises for the work to be carried out.

## Bachelor and master level education

There are several challenges in education that will need to be met during the period.

- Balance must be maintained between the programmes as regard resources.

- During the period, a revision of the master programmes shall be initiated following the revision that took place regarding the bachelor's programmes.
- The research profiles should be visible in the master programmes in the same way as they are in our bachelor programmes to ensure a research connection.
- We will implement pedagogical projects to support the development of course activities and encourage pedagogical development, in particular based on what we have learnt from the digital transformation that has taken place during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The department will support PhD-students and other recently appointed employees in teaching.
- The bachelor programmes that commenced in the autumn of 2019 will be evaluated.
- An increased national exchange in education, both in terms of teachers and students, will be facilitated.
- Internationalisation of education through links to international research networks, for example through the exchange of teachers within Erasmus, should be encouraged.
- Internationalisation for students is important. We want our students to be able to study parts of their education at universities outside Sweden. One goal is to facilitate such an exchange and ensure that the agreements we have with other universities will be to the benefit of our students. We need to continue to offer a course of study that is suitable for incoming exchange students also in order to ease the work situation for those who administer our international exchange programmes.

## Research and doctoral studies

Research is an important part of our work and it is conducted by professors, senior lecturers, doctoral students, researchers and post-doctors. It is important that the right conditions exist for conducting research.

- It is important to ensure the university lecturers' research time. This is done today, among other things, by all senior lecturers having five weeks of continuous teaching-free time during term time.
- We need to strategically within the department support the application procedure and facilitate applications to research councils, for example with administrative assistance regarding budget work.
- All research staff, including doctoral students, write individual strategic plans, which must be followed up annually.
- We will ensure that new employees are given the opportunity to enrich the research environment.
- We must be prepared to change the structure of research and change the focus of research groups when the research focus is shifted.

- Given the size of the staff group, it is reasonable to achieve about two promotions per year either to associate professor or professor. The goal is for at least five people to have been promoted by 2023.
- We will ensure that the number of professors and associate professors is maintained or increased through recruitment or promotion to ensure good supervision at the doctoral level. Active supervisors must have completed courses in supervising doctoral students.
- Doctoral programmes must continue to have clear structures with progressive seminars and a high completion rate. The department's research profiles play an important role in supporting doctoral students.
- An urgent goal is to increase the number of doctoral students so that the creative environment is not jeopardized. Special focus will be placed on this during the period.
- The doctoral students will continue to be offered mentors.
- At the department, we will support postdocs with resources for continued research activities.

### **Administrative and technical support**

A prerequisite for the core activities to work is that there are robust support functions. That is why we are going to:

- ensure that staff have the necessary resources for computers and other infrastructure and ensure that there are sustainable solutions for this.
- have well-defined job descriptions, function and role descriptions for all positions, where tasks, responsibilities and authorities appear.
- have clear and well-communicated delegations that aim to enable the administration to relieve the core business from administrative tasks and to offer fast and good service to employees and students. It is important to know who is responsible for different issues.
- in the coming period, take stock of the need for administrative and technical support to ensure that we have sufficient support functions in place.
- provide opportunities for continuous competence development for all employees.
- develop cooperation with other institutions to ensure the functions within the administration.

### **Communication and collaboration**

Communication consists of two parts. One is about the department's internal information, where everyone must be involved. We must also work to improve communication with students, the general public and researchers. We need a functioning infrastructure for communication via different types of media. The department's website and feeds in social media must be kept up

to date and convey relevant information. We need to review our need for staff who can ensure that this is done.

Communication to researchers consists of scientific publication that mainly takes place within the framework of each research project. Research collaboration takes place in research projects that include several researchers within as well as outside the department. This collaboration is expected to continue to a similar extent and when necessary, such work is supported by the department. The department has for some time been part of a collaboration on a national course programme for doctoral students and this is expected to continue in the years to come.

Collaboration is also important for the students' employability, our knowledge of working life in our field and for our commissions. The possibilities our alumni and their networks provide are important in this work and will continue to be part of our collaboration.