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POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH EDUCATION IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE: THE CASE OF NORDIC AND BALTIC COUNTRIES

The present paper will discuss the postgraduate research education of information professionals in Nordic and Baltic countries by analyzing, first and foremost, NordIS-Net (1998-2002) and Nordic Research School in Library and Information Science (2004-2008) - networks for doctoral training in library and information sciences (LIS) - from the aspects of organization of training, mobility of researchers and use and sharing of resources.

Common European principles for postgraduate research training

It is observed that research training has become a major issue in research and research policy during last twenty years – this has been the case in all the Nordic countries (Nordic research training 2003, Quality in research training 2004), and in world-wide as well (The Research Foundations of Graduate Education 1993).

The two processes have begun to merge: Creating a European area of higher education and a European research area in order to become a dynamic and competitive knowledge society on a global scale has not only created a renewed importance of the role of universities in terms of their task of research and research training, it has also led to a closer scrutiny of the ways in which research is currently organised (Realising the European Higher Education Area 2003).

There is a basic agreement in Europe that high quality research training as well as a higher supply of qualified researchers is important elements to realise the vision of a Europe of knowledge. Therefore changes in doctoral education and training are envisaged entailing the following shifts:

- from national to international,
- from curiosity driven to result oriented (i.e. relevance, impact),
- from individual to team,
- from narrow and discipline guided to multidisciplinary research,
- from small laboratories to larger research institutes and programmes (i.e. critical mass),
- from fragments to programmes,
- from purely academic to also professional,
- from national guarding and use to competitiveness, job creation and sustainable development on a broader scale (Kehm 2004).

Position paper of European Association for Library and Information Education and Research (EUCLID) focuses on the importance of European standards for competencies needed by LIS-professionals in the information society. EUCLID will initiate processes to promote curriculum and comparable degree programs development on a European scale (Position Paper 2003).

In the Estonian Strategy for Research and Development, a future Estonia is seen as a knowledge-based society where the sources of economic and labour force competitiveness, and improvement in the quality of life, stem from directed towards the search for new knowledge, the application of knowledge and skills, and the development of human capital. In a knowledge-based society research and development are valued highly as one of the preconditions for functioning and development of all of society (Knowledge-based Estonia 2002).

NORSLIS (Nordic Research School in Library and Information Science) – vision and activities

During the years 1998-2002 Nordic Academy for Advanced Study (NorFA) supported a network for doctoral training in LIS called NordIS-Net. It attracted doctoral students from all of the five Nordic and three Baltic countries to participate in joint research courses and workshops. The research courses organised once in a year consisted of intensive lecture series on theoretical approaches and research methods in LIS and the workshops organised also once in a year provided the students with an opportunity to get feed-back to their papers by a broad range of Nordic-Baltic researchers. A particularly successful activity was the travel support to research students for participating in research courses organised by the network and outside it or international research conferences.

Virkus and Harbo pointed out that LIS institutions have not used all possibilities offered in the Nordic higher education space and closed co-operation between the countries offers opportunities to utilize the resources for the benefit of Europe as whole (Virkus, Harbo 2002). Kajberg observes that networking and mobility efforts in European LIS education have not yet produced or convincing results (Kajberg 2003).

In 2003 NorFA has started a five-year initiative for graduate schools within humanities and social sciences. The purpose of this initiative was to increase mobility in the region, to strengthen research training and develop models to improve research training in each country and in the region as a whole. Five graduate schools has been chosen after external assessment (Nordic and Baltic/North-West Russian participants), each with a framework funding of NOK 1 million per year for five years, one of them is Nordic Research School in Library and Information Science (NORSLIS).

The objective of NORSLIS is to increase the quality levels of doctoral education in library and information science in order to meet the requirements of a knowledge society. The research school intends to achieve synergic effects, effectiveness and efficiency in doctoral education and research of LIS by collecting the scattered scientific expertise, often in small-size research educational units, throughout the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Each year NORSLIS will offer 2 research courses, 1 workshop, 1 road show seminar, and select 1 visiting professor. The novel component is the road show seminar attended by 2-3 researches and organised at about 3 network sites offering lectures and possibilities for individual supervision and consultation. The main activities of NORSLIS will be supporting mobility of researchers and interaction through a web-based portal with a variety of information functions.

The activities will cover a broad range of topics and combine theoretical and methodological aspects. Two 5 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) research courses will be developed and offered per academic year, some of which will be provided twice during the five-year period. The idea is to enable two cohorts of students to benefit from those courses, taking into account that doctoral students normally take courses in their first two years of studies. NORSLIS considers all credits as acceptable for local exams although the final decision is up to the local programs.

Workshops provide an opportunity for students to present a paper based on their research and to get feedback from their peers and from senior researchers. One workshop will be offered each year. Workshop credits will be in the range of 2-3 ECTS.

The novel concept of a 'road show seminar' will be incorporated. It means that a team of 2-3 senior researchers of high international status will visit about three Nordic-Baltic sites, each covering an adequate region, with a tailored set of lectures and tutorials on a pre-selected research area, as well as supplying improved supervision and consultation. The idea is in a cost-effective manner to provide research knowledge and experience out to the local research groups and doctoral students within Nordic-Baltic regions. Travel and accommodation costs are thus minimized. Visiting professors are expected to participate in 'road show seminars'.

Visiting professors for a period of 3-4 weeks at 1-2 relevant locations, e.g., to promote research frameworks and encourage local research groups.

Exchange of supervisor experience between the NORSLIS institutions will be encouraged by the availability of a number of travel grants. To be cost-effective the exchange is intended to take place in connection with other NORSLIS events, such as research courses or workshops in which the supervisor already is engaged.

NORSLIS activities 2004

Doctoral research courses and workshops have proven to be excellent means for sharing the Nordic mentoring expertise and creating contacts between doctoral students and senior researchers. Hence, a primary goal of the research course is to provide the doctoral students with a forum in which to present their research projects and to discuss with senior researchers and fellow students the range of appropriate methodologies available.

- Course on Research Design I: Theory and Development (March 28 - April 2, 2004, Borås, Sweden)

Course intends to promote the understanding and knowledge of this issue within LIS. Current LIS research will be examined considering its aims and the context for its

development. The course will allow for development of theoretical concepts and to synthesize theories into theoretical frameworks for chosen problems. The combination of unique disciplinary issues and the need to use theory from different humanistic and social science fields is a challenge for LIS research. The point of departure is current theories and LIS-dissertations from the Nordic countries.

- Course on Research design II: *Methods for studying information behaviour* (October 23 - 28, 2004, Oslo, Norway)

Selecting an appropriate research methodology for empirically founded doctoral dissertation work is one of the key decisions for novice researchers. The decision of what research methodology or approach to apply, and why, is important especially since there are nowadays several alternative perspectives to apply in information studies. Thus, the choice spans from hard, statistical methodologies (e.g., empirical IR research in laboratory settings) to soft, analytic methodologies (e.g., discourse analysis) through alternatives in between (e.g., empirical IR involving actual users and information seeking in real life work settings). The Course addresses this issue by presenting various methodologies and the underlying motivations for their use.

- Workshop: *Research in the field of Public Libraries* (September 16 - 18, 2004, Riga, Latvia)

The workshop aims to create a forum for senior and junior researchers doing research related to the public libraries. The research is in a positive sense very diverse, also in a methodological sense, and comprising studies in information seeking, user-studies, the history of public libraries, its concept and ideology, and their role in local communities and economic value, etc. There will be a mixture of lectures with a general focus on trends in research on public libraries and use of different methodological traditions and sessions dedicated to discussion of current PhD projects within the broad field of public library research.

- Road show seminar in *Bibliometric methods 2004*

Stop 1: March 22 - 23, 2004, Umeå, Sweden

Stop 2: March 24 - 26, 2004, Copenhagen, Denmark

Stop 3: October 6 - 7, 2004, Turku, Finland

In 2004 the aim of the road show is to present the latest developments in informetrics and bibliometric methods. Lectures will be mixed with laboratory casework, exchange of critical know-how and specialized computer software. The stops chosen are based on knowledge of ongoing PhD work in which these kinds of methods are being applied.

- Visiting Professor 2004 - Dr Jane Klobas (Bocconi University in Milan, Italy)

Visiting Borås (March 28 - April 2, 2004) prof Klobas was lecturing in Borås on "Research programmes bridging Information Science with Business and Management Sciences" and teaching on Course Research Design I.

Visiting Riga (May 3 - 7, 2004) and Vilnius (May 11 - 14, 2004):

- to give a Master class offering the PhD students the opportunity to work individually and in a group on aspects of their own research (or research plan) that are related to the theme of her visit. Each student would be required to present his/her work at least twice during the visiting period (according to a format that will be provided after the registration);
- to give lectures and seminars to the group of PhD students and staff members on Research Methodology, and Research on Topics related to Psychology, Management, and User Studies.

Topics of lectures and seminars:

- Using theory as a framework for doctoral research: Defining concepts and envisioning relationships;
- Developing data collection strategies;
- Designing and conducting valid and reliable survey research;
- Techniques for summarizing and mapping qualitative results;
- Multi-method research: Combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

Mobility support

NORSLIS will support doctoral students and post-docs mobility between their "home institution" and a "guest institution" (primarily other institutions of the NORSLIS network). For PhD students the "home institution" is where they are registered as PhD student. Post docs must be engaged in research and employed by one of the 15 institutions participating in NORSLIS.

NORSLIS intends to support visits of doctoral students and post-docs in other Nordic-Baltic research groups for 1-2 weeks. The aim is to help them to become acquainted with the work of eminent research teams and to encourage research co-operation between the post-docs and young researchers.

In addition mobility support for PhD students may include:

- travel grants for research conferences for which the student has had a research paper accepted or a research paper accepted for a doctoral forum connected with an international or Nordic conference;
- travel grants to attend other PhD courses in the Nordic countries;
- travel grants to attend other types of research courses, for example Nordic summer schools.

The guiding principle is that these grants are for high level research conferences or activities that make considerable demands upon the PhD students.

Conclusion

By cooperation and coordination it is possible to increase the effectiveness and make the research education more efficient by collecting the scattered scientific expertise, often in small-size research and educational units. Both networks encompass 15 institutions and are open to participation for about 150 doctoral students.

By pooling the doctoral students in Nordic and Baltic countries it becomes possible to gather groups large enough for providing them with relevant research courses tailored to their needs. The advantage is also the possibility to organize informal thematic discussion (or research) groups and workshops that may include doctoral and post-doctoral students as well as senior researchers.

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