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SOCIAL SCIENCE POLICY IN NORWAY

Report by Robert O'Connor

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Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy

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Report by R. O'Connor, ESRI
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I attended the above meeting on 25 February 1976. Most of the day was devoted to a confrontation meeting in which Social Science Policy in Norway was reviewed. In preparation for this meeting a Report on the subject had been prepared [SPT(75)8]. A copy of this Report is available and I give below a summary of its contents and a brief note on the discussion of the Report which took place at the meeting. Because of the length of the documents involved, I have had to be very selective and have had to omit points which others would surely have found relevant. Interested readers are therefore advised to peruse the main documents which contain much valuable information about research generally.

Report of Social Science Policy in Norway

The Report consists of two parts:

Book I: entitled Background Report was prepared by the Secretariat and contains an analysis of the development and utilisation of the Social Sciences in Norway.

Book II: entitled the Examiners' Report contains the examiners' views concerning the organisation, direction and evolution of Social Science Policy in Norway. The examiners were:

Professor William J. McKenzie, formerly Professor of Politics, University of Glasgow.

M. Jean-Daniel Reynand, Professor de Sociologie du travail, Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers, France.

Dr Kurt W. Rothschild, Professor of Economics, University of Linz, Austria.

Book I - Background Report

The development of the Social Sciences in Norway has been closely linked to the Government's need for information about the population. In the 17th and 18th centuries the Danish authorities, who ruled Norway at the time, began to collect statistical material on the population, the economy and health of the people. The clergy had been responsible for keeping parochial registers since 1685; from 1735 births and deaths were recorded and from 1807 all marriages. The first full population census goes back to 1769. From 1794 doctors were instructed to report on the health situation in their districts, while local government officials had to draw up reports of economic activity from the middle of the 18th century. Since 1820 the findings of all these surveys have been made public.

In addition to collecting factual data, the Norwegians were early in the field of data analysis. Between 1850 and 1869, Eilert Sundt received a special grant from the government to investigate a wide variety of social problems. Social Science activities had therefore developed in line with government's needs long before being established as university disciplines: Apart from law, the first discipline recognised by the university was economics and a special chair was created in 1814 in the Faculty of Law at Oslo University.

Geography was introduced into the Faculty of Arts in 1907 and a chair created in 1915. Ethnography (scientific description of races of man) was introduced in 1917 when a chair was created also. Psychology as a subject of teaching goes back to the start of the University of Oslo in 1811, but a separate Institute of Psychology was established in 1909. In 1936 an Institute of Educational Research was established.

Sociology and Political Science only received university recognition during the years immediately after the Second World War. Today these subjects are pursued in all four Norwegian universities, i.e. Oslo (founded in 1811), Bergen (1946), Trondheim (1968) and Tromsø (1972). The Social Sciences have also been brought into the technical and regional colleges.

Since the 1950s the Government and the economic sector have felt an increasing need for information concerning the Social Sciences. This need could not be supplied by the universities. As a result, various Research Councils were established to act as intermediaries between research circles, and business and government users. These in turn established a number of Research Institutes which were independent of the universities. The result has been a complex and highly differentiated research system. The problems currently dominating the debate on Social Science Policy concern organisation, co-ordination and financing. But the problem of the influence of these factors on the content of research i.e. on the degree of objectivity it can attain is gradually becoming a key question for that policy.

National Science Policy in Norway

When drawing up the Government's Science Policy, the Norwegian authorities chose a System of Committees representing the Department's concerned rather than a new Ministry. The Central Committee for Norwegian Research, established in 1965, is the overall Government Advisory Body whose task is to promote research and give information and advice to help the Government make its Science Policy decisions and prepare scientific budgets. The Central Committee is attached to the Prime Minister's Office.* It consists of twenty members, and although each is chosen by the Government according to his personal merits, it is representative of scientific circles according to disciplines, research institutions, universities, employers' associations, trade unions and students. The Social Sciences are fairly well represented on the present committee - two economists, one psychologist, one educational research worker, one political scientist and one town planner.

Research Councils

The main groups who influence research policy in Norway however are the Research Councils. In their respective fields their duties are:

* A recent white paper indicates that this Committee is being placed under the direction of the Minister of Church and Education.

- (1) Estimate research requirements, determine priorities and plan long-term development.
- (2) Finance research projects from money derived from the State Lottery and the Government.
- (3) Co-ordinate research activities in a given field in order to guarantee the best utilisation of resources.
- (4) Encourage recruitment and help train research workers and
- (5) Act as adviser to the Government and other potential users with regard to the application of research.

With regard to (3) above the word co-ordination is treated with some caution in Norwegian scientific circles. No attempt is made to make everything tidy. Co-ordination means knowing what every research worker in a particular field is doing and if two people are doing the same thing, they are expected to be using different methodologies.

At present there are four Research Councils. The first three were set up after the last war and the fourth in 1972. They are:

- I The Norwegian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (NTNF) 1946.
- II The Agricultural Research Council of Norway (NLVF) 1949.
- III The Norwegian Council for Science and the Humanities (NAVF) 1949.
- IV The Norwegian Fisheries Research Council (NFFR) 1972.

In addition to these, there are a number of smaller councils, which finance research in particular fields. These are mostly attached to the Ministry of Church and Education. Also in the last few years, a number of ministries have had their own budgetary allocations for research. The creation of a new Council for Social Planning is currently in the forefront of discussions on the organisation of Research in the Social Sciences field. Finally a Co-operation Committee was established in 1971 to co-ordinate the activities of all Research Councils. It is composed of the Chairman and Administrative Directors of these Councils and is responsible for co-ordinating fields which are common to more than one Council. It does not appear to have played a very active roll.

As in the case of the Central Council, the representatives of the Research Councils are drawn from the government, universities, technical colleges, other scientific circles, major employers association's and trade unions. The structure of the four main councils is described below.

I Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (NTNF)

This Council is attached to the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts and was originally responsible for technological research in the natural sciences. Recently research has been launched in the fields of pollution and regional planning. Most of the appropriations allotted by the NTNF go to the following Institutes. Norwegian Building Research Institute, Transport Economy Institute, and Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research.

II The Agricultural Research Council of Norway (NVLF)

The NVLF is attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and its research covers Agriculture, veterinary medicine and economic and social research as applied to the rural world. The NVLF finances only one quarter of agricultural research, the other agricultural research resources being distributed directly by the Ministry to the various research Institutions. The NVLF finances projects and grants fellowships. It does not have its own institutes.

III The Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities (NAVF)

The main functions of this Council, which is attached to the Ministry of Church and Education, is to promote fundamental research in the humanities, the social sciences, medicine and the natural sciences. It is divided up into four sub-councils, including one for the social sciences. All fields which are the sole responsibility of a sub-council are chosen directly by the latter. However the directors of the NAVF themselves define general policy lines and take decisions concerning the distribution of appropriations between the four sub-councils.

Research workers make application directly to the NAVF for funds for specific projects and a high proportion of its funds go to such applicants. It awards fellowships for the training of young research workers and it also subsidises a few social science research Institutes, in particular, giving financial assistance to help an Institute start up.

IV The Norwegian Fisheries Research Council (NFFR)

The work of this Council, which comes under the Ministry of Fisheries, is to encourage research in this particularly important field for Norway. So far it has not done much in the Social Sciences but it intends to look into social conditions among the population concerned.

The Institutes and Colleges

In addition to the Universities and Colleges, there are 20 Institutes engaged in Social Science research, of one kind or another. Of these, five are Private Foundations, 10 are public bodies attached to some of the different ministries, four are attached to the Norwegian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and one is attached to the Research Council for Science and the Humanities. The dominant disciplines in these Institutes are: economics, sociology, social psychology, political science and geography. In addition the following colleges include social science in their syllabus.

The Agricultural College of Norway

The Institute of Technology

The State College for Teachers

The Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration

The Norwegian College of Physical Education and Sport.

The amount of research done in these colleges is however relatively small.

In view of the proliferation of Institutes, the public authorities have now stated their general intention to create a new institute, only in exceptional circumstances. Hence efforts

are now directed towards including new subjects in the programmes of existing institutes rather than (as in the past) setting up new institutes to deal with these subjects.

Financing

Expenditure on Social Science Research amounted to 87.5 million Kroner in 1972 which was 7 per cent of total R and D expenditure. Among the sources of financing, the State holds the most decisive place. Over 90 per cent of appropriations come from the State Budget and the National Lottery, through direct financing for the universities and colleges, Research Council funds and research contracts put out by the various ministries. Most ministries also have their own research teams, and since the second half of the 1960s the budgets allocated to the various ministries to finance research have been particularly substantial for the Social Sciences. This is in contrast with university financing which has been marking time since the beginning of the 1970s. The change in the trend of financing, points the desire to orient research more towards applied work and somewhat away from the more fundamental projects favoured by the universities. It might be mentioned as well, that university teaching funds are being curtailed also, so as to stabilise student intake. After a rapid expansion since the war, it has become increasingly difficult to find suitable jobs for university graduates, while there is a scarcity of good technicians and skilled craftsmen. Students are therefore being encouraged to enter the technological colleges rather than the universities.

Science Policy

There is not a coherent Science Policy in Norway because of the relative independence of the financing institutions, especially the Research Councils. This lack of official co-ordination is at least partly offset by a great deal of unofficial co-ordination due to the small size of the country and the concentration of financing institutions in Oslo. There is however a desire on the part of the authorities to integrate social science research into a Social Policy (in a very broad sense) and this is explicitly stated in the latest long-term research programme, (1974-1977), which presents research as a medium for an active

social policy. In view of past experience, however, it is doubtful if anything very much comes from this intention.

Book II - Examiners' Report

In their Report the examiners made a number of important comments and asked several pertinent questions which were discussed at the confrontation meeting. The more important questions posed and the answers given at the meeting are as follows:

The Conception of a Science Policy and Role of Research Councils

Norwegian authorities are concerned with social science research because, in spite of policies which have tried persistently to promote equality and make social welfare generally available, there undoubtedly remain under-privileged groups. It is a national tradition that intellectuals should act as spokesmen, leaders and experts for these groups, which lack powerful associations or trade unions to defend their interests and champion their cause. In this connection it is pertinent to speak of "the crisis of the welfare state". This crisis is perhaps felt more strongly in Norway than anywhere else, because more had been expected. There are also the questions of how inflationary pressures might be reduced? How can new manpower requirements be met when immigration is considered neither effective nor desirable? How is Norway to avoid great disparities in income, the break-up of traditional communities and the lack of housing in urban areas? How can hydro-carbon pollution be kept to a minimum? In short how can the sudden growth in the economy resulting from the oil strikes be controlled?

It is hoped that social science research should provide some answers to these questions or at least help to clarify arguments and choices. This is what the examiners feel a Social Science Policy should be about and not about providing a tidy system with everything co-ordinated and everything fitting into neat boxes.

In discussing this question, the Norwegian spokesman who was the Under Secretary of State in the Ministry of Church and Education, said that the aim in Norway was not to

have a tidy social science research organisation. The problems were too complex for this. They try and organise research through their Research Council, each of which has links with outside groups. The Councils can therefore identify needs beyond what is expressed in demands by well organised groups. In other words, the Councils act as watch dogs for the under-privileged groups who have no spokesmen of their own. The Councils have arrived at their present position after long experience and the Norwegians are well satisfied with them. They try and steer a course between very little and complete co-ordination.

The Role of the Universities

The examiners point out that in the Social Sciences, Norway has so many first class university figures that it would be pointless to list them all, or the quality of the work done. As examiners their main concern was not with excellence but with application, not with academic brilliance but with social relevance. Do the needs of society and of groups in conflict in society make themselves felt in higher education and research?

The examiners felt that higher education had only limited contact with its environment both in regard to its own work and the future of its students. Its internal organisation by discipline fits it to develop the interior logic of a science, rather than to go and look for problems which need to be clarified and resolved. In particular, it has very little contact with economic life, and with the realities of work on the job, as they affect employers and employees. This they say is in complete contrast with what they saw at the Engineering Research Foundation at the Norwegian Institute of Technology in Trondheim, where studies are organised so that everything is shaped towards future jobs and responsibility.

The examiners also questioned the length of the training period for a social scientist in Norway - five years for a bachelors degree and several further years for a masters. They wondered if the training period was for real life. As a reason for this, they had heard that it was easier for the universities to get money for research than for established posts

and therefore they kept undergraduates and graduates doing research. The examiners also asked that the nature of the Tromsø University experiment be explained.

In reply to these questions, one Norwegian spokesman agreed that there was some truth in the criticisms raised. There was a definite policy to prevent further growth in the universities and a drive towards getting more relevant research done in these institutions. University fundings were therefore tailored accordingly. As a result, there was now very close co-operation between the universities and the Institutes, while the placing of research contracts in the universities by the Ministries was beginning to have a direct effect on the subjects chosen for research.

With regard to the training of students in the universities, it was stated that there was not (as in other countries) a clear division between undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Both studies overlap with undergraduates as well as graduates doing research. No comment was forthcoming however, on the length of the training period but a spokesman stated that they were not in favour of the American type Ph.D. course. It was pointed out by a delegate however, that very many Norwegians go abroad and take Ph.D's.

Concerning the Tromsø experiment, a spokesman explained that Tromsø is an experimental university situated in the Northern area, which is being denuded of population. Its purpose is to develop the region and integrate the university with the surrounding community. To date, however, the objective was not being attained. The university staff wanted an ordinary respectable university to educate northern students. However, the students attending are all drawn from the upper and middle income classes and the university is doing little or nothing for the lower income classes. Also, the university educated students, will all leave the region to get jobs, so that the university is only accentuating the population problem. The research conducted by the university for the region is going well but research is not sufficient. There must be a development agency as well, and this the university cannot provide. The outlook for Tromsø in its present form is not promising.

The Institutes

In developing the social sciences all European countries have supported or created Research Institutes within universities or outside them. Their purpose has been to develop new disciplines, to promote the recruitment of specialists in new fields and to orient research to specific problems which have been neglected or have arisen recently. Norway perhaps more than any other country has made systematic use of this type of organisation and the examiners think it is a good idea.

Even when these institutions are part of a university they are by no means fully integrated into it. Research staff have light teaching loads. Most young researchers are however, scholarship holders. The renewal of scholarships applies only to "good" students but the implied policy of scholarships is that those who hold them should achieve recognition in the university and make their careers there. The chance of mobility of staff between these institutes and government is therefore very limited.

The situation is different in institutes which are independent of the universities. Mobility is laid down as a principle and the appropriate turn-over is deemed to be 20 - 25 per cent per annum. The movement of staff is mainly to central government and the county councils. This according to the Norwegian spokesman is to be welcomed. It allows a two way movement, mainly of young people from research to administration and vice versa with a consequent all round broadening of visions.

The Elements of a Social Science Policy

In their concluding remarks, the examiners attempted to define what a social science policy was and what were its implications. They said that a social science policy has five functions:

1. to create basic facilities and assemble the necessary expertise.
2. to foster direct contact and exchange between the producers and consumers of research.

3. to formulate and draw attention to any overall or long-term problems which do not arise spontaneously out of these exchanges.
4. to decide effectively about priorities and
5. to promote the utilisation of research and the dissemination of its results wherever this does not happen automatically.

The first function is the most familiar. It involves investment in books, calculating equipment, and manpower, together with places to work i.e. the formation of institutions. But it should be kept in mind they said, that an institute is not just a grouping together of individuals. Functions, specialised areas, and career structures must all be defined.

One of the main problems relates to careers. University openings for research workers are going to be drastically reduced. Hence there should be greater recruitment at the lower levels in institutions. The constraints inherent in a research worker's first working years have often been stressed - job insecurity, modest salary, uncertainty about the future and above all constant testing of one's own abilities. But they say, we must not forget the research worker's privileges, freedom of thought, freedom from most everyday responsibilities, the joy of intellectual growth and creativity. Surely these privileges should be extended more widely. At the beginning of an administrative career it should be almost compulsory to spend a few years in research, and institutes should be given finance for these "temporary" workers. Conversely administrators and firms should allow staff to take leave of absence to carry out research. By definition, then, a large proportion of research staff would be temporary, making for a much smaller number of established personnel and more flexibility.

With regard to the other functions, the examiners said that the orientation of research can no longer be left in the air as a matter for purely individual decision. Research answers questions and the proportion of questions posed from outside the institute is usually predominant. Research can only develop if there is communication. If it were without social relevance, research would be without content, and the research organisations without purpose.

Finally, the examiners said that the widespread dissemination of results was an indispensable aspect of research. To disseminate is not merely to make research results available to the general public, to the mass media and the groups concerned, it is also a matter of teaching the recipients to profit by the reports in some way. Ways of achieving dissemination are not clearly defined and it is not feasible to draw up a schedule. Two of the most effective factors are the role of research in teaching and the mobility of research workers. But in these respects one has to seize opportunities as and when they arise rather than draw up a systematic plan of action. In this regard the NAVF Social Science sub-council intends to make available easily understandable reports summing up the knowledge acquired in different fields. It is even considering the recruitment of research workers to rewrite reports, and of introducing training programmes in writing and communications.