



Reflections on working life research in Sweden Institutional transformation, current policies and new networks

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We want Sweden to be a nation at work, a cohesive, equal and sustainable society. Inequities in our society have been allowed to grow. Widening gaps fuel anxiety, selfishness and racism. With the Swedish model as a foundation and modernisation as a tool, we are building a sustainable society where no one is left behind, and where no one is held back.

Budget Statement 2017 – Swedish Government

More than half a century of transition – looking backwards¹

Policies and institutional measures for occupational health and safety have more than a century's tradition in Sweden with a strong focus on workers' protection, occupational health, working hours and risks prevention at work. The modern development goes back to the years before and after the second world war. A national agency for occupational health started in 1949 and an institute for occupational hygiene was initiated in 1955. To provide a more comprehensive organisational structure, the Riksdag decided to follow a proposal of a Governmental Committee to build the National Institute for Occupational Medicine which was founded in 1966. Its independence was, however, short and in 1972 it was integrated as a division in the National Agency for Occupational Health. It was recreated as an independent research institute from 1987 to 1995 when it was incorporated into the new National Institute for Working Life (Arbetslivsinstitutet).

A crucial institutional concept in Swedish working life development and labour market policy is the Swedish model of labour market development (Håkansta, 2014, p.8).

The so-called "Swedish Model" sets working life research in Sweden apart from most other countries. The Swedish Model refers to the spirit of consensus established between the social partners after the Saltsjöbaden agreement in 1938, according to which there would be no direct government intervention in collective bargaining and the workers (LO) agreed that management (SAF) had "a right to manage" (Huzzard, 2003). By the end of the 1970s, this spirit of consensus had broken down.

¹ The purpose of this article for the EUWIN Bulletin is to reflect on governance, financing and current policies and programmes on working life research in Sweden. It starts by focusing the background of working life research, institutional transformations and then describes funding organization, governmental policies and initiatives as well as networking in the research community. Kenneth Abrahamsson is adjunct professor in human works science, Luleå university of technology and senior consultant in the Swedish network for promoting sustainable work in EU Horizon 2020.

The rise and fall of the Swedish model is a recurrent theme of Swedish labour market policies and debate. One might say that the model has been weakened, but still it is built on collective agreements between social partners and their shared interest and responsibilities on working conditions, wages, work organisation development and on-the-job learning. The Swedish membership in the European Union has strengthened the policy interest to protect and safeguard the idea of collective agreements between social partners and especially in the context of posted workers and the service directives.

While OSH policies were promoted by the government, the Swedish Federation of Employers (then SAF) had a stronger interest in work organisation, leadership and production models. Thus, SAF took an initiative in 1952 to start Human Resource Research platform ("PA Rådet ") with the purpose to initiate and support research on staff development, management and leadership and work organisation. During the 1950s and early 60s there was a consensus between social partners on the value of such research. By the end of the 60s goals and activities of "PA Rådet" met growing criticism from some union leaders and working life scholars that argued that research was used to manipulate the conditions of the workers.

New reforms of working life and R&D funding in 1970s and onwards

An important policy step further was the reforms of working life initiated by the government in the 70th. A range of new legislations were created – the Employment Protection Act, Annual Leave Act, Parental Leave Act, Employment (Co-determination in the Workplace) Act, Trade Union Representatives (Status at the Workplace) Act and Labour Disputes Act. New institutions also were established and efforts were made to develop a knowledge supporting system shared by the social partners. Furthermore, reforms were launched in the field of adult education and training.

A first public body for financing working life research was established in 1972: *Workers' Protection Fund* (Arbetarskyddsfonden, ASF), in 1986 renamed as *Work Environment Fund* (Arbetsmiljöfonden, AMFO). The fund was governed by representatives of Swedish employer organisations, trade unions, and the National Swedish Board of Occupational Safety and Health (in later years the Ministry of Employment). ASF and AMFO became the primary sources for funding research as well as development programmes dedicated to health and safety, as well as issues like gender equity, leadership, and learning. By the years 1990/91, the Work Environment Fund received around 1500 applications each year of which two thirds were granted. The fund received 900 million SEK from the payroll tax, of which half the sum was allocated to research and development.² As from the late 1980s an increasing proportion of the funds were allocated to the financing of positions and research at academic institutions.

Another public funding initiative was the creation of the *Swedish Working Life Fund* (ALF) in 1990. The aim was to improve the working environment in Sweden, more specifically to "increase labour supply by reducing absenteeism in the workplace and to cool down the overheated economy ". The fund provided financial assistance to businesses and local governments who wanted to improve work environment for their employees, rehabilitate employees with work-related injuries, or increase their productivity. During the period 1990-1995 approximately 25.000 workplace programmes were financed out of a total budget of 10 billion SEK (two billion SEK annually)³. The main actions covered

² See Håkansta (2014), page 25-26.

³ VINNOVA (2008) Kartläggning av ett halvt sekels jämställdhetsarbete i Sverige. VINNOVA-rapport 2008:07

were: Changes in work organisation 5.5 billion (51%), measures to improve the physical environment 2.2 billion (23%); vocational Rehabilitation 1.6 billion (17%); new technology 0.4 billion (4%), and local work environment 0.3 billion.

The shift of ownership for working life research from 1995

In 1995 the Work Environment Fund ceased to exist and *the Swedish Council for Working Life Research* (RALF) was established. It acted as a research council for working life and labour market studies, financed by state budget, and supported research in three main areas: work organisation, working environment, and labour market. Figures from 1997 show that work organisation was the largest field with around 105 million SEK followed by work environment with 86 million SEK, and labour market with 45 million SEK. ⁴ Although research funding was the primary function of RALF, part of the budget remained reserved for grants for development projects.

The second part of this institutional transformation was the creation of the National Institute for Working Life, NIWL that over the years expanded also on a regional level. Its predecessor was Arbetslivscentrum – The Swedish Working Life Centre from the 70th to early 1990th when it was replaced by Institutet för arbetslivsforskning – The National Institute for Working Life Research. The new NIWL comprised three components: the larger part was the National Institute of Occupational Health, plus the Institute for Working Life Research and parts of the Work Environment Fund. The principal change from 1995 and onwards was that the new system was funded over the state budget, while the Work Environment Funds was financed by a certain part of the wage earners cost as part of collective agreement between the social partners.

The year 1995 brought another important change, namely the entry of Sweden into the European Union. Therefore, the European Social Fund (ESF) became a new financial source for labour market and work place development. Over the years, the ESF became a major funding source for working life development programmes, but the space for research projects has been very limited.

There are, however, some major differences between the Work Environment Fund and the Swedish Working Life Fund one the one hand, and the European Social Fund on the other. The former funds have been much more oriented towards good working conditions, occupational health and an efficient and productive work organisation while the European Social Fund is more focused on long-term unemployed or people at risk at the work place. The European Social Fund is also promoting a strong anti-discrimination orientation on gender, age, ethnic background, functional impairment as well as sexual orientation.

IFAU – an institute to evaluate labour market policies and education

Working life research in Sweden usually comprise occupational health and safety, work organisation and labour market. In 1997, the Government and Riksdag decided to start a new research institute on labour market evaluations and labour market transformations. Previously, there was an expert group on labour market studies. From 2012, IFAU also was given the mission of evaluations of education. IFAU - The Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy is a research institute under the Swedish Ministry of Employment, situated in Uppsala. IFAU's objective is to promote, support and carry out scientific evaluations. Today, IFAU has around 40 employees and a small fund to finance research.

⁴ Budget Bill/Prop 1998/99:1, page 72.

IFAU has four assignments. These are determined by the government and can be found in the regulations for the authority.

- Follow-up and evaluation of the labour market activities. We follow up and evaluate new and old labour market policy programmes. We also study the effects of the design of the unemployment insurance. How programmes affect the income and employment effects of the participants is of importance. The analyses are made for different groups (for example women, foreign born individuals and individuals with low education). IFAU also compiles research surveys on the effects of labour market policy.
- Evaluation of the effects of measures within the educational system. We study education for youths and adults. The focus is on how different measures affect the study results of individuals and their future labour market outcomes. In particular, the analyses study the effects for men and women, different age groups and people with different social backgrounds.
- Evaluation of the effects of social insurance on the labour market. For example, we study what are the effects of the compensation levels in the social insurances or the rehabilitation efforts on the health of the participants and their return to work.
- Studies of the functioning of the labour market mainly concern wage formation, labour supply and demand for labour. How are these affected and what are the effects for particularly vulnerable groups.

Source: <http://www.ifau.se/en/>

The reform of the Swedish system for research funding from 2001

The next major restructuring of Swedish research funding took place in 2001, resulting in fewer and larger scientific councils. As for working life, it was decided to reallocate RALF's activities to two new funding agencies: the *Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research* (FAS) and the *Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems* (VINNOVA). RALF's budget (some 220 MSEK in 2000) was divided on an equal basis between FAS and VINNOVA. FAS' responsibility was broader than that of RALF, including support for research on work, welfare and public health. Research related to working life covered research on work organisation, the working environment, and the labour market. However, since VINNOVA focuses on issues other than work life, the overall level of funding for working life research declined considerably. Next to FAS, in 2012 renamed as FORTE, and VINNOVA, there is a third important source of funding, namely AFA Insurances, which is jointly owned by the Confederation of Swedish Employers, the Swedish trade unions and the Council for Negotiation and Cooperation. AFA funds research into occupational health and safety in Sweden and has an annual research budget of 150 MSEK.

The abolition of National Institute for Working Life in 2007

One of the first decision to be taken by the then new Liberal Conservative Alliance Government in 2006 was to close the Swedish National Institute for Working Life from 1st January 2007. This decision had major repercussions on the Swedish system of working life research, the dissemination of research, policy dialogues as well the role of Swedish working life research in a European context. At the time of closure, NIWL had 424 employees, of which 285 were researchers. Out of these researchers, 127 were

active in working environment and health, 107 in work organisation, 42 in labour markets, and 9 in “others”. The distribution of researchers between the three main areas, was approximately the same in NIWL as in the country. NIWL share of research in Sweden was about 23% for working environment and health, 17% for Work organisation, and 22% for Labour market.

It is an oversimplification to say that Sweden lost one of fifth of its research capacity in the NIWL closure, as several scholars repatriated to their academic departments, but over a night Sweden’s international image changed from being a country promoting good work and research on working life in a European context to one of the few countries in EU without a national institute on working life and work environment. Another indicator of this disruptive institutional strategy was that this research field “lost” around 200 MSEK on an annual level in the Governments fiscal budget.

Towards a new research community of working life research in 2009

In the end of 2008 Swedish researchers in the field of working life started a discussion on a new national forum. Forum för Arbetslivsforskning (FALF – The Swedish Forum for Working Life Research) started in 2009 and organises annual conferences, doctoral courses in the field of working life and also functions as a creative hub among researchers in this field, or may be in the mid-field of working life research. FALF is not so strong in occupational medicine as well as in labour market economics or labour law. It has, however, a central function the support and develop the research community in this field. On the website www.falf.se, the vision of FALF is comprising the following missions:

“The Forum for Working Life Research will create meeting places for working life research in Sweden and be a collective force for policy development in the field. The objectives of FALF are:

- *to participate in the debate on the focus and funding of working life research and encourage the involvement of working life researchers in the debate on working life issues and initiate and promote joint research projects.*
- *to initiate courses at the basic and advanced level as well as in postgraduate education and to promote recruitment of working life researchers*
- *to stimulate local initiatives in the field of working life research and development,*
- *to and stimulate publication in the Swedish journals highlighting working life and work life research for practitioners and to have an open website informing about current activities, policies and future developments*
- *to organise an annual conference on current working life issues and promote, care and develop international contacts in the field of working life.”*

The annual meeting of 2017 was held in south of Sweden and the general theme was working life contexts in urban and rural environments. More than fifty research paper were presented and key note talks about fatal accidents and the role of digitalisation in modern working life. Last year the conference was held in the city of Östersund and the theme was sustainable work.

New political priorities from 2014 and onwards

During the last decades, allocation of resources to working life research has slowly expanded, but not at all compensated the major loss as an impact of the closure of the NIWL. In 2008, the Liberal Conservative Government made a substantial contribution to the Swedish research community by investing more than 5 billion SEK to more than twenty strategic research fields. Working life was,

however, not included. In conclusion, one can say that the resources for working life research have been weakened while other fields have received major and substantial new resources.

The new coalition government with social democrats and the green party, had other priorities than working life policies and the need for research. In 2015 the Government launched a new strategy on work environment.

“The Government is raising the level of ambition in its work environment policy by basing this strategy on concrete measures within three prioritised areas:

- *Zero tolerance of fatal accidents and the prevention of accidents at work*
- *A sustainable working life*
- *Psychosocial work environment*

Improving the work environment requires action on the part of both central government and the social partners. Consequently, the process of drawing up the Government's work environment strategy for modern working life, which began in winter 2015, was commenced in consultation with the social partners. To maintain and deepen this tripartite process, the Government intends to create a forum for dialogue in which to continually discuss ongoing, planned and future actions in this area with the social partners. ...The Government's strategy for its work environment policy indicates the direction this work will take over the course of the next five years. Within the scope of the strategy, the relevant work environment issues will undergo further work in dialogue with the social partners.”

Another strong policy focus concerns employment relations and the increasing amount of temporary or fixed-time employment as well as the development of so-called ‘bogus self-employment’. Employment relations and the necessary labour law distinction are also at risk in the new sharing economy, where it is difficult to state who is the employer or the employee. Furthermore, the crucial role of the Swedish labour market model with collective agreement between the social partners is a top priority for the current Government. Thus, working conditions, social protection and wages of posted workers are issues having a permanent strong policy attention as well as the risk of opening the labour law system to promote wage dumping.

Policies and measures towards sustainable work is a core idea in the Government’s Work Environment Strategy 2016 – 2020:

People can work throughout their entire career. To achieve a sustainable working life, continued efforts must be made to improve the work environment conditions of mentally and physically taxing jobs. Everyone must reap the benefits of a longer working life. Modern working life comes with new challenges, at the same time as more traditional problems of the work environment remain. Global competition is constantly demanding increases in productivity and efficiency and is also leading to new ways of organising work. These may not come at the cost of employees' health and well-being. Work needs to be adapted to the circumstances of different ages throughout working life.

Two Government Committees on work environment knowledge and regulation

In the beginning of 2016, the Government appointed two committees in the field of working life. The first one should look at knowledge dissemination and evaluation of work environment policies and the second one should clarify the need of new regulation of occupational health and safety and employment relations as part of new working life trends, sharing economy, crowdfunding and other new forms of work.

The first committee was appointed to propose a national centre for reviewing and disseminating knowledge and research results on the work environment and for the evaluation of work environment policy should be established and designed. In March 2017, it presented an official report on “A national centre for knowledge about and evaluation of work environment”. The proposals are now subject to remits to major agencies, organisations and actors in the field, before the Government will present its proposal to the Riksdag. It is important to underline that the new centre is not a new NIWL, but a smaller knowledge dissemination platform and a tool to evaluate the Government’s work environment policies.

The mission of the second committee was the task of reviewing certain labour law related issues that have been identified in the development of the new work environment strategy. Purpose of the investigation was to provide a decision basis for any action and regulatory changes in the work environment area. The investigator was to map the challenges of modern working life, i.e. new trends and new forms of work that occur in Sweden today. He should furthermore analyse and assess current regulations regarding occupational health and safety are appropriate in view of modern working life challenges. Finally, attention should be given to the access rights and influence of regional safety representatives. The final report was published in the end of March 2017 and is now subject to remits from relevant agencies, organisations and actors in the field.

In addition, the government has recently before summer 2017 appointed a new inquiry into the regulation of working hours for a sustainable working life. It should not only highlight the possibilities for a job and life shift year, but also the right to full-time employment, safer conditions for “SMS employees”, measures against time cutting strategies within full time position, and the idea of working time banks. What happens to working time - should we work more or work less? How can and will the working time be distributed among different groups? Should we share working hours and work to promote occupational health and reduce long-term sick leave and social exclusion?

Forte – Swedish Research Council for Health, Working life and Welfare

The research funded by Forte within the working life area include studies on the labour market, work organisation and work-related health issues. One of the challenges for the future is to better understand the Swedish labour market, risks and possibilities linked to the physical and psychological work environment and organisation and management of work to achieve a sustainable working life. Changes in society, such as migration, urbanisation and technological development affect work organisations, work conditions and forms of employment, which creates a great need of research. Forte receives annually more than 500 MSEK for research funding on public health, working life and welfare. During 2016 more than 100 MSEK was invested in new projects in the working life field. It has to be recognised that the resource allocation operates on an annual basis, thus a major part of the annual budget is used to finance project previously supported.

As part of the research bill from 2016, a new long term oriented research programme on working life was launched. On April 6, 2017, the Riksdag decided on the recommendations in the Bill of research “Collaborating for Knowledge”. Forte has been commissioned to establish two 10-year national research programmes and to carry out a specific initiative on the quality, organisation and processes of Welfare. To meet identified societal challenges, the government initiates in all six 10-year national research programmes. Forte is responsible for two of the programmes, *Applied Welfare Research* and *Working Life Research*. Formas and the Swedish Research Council are each responsible for two other programmes.

Forte has begun planning the implementation of these initiatives and along with other authorities. For the national programmes, the responsible authority shall develop strategic and coordinated research agendas for each programme. In addition, a programme committee should be set up for each programme. The planning of the national programmes will take place in collaboration with other public research funding bodies.

In two of Forte's assignments, funds have been allocated to be distributed in 2017. This applies to the national research programme on *Working Life Research* and the specific initiative on the quality, organisation and processes of welfare. This means that during 2017 Forte will carry out calls for proposals in these areas.

The shifting profile of the Innovation Agency - VINNOVA

Another major but not so visible shift in the allocation of resources to working life research in Sweden as that the Innovation Agency – VINNOVA – has reoriented its focus on working life research as was stated in the reform of 2001. Open calls on research on working life or work organisation have been reduced and there is nowadays more focus on innovation management or embedded work organisation research as part of various strategic innovation investments, e.g. in the field of social innovations. The general vision of VINNOVA is:

“... for Sweden to be a world-leading country in research and innovation, an attractive place in which to invest and conduct business. We promote collaborations between companies, universities, research institutes and the public sector. We do this by stimulating a greater use of research, by making long-term investment in strong research and innovation milieus and by developing catalytic meeting places. Vinnova's activities also focus on strengthening international cooperation. In order to increase our impact, we are also dedicated to interacting with other research financiers and innovation-promoting organisations. Every year Vinnova invests about SEK 2.7 billion in various initiatives.”

The regular research financiers on working life issues – typically Forte and AFA Insurance and to some extent Swedish Research Council – apply a Mode 1 approach while VINNOVA is oriented towards Mode 2 with a triple helix touch. VINNOVA is also a national coordinator and hub on European collaborations:

“The international dimension is central to all of Vinnova's activities. In all its operational fields, Vinnova sees international competitiveness and international co-operation as integral parts of its objectives and strategies. Within the framework of its programmes, Vinnova identifies leading international research and innovation environments and encourages collaboration with these. Any evaluation of Vinnova's programmes and activities also covers the international dimension. Vinnova has the national responsibility for providing information and advice on Horizon 2020 - EU's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.”

AFA Försäkring/ AFA Insurance invest 150 MSEK annually on work environment research

Creating a sustainable working life is one of the biggest challenges for the Swedish labour market. AFA Insurance, which is one of the leading financer of R & D in the field of health and safety, has therefore decided to launch a R & D programme for research on a sustainable working life. The three-year programme comprises SEK 30 million. Three recent projects are mentioned below.

“AFA Försäkring has administered collectively agreed insurance policies on behalf of the labour market partners for more than half a century. Our long-term perspective does not only mean that we insure many people and manage substantial assets, but that we also see social advantages in working preventively to reduce the number of work-related injuries and sick-listings at Swedish workplaces.

As part of our mission from the labour market partners, we finance each year research within health and work environments through grants amounting to SEK 150 million. In this year’s four open grants, we were able to contribute to new research of accidents and ill-health in industry, absenteeism due to mental ill-health, as well as a new method for treating prostate cancer. In 2016, we also invested SEK 30 million in the newly started research program called Sustainable Working Life – a program that is designed to contribute to greater knowledge of the obstacles and opportunities that prevail within the Swedish labour market’s challenge to create a sustainable working life. The objective of our investments in research, precisely as with the 18 seminars we organised during the year, is to improve knowledge of how we can prevent and treat ill health in working life.”

Source: AFA Annual Review 2016/English summary.

According to one project, the increased use of laptops and smart phones in working life means that today we are more accessible for work in our spare time and for our privacy during working hours. The research currently lacks knowledge of the extent to which this can lead to stress and conflict of interest and how this potential health risk can be addressed.

Another project focusses on older workers. An important part of a sustainable working life is to create working environments, working conditions and working conditions that make employees want and manage to work at the age of 65 and beyond. To achieve this, efforts are required at the workplace level and at the community level.

A third example is a project on attractive workplaces. Strategies for recruiting, introducing and stimulating new employees, so-called organisational socialisation, are of great importance to employee health, professional development and willingness to stay in a profession. Particularly vulnerable are professions with high emotional demands like teacher, nurse, police, social secretary, psychologist, clerk and doctor.

Priorities for European Social Fund in Sweden

The European Social Fund is the EU’s most important tool for creating more and better jobs in Europe. The Fund has existed since 1957. Every year the Social Fund provides support, education and training to approximately 10 million EU citizens – from Tallinn to Trollhättan, from Barcelona to Boden.

The Social Fund Programme for the period 2014–2020 is an instrument for strengthening and developing the national labour market policy and will contribute to attaining Europe 2020 strategy’s objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. More women and men should have employment and fewer should be outside the labour market. A well-functioning labour market will be created and a higher employment rate achieved in the long run.

The European Social Fund has been operating in Sweden more than two decades from Sweden’s membership in the European Union 1995. Overall goal of the Social Fund Programme is that the programme should contribute to a well-functioning labour market and a higher employment in the long term. It is organised in three programme areas:

- Skills development should contribute to employment, growth and a sustainable working life. The initiative covers competence development to satisfy the needs of the labour market for a better skilled labour force and measures to strengthen the link between education, training and the working life.
- Improved transition to work will make it easier for youth, long-term unemployed, people with functional impairments, newly arrived migrants and long-term sick leavers, to obtain employment or improve their chances of getting a job. Examples of initiatives include education and training, work placement and job matching, vocational rehabilitation and preparatory initiatives, for example validation of skills.
- The Youth Employment Initiative is dedicated to regions within the EU which in 2012 had a youth unemployment rate (15–24 years) higher than 25 per cent. South Sweden, Northern Central Sweden and Central Norrland are covered by the initiative in Sweden.

Sustainable work in EU Horizon 2020 – a VINNOVA supported platform from 2013

The last years launching of the consultation of European Pillar of Social Rights highlights the future of work and welfare systems in Europe. The challenges of global competition, digitalisation and demographic change demonstrate the need for new research and innovation on sustainable work systems and innovative workplaces. Longer and healthier working lives are a key issue for Europe's future prosperity. However, research on "Europe at work" is fragmented and barely visible in the EU's research programme *Horizon 2020*.

In spring 2013, a platform for sustainable work as a resource for health, innovation and growth was given a grant to promote the inclusion of sustainable work in Horizon 2020. It was built on a consortium of leading Swedish researchers on workplace health coordinated from the Karolinska Institutet and with support from scholars on productive work organisations, the social partners and representatives from Swedish private companies and authorities. The definition of sustainable work used is:

Sustainable work highlights the dynamic fit between employees and working conditions and is a generic policy concept. Sustainable work promotes health, wellbeing, learning and influence as well as productivity, innovation and growth. The goal is to promote continual growth and regeneration of human, social, economic and ecological resources. The strategic importance of sustainable work, as a resource for health, innovation and growth, is emphasised in the European innovation strategy, and by the social partners.

The aim of the platform is to:

- strengthen the synergy between research centers of excellence in Sweden and the rest of Europe, as well as an in-depth dialogue with the social partners and research users;
- increase the scope for research on sustainable and innovative workplaces within Horizon 2020 and the emergences of new European research alliances;
- promote Swedish research on sustainable work as a driving force in European research cooperation;
- build a virtual platform for collaboration on improving interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral knowledge integration within the focus area in Sweden and Europe in general;
- provide policy pointers to authorities and other actors in the field. Vinnova, the Swedish Innovation Agency, has given the project 2,2 million SEK for 2,5 years. The Platform was coordinated from the University of Lund and from 2015 from Karolinska Institutet. The platform will continue until December 2018.

The platform has organised conferences and meetings in Lund and Brussels and has been participating in several national or European meetings in collaboration with Eurofound, EU-OSHA and social partners. It has furthermore been part of the consultation of European Pillar of Social Rights and giving suggestion on various work programmes in Horizon 2020. Further information can be found at www.sustainablework2020.se.

A new national network on work-place oriented research on sustainable work 2014

Another bottom up development in Sweden is a national network on sustainable work with the mission to promote competitiveness, quality and renewal through good working conditions in organisations and companies (AFoU in short).

The focus is work-based research based on specific needs:

Work and working life change faster - we need to build knowledge for sustainable working life and sustainable development. Through research that takes place at the workplace, we can build and practice new knowledge to understand the events, process threats and exploit new opportunities - all for the development of future jobs and workplaces.

It is an open and growing network:

AFoU is an open-growing network where collaboration takes place between different industries, companies, public organisations, social partners and researchers. Together we build knowledge of how good work environment, quality, efficiency and competitiveness are linked and strengthened.

The network has started a national workplace forum in the AFoU network, where the idea is to create a meeting venue where we share experiences from different workplaces and industries. Further, it also takes advantage of knowledge from several R & D projects, starts new collaborative activities and projects around key issues for business and public organisations. The network AFoU's reference group is composed of social partners' main organisations - Swedish Enterprise, LO, Saco, TCO, SKL and the Employers' Office - and highlight the development needs for the network.

In conclusion, AFoU network is an expanding bottom up initiative to connect researchers and practitioners in the field of work place organisation, design and innovations as well as learning and value creation in various fields of the business sector.

Future issues in the public debate

Sweden has managed to cope with the negative impact of the financial crises in 2008, is highly ranked on innovation scores and has one of the highest employment levels in Europe. The concept of good work and nowadays more in the form of sustainable work receives high policy attention both on Government level, among social partners and research funders. The discussion of future of work in Sweden can be seen in various time perspectives. In a more short-term view, high sick leave at work, women in health care, ageing care or services, is a growing problem.

More fragile employment relations, temporary job contracts and difficulties for migrants to embark on the Swedish labour market are other fields of policy concern. Furthermore, a critical issue is how Sweden will manage to provide good work and life quality in the new demography with an increasing number of migrants coming from non-European countries. It is a complex challenge comprising various groups with different conditions and rights, e.g. posted workers from other EU countries, former migrants being unemployed for a long period, new migrants and asylum seekers from the migration

boom in the autumn of 2015 when over 150 000 migrants arrived in Sweden. Finally, there are so called paperless migrant working in Sweden without having the legal right to stay.

In a more long-term oriented perspective, questions are raised to what extent digitalisation, new robots and automation will have impact on number and content of work. And which policies and institutional models could and should be developed to meet these challenges. Is work sharing a part of the new sharing economy? Can the working hours be reduced and shared in a more equal context or will polarisation on the labour market follow in a new form of digital Taylorism? The distribution of working time and working hours and working time in a life span perspective, will be highlighted in future policy debates. Will the new working life in Sweden with digitalisation, automation and internet of things reduce the demand for labour and working time? If so, will there be new options for a working time-sharing model, or will long term impact be a growing gap between those having jobs and good employment relations and a growing number of unemployed people on a polarised labour market?

Concluding comment on the rise, fall and recovery of Swedish working life research

Swedish working life research has been subject to many institutional transformations over the years. New models of governance and finance have been installed, reformed and abolished over the past decades. Various institutional forms have been applied. WLR has been funded through the then Working Environment Fund and the Working Life Fund and from 1995 over the state budget. AFA Insurance is, however, an independent non-government actor managed by the social partners in collaboration.

The research modes in function cover a broad field from sectoral research as part of public agency, institutes in various formations and finally, blue sky bottom up research where issues and methods are chosen by the research community. The trend from 2001 and onwards to produce excellent research published in high referee journals has also have an impact on what type of research that is funded from public funding agencies. Another trend is the demand for intervention studies in conjunction with evidence based policies. The closing down of the NIWL also had impact on the options for more interactive, action-oriented and participatory research.

It is difficult to estimate the size of the research community of working life issues. The field is still very active and the competition for resources are getting tighter for each year to come. In general, however, the resources being available are slowly increasing and gives some hope for the future. Another positive sign is the formation of various networks of scholars and practitioners on sustainable work and local development activities. A negative sign, however, is the missing link between research and development. The Swedish funds used from 1972 to 1995 were built on an active interaction and synergy between research and development. Today, Sweden lacks new bridges between research, development and implementation. Thus, one of the future challenges is to promote more flexible forms of financing to closed the gap between research and development and published results and utilisation in practice.

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- Vinnova – Swedish Innovation Agency <http://www2.vinnova.se/en/>

The AFoU network - Swedish national network for workplace-related R&D for sustainable working life
www.swerea.se; ppt <https://www.swerea.se/afou>
