

A Brief Guide to the History, Locus and Focus of Swedish Political Science

Tom Bryder
University of Lulea

Sweden may be unique insofar as it is the only country in the world—to my knowledge at least—that has a combined professorship in political science and eloquence! It dates back to 1622 and is located at Sweden's oldest university, the University of Uppsala, 60 miles north of Stockholm. For a long period the emphasis lay on eloquence rather than political science. Evil tongues eloquently say that this is still the case, although scholars from Uppsala tend to disagree, at least in public.

Like political science in most European countries, the discipline in Sweden has been shaped by its focus on history, jurisprudence, constitutions, institutions, and international relations viewed, in large part, from the point of antecedents as well as contemporary issues. It has gone all the way from *Allgemeine Staatslehre* to the *Behavioral Persuasion*, and, in some quarters, beyond. Rudolf Kjellen, who was professor at Uppsala in the beginning of the century and one of the founders of what has become known as *Geopolitik*, used to emphasize both the scholarly and professional aspects of the discipline. His spectre still haunts those committed to practicing political science and policy science as well as administrative advocacy is still a predominant element both at various university departments and in the bureaucracy. Especially at the University of Lund, which got its first professorship in political science in 1889, the devotion to constitutional history and comparative government has produced many governmental experts for parliamentary committees, Royal Commissions, and international organizations. The former UN commissioner and mediator in the Middle East, Gunnar Jarring, for example, once served in the Department of Political Science of Lund, and the present head of the department, Professor Nils Stjernquist, was one of the major constitutional experts who constructed the Swedish Constitution which was adopted in the early 1970s. Many, many more have entered the corridors of power from the Department of Lund, either as practicing politicians or as administrative experts.

The link to the scholarly practice of the discipline has, however, always been tight and strong. Nils Stjernquist, for example, is also a well-known co-author of *Parliamentary Opposition in Western Democracies*, edited by Robert Dahl. Herbert Tingsten, whose book *Political Behavior* (1937) has been widely read throughout the world, was similarly strongly engaged in practical matters, and as an influential opinion-monger through his position of being chief-editor of Sweden's biggest daily newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, he actively worked for Swedish membership of NATO (without success).

Although *Political Behavior* may be said to have

marked the point of transition toward behavioralism in Swedish political science, behavioralism's "take off" is of a more recent date, and closer associated with Gunnar Sjöblom's book, *Party Strategies in a Multiparty System* (1968), which brought forth an original synthesis of actor analysis and political calculus, strongly influenced by the work of Anthony Downs. It is no exaggeration to say that it influenced a whole generation of political scientists in Scandinavia at a time when political science as a whole was expanding. It also helped to promote an understanding of the importance of electoral studies, particularly electoral statistics, which for a long time was encapsulated and domesticated at the University of Gothenburg, where they were initiated. The dynamic features of Sjöblom's concerns have been strengthened further by his emigration to Denmark, where he is now professor at the University of Copenhagen, like another colleague of his, Lennart Lundquist, an eminent scholar in the field of public administration and decentralization. Social scientists more frequently emigrate to Denmark than the opposite, perhaps because Denmark has a greater amount of academic freedom than Sweden.

In a small country like Sweden it is imperative for an academic discipline to locate its specialties in distinct centers in order to concentrate research and teaching efforts from scarce resources in money and personnel. Centralized planning, with or without superintendency by governmental authorities, has always characterized academic life in Sweden, where higher seats of learning and research are basically sponsored by the government (an exception being the Business School of Stockholm). As far as academic subspecialization and coordination in political science is concerned, however, it is more or less a matter of tradition, personal interests of the research staffs—the two being interrelated—and geographical location of other institutions.

At the University of Uppsala there is a strong and persistent mainstream of scholarly interest in the history and analysis of political ideas and theories, most studies being influenced by the doctrine of value relativism as it has been formulated by Arnold Brecht and the world-famous theorist of jurisprudence and law, Axel Hagerstrom. The present head of the Uppsala department, Professor Leif Lewin has, however, broadened the institutional focus of research and teaching considerably in recent years, so that it now covers a broad range of subjects and methods. In particular, science policy and policy sciences are increasingly becoming the preoccupation of younger researchers at Uppsala, not least due to some pioneering studies in these fields by Sverker Gustavsson and Evert Vedung.

International politics receives the greatest research interest at the University of Stockholm and at the University of Lund. The Swedish International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which is an autonomous institution, produces some of the best documentary evidence on armaments and disarmaments in the world. It

publishes a series of monographs and a *Year-book* with articles and current statistics covering the field. Utrikespolitiska Institutet (The Foreign Policy Institute) is another autonomous research center for the study of international and foreign politics. Under the editorship of Per Jonsson it publishes its own bi-monthly magazine, *Internationella studier*. At the University of Stockholm, Kjell Goldman has laid the foundation for both conceptual and empirical studies of foreign policy doctrines, and the role of norms in warfare.

At the University of Lund, Lars Goran Stenelo has elaborated concepts and principles for the study of mediation in international negotiations, based on analyses of the Geneva Disarmament Conferences and ideas he has picked up from visits to Stanford University. It is perhaps also fair to say that disarmament has become such a popular subject of academic research due to the skilled efforts of Alva Myrdahl, wife of the sociologist and economist Gunnar Myrdahl who has received the Nobel prize for his studies of the U.S., Asia and welfare economics.

The debate on objectivity in social research and mass communication for a long time had its center at the University of Gothenburg, where Jorgen Westerstahl conducted a series of content analyses of public reports on the Vietnam War. He has tried to establish a doctrine with a list of criteria for what objectivity is supposed to be, but he has been challenged from many quarters, particularly from Goran Hermeren, professor of philosophy at the University of Lund and a frequent contributor to the methodological and theoretical discussions of modern political science in Sweden. Among some more salient aspects of political science at the University of Gothenburg we also find quantitative electoral studies of differences in policy preferences between and among MPs and the larger electorate. Gothenburg, and to some extent Umea in the far north of the country, has also been the center of local and regional government analyses and community studies. As far as Umea is concerned, its university is of recent origins, and its political science department was established only in 1965. Nevertheless, under the auspices of Par Erik Back, it has managed to produce an impressive series of studies on local government and democratic participation. Together with an emphasis on political socialization, augmented by Professor Gunnel Gustafsson and her followers, these subspecialties may be said to characterize the particular profile of this department.

In addition to these major centers, there are several other university departments and research centers where political science is being practiced on a professional level. At the University of Lulea, which harbors a large institute of technology, there are courses and research on the political conditions and consequences of new technology and technology development, particularly related to such aspects of modern, technocratic society as industrial robots, computers, satellite communications, in short "com-com"-technology (according to Heinz Eulau's terminology). Toivo Hofslagare and

Tom Bryder are at present developing methods for technology assessment by adapting cognitive mapping, political psychology and systems theory to technical decision making and the evolution of technological research strategies.

Political science in Sweden is fortunate to have its own scholarly journal, *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, edited by Torbjorn Vallinder of the department at Lund who, together with Gunnel Gustafsson of Umea, generously provided material for this piece on Swedish political science. *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift* is a quarterly and has been published since 1898, and this really makes it a veteran among political science journals. Since the middle of the 1970s, Leif Johansson, who is associate professor at Lund, has been content analyzing its articles in order to find out who did research about what, when, how, and why. Some preliminary research findings published in 1976 indicate that authors have predominantly come from Lund, Uppsala and Stockholm, Gothenburg, and other Scandinavian countries in the period 1970-75, whereas in the period 1930-34, Stockholm ranked highest, followed by contributions from other Scandinavian countries, Lund and Uppsala. As far as the educational background of the authors is concerned, there has been a marked increase of contributions from university professors, associate professors and assistant professors, whereas the relative number of contributions from persons without academic affiliation and education has declined. This may be an indication of what Merton has called the Mathew-effect: "To those who have shall be given, and from those who have not shall be taken even what they think they have," or simply interpreted as an increase in the professional standard of the contributions.

Despite its almost monopolistic position as a general political science journal, *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift* has certainly not functioned as a "collectivistic organizer" to use Lenin's outworn phrase, and it is autonomous in its relation to the Swedish Political Science Association. This association is, by the same token, of recent origins and it was not until 1970 that it was formally established at a national level by representatives from local university associations and individual practitioners in the civil service. The President of the Swedish Political Science Association and its board are elected for one-year terms. Among the Presidents of the Association have been Bjorn Molin, Gothenburg, a specialist on pension reforms and public administration, who is presently MP for the Swedish Liberal Party; Olof Ruin, Stockholm, a former vice-chancellor of the National University Board, and author of a study of cooperative movements in Sweden; Leif Lewin, Uppsala; and since 1978, Gunnel Gustafsson, Umea.

Statsvetenskapliga Forbundet—which is the Swedish name of the association—is open to researchers, teachers, post-graduate students, and others having a special interest in political science. The association's continuous task is to initiate and stimulate a critical analysis of the goals and means of political science in Sweden, and to promote the state of the art in the

surrounding society. The association promotes the institutional goals of political science as a scientific enterprise vis-a-vis the state, and promulgates its policy by spreading information about political science and political science research. It also works to promote relations between scholars from different institutions within and outside of the country. It publishes a mimeographed newsheet, *Politologen*, which is the Swedish equivalent to *PS*. The Swedish association collaborates with other national and international political science associations, such as IPSA, ECPR, and the Scandinavian Political Science Association. This is done, in the main, by attending international conferences to present research results and to discuss methodological matters and theoretical issues. Many Swedish political scientists have visited the United States for the purpose of gaining insight and inspiration with respect to scientific development, and in 1955 Sweden arranged the IPSA World Congress.

The output of research reports and dissertations has increased in recent years because of the general expansion of higher education and research. Since political science in Sweden has always had a "special relationship" with the public sector, political scientists have usually not had to suffer the fate of unemployment to the same extent as other academics from, for example, the humanities. The Swedish Political Science Association is constantly doing its best to promote the career chances of its members, broadening the traditional field of employment by spreading information about scientific results and by encouraging an interest in social quarters that traditionally do not employ scientific expertise from the social sciences, such as local and regional governments, industrial firms and technological research institutions, so there are good prospects for further expansion of both the academic discipline and the profession in Sweden.