

History

By Professor Emeritus Staffan Helmfrid and Professor Ulf Sporrang

Introduction

The international standing of Swedish geography today has little in common with that remarked upon by a German colleague in 1888: "As yet there is hardly any discussion in Sweden about an organization for higher education in geography. The subject has no representative at the university, nor is it an independent subject within either the Bachelor or the Licentiate Degree" (H Wagner). Swedish geography undoubtedly made a late start, but its subsequent development appears to have been rapid. This development began under the direct influence of German university geography, which then dominated the discipline, but there was also a tradition of Linnaean natural science, to which the *Vega* expedition gave a new impetus.

Those of our predecessors who surveyed the first half-century of Swedish geographical research were unanimous in declaring that the delimitation of the subject had been extremely unclear. Contributions to geography came from representatives of various disciplines. Its theories and methods were still so elementary that there was little need for their practitioners to be professional. The boundary between geography and other natural sciences was particularly fluid. In Sweden, specialization in the various systematic branches of geography began early. The result was that most Swedish geographers lay outside the main stream of philosophical discourse and schools which were then integral to the geographic discipline. Certainly there were tendencies towards natural determinism, but how many would uphold that as a philosophy? Certainly the 'regional monograph', the comprehensive, well-documented, balanced geographical description of countries and regions was accepted by many Swedish geographers as the implicit goal of research, but how many set out to reach that goal? There are no counterparts in Swedish geographical literature to the vast and in many respects admirable regional geographical literature then so typical of German and French geography. No Swedish geographer acquired the 'feeling' of a region in the manner accomplished by the French masters. For that reason, too, no Swedish geographer devoted himself entirely to the philosophy of regional geography, including its more specific '*Landschaft*'-philosophical form with the 'natural region' as the object defining the subject. The chorological character of geographical research problems was stressed early on, but Immanuel Kant's exclusion of time processes was never really recognized in Sweden. On the contrary, Swedish geographers soon discovered the particular opportunities open to them of elucidating development process in Swedish cultural landscapes and regional systems thanks to the extraordinary richness of older documentation.

The flowering of Swedish geography in the 1950s and 1960s was to a large extent due to the break-through in applied geography that resulted from its successful participation in important official surveys and planning activities. Swift-moving structural changes in Swedish social and economic conditions after 1950 necessitated extensive planning of a new kind in 'the spatial system of society'. Basic knowledge could be derived from socio-geographical models and theories. At the same time, the consequences of change

and economic developments to the Swedish landscape and environment generated a demand for expertise in physical geography and for direct involvement in environmental care. Similarly, during the past fifteen years, physical planning on a national scale created a greater need for assistance from research on the historical geography of rural landscapes.

To a greater degree than most university subjects, geography has directed its attention as a matter of course towards current social problems. Among geographers, an awareness of the potential and responsibilities of their subject in this area is considerably older than the awareness of social problems has been among politicians! Had those politicians concerned with education been better informed of the insights geography had developed, their attitude towards the subject might have been different.

These developments conveyed benefits as well as risks. The principal benefits were an increased demand for geographical research and the creation of new labour markets for geographers. The risks were at least threefold: firstly, these new labour markets tended to seduce the new generation of geographers prematurely from the universities; secondly, too little attention was paid to basic research; and thirdly, there developed a connection with the political establishment which could easily be misunderstood by an outsider – and the political establishment is, of course, always liable to undergo sudden change!

Human Geography in Stockholm

The first chairs in geography in Sweden were established at Lund in 1896 and Uppsala in 1902. In 1912, after professors of geography had been appointed at both Gothenburg University and at the Stockholm School of Economics and Business Administration, the reader in geography at Uppsala University, *Sten de Geer*, (1886–1933), was appointed teacher of and examiner in geography at Stockholm University College. He concurrently held the post of reader in economic geography at the Stockholm School of Economics. In 1929 de Geer was appointed professor of geography at Gothenburg. De Geer, who started tuition and research in geography at Stockholm University, became internationally renowned for his contributions to chorology, population cartography and geographical philosophy. His investigation into the urban geography of Stockholm paved the way for later research.

A chair in geography was established here in 1929. As its first incumbent, the Faculty summoned the reader of geology at Uppsala University, *Hans W:son Ahlmann* (1889–1974). Under his guidance, the Geographical Department at Stockholm became the focus of a lively international network of scientific contacts, especially after its move from a one-room locale at Kungstensgatan 45 to the Old Stockholm Observatory. The cosiness of the ‘home’ Stockholm geographers then acquired became renowned all over Sweden. Ahlmann’s scientific oeuvre was primarily in physical geography, with special reference to Arctic exploration, but his interests, which were global, included many of the major problems facing mankind. In the 1930s Ahlmann organized and directed, amongst other things, a comprehensive research project on Stockholm, a pioneer undertaking in the international research on metropolitan areas. Among the now classical works that formed

part of this project is *William William-Olsson's* doctoral thesis (1937) on the development of Stockholm between 1850 and 1930.

Another research team led by *Bertil Hedenstierna* devoted itself to historical-cum-human-geographical studies of the Stockholm archipelago. *Nils Friberg's* studies on old Swedish roads and the old trade hinterland of Stockholm were also of a historical-geographical nature, as was his later research on population history. His study on the population of Dalecarlia in the seventeenth century (1954) is particularly worthy of note.

On his appointment as Swedish Ambassador to Norway in 1950, Ahlmann relinquished his chair, but remained in close touch with his former department and with geographical research. After retiring from the diplomatic service, he moved into an emeritus room at the Department in 1955. From 1956 to 1960 he was president of the International Geographical Union and, in that capacity, acted as host to the XIX International Geographical Congress in 1960. This was, and indeed remains to this day, the largest event of its kind ever to have been arranged by Scandinavian geographers. Internationally, the congress is regarded as having marked the break-through of what came to be known as 'modern geography'. Leading researchers from sixty nations, representing both classical and 'modern' geography, assembled in Stockholm in August of that year.

From 1945, when the official University Committee published its report, the creation of a second chair in geography had been under consideration. In 1947 Uppsala and Lund had each been granted two chairs, one in physical and the other in human geography. Stockholm, however, was obliged to wait in order to avoid a situation in which three chairs would have to be filled at the same time. As compensation, Stockholm was granted a teacher in human geography with economic geography in 1949. Uncertainty about whether the chair was to be divided or not resulted in the most unfortunate interregnum lasting for three and a half years after Ahlmann's resignation. It was not until 1954 that the reader in geography at Uppsala, *Gunnar Hoppe*, was awarded the chair at Stockholm, which had still not been divided. Hoppe had published a doctoral thesis on roads in the Province of Norrbotten and had studied colonization and settlement in the northern parts of Sweden. At the time of his appointment, however, his main research interest lay in physical geography, and to a great degree followed the traditions initiated by Ahlmann. As assistant teacher, *Staffan Helmfrid* was in sole charge of human geography from the beginning of 1955. From 1957–1961 he acted as secretary-general of the XIXth International Geographical Congress.

In 1955 the chair in geography at Stockholm was finally divided. The resulting two chairs were entitled *Geography, particularly Physical Geography* and *Geography, particularly Human Geography with Economic Geography* respectively. Hoppe, who was given first choice, chose the chair in Physical Geography. As first incumbent of the Chair of Human Geography, the Faculty summoned the professor at the University of Lund, *David Hannerberg* (1900–1981). He took up the position in 1956. Prior to the division of the chair, the professor of geography had been a member of two faculties but, when the second chair was established, one came under the auspices of the Faculty of Mathematics

and Science and the other under the Faculty of Arts. When the latter faculty was itself divided in 1966, human geography became part of the newly created Faculty of Social Sciences.

Hannerberg threw himself energetically into the task of building up the new Department of Human Geography, its collections and equipment. Special project papers at the third term level was organized around field courses which were financed by grants to Hannerberg's research program on the evolution of the cultural landscape. These grants came largely from the Swedish Research Council for Social Sciences and, later on, from the newly established Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. Collections were put together, teaching material was produced and, after some time, Hannerberg initiated a revolutionary program of technical improvement which gave the Department a flying start into the computer age. To take charge of tuition and research in the new social-science oriented subject of human geography which had been introduced in 1956, Hannerberg recruited *Sven Godlund*, reader at the University of Lund, who was engaged in government investigation programs of fundamental importance, including fields such as physical planning and public administration. Whereas biology or history had previously been the subjects most commonly combined with geography, from now on the social sciences began to occupy a much more prominent position.

In his doctoral thesis on the countryside in the Province of Närke, 1600–1820, Hannerberg had touched upon several areas, such as questions of field area, agricultural production and the population of pre-industrial society, in which he was later to arrive at pioneering findings. To be able to extract quantitative information from old sources, Hannerberg had to unravel the seemingly hopelessly confused older systems of measuring-units, in particular the relationship between measures of length, area and volume for field-areas and grain. Hannerberg's metrological method enabled him to demonstrate a new way of approaching central socio-historical problems, and they proved surprisingly efficient at reconstructing step by step the history of the building and cultivation of farms and villages. Hannerberg organized an extensive research program of field reconnaissance and field studies into historical remains in the agricultural landscape dating from various periods as well as archival studies and cartographical analyses. Doctoral theses by *Sven-Olov Lindquist*, *Ulf Sporrang*, *Nils Sahlgren*, *Bruno Johnsson*, *Hilbert Andersson* and *Dagny Torbrand* as well as a number of licentiate dissertations emerged from this research program. Even before Hannerberg had taken up his post in Stockholm, Staffan Helmfrid had chosen the old agrarian landscape as his field of research. His doctoral thesis on the old cultural landscape in the Province of Östergötland was published in 1962.

A number of young researchers in Godlund's seminar were involved in government studies on problems of regional policy and planning. *Gunnar Törnqvist* (professor at Lund since 1967), one of the first geographers to make use of computers on a large scale, published his doctoral thesis in 1963. Among other doctoral dissertations in this field those by *Claes-Fredrik Claeson* (professor at the Stockholm School of Economics since 1972) and *Torvald Gerger* should be mentioned. In 1962 Godlund was appointed professor at Gothenburg.

From the point of view of both resources and scientific achievement, the 1960s were a time in which the discipline and the Department flourished – but they ended in chaos (a bit strong maybe?) due to unrestricted growth and student unrest. Until the mid-1950s, only prospective schoolteachers studied geography. Twenty students were admitted each year, this number later being raised to forty. Few of them stayed for longer than two terms and it was rare that anyone took his Licentiate. Many years elapsed between doctoral dissertations, which were sometimes in the field of physical geography, sometimes in human geography.

In the mid-1960s the number of students enrolling started to increase. This was partly due to the expansion of secondary education, and partly a result of more liberal university entrance requirements. This increase in student numbers became even more marked with the withdrawal of the restriction on the number of students attending courses (except in subjects requiring laboratory facilities). The numbers of those studying human geography jumped from about eighty in the mid-sixties to over eight hundred four years later. The situation as regards classrooms, library facilities and tuition became chaotic, and working conditions were often intolerable. The Department soon grew out of its premises at the Old Observatory, and in the autumn of 1965 it moved to Kungstensgatan 45. Some rooms in the Old Observatory were retained, however, and others, scattered around in the vicinity, were acquired. Teaching staff and researchers had to move time and again, and had to clean up, repair, paint and furnish ‘new’ rooms in buildings earmarked for demolition!

As already mentioned, in the 1960s Hannerberg initiated a technical build-up at the Department financed by various sources. In the early fifties lengthy discussions had preceded the Department’s first purchase, apart from a theodolite and a levelling tube: a mimeograph costing about SEK 200! Now modern calculating machines, the first desk computer, a digitizer, an optical pantograph, copying and photographic apparatus and field equipment were bought. The first course on the computerized handling of geographical data using modern software from the USA was held in 1969–70 by Professor *Duane Marble*. One of the students on that course, *Hans Hertling*, together with *Stefan Ene* and *Ingemar Bengtsson*, later built up the computer capacity of the Department and produced a highly efficient system of computerized cartography complete with a map-laboratory and a large library of software.

Staffan Helmfrid became professor in 1969 at a time that was to prove very trying for the Department. A new study system was being introduced whereby fixed combinations of subjects were to be substituted for the free choice of combinations which had hitherto prevailed. In less than six weeks curricula had to be completely re-written, new reading lists prepared and tuition re-scheduled.

After the end of the 1970–71 academic year the tide turned and the Department could begin to consolidate, build up its skills and see over its programs. In 1974 the accommodation question was solved and the Department could be re-united, this time at Norrtullsgatan 2. The reunion was a joyful occasion, and one that contrasted rather

sharply with the classical dignity of the entrance hall and the statues.

During Hannerberg's last years at Stockholm the post-graduate seminar grew to such an extent that it could easily fill a large lecture room. When the new professor took up his post there were 65 students registered as studying for their Licentiate or Doctorate. In the middle of the 1970s a temporary professor (*Bruno Johnsson*) was appointed. Together with the professor, the reader and two assistants, he was responsible for post-graduate tuition and research. After 1970, undergraduates were taught by a staff consisting of four lecturers, one (later four) extra assistant lectures and eight (later three) assistants.

From 1971, Professor Helmfrid became increasingly involved in leading the Faculty of Social Science and later the University. He was appointed vice-chancellor in 1978. The scientific and administrative leadership of the Department was taken up by *Torvald Gerger* and *Ulf Sporrang*, thus reflecting the natural division of responsibilities in the Department into two fields, the socio-scientific and the humanist.

In addition to the socio-geographical research led by Sven Godlund, the ambitiously conceived project initiated and led by Professor Hannerberg, 'Research Project Administrative Spatial Systems' (*Forskningsprojektet Administrativa Rumsliga System, FARS*), gave a distinctive profile to the Department's research in the 1960s. Hannerberg as Emeritus, together with Ulf Sporrang, continued the project right up to the time of Hannerberg's death in 1981. A study on the village of Hagestad in Scania, posthumously published in 1984, was among the papers Hannerberg left after him. Hannerberg summed up his principal scientific thinking and conclusions in the monumental work on Kumla (1977).

While serving as reader and holding a special post as researcher on historical geography sponsored by the Research Council for the Social Sciences, *Sven-Olov Lindquist* carried out two research projects. In one, which was the direct continuation of an earlier work on the agrarian cultural landscape, he developed quantitative methods of surveying the 'visual environment' of the landscape. The other project was concerned with the historical development of the oldest cultural landscape on Gotland. Both resulted in dissertations, which were presented in the 1970s.

During the 1980s the situation was further consolidated. The Department was to have moved out to the University campus at Frescati, on the northern outskirts of Stockholm, but these plans failed to materialise during the 80s. The building housing the Department was therefore renovated and a new library and lecture hall as well as map archives were added.

The Department of Human Geography now became an educational centre for planning dealing with socio-economic and environmental problems. At the end of the decade, a new teacher training program started. And, once more, the number of students and teaching staff increased across the whole field. Details of the tuition program will be presented below.

During the 1980s the humanist research profile was developed by *Mats Widgren* through his investigation of prehistoric and medieval settlements in western Scandinavia over a long-time perspective. The leadership of the socio-scientific profile was gradually taken over by *Göran Hoppe*. Research in this field concentrated on the spatial consequences of social and economic change in Sweden during the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1996 Hoppe left the Department for a new geography-chair at Uppsala University.

The 1980s witnessed a broadening of the scope of research activities at the department. There was an increasing interest in research into urban development and planning problems – a field in which *Kerstin Bodström* had noted the effects of the specific land policy pursued by the Municipality of Stockholm. *Lennart Tonell* studied the socio-economic and demographic transformation of Stockholm City, and *Bertil Sannel* concentrated on the problems of co-ordinating planning activities in large urban areas.

It was also possible to observe a growing interest in studies on developing countries, which attracted a group of young scholars collaborating with researchers under the guidance of *Carl Christiansson* from the Department of Physical Geography together with *Gunilla Andrae*, *Mats Widgren* and *Wilhelm Östberg*.

In 1986 *Staffan Helmfrid* was given a personal chair in human and economic geography and took up work as scientific editor of the National Atlas of Sweden. After ten years as vice chancellor of Stockholm University Helmfrid retired in 1988. *Ulf Sporrang* succeeded him as professor at the Department.

Finally, during the 1990s, the number of students increased to a level that had never existed before. (Currently about 600 students are coming to the Department every term.) Moreover, the research activities have been considerably broadened in recent times. For instance, in 1994 a new geography chair was established at Stockholm University. *Bo Lenntorp* is the new professor and his interests are mainly within research of time-geography and environmental problems with emphasis on transportation and social aspects. Another chair, in urban and regional planning, has also been established and *Gunnel Forsberg*, from Uppsala, was appointed in 1998. She is the first female professor in human geography to be appointed at the department and the second one in the country. Her research topics are regional restructuring and gender studies. At present the Department also benefits from the presence of three visiting professors: *Mats-G Engström*, previously professor at Nordplan, doing research on IT and communications; *Karl-Olov Arnstberg*, a social anthropologist, in the field of urban studies; and *Thomas Lundén* specializing in ethnic and political geography. *Mats Widgren* became new senior associate professor in 1997 and is now professor. The Department's current research program will be presented below.

During the academic year of 1996–97 the Department changed its geographical location in Stockholm. We left the classical university building at Norrtullsgatan 2 and moved to the Stockholm University campus area at Frescati, north of the inner city. For more than 30 years a new geography building had been planned. So, at last, in July 1997 the Department moved into a brand new locale housing a library, laboratories, lecture halls

and rooms for staff members. A new era for the Department of Human Geography at Stockholm University has begun. We are now localized together with the Departments of *Physical Geography & Quaternary Geology* and *Geology & Geochemistry*, a fact that to some extent has focused parts of our research program towards environmental issues.