

March 24, 1989

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Growth and Consolidation of Tema: An Outsider's View

In 1985-1986, I participated in a full evaluation of Tema activities at Linköping University, a study which was published under the title of Interdisciplinary Research and Doctoral Training: A Study of the Linköping University (Sweden) Tema Departments (Brock et al, 1986). Three years after this formative evaluation, I was invited, along with my colleagues from the original study, to participate in the workshop "Initiation, Growth and Consolidation: The scientific dynamics and societal relevance of a non-traditional research organization case--The Institute of Tema Research, Linköping University, Sweden." In preparing for this workshop, I was able to review a number of relevant publications and reports pertaining to Tema since 1985-1986 as well as to spend three days immediately prior to the workshop identifying and assessing changes and developments that had taken place at The Institute of Tema Research since my last visit. During these three days at Linköping, I attended faculty-student meetings of Tema H, Tema V, and Tema K, interviewed a number of faculty members and students of all Tema departments including Tema T, and had the opportunity to inspect the new Tema building at Valla. While this short visit was obviously not long enough for a thorough evaluation, it did provide adequate opportunity for noting major developments and trends at Tema since 1985-1986. The full cooperation of Tema faculty, students and staff in this endeavor is gratefully acknowledged.

Since my workshop colleagues, Professors Brock and Sigurd, have concentrated on Tema K and on many of the general issues identified in the 1986 study, my remarks in the short statement that follows will focus primarily on Tema V.

1) The move to Valla. There is no doubt that the move from the center of Linköping to the Valla campus of the university has proven to be of significant value. In my opinion, Tema V has reaped substantial benefits from this relocation. Tema V now has truly excellent physical facilities-- "state of the art" laboratories, much improved office space for faculty and students, greater access to other University resources, etc.-- a far cry from what it had in its previous location. Substantial improvement of the physical plant has had the additional but not incidental effect of furthering the internal integration and cohesiveness of Tema V, of increasing communication and cooperation among its faculty and between its faculty and students. In fact, the concentration of all Tema departments in the superbly designed T-building has enabled all four of the original Tema departments to reach greater internal integration and, therefore, sharper focus. Perhaps more importantly, the physical move to Valla appears to have facilitated the interdigitation of all Temas, their faculties and their students. In this context, it is obvious that the move has led to a noticeable increase in the relations between Tema and the University at large. All things considered, it would appear that the decision to move to Valla was correct and that the results of the move, to this point in time, have been most positive. Given this new contiguity of Tema and University, however, at least one caution is necessary. Tema V, as well as all other Tema departments, has to be wary of overcommitting its faculties and advanced students to undergraduate instruction or to other University activities unrelated to Tema. The Institute of Tema Research, as a whole, certainly can and should play a constructive role at the University, but it can only do so, over the long haul, by carefully husbanding its scarce resources.

2) Tema V--three years later. In 1986, the study team commented on Tema V's faculty and faculty composition, research programs and research output, and students and syllabus. In 1989, I concentrated on these three areas:

a) Faculty and faculty composition. In 1986, the Tema V faculty was found to be energetic, well-functioning, and of high academic quality. However, it was also felt then that the disciplinary composition of the Tema V faculty reflected a heavy imbalance of natural scientists to social scientists and thus posed problems for the vigorous development of interdisciplinary water-focused research and training. It was recommended then that the faculty be increased by a new chair in the social sciences, that additional teaching help be obtained in hydrology, and that the computer and laboratory personnel be augmented. In very large part, these recommendations were favorably acted upon by Tema V and Tema Council. Particularly important has been the appointment of Professor Carl Widstrand, a social anthropologist with long standing interests in sociocultural problems related to water distribution and allocation. With the arrival of Professor Widstrand and the addition of other instructional and research staff at Tema V, the problem of imbalance, given the authorized size of the faculty, has virtually disappeared. Consequently, at present, Tema V continues to have an energetic, well-functioning, productive, high quality faculty but one that is now much better balanced in disciplinary composition and research orientation.

b) Research programs and research output. In 1986, it was found that Tema V faculty had an impressive record of research and publications but that this research was almost always monodisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary in focus. Over the past three years, Tema V has taken several initiatives to adjust research orientations. One, already mentioned, has been to balance better the disciplinary and research interests of the faculty. Another has been the introduction of new research and training programs with theoretical and methodological emphases that facilitate interdisciplinary research. The last few doctoral dissertations completed by Tema V students reflect these new emphases and demonstrate a commendable increase in disciplinary cross-fertilization and interdisciplinary orientations.

c) Students and syllabus. In 1986, it was found that the weaknesses of the good training program then in place stemmed from the heterogeneous backgrounds of faculty and students and the consequent difficulties of designing courses which would be challenging and stimulating to all students within the time constraints placed on completing the Ph.D. Specific recommendations were made then to help alleviate program weaknesses. It appears that these recommendations, in the main, have yet to be acted upon. I would urge that the 1986 suggestion for an inter-university consortium to facilitate the training of Tema V students still has validity as does the recommendation to institute the Fil. lic. option. In general, however, the training of Tema V students is of high standard and graduates of the department have little difficulty in obtaining appropriate employment. Of thirteen recipients of the Ph.D., five have stayed in Tema V (2 Senior Lecturers and 3 Research Associates) and eight have been appointed to relevant posts outside of Tema (in environmental protection agencies, county government, overseas research work, etc.).

In 1986, there was little doubt that Tema V was a very good teaching and research department. In 1989, I consider it an excellent department, one of which the Institute of Tema Research can be proud. It should be particularly commended for its balance of national, cross-national, and international research interests, one among its several accomplishments.

3) Some general considerations. I would like to close these remarks with brief comments on Tema faculty build-up and on my overall assessment of Tema in 1989.

a) Build-up of Tema Faculty. The 1986 study team urged that the Riksdag mandated build-up of Tema faculty be given highest priority. This appears not to have been done. Nevertheless, I continue to urge all possible action in this regard. It is unfortunate that complete faculty build-up of Tema has been so long delayed. I should point out that there are real dangers in piece-meal build-up. For one, overall plans and long-range objectives, so vital for maintaining the uniqueness and character of academic institutions, are often distorted or sacrificed in order to relieve the pressure of immediate problems and issues.

b) Overall assessment. In 1986, the overall assessment of Tema departments at Linköping University by the study team was a positive one. In 1989, this assessment appears to me to have been absolutely correct. The Institute of Tema Research, initiated as an experiment, continues to prove itself a unique, viable and important component of Swedish higher education and an innovative research presence at Linköping University. It deserves continuing and expanded support.