



**Interdisciplinarity, Research Policies and Practices:  
Two Case Studies in Norway**

**By Research Assistant Camilla Jordheim Larsen  
And Professor Karin Widerberg**

**February 2006**

**Department of Sociology and Human Geography  
University of Oslo, Norway**

<b>Interdisciplinarity, Research Policies and Practices: Two Case Studies in Norway .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Interdisciplinarity – the national context and background .....	1
The Research Council of Norway and its research programs .....	2
How research programmes are initiated and run .....	3
“The Programme for Cultural Research” and the programme “Gender in Transition” .....	4
<b>Method and limitations.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1) Written documents.....	5
2) Interviews and meetings .....	5
A brief remark on terminology .....	6
<b>Programme for Cultural Research (1998-2002).....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Organisation .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Preparatory work.....	9
The programme board.....	9
The Centre of Cultural Research at the University of Bergen.....	10
<b>Interdisciplinarity: How was it articulated? .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Goals .....	11
Meanings.....	12
Multi-, inter- or transdisciplinarity?.....	13
Cognitive or instrumental interdisciplinarity? .....	13
Intentions expressed in the interviews .....	14
<b>Interdisciplinarity: How was it performed?.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Writing the policy document .....	15
Distribution .....	16
The active approach of the board.....	19
Conferences and seminars.....	20
Syntheses.....	21
The Cultural Dialogue.....	22
Interdisciplinary at project level: The umbrella structure.....	23
Interdisciplinary at project level: Two individual projects within the umbrella..	25
University structures hinder interdisciplinarity .....	27
<b>Interdisciplinarity: How was it evaluated? .....</b>	<b>28</b>
At the programme level .....	28
At project level.....	29
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Gender in Transition: Institutions, Norms, Identities (1997-2002) .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Organisation .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Preparatory work.....	34
The Programme Board .....	34
<b>Interdisciplinarity: How was it articulated? .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Goals and meanings .....	35
Inter- multi- or transdisciplinarity? .....	37
Cognitive or instrumental interdisciplinarity? .....	38
<b>Interdisciplinarity: How was it performed?.....</b>	<b>38</b>
Distribution .....	38
Conferences and seminars.....	40
Interdisciplinarity at project level: Two networks .....	41
Interdisciplinarity at project level: One umbrella .....	42

Interdisciplinarity at project level: Two individual projects.....	45
Structural barriers - particular to junior researchers? .....	45
<b>Interdisciplinarity: How was it evaluated? .....</b>	<b>46</b>
At programme level .....	46
At project level.....	47
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Interdisciplinarity: Reflections for the future .....</b>	<b>49</b>
From structure to actor .....	49
Doing interdisciplinary research – problems and joys.....	50
Interdisciplinarity in practice – the researchers’ interpretations and views.....	52
To whom, when and where is interdisciplinarity actually an issue?.....	54
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>57</b>
Appendix 1: The Programme Board of PCUL .....	57
Appendix 2: The dissemination committee of PCUL.....	58
Appendix 3: The programme board of GiT: .....	59
<b>Literature.....</b>	<b>60</b>

# **Interdisciplinarity, Research Policies and Practices: Two Case Studies in Norway**

## **Introduction**

This report focuses on how research programmes which are interdisciplinary in disposition actually “do interdisciplinarity”. The purpose is to illuminate how interdisciplinarity is stated, performed and evaluated at different levels; the program level, the project level and the individual level. This report focuses on cases from the Norwegian context, while other reports centre on cases from Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Spain, Sweden and the UK (see [www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration](http://www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration)). We are all partners in a specific targeted research project (STREP) on ‘Changing Knowledge and Disciplinary Boundaries Through Integrative Research Methods in the Social Sciences and Humanities’, funded under the European Commission’s Framework 6, Priority 7: ‘Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge Based Society’. A key objective of this project is to understand the barriers to interdisciplinarity in the social sciences and humanities.

## **Interdisciplinarity – the national context and background**

Interdisciplinarity within and between the social sciences and the humanities has a long and quite strong tradition in the short academic history of Norway (the material in this section is primarily based on one of our previous reports (Widerberg et al. 2005). The reasons for an interdisciplinary orientation within research and higher education have varied over the two centuries since Norway got its first university (1811), and was declared an independent kingdom a century ago. And so have the expectations and meanings of the term. The story of the development of disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking and organization within and between the social sciences and the humanities is accordingly both complex and ambiguous.

Historically, on the one hand the young academic traditions (there were few old and prestigious disciplines) and the scarce resources made interdisciplinary orientations in research and teaching both natural and necessary. And since most of the disciplines – especially the social sciences – developed alongside the development of the welfare state, there was an expressed demand for their usefulness, that is, a demand for thematic, problem-solving, and, accordingly, interdisciplinary orientations. The establishment of quite a few interdisciplinary research institutions, research programmes, sections (for example on women’s law) and subjects during the last part of the previous century, is one expression hereof. On the other hand, though, university education until the new reform in 2003 implied longer and more in-depth disciplinary undergraduate studies compared to the American model which was implemented in Sweden as early as the 1970s. A disciplinary identification, for example presenting oneself as a sociologist and not as a social scientist (the latter would probably have been the case in Sweden), was accordingly stressed through the education system.

With the transformation of the university into a mass university, lengthy degrees and a disciplinary focus were considered problematic by the political authorities. Schools had already been reformed so as to be in more accordance with “the demands of modern society”. Thematic approaches, problem solving and collaboration were stressed while the importance of the disciplines was downplayed. And while the pupils who graduated from school could be expected to fit into the new

labour market, the graduates from the “old” university could not. The university was conceived of as lagging behind in more than one sense, which made the Bologna Declaration an excellent and legitimate opportunity and excuse for a total reform of higher education. In this process labour market interests and ways of thinking, internationalization, but also intellectual debates and paradigms, pushed towards interdisciplinary orientations.

This was heavily underlined by the new research policy formulated through the reorganization of the Research Council of Norway – stressing interdisciplinarity and large, collaborative projects – as well as through the new budget system for the universities. Money talked of interdisciplinarity and not of disciplinarity. On the other hand, though, the administrative university structure with discipline-oriented departments and faculties was left more or less intact, even though the allocation of money was now made more indirectly (based on production). That is, the administrative skeleton of the university is still more or less the same. So, even though there are interdisciplinary Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes planned and lined up for students – before the Reform interdisciplinary education was an individual affair – administratively the programmes are handled in the old-fashioned way. When it comes down to the core issues – exams, curricula etc. – one seems to fall back on disciplinary thinking, including at school level.

Overall, interdisciplinarity is publicly expressed as an unquestionable goal within research and higher education in the Norway of today. The reasons to “go for interdisciplinarity” are however both varied and conflicting. What the market wants with and expects of interdisciplinarity might not coincide with the welfare state’s and the politicians’ wishes. And none of them mean the same thing as the intellectuals arguing for interdisciplinarity in the name of gender, queer and post-colonial perspectives. For the present, then this general discourse on interdisciplinarity opens up a space to the actual doing of interdisciplinarity in all its varieties. In other words, it is there for all of us to claim.

### **The Research Council of Norway and its research programs**

The close connection between science and politics – often manifested in the very same persons – are corner stones in the Norwegian house of knowledge. This combination became characteristic of the development of the Norwegian nation *and* the Norwegian Research Council.

In Norway, as in most other countries, research funding is both private and public. Large corporations, organizations, labour unions and the like either accept applications for funding, employ their own researchers, or finance separate research institutes. There are quite a few social science-dominated research institutes in Norway – compared to the other Scandinavian countries – which are financed, at least partly, through private means. But even here a major part of the funding is based on applications to the national Research Council, the Research Council of Norway. Norway has only one publicly financed and controlled research council, which accordingly has the sole responsibility for the overall administration of the national research funding. Political guidelines manifested in budget decisions constitute the frames of its workings. The Council has about 4000 million Norwegian kroner (NOK), which equals about 500 million € annually, at its disposal, for research projects in all disciplines. In 2003 the Council was completely reorganized and since 2004 it has been divided into three divisions: the *Division for Science* (allotted 36 per cent of the total budget), the *Division for Strategic Priorities* (24 per cent of the total budget) and the *Division for Innovation* (35 per cent of the total budget). All three

divisions are headed by the Council's managing director and his (or her) staff, consisting of about 300 employees plus 1000 external experts used for committee work, evaluations and so forth.

Within the Research Council there have been profound changes, not only of an administrative character. Strategic planning of research has increased dramatically. Previously – a decade or two ago – the distribution of research funding was based more on the applications that were sent in than today. The money was distributed to good applications, no matter what the topic was. Of course there were programmes then too, but a substantial part of the funding was not tied to anything other than to disciplinary strategic plans or goals.

As a result of this change, there has been a change of focus, from disciplines to topics. Where before there was struggle and competition for research funding between the disciplines, the battle is now fought between programmes that for the most part are interdisciplinarily formulated, at least those related to the social sciences and the humanities. The big battle is now primarily between “the hard and the soft sciences”, although the less favourable situation of the humanities in relation to the social sciences is still a much debated topic.

The fact that the programmes themselves are interdisciplinarily formulated and that it is required of applicants to be affiliated to specific research environments, constitutes a push towards interdisciplinarity. The general rule is that money is no longer awarded to individuals or small projects, but instead is given to large projects and research environments.

As a policy, a division of labour between the Research Council and the universities has been underlined. The universities are given the responsibility for the development of the separate disciplines and accordingly for allotting individual graduate scholarships. The Research Council, on the other hand, has the national and overall responsibility for the development of research, and should accordingly stimulate the establishment of research environments, large projects and competition. But this is a long-term policy, and the Council still takes a disciplinary responsibility when and if the universities and university colleges are not able to do so.

### **How research programmes are initiated and run**

The close connection between science and politics is also manifested at research programme level, in how these are initiated and run. Based on political signals expressed in budget decisions, the initiative to a programme is most often taken in collaboration between the Research Council, relevant Ministries and academic experts. Since the amount of money a Ministry is willing to put into a programme depends on the relevance of the issues to be raised there, political interests and agendas do play a significant role in the establishment of a research programme. But although political interests are expressed in relation to the focus of fields and themes, academics have always been the ones to formulate the research issues and policy document of a programme. It is also academic experts who constitute the majority of the board each programme has to establish. The head of the board is almost always also an academic expert. The fact that the Ministries supporting the programme through financing are board members and accordingly participate in all the decisions regarding the running of the programme might however influence how interdisciplinarity and disciplinarity is handled and valued in the programme.

A programme is not meant to be permanent but is a tool to promote flexibility and development regarding research fields. The intention is to concentrate research activities in a particular area and build up research competence and research milieus

in that field. The regular time-period for a research programme is 5-7 years. Quite often, though, a research programme in completion argues for a successor programme – so as to not lose but to further the competence developed in the field. And this is more often than not also a request which is granted. Five years are in practice considered too short a period for developing a research field. Many programmes, maybe most, have both a predecessor and a successor, just like the ones we have focused on in this study and which are presented below.

The board is responsible for the daily running of a programme. What this implies in practice depends among other things on the size of the programme. Some programmes appoint a research coordinator, for example, to be a link between the researchers and the board. Most boards however, meet regularly and are quite active in the running of the programme. Their major tasks are:

- Evaluating applications (although referee statements from external researchers might be used, sometimes in combination with internal referee statements)
- reading and commenting on annual and final reports delivered by those who have received money for projects
- planning conferences
- organizing networks
- performing evaluations of the programme
- dealing with issues (for example ethics), conflicts, problems etc invoked by the project researchers

### **“The Programme for Cultural Research” and the programme “Gender in Transition”**

What all this implies in practice and for the possibility of doing interdisciplinarity research is something we aim to illustrate when we now turn our attention to two particular research programmes, *The Programme for Cultural Research* (PCUL) and *Gender in Transition* (GiT).

Why these two programmes? The first and most important criterion is that the programmes were open to the humanities and the social sciences alike. PCUL was however to put its main weight on the humanities (PCUL policy doc: 12). This was reasonable since the Research Council, on the whole, had more programmes open to the social sciences than to the humanities. Still, both programmes stated interdisciplinary research to be a goal in its own right (GiT policy doc: 3). Second, both of them were initiated, financed and administered by the Research Council of Norway. As described above, this is the main funding body in Norway, and the only public funding body responsible for programmes of this scope. Both were large scale programmes - in Norwegian terms - although GiT was smaller than PCUL, owing, it is argued, to the broader thematic range of PCUL. Third, the programmes were active in the same period, in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This means that they were subject to the same policies and discourses surrounding research, and thus comparable. Furthermore, they were both the second of three programmes on their respective research fields, which makes it possible to look for historical lines when it comes to the emphasis on interdisciplinarity at programme level.

Finally, there are interesting differences between the programmes. Obviously, the research fields are different. In our project, however, the central difference is the issue of the disciplinization of those fields. In the case of women’s and gender studies, there is the question of whether or not it should become a separate discipline, having its own research centres in all the university cities in Norway. This has not been an

issue for cultural studies in Norway, although, in fact, there used to be a research centre for European Cultural Studies at the University of Bergen, which at the time of PCUL was located in the same building as the daily workings of that very programme took place.

## **Method and limitations**

We have used two types of data in our case studies: 1) Written documents and 2) interviews and conversations.

### **1) Written documents**

All material produced in connection with the board of a programme is generally kept in archives at the research council. Most of this material – except for example evaluations of applications – is also publicly available. And since the administrative staff at all levels at the council have been most helpful, supportive and interested in our project, it has been possible for us to have an overview of all the documentation from the two programmes. A confidentiality form was signed before entering the archive.

The material gathered in the archives consisted of: protocols from board meetings, policy documents, self-evaluations, applications, expert evaluations of applications, etc. Browsing through the material we gained an understanding of the boards' work in progress. However, since the written material was quite extensive - a couple of shelf meters - we concentrated on issues relevant to interdisciplinarity and tried to map when, where and how it was made an issue. The documents analyzed here are mainly the ones open to the public, the policy documents and the self-evaluations (no external evaluations were written). Both are available on the programmes' web sites. GiT's policy document is also available in English.

The self-evaluations of the programmes are documents we found very useful, but also problematic. These are the most informative texts on the programmes as a whole, especially since there are no written external evaluations at programme level. Still, the fact that the texts were *self*-evaluations posed some validity problems. Interdisciplinarity was a stated goal for both programmes, and when the authors of the policy documents and the evaluations were the same people, it may have been tempting to write a success story, or at least to focus on the positive achievements of the program, not least because one of the goals with self-evaluations – implicitly or explicitly - is to argue for continued financing of the field, in the form of a successor programme. On the other hand, these evaluations were written by those closest to the decisions and therefore these texts give an insight into motivations that might be lost in external evaluations. In our use and analyses of the self-evaluations we have tried to bear these dilemmas in mind, and we also made them an issue in the interviews.

The research results (books, articles and so on) have also been mapped, but due to the amount and the scope of this study we have only dug into those belonging to selected projects. These have served as background material and will thus not be evaluated by us in this case study.

### **2) Interviews and meetings**

At an early stage of this study we had a preparatory meeting with two employees from the Research Council. This meeting was most helpful; they advised us on what

programmes would be relevant to our study, they informed us on the internal structure of the Council, and offered us free entrance into the archives.<sup>1</sup>

The bulk of our interview data consists of interviews with people who were involved in the programmes, but at different levels. We interviewed the head of the boards, board members and researchers from each programme. All in all 14 interviews were done. Everybody was most helpful and expressed great interest in the project.

Just like the written material, the interview data also have their limitations. First, the interviews only convey the perspectives of the “insiders”. We have thus no means of evaluating the quality of the results from other points of view. This was clear to us from the start, and was therefore not on our agenda. However, the fact that we interviewed people both from the board and from the projects, brought to light more facets than otherwise; the roles the different interviewees had of course made an impact on their focus and experiences of the programme. Still, the fact that we only have this insider perspective may make the picture prettier than it would otherwise have been.

Second, we must stress that our interviewees were few in light of the number of researchers involved in the two programmes. We therefore want to emphasise that this report does not claim to be representative, either for the research programmes at large or for the two programmes we studied. We have found our methods satisfactory for our purposes; to describe some strategies of interdisciplinary work in practice and to raise issues regarding interdisciplinarity in humanist and social science research in Norway more generally.

Finally, a note on confidentiality; our informants were promised anonymity. In some cases this has been difficult for us to maintain; some of the projects are recognizable to those familiar with the field and thus the coordinators and chairmen too. We have attempted to solve this problem by allowing the informants who wanted to do so to read through the sections where their information had been used before publication. In some instances we ourselves decided to change recognisable characteristics of individuals and projects to mask them, when we considered the information sensitive or compromising in any way. This means that some projects will be recognisable – where this has proved unproblematic – whereas some projects will have been somewhat altered so as to be more anonymous. We chose to remove all names; only the board members are listed in the appendices as their names will be public in any case. This of course also results in the fact that people we would like to name in order to make their great efforts known will remain secret “heroes”. This is something we regret.

### **A brief remark on terminology**

In the course of this report the different terms inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinarity will be used. These terms are defined in different ways by different actors, including in existing literature on the field. In this report “interdisciplinarity” is used as the generic term, comprising all collaboration across disciplines. However, in several contexts it is also differentiated from multidisciplinarity (transdisciplinarity is used less). In these cases interdisciplinarity points to the intermix of different theoretical perspectives or methodologies in one and the same project, either owing to collaboration or individual endeavours, whereas multidisciplinarity points to a

---

<sup>1</sup> We would like to acknowledge the sociologist Silje Hirsch, who gathered the material from the archives.

collaboration between researchers from different disciplines, with the intention of producing research on the same topic from different (mono-)disciplinary angles. The meaning intended will be clear from the context.

## **Programme for Cultural Research (1998-2002)**

The Programme for Cultural Research (PCUL) was active in a five-year period from 1998 to 2002. It succeeded a similar programme named KULT (1986-1997) and would in its turn be succeeded by KULFO (2002-2007) which is still active. The focus of the programme was expressed through three headlines: 1) cultural understanding, 2) cultural refractions, and 3) cultural policy. The topics were to reflect Norway as a changing society, with a population becoming more and more culturally differentiated – possibly fragmented – mostly as a consequence of immigration. Non-essentialist perspectives were to be favoured.

The topics were connected to the concept of “cultural dialogue”, which expressed the aspiration of creating a dialogue between 1) the researchers themselves, 2) the researchers and the policy makers, and 3) the researchers and the reading public. The second and third groups were especially focused on. The preceding programme, KULT, had been pioneering in this respect (Dokk Holm 2000); for the first time there had been a committee responsible for dissemination. The goal was to encourage researchers to experiment with untraditional modes of dissemination in order to make the research relevant outside the research communities and generate interest in the general population. The resources put into this were deemed fruitful, and hence retained in PCUL. The term “cultural dialogue” was coined to convey the idea that research should be able to make an impact on cultural understandings among the general public and hence increase tolerance and acceptance of difference. Interestingly, interdisciplinarity was seen as part and parcel of this process; there was a concern that the research results would become esoteric – and hence incomprehensible or seemingly irrelevant to the general reading public – when disseminated in academic journals, intended first and foremost for the research community in the respective disciplines. Inter- and multidisciplinary were hence related not only to the research as such, but also to dissemination (PCUL pol doc: 10, Holm 2000: 10-11). This was seen as important for public research funding to maintain its legitimacy at large.

The programme was funded with the annual sum of 14 mill NOK (1,8 mill EUR). For the whole program period this amounted to 70 mill NOK (8,9 mill EUR). In addition, parts of the research projects were financed from other sources. University staff made use of their research time at their respective institutions, and also benefited from the administrative resources there. PhDs, also financed by the university departments, were connected to programme projects, and some projects would receive funding from other external sources, like the Ministry of Cultural Affairs or the Ministry of Church, Education and Research.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that the funding from these sources – all in all - amounted to as much as the programme itself (PCUL mid ev: 8).

---

<sup>2</sup> The state departments were later reorganized and renamed. The names used here are the ones used at the time in question.

## Organisation

### Preparatory work

The Research Council's Division of Culture and Society<sup>3</sup> was the central administrative funding body, and the initiator of PCUL. Already in 1995, two years prior to the completion of the preceding programme, a commission led by a professor of Russian was engaged by the Research Council, with the task of considering whether a new programme of cultural studies should be embarked upon. The commission's conclusion was positive, and another commission of three researchers from the social sciences and the humanities was engaged to outline more detailed proposals. In addition, research communities were invited to advise the Research Council on what topics would be relevant for the programme to focus on. One meeting was arranged with the deans of the humanist faculties and one with the chair of the national faculty meeting of the social sciences. Based on these proposals and dialogues, the Division of Culture and Society decided to establish a new programme, and appointed a *programme board*.

This process of moulding the programme seems lengthy, but also democratic, in the sense that the researchers likely to benefit from the programme seem to have had a strong influence on the programme. This means that political impact on the outline of the programme seemed miniscule. This might have been fortunate for the humanists, since humanist research is traditionally not regarded as "useful" like that of social scientists, who are the ones expected to do "applied research", e.g. by evaluating or preparing public policy. The programme board members, on the other hand, were less free to formulate the policy documents and in the evaluation this was stated as a disadvantage (PCUL mid ev: 6, 52).

### The programme board

The board consisted of six researchers from various fields and from different universities and university colleges in Norway (and one from Denmark), one representative from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs<sup>4</sup> and one local politician – eight members in all (see Appendix 1). This means that the majority were academics and that a minority were political representatives – or representatives of what one might call the "user group". In other words, both groups were given some power in the process. The majority of the researchers had affiliations to the humanities (five out of seven). This was in line with the official foundation.

The tasks of the board were:

- Formulating the policy document.
- Board meetings. These were held regularly about 5 times a year.
- Evaluating applications (accepting / rejecting projects).
- Evaluating annual reports from researchers funded by the programme.
- Evaluating the programme; one mid-term self-evaluation was written, and one book at the end, which was a compilation of some of the projects funded by the programme. This was considered to be the final self-evaluation.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Research Council has been reorganized since this period and the sections renamed. We use the names that were active in the programme period.

<sup>4</sup> Yet again we use the name used during the programme period.

(Administration, conferences, seminars and dissemination were evaluated at board meetings.)

These are the tasks usually taken care of by programme boards. In addition this specific board decided to take a more active approach than most, involving a lot of extra work. These tasks were:

- Implementing the policy document throughout the programme period through relevant measures; e.g. they proactively sought to cover research areas stated in the policy document which were not met by the applications. They also paid visits to researchers, and offered guidance to both project leaders and researchers.
- Planning conferences/seminars. 47 conferences were held, 7 organized by the board, one by the centre, the rest by the respective projects.
- Handling issues raised by researchers, and by the administrative body, the Centre of Cultural Research.
- Editing books in the book series of the programme, "Studies of Culture". This responsibility was distributed among the members and/or the researchers according to field of competence.

As it happened, a lot of the work on implementing the programme was in fact connected to making the projects interdisciplinary, not just in words, but in practice. The seminars were arenas for creating interdisciplinary networks. But the book series may also have been of vital importance in this respect, something we will return to.

This board was also unusual in its relation to the Research Council. Most boards meet at the Research Council in Oslo, but this board kept most of their meetings at the Centre of Cultural Research in Bergen, established through the programme, only coming to the Council "for sandwiches once a year", as one board member put it. Representatives from the Centre (administration under the board) were also present at the meetings. This organization away from the Council was seen as an experiment, both by the Council itself and the board. The Centre served both as the main administrative body and as a resource centre for the researchers involved.

We should emphasise this point more strongly; PCUL was not a conventional programme. This has been expressed by board members as well as by researchers. The weight put on interdisciplinarity was extraordinary, as was the work regarding this. Hence, let us repeat that this is a case study and as such not representative for Norwegian research programmes in general.

### **The Centre of Cultural Research at the University of Bergen**

A Centre of Cultural Research was established so as to constitute a context for the activities of the programme. The administration was divided between the research Council and the Centre. The board was in charge of the programme and all decisions were made by the board. The Centre dealt with the day-to-day administration.

The four universities in Norway were invited to submit an estimate on the costs of hosting such a centre. Hosting the Centre became a prestigious matter, and this fact led to generous offers from the universities. In the end it was located at the University of Bergen, sharing a house with the Centre for European Cultural Studies. It should be noted that the University of Bergen was stated to be favoured due to its experience with organisation of interdisciplinary research units. Besides, Bergen

offered free housing as well as a PhD position and an administrative employee. The programme employed a full-time research leader.

The original idea behind the centre was to create a centre where cultural research could be undertaken. Such an institute would be an arena for interdisciplinary networks within the humanities and as such a platform to raise funding. The idea of establishing such a centre came from a historian who worked at the Research Council at that time and was a member of the first preparatory commission. He was also the chairman of NOVA, an interdisciplinary research institute, which served as a model. To the great disappointment to those involved, the Centre in Bergen did however not develop as hoped. It was first and foremost an administrative body, a meeting place for the project coordinators and the board to discuss and deal with practical matters. It also functioned as an arena for academic seminars, however, and in this way, the Centre was a crucial part of the programme board's intention; to actively integrate the researchers involved. The Centre was closed down when the programme was completed.

From 2000 and onwards an additional dissemination committee was established, also working at the Centre. The committee consisted of one representative from the programme board, one from the research community, and two representatives from the media (see attachment 2). A professor of communication, who was also a board member, was appointed chairman.

### **Interdisciplinarity: How was it articulated?**

The terms multi- and interdisciplinarity were widely used in the policy document, in fact "interdisciplinarity" occurs nine times on ten pages! In the English summary on the web site of the programme, the goal of interdisciplinarity is indeed stated in the second sentence: "the Programme aims to promote interdisciplinary humanities and social sciences research into cultural understanding, cultural refraction and cultural policy in modern Norway" (PCUL Eng sum: 1). No doubt, multi- and interdisciplinarity were considered an important priority, but what was meant by the terms? And what goals were aimed at by interdisciplinary research? The terms are not defined explicitly, but analysis of the contexts in which they appear can offer some suggestions.

### **Goals**

Let us start by quoting the first paragraph in which the term occurs, as it sums up the goals quite well:

In order to promote academic development and offer society the desired insight and knowledge, the cultural research funded by the programme must spring from both the humanist- and the social sciences, and be inter- and multidisciplinary. Dissemination will also have to be given particular emphasis (PCUL pol doc: 1).

The *goal*, as expressed here, is twofold:

- 1) to improve academic development, and
- 2) to offer (the Norwegian) society deeper insight into its cultural complexity

Of course, these points are interconnected, the one generating the other. Still, they shed light on different aspects of research and research as a legitimate state-funded

activity. The first goal seems to be connected to basic research and theoretical advancement, and may be important to the research community, first and foremost. It is also reasonable to relate it to national prestige. According to the Research Council's long-term strategic plan 2004-2010, Norway is lagging behind in research internationally, and a goal is to alter this fact. Here, interdisciplinarity and internationalization are mentioned in the same sentence: "Supporting interdisciplinary and cross-institutional projects and furthering the internationalization of Norwegian research are important tasks of the organization" (Strategic plan of the Norwegian Research Council: 5, our translation). Naturally, this does not oppose the essential goal of improving the quality of Norwegian basic research; rather, it would be an intended consequence.

The second goal should probably be connected to the concept of "cultural dialogue" mentioned earlier, and thus points to the aim of disseminating research through non-academic channels. At the same time it directs attention to politics, the point being that new cultural understandings are needed to make sense of a changing Norwegian society. As was also stated: "Our diverse contemporary cultural situation challenges [cultural] studies and demands analysis from the vantage point of different disciplinary traditions with different perspectives" (PCUL pol doc: 9, our translation). The cultural complexity cannot be understood through the perspective of only one discipline, the argument goes.

### Meanings

It becomes clear that the *meaning* of interdisciplinarity in these paragraphs is new *perspectives*. In other words, interdisciplinarity should be evident in the research questions, in the analysis and in the results. This is interdisciplinarity in a strong sense, and in a sense that seems to be both time-consuming and demand original theoretical work. Thus we must conclude that this goal was ambitious.

However, there are also broader meanings attached to the terms. *Networks* across disciplines appears as a central one, often referred to as "meeting points", where researchers from different disciplines can exchange views and knowledge. "It should be arranged for collaborating networks across the projects, across disciplines and institutions, in order to reach the programme goal of inter- and multidisciplinary connections" (PCUL pol doc: 18, our translation).

Another meaning attached to the terms was experimental or popular dissemination, i.e. dissemination not directed to fellow researchers:

Dissemination can be a tool and a strategy in knowledge production as such, which entails reflection over the relationship between researcher, the general public and various user groups throughout the research process [...]. Also in the organisation of the dissemination the inter- and multidisciplinary aspect should be taken into account. It is especially important here because the cultural processes in contemporary society open for inter- and multidisciplinary collaboration [...]. The organisation of the program, with a centre, is meant to be central when it comes to dissemination, as a meeting point between the researchers and society (PCUL pol doc: 17, our translation).

Again, this was what was meant by "cultural dialogue". The point was that dissemination should not take place merely at the end of the project, but also in earlier phases. In this way the researchers might learn from the listeners' response. However,

inter- and multi-disciplinary dissemination was also meant to include the exchange of knowledge between researchers from different disciplines. Indeed, the Centre established in Bergen was mentioned as a fitting arena for such activity. In this sense, the meaning goes back to the previous one. All in all, this makes a list of three meanings:

- 1) Shared perspectives
- 2) Networks across disciplines
- 3) Popular dissemination

At the same time, these three meanings can be regarded as means (networking, dissemination during the research process) and consequences (shared perspectives, dissemination) of interdisciplinary research.

Nevertheless, the analysis here makes clear that interdisciplinarity was a hot topic, and that a lot of thought was put into making it work in practice. It also makes clear that the terms had several meanings which would lead to different - or a plurality of - practices, if followed.

### **Multi-, inter- or transdisciplinarity?**

The document does not distinguish between inter- and multi-disciplinarity. Most often the terms occur together as a pair. Consequently, a definition in which multi-disciplinarity refers to a project where different disciplines are engaged to approach the same field through their different perspectives, may coincide with a definition of interdisciplinarity as shared methodology and a new perspective based on the intermingling of disciplines, to represent the officially stated means and ends of the Research Council as well as the Programme of Cultural Studies (PCUL). The term “transdisciplinarity” does not occur in the policy document. Defined as a critical view of disciplines and their respective knowledge production as such (Widerberg et al. 2005: 48, Krebs et al. 2005: 47, Holm and Liinason 2005: 40), this is not a standpoint which is expressed or reflected upon under other terms either. Probably this is due to the fact that the terms trans- and post-disciplinarity had not yet entered the academic discourse. However, the Research Council may also have taken an active approach contrary to such a view; in the other programme of our study, Gender in Transition, we will see that there was a stated emphasis on *both* developing gender studies as an *interdisciplinary* field *and* developing gender studies *within the disciplines* (see also Widerberg, forthcoming).

### **Cognitive or instrumental interdisciplinarity?**

There are two ideal typical associations attached to the term interdisciplinarity, which are partially opposed to one another. First, *cognitive* interdisciplinarity, and second, *instrumental* interdisciplinarity (Holm 2004). The former refers to shared perspectives and new forms of knowledge, whereas the latter refers to applied science, in which the different disciplines are combined in order to produce the data needed in each case, most commonly middle-range research without much theoretical elaboration.

Both of these meanings may be applied to the goals and meanings stated in the programme at hand. We would however argue that interdisciplinarity in the *cognitive* sense is fronted most strongly. The goal of academic achievement (the goals of the programme are listed on p. 14) makes this explicit, as does the meaning of new perspectives. The second goal might fit better with interdisciplinarity in the

instrumental sense, as might the meaning of popular dissemination.<sup>5</sup> However, instrumentality, as stated here, was not related to the making of a concrete technical tool or anything of that kind. Quite the opposite; interdisciplinarity was a premise for the new knowledge to be spread. Perhaps this sort of instrumentality nonetheless poses a threat for the humanist disciplines. In their self-evaluation the programme board reflected on the problem that the humanities might be “sociologized” through the push for interdisciplinary work and cultural dialogue (PCUL mid ev: 50).

### **Intentions expressed in the interviews**

The interviews with the board members supported our interpretations of the policy document. They made clear that the board itself had been enthusiastic about interdisciplinarity and did not see this as something forced upon them from above (e.g. by state departments or the Research Council). Our hypothesis was that political bodies would be interested in research serving their own ends, and hence prefer research by the social sciences, or at least influenced by them. The interview with the chairman of the board rather put this the other way round; as a humanist professor, he had *wanted* to influence state politics, he had *wanted* the research done in the programme to become politically relevant and to have real impact. This was indeed part and parcel of the concept of cultural dialogue. The fear of “sociologization” of the humanist disciplines was absent, as far as he was concerned:

I see any renewal of the humanist disciplines as an advantage. If there is a sociologization... that would mean that one is not strong enough to maintain one's discipline academically. So the disciplines should be able to take it. I think that the humanities and the social sciences are equally in need of influence from one another [...]. So the fear of being influenced and changing the discipline accordingly, I rather see that as an expression of structures having become too rigid (chairman).

According to him, it was the governing bodies that were reluctant in applying cultural research to their policies. Furthermore, he said that the good thing about the Research Council was the academic independence of the researchers. Hence, there did not seem to be any political pressure for interdisciplinarity in the “instrumental” sense.

We confronted the chairman with the two definitions of interdisciplinarity (cognitive and instrumental) and asked for his opinion. His answer more or less supported the content of the policy document: instrumentally, different academic perspectives were needed to be able to make sense of a complex society, in his opinion. Likewise, research on several social arenas. Having made sense of it, he wanted the perspectives to have political impact. Cognitively, such a shared effort would hopefully end up in new and fruitful perspectives – new ways of seeing the world would evolve. As we saw in the policy document these two goals were interconnected. To elaborate on the difference between instrumentality in this sense and instrumentality in what we may call a business-oriented way, he continued:

There are two types of knowledge. There is the one you gain by reading; you read other people's work and get wiser. And then there is the knowledge of *knowing how to produce knowledge*; you understand the connection between

---

<sup>5</sup> Networking fits better with the term multi-disciplinarity (and it is a means for both cognitive and instrumental interdisciplinarity) and is therefore left out in this discussion.

sources, methods, concepts and theories and ways of tackling a problem area. The first type enables you to succeed in school examinations. However, as you leave your desk, the knowledge is already outdated, since new works are written every day [...]. So what we wanted to contribute to was ways of seeing, new methods and understandings. And then you can be instrumental on top of that. We cannot become handy men for the state departments, fixing their things, but we *should* be able to deliver premises, to make an impact on social development. So interdisciplinarity is about understanding complexity, understanding how society is put together, and that it could be put together differently, that it can be improved through knowledge about the interconnectedness of things.

We may conclude that the intended usage of interdisciplinarity by the chairman did in fact not pose an opposition between the instrumental and cognitive concept of interdisciplinarity. The one thing depended on the other.

### **Interdisciplinarity: How was it performed?**

First you must find common ground in the programme board [...]. But then, when you know what you want, you must get it practiced! And that's where we did something that had not been done before (chairman).

#### **Writing the policy document**

In general, the policy document has great impact on how a research programme will end up. It is the foundation for applications sent in and their evaluation. A programme as big as PCUL should also make the majority of the Norwegian humanist researchers happy. The Research Council is after all a state organization, and it needs wide legitimacy. The problem, according the chairman, was to manage this while at the same time fronting the board's goals for the programme period in order to keep a certain focus. The announcement seeming relatively inviting, some researchers would inevitably be disappointed.

The board's goals and academic preferences were also subject to long discussions and compromises. The members of the board have a lot of power, especially since they are the ones who evaluate the applications. This has implications for the weight put on interdisciplinarity in this programme; some of the board members were ardently enthusiastic about this, in fact sufficiently enthusiastic to do a lot of extra work to see it through. It should also be noted that the board members themselves had different disciplinary affiliations (see p. 12 and appendix 1). This may have made it easier to cater for a policy document fronting interdisciplinarity. The process was lengthy, however; a full year went by before it was finished.

The importance of *personalities* partly explains why interdisciplinarity became so important in PCUL, and maybe also why it does not seem to be fronted as much in the current program in the same field. It is customary that the board members are changed completely in the next programme. On the one hand, this is important to balance the academic power they exert in that role and also to renew the field. On the other hand, there is no institutionalized transfer of experiences from one board to the next, which may lead to a loss of knowledge and a discontinuity in academic networks and traditions.

## Distribution

As the programme was announced, some preparatory work was done by the board in order to receive relevant project applications. The universities were visited and meetings were held where the board encouraged large, interdisciplinary projects and new perspectives. According to the chairman, who was actively engaged in this process, these meetings raised much enthusiasm among researchers, resulting in many good applications. Some researchers were disappointed, however, that they did not get funded after their preparations. Interestingly, though, some of them decided to embark on their projects anyway, finding alternative sources. In some cases researchers already supported by PCUL helped raise further resources by expanding their project and getting their home institution to pay for this. In other cases money was raised from PCUL on the condition that the same amount was raised by another source, e.g. a state department or university. In this way the budget doubled from 75 to 150 mill NOK (19,3 mill EUR). The projects funded elsewhere, wholly or in part, still worked through the same networks and with the same focus as the others. In other words, the enthusiasm brought forth money from alternative sources. The project coordinator considered the interdisciplinary foundation a main source of enthusiasm:

This was of course owed to the fact that the researchers found the policy document interesting and that working interdisciplinarily would be interesting, and perhaps it opened up something which previous programmes had lacked (chairman).

This is certainly one important part of the story. One should however not forget the other side of the coin; namely that many of the listed projects were indeed not funded by the programme at all. The long list of projects involved might then give an impression of a bigger programme production than may actually be deserved. According to some researchers it is a widespread practice to list works under several programmes. This is not strange, considering the fact that some programmes overlap and that funding may be received from several sources, but to an investigation like this, it is still somewhat misleading.

The umbrella projects were connected by a shared name and project coordinator. The size ranged from just a couple of researchers to thirty-something. The connectedness also differed. Some collaborated more closely than others. But, as we shall see, the board interfered if the projects seemed too loosely connected. The fact that some of the projects were funded through other sources did not make a difference in this respect. According to the chairman, their activity stretched out to the umbrella as a whole no matter what the individual projects' formal/economic obligations to the Research Council.

In the evaluations of the applications, inter- or multi-disciplinary networks were sometimes mentioned as an argument for funding a project. For instance, one of the board members argued for funding a project as follows:

The project participants hope to challenge the way of thinking about separate sectors of society [the art sector versus the market]. The way I see it, the main questions are not only interesting and well written, but also approached by perspectives from the humanist- and social sciences [...]. This is a project that may lead to new ways of thinking within the disciplines involved and not least new ways of thinking interdisciplinarity (archived material, our translation).

Another board member commented on another project in a similar manner: “Interesting research questions that will be illuminated by several disciplines and perspectives” (archived material, our translation). And a final example: “The project has many positive aspects. It is interdisciplinary and involves several research milieus [specified]” (archived material, our translation). Evidently, the meanings of interdisciplinarity expressed in the policy document were maintained in the evaluation procedure, both in the sense of creative perspectives and research networks. Interdisciplinarity seemed an actively used criterion when accepting or rejecting applications.

Without claiming a thorough analysis of the archived minutes of the board meetings and correspondences, our impression after browsing through these was that the board regarded the issue of interdisciplinarity as central and acted accordingly. This once more indicates that interdisciplinarity did not seem to be a threatening concept implemented from “above” - from e.g. political funding bodies. Probably because interdisciplinarity was most often used in the “cognitive” sense (see pp. 16-17). However, one issue that caught our attention through the interviews with the researchers who had been active in the process of creating umbrellas was the fact that only a few of the projects under the umbrella were in fact funded in the end. This means that the wholeness of the programme suffered and that it became less inter- and multi-disciplinary than it had been intended to be. Also the chairman had to admit that some researchers were disappointed, following on from the enthusiasm that had been raised initially.

A prerequisite for interdisciplinary research is, necessarily, that different disciplines are represented in the programme. The distribution of funded researchers across disciplines was as follows:

#### Distribution<sup>6</sup>

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Number of researchers</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Philosophy	12	8
History	14	9,3
Literature	11	7,3
Languages and linguistics	19	12,7
Theology and religious studies	15	10
Music science	7	4,6
Art history	5	3,3
Theatre studies	1	0,7
Ethnology and folklore	2	1,3
Media and communication studies	32	21,4
Archaeology and classic studies	3	2
Sociology	9	6
Social anthropology	13	8,7
Political- and organisational science	3	2
Education	2	1,3
Sports science	1	0,7

<sup>6</sup> The distribution was gender balanced (51 % women and 48 % men).

Divided by faculty, this means the share of researchers from the humanities was 57,2 and from the social sciences 18 (Education included). Media and communication is a new<sup>7</sup> field which cuts across the border between the two faculties, and was the research field represented with the most researchers. However, as was also admitted in the evaluation (PCUL mid ev: 20), this does not mean that the research as such was interdisciplinary, since researchers belonging to this field may very well stick to their own disciplinary educational background, affiliation and identity in their work. Hence, it is not necessarily right to conclude that the funding given this field will further interdisciplinarity. It is clear, though, that the traditional disciplines did not benefit from their status and vice versa that interdisciplinary research fields were not discriminated against - rather the opposite.

However, this must be seen in light of who actually applied. We have not seen the complete list of applicants, but according to the chairman the enthusiasm he noted among the researchers did not extend to all disciplines:

The pertinent question is: *who joined and who did not?* It was my impression and the board's impression that the large, supposedly heavy, milieu; the large field of languages and the large field of cultural analysis was poorly represented among the applicants. It was the newly established milieu, not least at the university colleges, and younger people, especially women, who showed the greatest ability to think in these challenging ways [...]. The ones who were open to this were those who were not caught in heavy structures. Those who did not belong to any of the more conventional boxes were the ones able to renew the field (chairman).

Is it possible that formally structured mono-disciplinary work environments actually decrease academic curiosity and motivation of change? Or does academic rigidity have organizational and economic roots? The questions are naturally more complex than this, and the answers different from one milieu to another. Let us pose the questions anyway, and come back to them in our concluding remarks.

Larger, seemingly tightly knit projects with a multiplicity of disciplines were clearly given priority: only one project was a social science project all through. A few projects had participants solely from the humanities. However - as the chairman also reflected upon in the interview - interdisciplinary thinking may very well happen within one faculty. The borders between disciplines are constantly subject of maintenance or readjustment (Hark 2005) and the locations and administration of the different disciplines under different faculties are historically, geographically and locally specific.

Seven individual projects, often in the form of PhD-scholarships, were funded without being part of a larger project. But these most often became part of larger networks later in the process. Some may have been more autonomous than others, and the question arises: can individual projects claim to be interdisciplinary? If the term refers to an intermingling of research methods, one should think that one person might manage this task as well as several. Indeed, a larger project with researchers from different disciplines may rather result in multi-disciplinarity, an issue we also raised in the interviews.

---

<sup>7</sup> Media and communication was institutionalized in 1987 at the University of Oslo. It is administered by both the humanist and the social sciences faculty.

### **The active approach of the board**

The minutes from the board meetings often referred to discussions on measures that would further interdisciplinary research in practise. One measure discussed was collaboration between different research programmes. This measure was deemed too extensive, however, and ruled out. But the policy of supporting network projects *within* the programme was maintained repeatedly (archived material).

The interviews here offer deeper insight into the work of the board. The members were not equally engaged in the daily business. The leader sometimes made use of the so-called “hasty decision mandate”, to be accepted or at least noted by the board at the next meeting. The main characters in the day-to-day activity were the chairman and the research leader at the Centre in Bergen. The two had meetings every two weeks, whereas the rest of the board met about five times a year. The former’s activity aimed at implementing the policy document and realizing the goals stated in each project application. Both of these aims had consequences for the realization of interdisciplinary research. As the chairman said:

The project coordinators had a new and – for some - costly experience. What are the consequences of applying for an interdisciplinary project? The consequence is that you must explain what the interdisciplinarity consists of and not just present a compilation of different things (chairman).

In other words, the board encouraged *inter-* rather than *multi-*disciplinarity. And the active approach made it difficult to take part in a merely discursive manner.

In the midway evaluation three models of interdisciplinarity evident in the programme were presented (PCUL mid ev: 22):

- 1) Seminars and conferences
- 2) Collaboration during the research process – shared perspectives
- 3) Synthesis - a completing report putting the various perspectives produced in the project together (written by the project coordinator)

These models corresponded to the meanings presented in the policy document, and so it seems that the various meanings of interdisciplinarity stated there were carried out through relevant means. The aim of the dissemination too was actively sought by making a book series based on the programme.

Keeping in mind that this is a self-evaluation, the seminars and the networks are of course recorded. Based on the papers presented, most conferences resulted in anthologies, 40 in all, published in the mentioned series. Whether the measures were experienced as rewarding and/or enhancing interdisciplinarity in a fruitful way is a question we will return to in the analysis of the interviews with the researchers.

There were also more irregular means adapted to the varying needs of the projects. Some project coordinators were new in this role, and needed guidance. In those cases the chairman and the Centre leader helped to make the project run more smoothly. Some projects had difficulties in finding the shared perspective stated in their application. In those cases the project coordinators and researchers were invited, if not to say “called on the carpet”, to the Centre (meaning required to attend) in order to get on the right track. There were also more personal conversations in cases where researchers made slow progress, either due to a heavy work-load, health issues or private matters. In those cases there were conversations with the employer to make

adjustments in the work situation to improve progress, or other sorts of support were offered.

We cannot tell whether this was felt as intrusive or helpful by the researchers involved. It probably varied. On the one hand, it may have been experienced as difficult in cases where progress was slower than planned or if the interdisciplinarity became less evident than hoped for. On the other hand, it may have been experienced as helpful and/or necessary to reach the academic goals of the programme.

### Conferences and seminars<sup>8</sup>

All in all, there were 47 seminars / conferences funded in whole or in part by PCUL. About seven of these were organized by members of the programme board. The rest were organized by one or more projects or networks. The numbers plummeted from start to finish, starting with eleven conferences in 1998 and evenly dropping to four conferences in the last year of the programme in 2002 and three in 2003, the year after its completion. This pattern is owing to the fact that most of the projects had opening conferences during the first year whereas those nearing completion were more evenly spread out during the period. It may also indicate that there were indeed great efforts made to create networks *at the outset*, in order to stimulate collaboration during the research process and not only end up with multi-disciplinary dissemination. The programme started with a grand opening conference. The topics of discussion centred on the constructivist theoretical perspective which was the foundation of PCUL. National and international researchers and culture institutions were invited. Furthermore, the funded projects were presented by the chairman of the board.

The second seminar open to the whole programme is of special interest. The topic was different disciplinary understandings of the term “culture”. We quote the invite:

What consequences does the discipline’s concept of culture have for the different disciplines’ research topics, methodology and theory? Is it possible to identify discipline-specific concepts which constitute and demarcate disciplines? Is it, for example, the sources, the tools of analysis or the thematics that distinguish the works of a sociologist studying religion from that of a professor of religion? Are there instances of disciplinary encounters, such as perspectives borrowed from other disciplines? [...] What are the hegemonic positions, disciplinary tensions and relations to other disciplines? (from PCUL’s invite to Voksenåsen Oct 12-13, 1998, our translation).

Apparently, interdisciplinarity was not only intended to be performed; it was also made an analytical issue.

The *conferences* were generally larger than the *seminars* and the former were always open. The latter often gathered one or two specific projects or networks. Whether the seminars were open or not was up to the projects/networks to decide. The main bulk of the seminars were relatively small and some were combined workshops and research courses for PhD scholars. Some seminars even functioned as lectures for master students.

The main point of the seminars was to establish collaborating networks. The Centre in Bergen was also meant to be an arena for networking. Some seminars were located there, but the projects were spread out geographically, and most were located

---

<sup>8</sup> Source: Web site listing conferences/seminars.

elsewhere. The Centre did however serve as a meeting point between the project coordinators and the programme staff.

There were four international conferences, one in Bergen, one in St. Petersburg, one in Rome and one in Athens. The conference in Bergen initiated an international network of researchers studying cultural politics, and the conference has become a regular event, rotating between different countries (after Norway, New Zealand and Canada were hosts).

### Syntheses

The programme board decided to organize the publishing of the research texts themselves. They signed a contract with a publishing house, and the book series got a recognizable design with PCULs logo on the front. Most of the books were anthologies based on papers delivered at the conferences. These were edited by either members of the program board or by the researchers involved, depending on who initiated the conference. Some books were authored by one or two researchers, based on their work. In all 40 books were published.

The board's decision was based on previous experiences with lengthy publishing processes with uncertain outcomes. They wanted to make sure the project work would actually be published in a form available to people outside the research community (the aim of the cultural dialogue). The anthologies were multi-disciplinary in the sense that different disciplines were represented. However, the last book in the series, which was simply called *Cultural Research* (Hodne and Sæbøe 2003), had the specific goal of being *inter-disciplinary*. It was to contain syntheses of the different perspectives developed in the many umbrellas.

All the project coordinators were requested to write a synthesis of all the projects covered by their umbrella. The product was a compilation of 22 texts, ranging from five to twenty five pages, summing up the projects and divided in four parts, reflecting the four priority topics mentioned in the policy document. The task of finding a shared perspective was a difficult one, according to the chairman. Few researchers were used to such synthesizing work, and some were given assistance along the way. Some expressed doubts about the possibility of succeeding, and in hindsight some researchers we interviewed were still doubtful about the fruitfulness of this endeavour, as we shall see. Nevertheless, the book appeared, and manifests the effort of producing interdisciplinary research, in a strong sense of the word.

The series might have had fortunate effects on interdisciplinarity in another way as well. The major research journals have affiliation to the conventional disciplines, and might therefore be sceptical when it comes to publishing interdisciplinary work because it might seem to fall outside their scope or field of interest. The board did not consider this problem when establishing the book series, but reflecting on it during the interview, the chairman concluded that the series may well have been crucial:

You may meet internal opposition because you work differently. The book series might have worked as a safety valve guaranteeing publication (chairman).

He had recently experienced that a colleague of his had had his article on religious history returned with the message to make it more suitable for a *history* journal. Such conventional ways of thinking pose a problem to interdisciplinarity and special measures must be taken to amend them.

### The Cultural Dialogue<sup>9</sup>

Special note should be taken of the “cultural dialogue”. This concept was not an empty phrase, but materialized in the form of several meetings between academia and other cultural institutions. A separate dissemination committee, which was in charge of this, was established in 2000, i.e. halfway through the programme. These meetings were part of PCUL’s goal of reaching out and making an impact on society at large, quite the opposite of having a dialogue within one’s own discipline and adjusting one’s work solely for peer reviews. The dialogue with policy makers and the general population was especially focused, but it also extended to industry and the art sector.

As already mentioned, interdisciplinarity was regarded as a prerequisite for cultural dialogue. At the same time it was an integral part of it; the projects undertaken were in large part inter-institutional; the end product could not be reduced to the research findings as such, and thus the collaboration created something new. As the post-positivist paradigm tells us, cultural research cannot separate itself from its object; it is dialectic in its very nature. The concept of cultural dialogue was a way of taking this truism seriously, in a more practical - and not merely cognitive – way, by giving something back to the object and giving heed to the response. This was also considered necessary for the legitimacy of cultural research. One member of the dissemination committee also saw this as its major motivation: “One could say that cultural research is a specially refined and institutionalized part of a cultural debate in society. So if one doesn’t partake, it’s quite meaningless”.

In the case of the cultural dialogue interdisciplinarity was defined in two ways: first, as the collaboration between researchers from different disciplines in the research phase, and second in the collaboration between the researchers and the various institutions outside of academia. However, the term also seems to have covered popular dissemination through mass media better suited for one-way communication.

Let us turn to some examples. A dialogue with the policy makers was made through participation in the writing of the so-called Ministry’s Cultural Report (Kulturmeldingen). This is a report, presented by the Ministry at uneven intervals,<sup>10</sup> of the status quo in Norwegian cultural life, along with proposals for political priorities. The collaboration was an arrangement made with the Ministry’s Department of Cultural Affairs, in which several researchers of culture applied their academic perspectives to the concept of culture as well as knowledge of particular fields relevant to Norwegian cultural policy. According to the chairman of PCUL the report did not gain much in concrete politics, but got through on the discursive level; for the first time in political documents culture was described as a *process* and not as a fixed entity. Researchers had in fact been involved in the writing of these reports previously, but this time the researchers in large part led the process themselves and they were given room for more generic perspectives on society at large. For instance, concepts like globalization, individualism and post-modernity were introduced – in addition to the view of culture as process. This meant that the language of academia spread both to political bodies and thus to a larger crowd. However, some of the researchers who were among the most involved in the report admitted, in interviews with us, that the report to a great extent expressed middle-class values that might not find resonance among all social groups. Another researcher was disappointed about

---

<sup>9</sup> This section is in large part based on interviews by the Masters student Christine Viland. She also produced for us the information on the Ministry’s Cultural Report.

<sup>10</sup> The Report prior to this one was written ten years earlier.

the lack of concrete political proposals – perhaps the researchers’ pencils were not sufficiently sharpened for down-to-earth politics? This need not be seen as a problem, however. If a discursive break-through influenced and developed the public debate, this is a major achievement in itself. And besides, if the researchers’ voices had been indistinguishable from the dominant political discourse - why then use somebody new to do the job?

The specific work of writing the report was based on three seminars in which 30 research contributions on understandings of art and culture as well as cultural development internationally and nationally were presented. These were in turn published as three books. The contributions were then adapted and rewritten into a unified document on the status quo of Norwegian cultural life and became the first part of the Report (the second part was left to the Ministry).

Another example of the cultural dialogue was a linguistic project on teenagers’ use of slang expressions, which was in turn developed into an electronic educational programme for pupils in secondary school. Some of the results were put into tables, and the pupils could make use of these in order to replicate parts of the survey in their own class room. Questions were based on the frequency of the slang expressions as well as their semantic and geographical roots. The programme is still available on the internet at [www.slang.no](http://www.slang.no).

Further examples of the cultural dialogue were:

- A project in which researchers participated in the evaluations of décor for a few decoration projects, in collaboration with the Foundation of Decoration of Public Buildings (Utsmykningsfondet for offentlige bygg).
- The history exhibition “Sapmi – a nation comes into being”, at Tromsø Museum, covering the history of Sami identity and history.
- A research conference on fashion, which was joined with a fashion show of a Norwegian clothes designer.
- Journalist scholarships; four journalists were given two months’ payment to get indepth knowledge of cultural research in general and of specific projects in order to write informed articles.

Apparently, the dialogue was practiced in several and very different ways. The common trait was the contact between academia and other social institutions and the opening up of the academic community and its work on cultural understandings. As discussed earlier, parts of the activity were affiliated to what we often categorize as “applied science”. The initiative was on the side of the researchers, however, and the projects and research questions were not linked to this activity, which seems an important difference. Neither was the activity necessarily linked to specific projects. Slang.no exemplifies a project which was intimately connected to its use - but which was nonetheless not initiated for that purpose - whereas e.g. the decoration project was based on general knowledge and interest and not the outcome of a specific study. The fashion show and the research conference were two independent entities; the one commenting on the other. The Ministry’s cultural report was based on both abstract concepts of culture as well as specific empirical studies.

### **Interdisciplinary at project level: The umbrella structure**

Clearly, some of the board members did their utmost to enhance interdisciplinary research within the programme. So let us now turn to the project level. How was the

aim of interdisciplinarity understood from the researchers' point of view? And how did they *do* interdisciplinarity on a day-to-day basis?

We interviewed a coordinator of a large umbrella project. She summed up their collaboration like this:

The seminars and conferences *were* the umbrella. The project *could have been* about making new concepts. If it had been a grand project which created new concepts that were spread out, you know (laughs). But I wouldn't say we were quite *there*. Still, I think the seminars were important for our work.

As we shall see below, these meetings really were to mould some of the researchers academically, according to their own accounts. This particular project had several large, open conferences, some in combination with art and design institutions outside academia. And the seminars and conferences were the most important means of contact and what kept the umbrella together, as evident from the quotation above. In the same passage, however, the ambitious hope of creating new knowledge based on this interdisciplinary work was more or less joked away, because this ideal did not go well together with the loose organization of the umbrella itself.

The programme had encouraged applications that involved several institutions across the country and between several disciplines, as we have seen. The researchers who had put this into practice, however, found that the amount of projects involved had to be reduced because only a few were funded. The projects were evaluated separately, and thus some were accepted and others rejected. Consequently, the numbers of disciplines and institutions involved were reduced along with the number of projects. This in fact made some umbrellas less interdisciplinary than they would otherwise have been. In this sense one might ask if the programme did not promise more than it could offer and thus encouraged work that would in hindsight seem wasted, from the researchers' points of view. As we have seen, some projects which were not funded joined anyway, by other means, but whether this should be seen as a product of the programme is disputable. The programme may have served as an inspiration in these cases, but inspiration is not enough to sustain a research project! One of the researchers who was not funded bluntly expressed it like this:

You make a big effort in coordinating a whole; you find a logical place for the particular parts. And then the board picks it to pieces, not caring about the wholeness and the operation of it [...]. And that was quite a common strategy used by the Research Council at the time; you could apply with an umbrella wonderfully put together, and then they [the board] would fund only certain parts of it, but they would still expect it to be maintained. It seemed like they assumed that the applicants all held permanent positions at the university, so that they would spend their research time on the project and not need money. But that was misunderstood [...]. Applicants are not always employed, sometimes money is needed.

The umbrellas, still interdisciplinary and inter-institutional, faced the challenge of long-distance collaboration. Geography had to have consequences for the nature of the collaboration; one cannot work as a closely knit research community at a remove. The organization did not offer such a possibility for all, and our informant said that this was easy to foresee, and because of this, the plan from the start had been to work

in a multi-disciplinary and not interdisciplinary way in the strict sense, although some of the researchers in the umbrella did research on topics outside the conventional scope of their discipline. The request for a synthesis at the end thus seemed strange to her, and she felt that the communication between the board and the projects had been poor in this respect. “To be able to do that fruitfully, you must be five people studying together and doing things that are directly comparable”. She had good previous experiences with interdisciplinary work in smaller groups. But synthesizing a large umbrella of different studies would end up in too broad questions and conclusions of unsatisfactory academic quality, in her opinion.

The larger cross-institutional umbrella might not be the best solution for close collaboration, then. But it might still be a good way of working multi-disciplinarily. As a multi-disciplinary project, the project coordinator regarded the umbrella as a whole as fruitful, in the sense that it brought forth different perspectives around the same core in a way that would probably not have happened otherwise, and in the sense that many of the individual projects had delivered good research in their own right. Besides, as it turned out, smaller networks collaborating more closely also developed within the umbrella, as we shall see in the next section.

### **Interdisciplinary at project level: Two individual projects within the umbrella**

In this section we will draw on two interviews; one with a social scientist and one with a humanist. Both were parts of this umbrella; one received a PhD scholarship by PCUL and the other was a senior researcher who did not have her project funded by the programme, but who joined anyway.<sup>11</sup> The latter’s motivation was the seminars and the interesting mix of people and projects involved. She liked to have one foot in the humanities and one in the social sciences, she said, and the umbrella network gave her an opportunity to be inspired by various disciplines from both sides. Her regular work environment was interdisciplinary, but dominated by the social sciences. This researcher was funded by another programme and thus she came under the board of that programme and not PCUL. This researcher mentioned many of the same points as the coordinator. Most importantly she was located far from the coordinator, and thus the conferences and seminars served as the main link between her and many of the other participants. There was no day-to-day collaboration. This did not seem to be a loss to her, however. She said she preferred to work individually and within her own discipline. But she aimed to *expand* her own discipline; to use methods and perspectives not part of that discipline’s current syllabus, or to study topics often claimed to be outside of the scope of her own discipline. She recalled some hindrances along the way:

In the beginning of my career I met resistance when I wanted to do research on Norway. In those days anthropologists were supposed to study countries and peoples of the third world.

Just before the programme period, however, she had gained a position as a senior researcher, and because of her new position those critical voices seemed less prominent, although she was still eager to break new ground. However, she did not believe that interdisciplinarity in the strict sense was needed in order to do this: “I’m not that keen on the concept of interdisciplinarity”, she said,

---

<sup>11</sup> These interviews were conducted by Masters student Dagny Melvik.

I have more belief in what I will call trans-disciplinarity<sup>[12]</sup>; that is to move the borders of your own discipline – if and when your data material calls for it [...]. So I prefer to work multi- and trans-disciplinarily.

Suggestions and resistances received from multi-disciplinary seminars might inspire such movement at the borders,, and thus enrich the analysis. But this interviewee did not express the desire for closer collaboration resulting in a co-authored and strictly interdisciplinary product. In PCUL she turned to textual analysis and used methods more commonly used in literary studies. This is an example of how she opened up to methods appropriate to the material she wanted to analyze. She expressed the view that other social anthropologists might not be best suited to give her feedback in the process. And this is where the multi-disciplinary networks became important.

Although the research institute at which she worked was dominated by the social sciences, she still thought the multi-disciplinary milieu was central to her work. “If I was to become a professor of anthropology at a university I think – or at least I thought so ten years ago – that the jacket would be too tight. It would be like wearing a jacket I had grown out of last year”, she said.

The humanist PhD-student was located in the same town as the coordinator. He did not work at the interdisciplinary centre which the umbrella was initiated from, but he kept in touch with the local branch of the umbrella on a regular basis, a collaboration which he expressed great enthusiasm for. He had also been part of the network that preceded the one active during PCUL and he reminisced like this:

I got into a fantastic milieu. We were 30-40 people from different disciplines; music, geography, education, rhetoric, art history, public administration and other social sciences. The coordinator had a unique ability to create milieus where nobody would dominate with his own disciplinary language.

So what did they do that created such a good atmosphere?

We had seminars and talked ourselves into new fields; we made “anticipation horizons” and experienced new ways of speaking, new ways of seeing society through different disciplines, from music to geography. We had some fantastic lectures [...] and we developed ideas for what we wanted to study, we commented on each other’s work and presented our own [...]. It was organized by the centre which the coordinator was chairman for. It was the most fun I have ever had in my professional life.

The activities seem quite normal; presenting, commenting, and attending lectures. It seems to be the people gathered and the mixture of perspectives which made this collaboration special. What we also ought to note here is the informant’s emphasis on the coordinator’s role. Some resourceful individuals seem especially able to initiate fruitful combinations of people and to create a good atmosphere. And, further, this collective enthusiasm and also the sociability among the participants should not be underestimated.

We can also note that he talked of the interplay of different perspectives. As it happened, this informant worked both inter- and multi-disciplinarily; he wrote an

---

<sup>12</sup> Note that her use of the term “trans-disciplinarity” differs from our definition on p. 16.

interdisciplinary thesis individually and he was involved in this multi-disciplinary network (both preceding and during PCUL). He elaborated what was to be gained by borrowing perspectives from both the humanities and the social sciences:

The social sciences have some tremendously good research questions, but they are tremendously bad readers of texts, and they are not very good at analysis. The humanities, on the other hand, have many good analytic tools from the linguistic turn, but very introverted research questions. So I have found it very fruitful to combine questions from the social sciences with humanist method.

We may ask if this is not more or less the same as the social scientist did, but described in different terms, or with a different view of the scope of one's own discipline. Either way, the quotation still sheds light on the personally felt academic satisfaction derived from working interdisciplinarily and what it may entail.

However, this PhD-student also met problems due to his non-disciplinary affiliation. He had had to move from one office to another several times during his research period, and for some time he lacked available PCs and the like. Why? Because no department was officially administratively responsible. Temporarily employed staff – often researchers in the first phase of their career – are thus particularly vulnerable when engaging in interdisciplinary research. This forms a paradox since young people may be more open to interdisciplinarity, having few dogmas to defend in their own discipline to date. The over-representation of young applicants to PCUL at least indicates their bigger interest, no matter what the underlying reasons may be. The same point became evident in the interviews with researchers funded by *Gender in Transition* (see pp. 42, 47-48).

If we are to generalize any of this, we might say that some researchers seem more willing than others to expand the scope of their research fields, and that those open to this may gain from multi-disciplinary networks. Our impression is that some project coordinators in PCUL did a tremendous job in gathering together researchers that were open to perspectives from other disciplines. The result may not have been interdisciplinary in the way that the programme board had hoped, because the researchers involved did not have such a close collaboration in mind – at least not for the umbrella as a whole. Still, the participants we interviewed said that the multi-disciplinary networks had had very positive consequences, both professionally and socially. But such effects are of course hard to measure. And unfortunately – for the researchers who had enjoyed the network - recent university reforms seem to have endangered such multi-disciplinary initiatives.

### **University structures hinder interdisciplinarity**

One of our informants was one of these resourceful coordinators we have written about. In her account of her coordinating role during PCUL, she emphasized the importance of working at an interdisciplinary research centre. She herself had led such a centre and thus initiated and coordinated larger networks prior to PCUL. Her experience and pre-existing networks were important, and it is doubtful whether the umbrella during PCUL would have been created had it not been for her position at the centre. She was used to crossing disciplines; she was used to organizing large projects. These were indeed among the daily tasks of running the centre. The PCUL project was an extension of a project already completed. There was an overlap of researchers involved, and thus earlier acquaintance was important: “being so loosely

organized in the umbrella it wouldn't have worked otherwise", the coordinator reflected. In her opinion multi- and interdisciplinary work in general relies on permanent arenas and economic support. Research centres *are* such arenas. Building and maintaining networks, applying for money, arranging conferences and cooperating across disciplines are part of the daily business and the work description at such centres. These are time-consuming tasks, and therefore such efforts must be rewarded by structural and economic backing if they are to continue. Her experience was that such backing was non-existent: "The centre existed *in spite of* - not *because of* - the university structures", she said. In other words, personal initiative stands out as extremely important.

Although interdisciplinarity is a goal for the Research Council, these structures have in fact become even more hostile to research centres since the recent university reforms. At some universities, the affiliated research centres now have to earn their own living; salaries, overheads and other expenses must be externally funded (i.e. funded by sources other than the university). The centres are thus left with less money combined with the large and tedious work load of writing applications.

Furthermore, research centres have traditionally not had educational rights. So far some employees may have regarded this as a privilege. However, the university reforms entailed that a substantial part of the money was to be distributed according to the student points earned at the respective departments. This made education a major source of income, and the centres' lack of educational rights became another economic issue.

Keeping up a centre has thus become very difficult, and our informant has by now returned – after 15 years in interdisciplinary research milieus – to her mother discipline. After an application for another large-scale interdisciplinary research project did not go through, the centre was closed down, and its former chairman did not express enthusiasm about having another go at a new, large project in the near future.

Her account directed our attention to the following paradox: large projects like the one she coordinated are what the EU and the Research Council want, and were of course the aim of PCUL. In practice such projects depend on a context, as well as human and economic resources. Centres offer such contexts, and serve to develop personal competence, while research programmes such as PCUL may offer the money. However, recent reforms of the university structure have made it more difficult for such centres to start up and prevail. In this way the official goals in fact conflict with official strategies.

## **Interdisciplinarity: How was it evaluated?**

### **At the programme level**

The programme board authored two evaluations of the programme; one midway (PCUL mid ev) and one at completion (Hødne and Sæbøe 2003). Since the programme was not externally evaluated, this section will present how the involved researchers and board members presented the results in the written material and in our interview material (the methodological limitations which self-evaluations entail are discussed on p. 7). The final evaluation was part of the synthesising book mentioned earlier. That the book was written to appeal to a larger circle of readers, for instance the theoretical assumptions shared by most projects in the programme fill several pages, and are presented in a popular fashion – in the spirit of the cultural dialogue.

The two self-evaluations gave an overall positive view of the programme. Here we will focus on the evaluation of interdisciplinarity.

In the midway evaluation interdisciplinarity was discussed in a separate section. Here the distribution between disciplines was deemed satisfactory and so were the umbrella pattern and the number of seminars held at programme and project level. Then the board posed the question: “Do the interdisciplinary groups research interdisciplinarily?” and concluded: “[...] The answer seems to be an unambiguous *yes*” (PCUL mid ev: 22, our translation). The evidence for this was the seminars held, the shared perspectives in some projects and plans for synthesizing work. More generally it was mentioned that the field of cultural studies had “tendencies towards a shared curriculum”, both theoretically and methodologically (PCUL mid ev: 22). Especially it was noted that this curriculum bridged the humanist and the social science faculties. For example social scientists made use of textual analysis, and network analysis was used among humanists. Halfway through, the idea of expanding the number of written syntheses of the projects also seemed theoretically promising.

In the final evaluation there is a section called “the blessings and problems of interdisciplinarity” (Hodne and Sæbøe 2003: 317-319). The alleged blessings were a deeper understanding of cultural context in the aesthetic disciplines, and more focus on the content of the cultural expressions in the social sciences. Among the problems particular mention was made of the fact that the conventional barriers might be replaced by other barriers even less fortunate, like a division between *topics* instead of disciplines. The potential problem with such a division would be the proximity between, and sometimes intermixing of, the researchers and the actors in the cultural field itself. “This may produce results that may seem useful then and there, but it may lack the critical distance that the traditional disciplines offer”, as one of the researchers cited in the book expressed it (Hodne and Sæbøe 2003: 318, our translation).

The final evaluation does not evaluate the syntheses thoroughly, as many of these were in fact published in the very same book. We must therefore turn to our interview material. In hindsight the programme chairman diplomatically stated that writing the syntheses was the strategy that, in his opinion, had “the highest potential for improvement”. The simple reason was that it had been a pioneer project; to many of the participants it had been a totally new way of working and writing and it proved a challenging task. But as he also stressed: “The fact that something is difficult does not mean one should not do it again. It rather means one needs more practice”. On the whole he was happy with the achievements of the programme interdisciplinarity-wise. And the efforts had not discouraged him. On the contrary he claimed to have become even more enthusiastic about interdisciplinarity in the later years.

### **At project level**

The researchers’ evaluations were available to us only through our interview data, which consisted of very few interviews in light of the scale of this programme, and are consequently not representative. Nevertheless, what struck us as important was first and foremost the joy some researchers expressed when they talked about the periods when they had been collaborating closely in interdisciplinary networks (before, after and during PCUL). It seemed to us that the sociability – and sometimes friendships – that developed between the researchers in their opinion also benefited their research. It is however unclear whether this affected the network as such or the interdisciplinary aspect of it. Our impression is that the sociability was of main

importance, but that the interdisciplinarity created new ways of collaborating, which were also professionally refreshing and stimulating.

However, as already mentioned tightly collaborating groups did not comprise the whole umbrella, when these were large and spread all around the country. This was considered impossible, or at least too expensive (due to travelling costs). Furthermore, the task of writing a synthesis was deemed unrealistic by several researchers. A conclusion may be that many of the researchers conveyed a pragmatic view of interdisciplinary collaboration; the anticipation must be adapted to the organisation and resources available, in order to gain the best result – be that mono-, multi- or inter-disciplinary. The researchers' main complaints, however, were not directed towards the programme, but to university structures hindering personal initiatives to promote interdisciplinary work.

## Summary

- PCUL (1998-2002) was a research programme initiated by the Norwegian Research Council amounting to 8,9 mill EUR, which was open to the humanities and the social sciences, but with a stated predominance of the former.
- The policy document emphasised interdisciplinarity to a great extent. There seems to have been great enthusiasm for this on the board. Archived material on their meetings suggests that interdisciplinarity was one criterion referred to when evaluating the project applications.
- Interdisciplinarity, as it occurred in the policy document, was most often defined as a fusion of perspectives from different disciplines. Such new perspectives were needed to make sense of a more complex (Norwegian) society, it was argued. Dissemination and feedback were also parts of this point; one goal was to create a “cultural dialogue”, which would both rely on and be an integral part of the process of researching interdisciplinarity. A separate dissemination committee was formed to help this process.
- The board members were unconventionally active throughout the programme period in order to make sure that the researchers who had applied funding for an interdisciplinarity project really collaborated across disciplines in practice. Their activities ranged from organizing seminars, meeting with the researchers who proved to have difficulties, and establishing a book series to secure effective dissemination. This series might have worked as a safety valve for unconventional publications not suited to monodisciplinary journals.
- The interdisciplinary projects were often organized under umbrellas: a project coordinator on top and several small projects related to the same topic, connected to different institutions across the country. The members of the umbrella were gathered in conferences and seminars/workshops.

- Some umbrella projects, like the one we investigated, were national and accordingly geographically spread out. This might have hindered a closer collaboration and interdisciplinary approaches from developing further.
- Some researchers who joined experienced a synergetic effect of enthusiasm, out of which creative ideas had grown. The social aspect of the networks should not be underestimated. The effect in the end product is of a kind which is hard to measure, however. In these settings, the researchers we interviewed were most interested in multi-disciplinarity, i.e. letting oneself be influenced by other disciplines without leaving one's own. Fusions as such did not seem to be an ideal.
- Successful umbrellas seem to have been made by key persons with long experience with interdisciplinary collaboration from research centres. Such centres catered for large networks which can be developed further. It is also a physical arena for meetings. However, university centres now face an uncertain future due to new demands for external funding.
- The most ambitious experiment of the board was to initiate a book which aimed at synthesizing the work of the umbrellas into one piece. Some researchers were opposed to this effort, because their focus had been too broad to unite fruitfully. The geographical context and the consequent looseness of the umbrella did not cater for close collaboration. Still the umbrella seems to have created original work, e.g. some topics were studied within disciplines in which these had not been conventional objects of research.
- Young, and predominantly female, researchers were the most eager applicants for this interdisciplinary programme. Paradoxically, they might also be the most vulnerable: one former PhD scholar we interviewed had lacked essential office facilities because no single department had been responsible for his employment.



## **Gender in Transition: Institutions, Norms, Identities (1997-2002)**

*Gender in Transition: Institutions, Norms, Identities* (GiT) was the follow-up of two parallel programmes for gender research: *Basic Women's Research for the Humanities* and *- for the Social Sciences* (1989-1996). This makes GiT the first gender research programme bridging the two domains and interdisciplinarity was also given priority in the stated goals of the programme. GiT was later to be succeeded by the current programme, *Gender Research: Knowledge, Change, Boundaries* (2002-2007), in which the interdisciplinary organization is maintained. The total funding of GiT during the five years was 27,6 mill NOK (3,3 mill EUR).

The programme aspired to meet two main challenges, both springing from the historic strengths and weaknesses of Norwegian gender research. The first goal was combining theoretical problems with empirical research. This meant building on the strong tradition of "problem-oriented empiricism" in Norwegian gender research, which had been strong since its start in the 1970s, and continuing the theoretical turn encouraged by the first research programme in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The second goal was "continuing the comprehensive inter- and multidisciplinary cooperation that has characterized gender research" (GiT pol doc: 8). We will of course focus on this second goal in detail, but first to the thematic priorities of the programme.

Six fields of priority were stated:

- 1) *New forms of working life*
- 2) *Individual rights and institutional norms*: Moral and political dilemmas engendered by the tensions between individual and collective views in modern society.
- 3) *Gender, religion and cultural conflicts*
- 4) *Cultural coding of the body* - the body as an interface between biology, past experience and culture.
- 5) *Sexuality, gender and identity*
- 6) *Feminism as critique (of the disciplines)*. Basic research emphasized. Theoretical work on the sex-gender system and reflections on gender studies' own normative premises are mentioned in particular.

The priorities were meant to give direction to the applications. Focus was needed because the economic resources were considered small. In addition to social and academic relevance, one important argument for selecting these particular topics was their alleged equal appeal to the humanities and the social sciences (GiT mid ev: 2).

The board seems to have been reflecting on the issue of disciplinization in several ways in the process of writing the policy document. For instance, it is mentioned that the board's decision not to list men's studies on the list of priorities, although it was a research area they wanted to encourage, was based on the undesirability of making an "artificial" schism between women's and men's studies. It was argued that men's studies should rather be integrated in the topics listed – as should women's studies (GiT mid ev: 2).

## **Organisation**

GiT was initiated by the Research Council's Division of Culture and Society, which appointed the Program Board (or Committee), which was the leading body. A research coordinator was appointed to connect the researchers and the board. During the five years of the programme three different persons held this position.

### **Preparatory work**

Prior to the appointment of the programme board, two committees were engaged by the Division of Culture and Society to gather advice and suggestions among researchers in the field on what areas and perspectives should be focused in the programme. The first report handed in was discarded on the grounds that it was not thorough enough on the "state of the art" of Norwegian gender studies (according to the interview data). Therefore a second committee was engaged, and their report was an important foundation for developing and writing the policy document (GiT end ev: 1). This lengthy process may seem to reveal an image of a powerful research council, which is, of course, partly realistic. However, the people who discarded the first report had a lot of knowledge of gender studies and were researchers rather than politicians whereas the first committee was in fact not composed of gender researchers. The decision may thus be argued to be in the interest of researchers in the field and an expression of their strength and role in this area of the Research Council. The programme board had to take the second report into account when formulating the policy document. There was however a considerable overlap between the members of this committee and the programme board, and consequently most of the board members were hardly restrained by other people's advice and interests in this work.

### **The Programme Board**

The Programme Board was appointed by the Research Council to serve from 1 June 1996 until 30 June 2002. The board's term of office was extended for six months after completion of the programme to facilitate post-programme evaluation and the dissemination of the results.

The Programme Committee members (see appendix 3) had different disciplinary affiliations; three were research staff from the humanities and three were from the social sciences. One was from an interdisciplinary work environment at the time (Centre for Technology, Innovation and Culture, TIK), but several had previous experience with interdisciplinarity. In addition there were two members from the "user group", one from the Ministry of Family Affairs and one from the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO), Norway's largest interest organization of employers. According to the chairman, these two were resourceful members with great interest in basic research and did not push the policy document in an "instrumental" direction, politically or otherwise. In fact, in the self-evaluations it was asked if these representatives had not given more to the board than what they were given in return.

The tasks of the board were:

- Formulating the policy document.
- Evaluating applications. The board members were mainly academic researchers with broad knowledge of the field in question. External

consultants were used in a few cases where the applications were considered outside of their field of competence.

- Arranging conferences and seminars. Four conferences and three seminars were held.
- Writing mid- and end-evaluations, both of which are publicly available.
- Evaluating progress plans of the funded projects once a year.

## **Interdisciplinarity: How was it articulated?**

### **Goals and meanings**

*Gender in Transition* professed interdisciplinarity, and paid special attention to inter-faculty research. The policy document states that:

The Programme Committee particularly encourages projects that involve social scientists and humanists alike. Priority may also be given to individual subjects, particularly those in which women's and gender perspectives are not well developed, and in which the challenge may lie in breaking new ground (GiT pol doc: 11).

And further that:

The programme will provide incentives for closer cooperation between humanists and social scientists and attach emphasis to the interdisciplinary nature of the projects (GiT pol doc: 23).

*Gender in Transition* seems to have taken both the existence of and the positive aspects of interdisciplinarity as a matter of course in the programme and it is thus less pronounced than it was in the policy document of PCUL. In fact, interdisciplinarity seems to have been regarded as a distinctive feature of gender studies as such:

The second challenge lies in continuing the comprehensive inter- and multidisciplinary cooperation that has characterized gender research. The field would have been inconceivable without such cooperation (GiT pol doc: 8).

The special status interdisciplinarity has had in gender studies seems to have reduced the need of arguing for the value of interdisciplinary research as such. This was a major difference between GiT and PCUL; remember the meticulously written social diagnosis which was to legitimize interdisciplinary cultural research (see p. 11, 14-15). In gender studies, on the other hand, interdisciplinarity seems to have been naturally legitimate. On the one hand this may mean that interdisciplinary research will meet with less resistance. On the other hand, it may also mean that some of the "romanticism" and ardent enthusiasm often surrounding *the new*, may have gone – for good or ill. In PCUL it became evident that the overall goal of interdisciplinarity was to gain a *shared* perspective. According to the chairman of GiT, their goal was rather to produce *different* perspectives inspired by a multitude of disciplines, with no aim of working out syntheses. "We rather aimed to be *multi-disciplinary*", she proclaimed.

PCUL was an experiment with high ambitions. Interdisciplinarity was something new to the field. PCUL's chairman's comments may be interpreted in the direction that all the syntheses may not have been all that successful, but that it was a

step in the right direction. Gender studies has a lot of such efforts to look back on, and perhaps there is a mentality that the experimenting phase is over? That the research results are what matter – and that whether the methodologies and perspectives are interdisciplinary or not is less important?

No matter the answer to these questions, the discussion of interdisciplinarity in GiT neither questioned the fruitfulness of the phenomenon as such nor its inherent possibilities. Because of this, the underlying meanings are harder to analyze. As always the taken for granted remained unsaid. The following two questions were deemed more relevant themes for open discussion:

- 1) Whether the main bulk of gender research should be conducted within the conventional disciplines or outside.
- 2) If and how gender- women's, men's, gay/lesbian and queer studies should be more closely integrated, how to combine different theoretical traditions in these fields, and how to combine theoretical and empirical research.

The first issue points to internal competition between the disciplines and the centres. At first glance, such a division may seem a chronic headache for a funding body. Looking back at PCUL this issue was less relevant since there was and *is* no well integrated field of cultural studies outside the disciplines. The problems of this inherent division should not be exaggerated, however. On the contrary, gender studies seem to have flourished exactly because it has had several institutions to spring from (Widerberg, forthcoming). The board of GiT continued this practice and thus opted for a “double strategy”; gender studies should be supported *both* as a separate field *and* as a research topic integrated in other disciplines. In other words, they refused to make a choice as to which “side” they wanted to support:

Efforts will be invested in developing and maintaining broad, multidisciplinary scholarly expertise. At the same time, the programme will contribute to the development of knowledge within the individual disciplines (GiT pol doc: 4).

According to the chairman there was a consensus within the board on this matter. The board decided to handle the applications according to academic quality, first and foremost. They did however also consider national, disciplinary, thematic and institutional distribution. In some cases they focused funding in order to support a specific milieu. This was the case with the research centre for gender research in Tromsø, which was in its starting phase at that time (KVINNFORSK). They also gave priority to disciplines in which the gender perspective had been rare or absent. The chairman stressed that quality always came first, however. For this reason, no funding was given research on men and masculinities, even though this was a desired topic, due to the lesser quality of the applications. Instead they supported networks on men and masculinity studies.

The second issue – concerning the integration of different research traditions – was seen more as a resource than a problem. One tension had to do with theory versus empiricism, another had to do with new (post-structuralist) versus traditional (feminist) perspectives. The latter often went along with different views on political action, although of course post-structural perspectives can be argued to contain as much political potential as earlier feminist theory. This fact became utterly clear during the hearings for the policy document, where the policy had met with criticism

from diametrically opposite positions. Some argued that it had no political ambitions whereas others argued that it was too political. “Creating such tensions the policy document must have touched upon some important and interesting points”, the chairman concluded during our interview. Interestingly, the oppositions may be connected to faculty affiliation as well as research fields and different views on political action. As is stated in the policy document:

There is a tendency towards a certain distance and tension between the social sciences and the humanities, not least because the humanities have begun to make more independent theoretical contributions. There are also divergent views among researchers in women’s, men’s and gender studies, particularly as regards politics and the distribution of power. While the original women’s research has been criticised for presenting an oversimplified picture of the relationship between the sexes, thus furthering gender stereotypes, it has been claimed that the current gender research has abandoned interest in power and thus become politically indifferent. Meanwhile, there appears to be agreement that both women and men should be the objects of gender-relevant research, and that gender should be analysed in connection with other forms of sociocultural differentiation.

The Programme Committee views the ongoing discussions as an important resource and an expression of the growing scope covered by the field. The new gender research programme will take this broader scope into account and exploit the constructive opportunities inherent in the tensions between various fields of research and theoretical positions. As a result, the concept of gender research will include traditions from women’s research and feminist research as well as impulses from newer areas such as men’s research and culture-based gender research (GiT pol doc: 7).

Categorizing such a statement as an issue of *disciplinization* might be to stretch this point too far, however. Theoretical disagreement within one and the same discipline might be the rule rather than the exception. Still, it was these questions that appeared as interesting in this context. Interdisciplinarity as such seemed to be uncontroversial. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that it was a widespread *practice*. We will return to this question later.

### **Inter- multi- or transdisciplinarity?**

Throughout the policy document, the term used pointed to cooperation during the research process and hence what we have defined as *inter-* rather than *multi-* disciplinarity. More specifically it pointed to “experimental” methodology and original theory development. Again, however, there was the emphasis on retaining the best from both traditions, the double strategy:

The Programme Committee envisages a programme that develops and reinforces the diversity of methodologies represented by the disciplines involved, affording opportunities for the use of experimental as well as traditional methods (GiT pol doc: 11).

To complicate this further, one might ask whether experimental methodology and original theory entail interdisciplinarity. For example, discourse analysis stems from linguistics, but is now on the curriculum in sociology. Is this an interdisciplinarity

method when used by social scientists or is it merely a new method *within* a discipline? Another issue is that interdisciplinary research can also be performed as an individual enterprise. In GiT one social anthropologist, for instance, combined history and anthropology in his PhD.

The conclusion must be that both interdisciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity were present goals in the programme, but that these goals did not override the goal of good disciplinary research. Contrary to PCUL, interdisciplinarity was not hailed as GiT's most important ambition.

This double strategy may lead one to believe that *trans*-disciplinarity may have been irrelevant – the appreciation of the disciplines appearing as strong as it does. One of the thematic priorities seemed to indicate the opposite, namely “contributions to feminist critique of the disciplines” (GiT pol doc: 9). Not much was said about this topic in the policy document. Looking back, the chairman admitted that this theme might have been product of wishful thinking rather than realism: “One cannot expect a PhD student to write a thesis attacking her own discipline”, she reflected. Did this theme mirror a critical transdisciplinary stance within the programme board that did not have resonance in the research community at large? This does not seem to have been the case. At least the chairman herself was very committed to the double strategy, and furthermore favoured a model in which the interdisciplinary centres were composed of researchers educated in different disciplines. She also pointed to other board members who were enthusiastic about developing gender studies within the disciplines. It was thus hoped that the programme would develop and renew the disciplines rather than abandon them.

### **Cognitive or instrumental interdisciplinarity?**

In PCUL we saw that interdisciplinarity was used both in a cognitive and an instrumental way, but that the instrumentality did not oppose the cognitive. The instrumentality here aimed at understanding a changing society. In GiT there was no such social diagnosis – there was no need to legitimize interdisciplinarity as such. Consequently, interdisciplinarity in the instrumental sense was not evident in the same way. From a comparative angle one might consider that GiT's policy document could have appealed to gender studies' relevance to human rights or gender equality and argue that interdisciplinarity was needed to counter the traditionally male dominated disciplines. However, this seems to have become part of the elementary curriculum and was thus probably taken for granted – or perhaps it is even academically out-of-date as a theme for discussion?

### **Interdisciplinarity: How was it performed?**

#### **Distribution**

120 applications were received. One third was considered fundable and 75 % of those were supported (29 in all) – but several with less money than applied for. The funded projects were quite evenly divided by faculty; nine were humanist projects and 11 were social science projects. Few disciplines within the social sciences were represented, however; only sociology and social anthropology, the former being the dominant discipline in the programme as a whole.

Discipline	PhDs	Milieus, networks, seminars	Research grants	Post doc.	Collaboratory projects	TOTAL

Multidisciplinary projects		6	2		1	9
Sociology	4		2	1	1	8
Social anthropology	2			1		3
Ethnology	1			1		2
Philosophy	1					1
Linguistics	1					1
Literature	1		3			4
Religion		1				1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>29</b>

Nine projects were listed as multi-disciplinary. Note, however, that in six of the nine entities in this category the funding consisted of *network support*, not money for full research projects. Only two projects were listed as collaborative and one of these was listed as multi-disciplinary. Overall, this means that only one research project entailed multi-disciplinary collaboration as defined in the self-evaluation. Two more were listed as interdisciplinary individual work (GiT end ev: 4). However, because the networks funded – with one exception - were interdisciplinary, it is reasonable to say that the choice of prioritizing networks in fact favoured multi- or interdisciplinary initiatives. When exploring how interdisciplinarity was performed at project level, we will take this into consideration by looking at two networks, one collaborative project (“umbrella”) and two individual projects.

However, if we go back to interdisciplinarity as it was intended by this particular programme, we find that the mere distribution of disciplines in collaborative projects may not be the place to look. It tells us little if anything about the relationship between theory and empiricism or between different theoretical traditions in different types of gender studies – which were the central point in relation to interdisciplinarity in GiT’s policy note. Neither does it say anything about gender studies as a discipline in its own right versus gender as a perspective within different disciplines – GiT’s “double strategy”. Let us therefore turn to these matters.

Concerning the link between theory and empiricism, efforts were made to reach this goal. The main means was the “umbrella”-structure, joining projects together. In PCUL different *disciplines* were gathered underneath the umbrellas while in GiT *empiricists and theorists* were the criteria used for such endeavours. One example of the organizational form was like this: two senior researchers were funded to write theoretical work. At the same time these two were engaged in more empirically oriented projects funded by other sources. PhD scholars, MA students and other researchers became connected to the seniors’ projects, and in this way larger groups were created consisting of 10-15 people doing different work on related topics. These groups may well have been multidisciplinary as well, but this was not what was focused on in the self-evaluation of the programme - perhaps because it was taken for granted. Linking empiricism and theory was regarded as a greater challenge, it appears.

The next issue we identified as important to interdisciplinarity in GiT was the integration of women’s and gender studies and lesbian, gay, queer and masculinity studies. Direct comparisons of the numbers of projects supported are hard to make because support was often given for small arrangements that should not count as much as full economic support for research projects. But excluding network and

seminar-support and the like, six projects on topics related to homosexuality were supported and one project on men and masculinities, leaving the vast majority to women's and gender studies, with the weight on *women*.

This was natural considering the relative strength of women's and gender studies in Norwegian research at the time, and special means *were* used to encourage applications from the other fields. *Sexuality, gender and identity* was made a topic of priority, as we have seen, and the board also arranged the conference *Sexing the Self* in 1997 in order to stimulate applications in this field. The conference started with lectures by senior researchers and continued with smaller sessions in which applicants presented project sketches and got comments both from other researchers and board members. The theme was then announced open for applications separately and the deadline was a date after the conference. Two participants who received funding on this topic had different evaluations of this conference (as expressed in our interviews). One of them appreciated the help she had received in revising her application and saw it as a hand reaching out to a hitherto under-prioritized research field. The other criticized the selection of invited speakers, who – in her opinion - were not competent on the theoretical branch the board had announced to support. In the self-evaluation the conference was considered a great success; it produced enthusiasm and several good applications (GiT end ev: 3, 15). However, GiT's tight budget demanded strict priorities, and the distributions between the branches conveys the fact that women's studies was favoured to a higher degree than gay and queer studies. When it came to men and masculinities there was - according to the self-evaluation - a lack of good applications.

One more topic was given special attention, namely *Feminism as critique*. In this case the board approached specific milieus that might be competent to embark on a project of such a theoretically ambitious character.

As was the case in PCUL, there was a large proportion of young applicants; in total PhDs constituted almost half of the funded projects (56 of 120), and the board regretted they were not able to support even more in this category (GiT end ev: 4). In PCUL the chairman linked the appeal to the young to the experimental interdisciplinary profile of this programme. This might not explain the young mass of applicants for GiT, considering the status that interdisciplinarity has had in gender studies since the very start, but perhaps the openness for post-structuralist perspectives and research on sexuality here may be a clue, since this was also something new at the time.

### **Conferences and seminars**

The board arranged four conferences and three programme seminars. These arrangements were the main means of encouraging multi-disciplinarity at programme level. Did it work as planned?

This is a question that will most likely be answered differently by the different participants according to the conferences' fruitfulness for their particular project. However, one of our informants pointed to some problems that might have generic relevance. Firstly, the number of gatherings was quite small. This goes for all programmes; GiT did not have any fewer gatherings than the average programme and thus this is a general point. It still means that the researchers meet about once a semester if they participate in all of them – which they are not likely to do. The reason for this is as simple as it is rational; researchers are busy and must combine work with family matters like everyone else. If the topics are not on target for their own project it may be thought better to spend time on more relevant activities. One informant did

however stress that the conferences he had attended had been fruitful and that, in hindsight, he somewhat regretted not having made more use of them.

Interdisciplinarily speaking, the integration between different research fields appears important in this context. As we have seen, the programme board saw the inherent tensions between the different branches of gender studies as something to be gained from, academically. However, some researchers experienced the tensions as too strong to have a constructive impact. One studied a topic that was not focused on in most of the conferences and thus the discussions became more or less irrelevant, in her opinion. Another experienced that her interpretations of a certain gendered power dynamic were considered politically incorrect within the feminist research community which comprised the majority, and she felt that she was not given constructive responses to her work because of this overwhelming opposition.

In this way the gender programme brought to light an interesting fact; namely that women's and gender studies may have shown the same rigidity problems as conventional disciplines may have, when having their doxa confronted. The problem would not be whether you used anthropological fieldwork or textual analysis, however, but whether or not you agreed with the dominant theoretical and political assumptions of women's and gender studies.

### **Interdisciplinarity at project level: Two networks**

The shortage of money was one reason why networking was funded. This was a way of encouraging milieus in the making which they were not able to fund more substantially. We interviewed researchers from two such networks, one in Oslo and one in Bergen. Both networks must be considered successful in the sense that they still exist. The two were very different in scope. The Bergen network was primarily a relatively small reading circle, which also organized a larger conference, by now resulting in a book. The Oslo network consisted of four people organizing open seminars and conferences at fixed dates throughout the year. The Bergen network was feminist-philosophy oriented whereas the Oslo network was open to all kinds of research on homosexuality from all disciplines and perspectives, from student to senior level.

How did the two networks *do* interdisciplinarity? The Bergen network consisted of researchers from philosophy, literature, public administration and Spanish. Very different disciplines on the surface, but the individual researchers had shared interests in basic theoretical research with philosophical roots, and this was their common ground. Their goal was to discuss theory across disciplines. One of the members expressed the view that the researchers from the social sciences had been more passive than the humanists, however. But she was not sure whether this was a result of individual priorities or the humanist core of the main questions. The network was self-initiated, and the participants had both professional and social ties. Bergen is a relatively small city - though the second largest in Norway - and researchers with shared interests thus have good opportunities to meet. Symptomatically, our informant could not remember how the group had become acquainted. But the reading circle also stretched out internationally. Money was spent to house guest scholars from the Nordic countries and the US, who lectured on their own work and contributed to the reading circle along with the other participants. Parts of this network are still very much alive, with a book in print. The different disciplinary backgrounds never posed a problem, our informant claimed. The theoretical interest cut across, and their respective disciplinary affiliation seemed to be less important.

A context easily left out here is local academic traditions. At the University of Bergen – due to earlier and present outstanding philosophical scholars - there seems to be a stronger interest in more purely theoretical or philosophical matters in disciplines like sociology, political science, literature and organization studies than is the case at the University of Oslo. Such an interest may in fact make interdisciplinary collaboration less of a challenge, since different disciplines may have a certain core in common. The point is that the more inclusive traditions will make interdisciplinarity easier. On the other hand – may there be less to be gained by interdisciplinarity if there is already an academic consensus at the outset?

The Oslo network was multi-disciplinary in the sense that students and researchers from all disciplines were welcome to give talks. It served as a way for researchers to get acquainted with research on homosexuality from all disciplines (though mainly from the humanist and the social sciences). The network started during GiT's programme period and is still going strong. It organizes one seminar a month and one larger weekend conference at least every two years. The audience varies from five to thirty at the monthly seminars. The network has a low threshold of participation both on the side of the audience and the speakers; there is no signing in or fee, and students are invited to speak as well as senior researchers. Thus the network offers training and networks to young research talents. This openness may indeed be a key to its seemingly non-problematic multi-disciplinarity. As there is no strong commitment demanded, there may seem less need for conflict.

According to one of the initiators interdisciplinarity is more or less a necessity in research on homosexuality, the milieu within one discipline being as small as it is. Research on homosexuality is also especially interesting in terms of identity; it remains a fact that a majority of the researchers in this field identify as homosexuals, and this may be central to the understanding of the collective spirit and shared enthusiasm across disciplines in this research field. The academic identity may thus overlap with other identities, like the sexual - and perhaps social - in this case. The dominating *academic affiliation* may still be disciplinary and not interdisciplinary defined, however. At least our informant stressed the importance of his disciplinarily education; the disciplinary tools are after all not made for the study of only one topic, but have a more general scope: "I'd rather study other topics with the tools of my own discipline, than continue with work on homosexuality with no disciplinary direction".

To sum up: GiT financed quite different kinds of networks. The Oslo network worked to enhance the dissemination of gay, lesbian and queer studies and thus to support recruitment through open seminars and conferences. The Bergen network was formed to strengthen the theoretical level of competence among a smaller group of researchers through a multi-disciplinary reading circle. Both seem to have had an integrative effect on those involved, each according to their goals. Whereas the small network united on the grounds of shared theoretical interests, the larger and more open network may have been little prone to difficulties because of the low commitment involved.

### **Interdisciplinarity at project level: One umbrella**

As in PCUL the umbrella structure was used. One of the umbrellas in GiT was a network of researchers located in Oslo, working on issues related to gender and the labour market. The umbrella was multi-disciplinary, but dominated by the social sciences; sociology, social anthropology, criminology and medicine were the disciplines represented. The umbrella applied for money for individual research projects as well as network activities. Each project in GiT was evaluated on its own

terms, and hence some projects were granted money and some were not. Money was granted two senior researchers, financing one and a half years of research for each of them (both worked at independent research institutes and thus their research needed to be fully funded). In addition some conferences and seminars were funded. The other researchers in the umbrella were funded by other sources. The project period was planned for three years and even though the seniors were only granted half of the time applied for, the three-year period was maintained for the umbrella network, as three years is the estimated time span for a PhD to be completed. Some additional expenses for seminars were granted by the programme midway.

The details concerning funding are worth dwelling on. Even though each project was important to the umbrella, the applications sent in were evaluated separately. This means that the sight of the umbrella as a whole – and the role of each project in it - might get lost in the process. It also means that an umbrella planned to be inter- or multi-disciplinary might end up as a disciplinary one, if money is lacking. In a programme as poor in resources as PCUL, this particular umbrella may have been regarded as a big investment, but for the researchers involved, the funding was a minimum of what was needed, and it would not have been possible to get it going without money from other sources funding the PhDs. One might in fact say that the umbrella existed both *because of* but also *in spite of* the programme's priorities. On the one hand the programme was an important contributor for the initiators of the umbrella. On the other, it did not give sufficient funding for the rest of the participants who were of course necessary for making it multi-disciplinary.

The core of the umbrella was 10-12 researchers, plus a few who frequented it occasionally. Half were seniors and half PhDs, and some of the seminars were even credited as PhD courses. The seminars served both as reading circles in which theoretically relevant texts were discussed and as workshops in which the participants' own texts were reviewed and commented upon. One of the coordinators emphasized the importance of maintaining the same network for a longer period of time, because mutual confidence needs time to grow, and such confidence was indeed, she reflected, important to the fruitfulness of those seminars. The participants met regularly four times a year and they also had two two-day seminars during this period. In addition they arranged a few open seminars with guest speakers. Several of the participants later contributed to an anthology edited by the coordinators, as part of an additional project.

How did the participants meet in the first place? The two research coordinators only knew of each other through their shared field of research before the collaboration started. They both worked at different institutes in Oslo, and invited the researchers with similar interests at their own institute to join. One additional researcher was linked to the umbrella by the programme board. According to one of the coordinators, the group became tightly knit professionally, and they were all reciprocally inspired. A sign of this is that the network's collaboration was extended at the termination of the three-year period; several of the participants were funded by proceeding programmes, and the collaboration continued in the same manner. In all, the umbrella collaborated actively for seven years! This means that in this case the collective competence that was created during the first project period was given a chance to develop further.

Why limit the scope of the umbrella to Oslo? This was pragmatic. The initiators wanted the umbrella to be collaborating closely on a regular basis, and proximity was important to achieve this. Norway is a large country, and with participants in different corners, a lot of time and money would have had to be spent

on travelling. Therefore this geographical concentration was chosen. Furthermore, they wanted to keep the umbrella small enough to work efficiently together and to build up confidence.

We have noted that the umbrella was multi-disciplinarily constituted (though no humanists were represented), but what kind of cross-disciplinary work was performed? What effect did the multi-disciplinarity have on the participants and their research? First, let us note that the two coordinators were themselves educated within different disciplines, social anthropology and sociology, respectively. These are disciplines that may be quite similar or quite different, depending on what academic tradition the sociologist and the anthropologist belong to. Our informant – the sociologist – said that she felt at home in her own discipline, but that this did not hinder interdisciplinary collaboration. She and her research partner shared a field of interest, they were both concerned with economics and structures, and this cut across. She was also used to interdisciplinary collaboration through her everyday work environment. Still she could see that the direction her work had taken *could* be attributed to the collaboration with the anthropologist: “In hindsight, I see that the anthropological approach has had an impact on my own work”, she said, and continued:

I don't believe in one-factor explanations and thus I don't think that this collaboration is the only reason why my own research has taken the turn it has. But I most definitely think that I have learned a lot from the collaboration and that this contributed substantially to my academic development.

It should be noted that the other coordinator was the only social anthropologist in the umbrella whereas sociology was represented by several. Looking at the quotation above, we still see that this disciplinary domination did not lead to a one-way influence. Our informant attributed this to at least two factors: the minority's own academic and disciplinary integrity, on the one hand, and mutual respect for the others' disciplinary perspectives on the other. Although she talked of an academic change in her own work, she would not identify it as interdisciplinary. It was rather a change *within* the frames of sociology. “The umbrella project was about *multi-disciplinarity*”, she stated.

The programme board did not seem to be very present during the research process. As mentioned, they linked one researcher to the umbrella. The programme activity did not seem to be of vital importance to the project's progress. The network was already formed and hence the programme seminars and conferences were less important to multi- or interdisciplinary integration. As mentioned by others, the seminars not directly relevant would not be attended if there were more relevant networks at hand. Of course this might be viewed very differently by researchers with no such network in their field.

The interdisciplinarity taken for granted within gender research was expressed also by this informant. But that is interdisciplinarity in the traditional sense, i.e. crossing *disciplines*. The umbrella was however a meeting point for theory and empiricism, as the seminars served as workshops where they presented their own texts - both theoretical and evidence-based - and theoretical courses or reading circles. This combination was a stated priority for the programme, on the grounds that Norwegian gender research had to some extent had a gap between theoretical and empiricist traditions.

The other type of interdisciplinarity more specific to GiT, i.e. the integration of different branches of gender research, was less relevant to this umbrella. They were gathered because of their shared thematic interest, and thus this was not an issue. Let us now turn to two individual projects where this became central in various ways.

### **Interdisciplinarity at project level: Two individual projects**

We interviewed two researchers who had individual projects in the programme. At the time, one of them worked in a mono-disciplinary department at a university whereas the other worked at an interdisciplinary research institute. The latter felt that she had had a sufficient professional network at the institute whereas the former was less pleased with the degree of collaboration she had at her department. She was interested in collaborating more closely with researchers with similar thematic interests. Besides, her research questions would have benefitted from an interdisciplinary approach, in her opinion, and for this reason, she thought a collaborator from the other relevant disciplines would be academically valuable to the project.

One possible way of finding a research partner might have been through GiT. However, the programme was dominated by certain academic preferences that did not suit her project (as mentioned above), and thus the programme was of little help in this matter. The other intuitive way was to turn to her work environment, the university. She contacted a few researchers in different departments, who all responded positively to her invitation. Still, heavy work loads or slightly different interests made them turn down closer collaboration. After a while, however, she started a loose collaboration, based on commenting on each others' work, with another young researcher, which worked very well. However, this researcher was only temporarily employed on a PhD scholarship, and had to end the collaboration when his term was over and there was not enough money in the project to fund another researcher. In fact, many young researchers work temporarily and have little time left to engage in work that might improve their research; interdisciplinary work might be more time-consuming than monodisciplinary work. As it happened, our informant did not experience the university as a milieu open to inter- or multi-disciplinary collaboration; there were no incentives to do so and no arenas in which to meet. On the contrary there seemed to be constraints. And these constraints may be especially strongly felt by junior researchers – paradoxically the ones noted to be the most enthusiastic about interdisciplinarity, according to the applications received by both PCUL and GiT.

### **Structural barriers - particular to junior researchers?**

Must an interdisciplinary dissertation hold the same academic quality in all the disciplines involved? Uncertainty surrounding this question may make interdisciplinary work threatening to PhD scholars.

When a dissertation is evaluated it is of course evaluated by the quality criteria specific to the discipline within which it is written. If two disciplines are intermixed, one of them may be less meticulously sketched than the other, or the quality criteria may even be at odds. Hypothetically speaking, an examiner from one of the disciplines may thus be able to reject the dissertation, according to the criteria of his or her discipline, whereas one from the other may praise it, according to her standards. Stories about such incidents circulate among the PhDs.

One of our informants had experienced a similar situation during her own doctoral disputation. Although she herself considered her thesis well within the traditions of her own discipline, one of her examiners criticized it for lacking some of

the qualities allegedly characterizing this discipline. Her examiner did not make a big issue of this, and was satisfied with the answer that the thesis belonged to a broader field of gender studies and that the disciplinary affiliation was less important, but other PhDs may have been less fortunate in this respect.

But young researchers will themselves become seniors. Then it will become clear whether the enthusiasm for interdisciplinarity is considered a generation or a lifecycle effect. Will the young researchers of today still be eager to collaborate across disciplines and dig into new paradigms in the future? Or will their positions and the prestige of certain older paradigms get in the way in fifteen years?

Complaining about the vulnerability of the young, one should not forget that some of these juniors might be the leading intellectuals of tomorrow. Vulnerability due to creativity and path-breaking may be a strength in the long run and be recognized and well received at a later stage. Quite a few of the outstanding intellectuals of today have struggled for recognition when younger – just think of Freud, Foucault, Bourdieu and Smith, to mention but a few.

## **Interdisciplinarity: How was it evaluated?**

### **At programme level**

Two self-evaluations were written; one midway and one at the end of the programme. Again, we must stress the self-evident limitations when relying solely on self-evaluations; without referring to anyone in particular, some roles will give certain inclinations for what is said and how.

On the whole the programme was deemed successful, although a couple of the prioritized topics had been insufficiently focused on due to few received applications. However, the tight budget was presented as a main problem in both evaluations. As we have seen, the board decided to give network support instead of fully financing research projects for this reason.

How was interdisciplinarity evaluated? As we have seen, GiT chose a “double strategy” – *both* focussing on gender studies at interdisciplinary research centres *and* within the traditional disciplines. The former was evaluated as more successful than the latter in the final evaluation. The board had hoped to give opportunity for gender research within disciplines which did not have a tradition for employing the gender perspective, but was not satisfied with the results in this regard. Sociology, anthropology and literature dominated heavily, they admitted (GiT end ev: 12). Multi- and interdisciplinarity were regarded as important aspects of the programme, both in the traditional sense and in the sense of integrating different branches of gender research. In the midway evaluation these efforts were evaluated as follows:

Through distribution of research means and conferences held, the programme has succeeded in demarcating gender research as a more integrated research field in which room has also been made for men’s studies, research on homosexuality and gender research with a culture focus. Likewise, the multi- and interdisciplinarity is a strong point of the programme. Especially it should be noted that perspectives from the social sciences and humanities have been well integrated, both within the separate topics prioritized and within the programme conferences. It is thus reasonable to say that this programme has contributed to initiating research on gender which differs from the traditional gender research, and thus has achieved the goal of

contributing to the renewal of women's and gender research (GiT mid ev: 5, our translation).

As evident, the board was pleased with the fact that they had succeeded in integrating the different branches in one and the same programme. In the final evaluation they expressed satisfaction with the amount of studies undertaken on gender categories and homosexuality, whereas they regretted the low number of supportable project applications on men and masculinities.

Finally, the consequences of crossing disciplinary boundaries were briefly discussed. The multi-disciplinary seminars and conferences had been a success, they concluded, but continued: "it is more doubtful whether the programme has also managed to initiate inter- and multi-disciplinary collaboration in a way which has had impact on the results in terms of knowledge" (GiT end ev: 12, our translation).

### **At project level**

The voices of the researchers we interviewed have been heard throughout this chapter, and their evaluations have thus been touched upon already. Let us here only sum up their main points, concerning the programme and its potential as a door opener for interdisciplinarity.

We have seen that the coordinator of the umbrella project we studied was happy with the way the collaboration had worked out. The programme's role in this was to fund the seminars and the two main projects. Ideally she would have liked more PhD projects to have been funded, but the result had still been good, she maintained. One important aspect of this success was the relatively long existence of the umbrella, which created confidence among the members. Continuity was secured by later funding of the same network members. In this case, their collective competence was recognized by succeeding programmes.

The two networks we looked at were very different, but they had both received network support. One arranged open conferences, and worked as an arena for dissemination and network building. The other was a small reading circle. The participants worked well together due to shared theoretical interests. Finally, two individual researchers raised the respective points that the programme conferences were not always relevant and that the threshold for being politically incorrect was experienced as low within gender studies; despite the fact that several disciplines were welcome, they experienced little openness to alternative views.

### **Summary**

- GiT (1997-2002) was a research programme open to the humanities and the social sciences alike.
- Interdisciplinarity was taken for granted in the policy document as an inseparable part of the history of gender studies. The board chose a "double strategy", meaning that they aimed to support gender studies both performed in interdisciplinary research centres and in the different university disciplines. In addition they aimed to integrate different parts of gender studies – which have been at odds theoretically – like men's and masculinity studies and gay, lesbian and queer studies with (at that time) more conventional women's and

gender studies. Finally, they aimed to join theoretical and empirical work to a higher degree than before.

- A special trait of this programme was the funding of networks not linked to specific research projects. This was done to strengthen certain research milieus when the programme did not have sufficient money available by their own criteria. The networks could be small reading circles or take the form of larger, open conferences. One such small network worked interdisciplinarily quite easily due to shared theoretic preferences whereas the other was easily manageable due to the low commitment necessary for joining, and the shared thematic interest.
- As in PCUL some projects were joined by umbrellas, but smaller and more geographically limited ones. One such interdisciplinary umbrella had been especially successful, according to both the board and the researchers involved. Key words seem to have been: an arena in which to meet, continuity over time to create confidence, a relatively small number of researchers, balance between seniors and juniors, and respect for different disciplinary perspectives. Simple but effective means, in other words.
- An issue raised by the researchers was that gender studies during GiT did not seem open to perspectives considered politically incorrect by the majority of feminist researchers. This was linked to the interdisciplinary focus of gender studies. Even though collaboration across disciplines is mainstreamed, this had not, allegedly, created a general openness towards alternative views. As such it was conceived as a (doxic) discipline and not “truly” interdisciplinary.
- Most of the researchers we interviewed preferred a multidisciplinary approach to an interdisciplinary one. But we have by no means representative numbers!
- University structures make interdisciplinary collaboration difficult. There are few arenas in which to meet with researchers from other disciplines. Furthermore, the economic reward is distributed by, amongst other things, number of publications. This does not reflect the fact that interdisciplinary studies may take longer to complete.
- PhD scholars seem specifically vulnerable when researching interdisciplinarily on an individual basis. The reasons for this is that they meet with more – or even opposing – standards for what it considered good research quality by their opponents.
- As in PCUL, young researchers seemed to be the most enthusiastic about interdisciplinarity. Even though they potentially face the most difficulties, we should not forget that they are indeed the researchers of tomorrow. Their path-breaking may have resulted in road signs for future generations of researchers.

## **Interdisciplinarity: Reflections for the future**

### **From structure to actor**

At policy level interdisciplinarity among and between the humanities and the social sciences no longer seems to be a contested issue within the research administration in Norway. On the contrary, it is taken for granted as a goal, and therefore hardly discussed either in the Ministry or in the Research Council.

In the Research Council interdisciplinarity is stressed as a vital criterion for funding. However, it is not made explicit what is meant by the term, nor what should be expected of interdisciplinary research. Other vital criteria for funding – such as geographical distribution (historically and traditionally maybe the strongest criterion in Norway besides quality), disciplinary and gender distribution – also compete with the interdisciplinarity criterion, resulting in scarce research resources being spread thinly all over Norway. Being aware of these criteria, applicants quite often try to integrate them all under the interdisciplinary hat, thereby increasing their chances for funding. The Program for Cultural Research, here investigated, was quite explicit and successful in this respect. Meetings with all the universities were organised and applicants were encouraged to seek partners for projects across institutions as well as across disciplinary boundaries. Since then, and in the future, the interdisciplinarity criterion can however be expected to increase further in importance on behalf of the criterion of geographical distribution due to the policy of specialization in competence (a thematic division of labour among the departments of a particular discipline has for example been strongly suggested – and more or less accepted as a general policy at the university level). At the Research Council there is accordingly a strong push towards interdisciplinarity, which most likely will increase even further in the future.

At the university level the situation is different. Although here too interdisciplinarity is stated as a goal for teaching and research, and some efforts are made to make it happen, the disciplinary structure of the universities constitutes fundamental barriers to any such endeavours. Collaboration across disciplines is hindered by systems for budgeting time and money (which department should be credited for the time and money spent and for the work done...) and localities. Hence, it takes a lot to get something interdisciplinary going. Only the academic superwoman or superman can bring it off within the traditional structures. The universities have so far not developed a proper research politics, thereby leaving the initiative as well as the problems to individual actors.

Interdisciplinary centres, such as for example The Centre for Women's and Gender Research at University of Oslo, then, seem to be of vital importance as alternative arenas where interdisciplinary research can be debated, planned and performed. The institutionalization of interdisciplinary fields is accordingly one precondition for their continuity and development, something the chairman of Program for Cultural Studies also stated when describing the difficulties of keeping a milieu alive, after the completion of a program, when an institutionalized arena is missing.

The interdisciplinary research institutes outside the university here offer a milieu which can attract researchers who find "the disciplinary jacket too tight" – as one of our interviewees expressed it. And here they are not only allowed but even encouraged to work interdisciplinarily individually or collectively and design and apply for interdisciplinary research projects.

Since "money talks" the Research Council could use its power more strategically to enhance the possibilities for interdisciplinary research not only through supporting interdisciplinary centres and institutes, but also through supporting key persons at the universities. Our investigations have made it quite clear that it is not only a structural issue, but also a question about the right persons. Some intellectuals have the knowledge, capacity, energy and charisma or gift to gather people to enterprises they otherwise would not have embarked on, enterprises that "changed their lives", as some of our interviewees expressed it. To recognise and support these kinds of key persons and their research activities over longer time periods, will most likely be a most efficient way to guarantee continuity as well as expansion regarding interdisciplinary research.

Interdisciplinary superwomen and supermen are not only those key persons who have applied for and run umbrella projects on the two research programmes here investigated. Some board members also seem to be of that quality; they have fought for the establishment of the very programme and its profile. No wonder then the ambitious policy and praxis regarding the running of the programmes, which the documents we studied as well as our interviews give clear evidence of. To us their involvement and amount of activities seem unusual (for example visiting research milieus, supervising and helping researchers with work-place/milieu problems and evaluating all applications sent in). Whether this is, in fact, quite unusual and could be explained by an interdisciplinary or thematic (culture/gender) "mission" or the very intermingling or combination of both is a question only further investigations (of other research programmes) can give a proper answer to. Here we only want to stress that we were struck by the involvement expressed at both board and project level, through the documents and in the interviews. Looking at the themes brought up in the interviews, such involvement seems both a precondition for interdisciplinary research as well as the very result of it.

### **Doing interdisciplinary research – problems and joys**

How interdisciplinary research is experienced, which problems and joys one encounters, seem to depend on three fundamental variables: which discipline one originates from, which generation one belongs to, and which position one holds. The latter two often go hand in hand; an established researcher is often older and has a secure research position - but not always. The younger researchers still seem to encounter both more but also more serious problems when embarking on an interdisciplinary research project than their established colleagues. And yet, the younger ones are the ones who turn to interdisciplinarity and are the ones most welcomed – expressed by several of the board members - due to their genuine interest, involvement and disciplinary creativity. The young generation of researchers are accordingly the ones most tempted by interdisciplinary research, but also the ones most vulnerable in the process. The following are some of the stepping stones or themes that came up in the interviews with the researchers of the two programmes:

- **Practicalities.** Getting an office, technical facilities, functioning economic routines and so forth were issues raised by PhD scholars linked to the programmes who – due to their interdisciplinary projects - seemed to have fallen in between disciplinary administrative chairs. They were nobody's "proper" responsibility and had a hard time finding their way through the system. Some of them used quite a lot of time and effort to try to solve the practicalities and in some cases these things were not fixed until the end of their scholarship period.

- **Evaluation of the PhD dissertation.** Some of the interviewees talked of their own as well as others' problematic experiences related to the PhD dissertation. The issue of disciplinary quality and depth was questioned in interdisciplinary dissertations, they claimed, both in the written evaluation and in the oral examination and debate. And they were all familiar with "horror stories" regarding interdisciplinary PhD dissertations.
- **Publication.** For researchers at all levels publication was a relevant and problematic issue. Having a publication series of their own, however, diminished the problem for those under the Program for Cultural Studies, as long as the program lasted, that is. Focusing on the theme, gender or culture also opened up interdisciplinary publication paths along these lines. Trying more disciplinary publications paths were however deemed more problematic and less successful for interdisciplinary approaches. And since publication in disciplinary journals is what really counts when applying for a position at a university department, this is an issue of particular importance to the younger generation of researchers.
- **Funding.** The possibilities for funding interdisciplinary research projects seem to be of vital importance for the establishment of networks. In both of the programs several networks were organized already before the start of the programs or with an aim related directly to the programs. These networks constituted a platform for designing research projects or other collaborative enterprises, such as seminars, conferences and other networks.
- Although large-scale interdisciplinary umbrella research projects are prioritized in the Research Council and such applications are stimulated, the amount of money finally awarded does in fact not make it possible. By financing only parts of it – which seems to be the general rule – the umbrella project is scattered and fragmented. Thereby interdisciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity is made problematic if not impossible. This way of cutting finances may in practice turn an interdisciplinary project into a disciplinary one.
- **Networking.** Interdisciplinarity most often implies networking. One is "forced" to approach researchers in other departments or research milieus, so as to have fellow researchers with whom one can exchange knowledge on the theme. As a chance "to get out and round and about" this is however generally considered most vitalizing and intellectually inspiring. Quite a few of the networks are reported to function long after the money has dried up or the projects have been completed. And through the networks one has found partners for future research endeavours. The importance of the networks – local as well as national – can accordingly not be overestimated. Their "interdisciplinary touch" might also be the reason why they have been perceived as so fruitful. When networking, the role of key persons, should also be made visible. In fact, key persons might be the ones who initiated the network as well as guaranteed its progress.
- **Key persons.** In our interviews with the researchers the roles of (particular) key persons were strongly underlined. It was the key person who made it all possible; the project, the network, the spirit, the success... Describing his or her knowledge, capacity, involvement or gift for collaborative enterprises, his or her interdisciplinary approach and

understanding was stressed as of particular importance to the collaboration as such.

- **Theoretical paradigms.** Theoretical paradigms might be more or less interdisciplinarily oriented and yet have a disciplinary “overdetermination” (a concept from Athusser). While the Marxism of the seventies can be classified as over-determined in the approaches of the social sciences, the post-structuralism of the nineties can be classified as over-determined in the approaches of the humanities. Both paradigms have tempted researchers to go for interdisciplinarity but in different disciplinary directions. Today, it is more natural for researchers within the humanities to go for interdisciplinarity due to this overdetermination than it is for researchers from the social sciences. Under the rule of this paradigm the social scientists have to cross a border, which some of them also do, in order to do interdisciplinarily research in a post-structuralist way. The greater challenges but also difficulties this theoretical turn represents can however be expected to result in more dramatic changes in the approaches of the social scientists. That is, in the long run they - and their disciplines - are probably the ones to profit most from interdisciplinarity work. Among the humanities and the social sciences, it is the young generation who pick up new ideas and new paradigms. Accordingly they are the ones to go for interdisciplinarity.

Related to theoretical paradigms is the fact of disciplinary background which seems to over-determine all the themes mentioned above. Some disciplines are more open to other disciplines and their approaches than others. Some might even be classified as interdisciplinarily in their own right. When asked about their view on disciplines in this respect, our interviewees tended to classify the same disciplines as “closed” (history within the humanities and economics within the social sciences), “open” (literature versus sociology) and “self-sufficient” (philosophy versus social anthropology). The importance of the disciplinary background for their own research orientations were clearly stated in all the interviews. It was *the* reason behind their choice of workplace, research themes and projects, networks and theoretical paradigms.

But, as some of them argued, it was because of personal characteristics, that they had chosen that particular discipline in the first place. And, further, this “personal issue” was also the reason given why they had embarked on interdisciplinarily research projects. So, what then did the researchers actually mean by interdisciplinarity? And had their views changed over the years and with their experiences of interdisciplinarily research?

### **Interdisciplinarity in practice – the researchers’ interpretations and views**

A taken-for-grantedness regarding the interdisciplinarily platform was expressed by the board members of both research programmes, but especially in *Gender in Transition*. When asked why it had not been contested, debated or made an issue at board level, this explanation was given: gender researchers have always been interdisciplinarily oriented, it was said, due to knowledge claims (gender cuts across disciplines and the disciplines have not evolved with the aim to understand gender) as well as out of necessity (few gender researchers within each discipline). Culture is also a theme which demands interdisciplinarily approaches, it was said, it cannot be owned by any particular discipline but belongs to us all. In spite of this shared taken-for-grantedness at programme level, their interdisciplinarily “mission” seems to have been quite

different. While the *Program for Cultural Research* aimed to organize interdisciplinarity at all stages, and in new ways – like, for example, the cultural dialogue - in such a way that the whole range of definitions “true interdisciplinarity” (the effort to produce syntheses), transdisciplinarity and post-disciplinarity (some of the actions related to cultural dialogue) as well as multi-disciplinarity can be used to characterize their activities, another aim seems to have been more important for the programme *Gender in Transition*.

In *Gender in Transition* the interdisciplinary approach of previous gender research was stated to be “doxic” and accordingly in need of being opened up to other perspectives and approaches. The aim here was to organize for the prevalence of different theoretical and political perspectives in the programmes, projects, networks, conferences, seminars and so forth. And the tension was here around theoretical perspectives and approaches, and not around interdisciplinarity as such. One younger researcher even expressed the view that gender research, also within this program, was *not* interdisciplinary, since it was not open to different theoretical perspectives. As doxic and political, it was, according to her view, a discipline. The taken-for-grantedness of interdisciplinarity within gender research was here questioned and interpreted as disciplinarity instead. As such it questioned the theme as a foundation for interdisciplinarity, arguing for theoretical perspectives and approaches instead.

One reason for the different foci and ways of working with interdisciplinarity might be that there are today fewer tensions among researchers from the humanities working on culture than there are among researchers from the social sciences and the humanities working on gender. The “new” paradigm of post-structuralism is more founded, shared and less threatening to the humanities and as such forms a platform attracting also the younger generations of researchers. Gender research has been dominated by the social scientists and to them this paradigm – stemming from the humanities - is stranger and more alienating. Accordingly tensions around theoretical perspectives and approaches – indirectly around disciplines – can be expected to be more immediate in this field and in their research programmes.

All the researchers said that they would stick to an interdisciplinary orientation also in the future. Interdisciplinary research milieus, networks and collaboration were something they valued and sought. But asked about their identity, interdisciplinary or disciplinary, they gave quite different answers across generation and faculty borders. While the cultural researchers claimed an interdisciplinary identity, strengthened over the years, the gender researchers claimed a disciplinary identity, strengthened over the years. And the last category – including both younger and established researchers - stressed the importance of having a disciplinary foundation before embarking on an interdisciplinary project. Such endeavours should wait until after the MA, preferably after the PhD, to guarantee quality as well as disciplinary security. Due to the - by us - estimated higher intellectual tensions within the field of gender, this view might at least partly result from having had bad experiences. It might in other words be tougher to do interdisciplinary work in this field than in the field of culture - at least at present. Another reason might of course be that gender research now returns to disciplinarity after two decades of interdisciplinarity. And maybe now, at this stage, interdisciplinarity is in fact not what it is all about.

Among the researchers with an interdisciplinary inclination we accordingly found quite different strategies – regarding their own research as well as regarding research policies. While some limited their interdisciplinary orientation to participating in such contexts (seminar, conferences, networks) and reading interdisciplinarily on their theme, others approached and appropriated the theories and

methods of other disciplines into their own research. When collaborating in writing with researchers from other disciplines, some just added it all up while others tried to write the very text together. As a whole though, as was pointed out by most of our interviewees, there is today – partly due to post-structuralism – a theoretical overlap which makes the disciplinary borders less strict and "doxic" than previously. So maybe the issue of interdisciplinarity is outdated, at least if expressed as a general claim or issue. Maybe it has to be reformulated, from below, locally and contextually and maybe we should ask...

### **To whom, when and where is interdisciplinarity actually an issue?**

As previously stated – including in one of our previous reports (Widerberg et al. 2005) – interdisciplinarity is an issue of increasing interest to the Ministry and the Research Council. So far it has however not resulted in any clarification as to its possible meanings and accordingly no debate has occurred on relevant actions to further different kinds of interdisciplinarity. One seems to rely on a general understanding that problems and themes have to be approached and solved in practice and from many angles and in collaboration. The answer to this call (from "real life") seems to be an idea of the intermingling of disciplines. How this is to be done, at which stage in the research process, is more or less left to the researchers to find out. And it is, in principle, of course a good idea to let the researchers explore the interdisciplinarity possible on the theme in question. The problem is only that the disciplinary structure, especially at the universities, makes such collaborate exploration most demanding, if not impossible.

On an individual level and as intellectuals, the researchers can however orient themselves towards approaches that cut across disciplinary barriers. And so they do, today, partly stimulated by new paradigms. But when including these interdisciplinary approaches in their writing and teaching, the doxa of their mother discipline are also challenged and changed. We would argue that there is an interdisciplinary trend within the disciplines, more so in some and less so in others, and that this trend is increasing. Paradigms are not the only reason for this change; interdisciplinary BAs and an increased competition in the recruitment of students (further provoked by a new budget system where money goes with the student) are other important factors. The result is anyway that the disciplines seem to go interdisciplinary.

Interdisciplinarity is accordingly not the issue and challenge it was a couple of decades ago. In this situation, interdisciplinarity as term or concept in the old sense does not give much meaning. If we in the humanities and the social sciences are more or less interdisciplinary then it seems more interesting to ask what one is (still) not allowed to do (methods), to know or be known (themes) within our disciplines and that we believe would enhance our understanding. It is when asking what can *not* be done, that we learn of the limits which then can be confronted more successfully. Asking about interdisciplinarity is asking what is allowed and since interdisciplinarity is not defined or problematized but more like a political slogan, everything is stated allowed while making all that is actually forbidden invisible. The study of *Gender in Transition* gives a clue what to look for; politically incorrect perspectives or academic perspectives not corresponding to the current scientific paradigm within a research field or discipline may create stronger tensions than differences between different disciplines.

## Summary

- At a policy level interdisciplinarity among and between the humanities and the social sciences no longer seems to be a contested issue within the research administration in Norway. On the contrary, it is taken for granted as a goal, and therefore hardly discussed either in the Ministry or in the Research Council. Still, it is not taken into consideration that interdisciplinary projects may have special needs. For example they may be more time-demanding than mono-disciplinary projects, and if not fully financed may result in disciplinary research.
- At the universities collaboration across disciplines is hindered by systems for budgeting time and money as well as allocation of localities. The universities do not offer the proper arenas and other resources, hereby leaving the initiative as well as the problems to individual actors. Actors make a difference, but a system depending solely on personal initiative becomes vulnerable and unstable, and it also puts a heavy load on its employees. In other words, the institutionalization of interdisciplinary fields is an important precondition for the continuity and development of interdisciplinary milieus. Improving conditions for research centres as well as catering for other arenas at the universities are suggestions forwarded by several researchers.
- Potential problems arising when working interdisciplinarily are connected to:
  - Practicalities
  - The evaluation of the PhD dissertations
  - Publication
  - Funding
  - Networking
  - Key persons
  - Theoretical paradigms
- How interdisciplinary research is experienced, which problems and joys one encounters, seems to depend on three fundamental variables: which discipline one originates from, which generation one belongs to, and which position one holds. The young seem to be the most vulnerable, albeit the most enthusiastic.
- While cultural researchers claimed an interdisciplinary identity, strengthened over the years, gender researchers claimed a disciplinary identity, strengthened over the years. A last category – including both younger and established researchers - stressed the importance of having a disciplinary foundation before embarking on an interdisciplinary project. Following this line, several were critical towards interdisciplinary BAs or even MAs, and rather advocated it at PhD level.
- We would argue that there is an interdisciplinary trend within the disciplines, more so in some and less so in others, and that this trend is increasing. Paradigms are not the only reason for this change; interdisciplinary BAs and an increased competition in the recruitment of students (further provoked by a new budget system where money goes with the student) are other important

factors. The result is that the disciplines seem to go interdisciplinary. The heavier battles seem to be raging between different perspectives crossing disciplines – also creating tensions within one and the same discipline – rather than between the traditional disciplines.

- Conclusion: Making interdisciplinarity work is first and foremost a question of economics, organisation and research politics, both at state and university level. Academic tensions are not first and foremost a question of tensions between disciplines, but of larger conflicting paradigms or politics crossing disciplines.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: The Programme Board of PCUL

Professor Bjarne Hodne, Ethnology (chairman)  
Department of Cultural Studies  
University of Oslo

Professor Jostein Børtnes, Russian  
Department of Russian Language and Literature  
University of Bergen

Siri Gerrard, Social Anthropology  
University of Tromsø

Professor Søren Kjølrup, Philosophy  
Department of communication  
Roskilde University Center, Denmark

Professor Kari Melby, History  
Centre for Women's Research

Later replaced by Ingebjørg Seip, Philosophy  
Department of Philosophy  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Pål Repstad, Sociology of Religion  
Agder University College

Magne Velure, Senior advisor  
Later replaced by Øyvind Danielsen,  
and finally by Silje Thingstad,  
The State Ministry of Culture

Aaslaug Vaa, fylkeskultursjef  
Nordland fylkeskommune

Advisor and secretary for the programme board:  
Ingeborg Kongslien,  
The Norwegian Research Council

**Appendix 2: The dissemination committee of PCUL**

Søren Kjørup (chairman), member of the programme board  
Erik Fossåskaret, Stavanger University College

Marta Nordheim, NRK (the Norwegian state-funded broadcasting company)  
Later replaced by Janne Kjelberg.

Turid Birkeland, Rubicon TV  
Later replaced by Tove Veierød.

**Appendix 3: The programme board of GiT:**

Professor Gro Hagemann, Institute for Social Research, Oslo (chairman)  
Professor Jonas Frykman, Department of Ethnology, University of Lund, Sweden  
Senior Lecturer Elin Kvande, Department of Sociology and Political Science,  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Assistant Director General Gerd Vollset, Ministry of Children and Family Affairs  
Senior Lecturer Anka Ryall, Department of Languages and Literature, University of  
Tromsø  
Senior Lecturer Hege Skjeie, Department of Political Science, University of Oslo  
Attorney-at-Law Oskar Rønbeck, Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry  
(NHO)  
Head of research Tian Sørhaug, Centre for Studies of Technology, Innovation and  
Culture, University of Oslo

Special Adviser Ingebjørg Strøno of the Research Council of Norway's Division of  
Culture and Society served as secretary for the Programme Committee.

## Literature

### Web Sites

Programme for Cultural Research

<http://www.uib.no/kul/>

(Accessed 03/11/2005)

Gender in Transition: Institutions, Norms, Identities

<http://www.forskningsradet.no/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=kulfo/Page/HovedSide&c=Page&cid=1088796614909>

(Accessed 03/11/2005)

### Public Documents

Norges forskningsråd (2004): *Forskning flytter grenser. Strategi for Norges forskningsråd.*

[http://www.forskningsradet.no/CSSStorage/Flex\\_attachment/Strategien.pdf](http://www.forskningsradet.no/CSSStorage/Flex_attachment/Strategien.pdf)

(accessed 03/11/2005)

PCUL Eng sum:

English Summary of the Programme for Cultural Research (in PCUL pol doc).

PCUL pol doc:

Norges forskningsråd (1999): *Program for kulturstudiar. Programnotat. 2. utgave.* (1. utgave utgitt i 1998)

PCUL mid ev:

Norges forskningsråd (2000): *Egenevaluering for Program for kulturstudier 1998-2000.*

GiT pol doc:

Norges forskningsråd (1997): *Gender in Transition. Policy Document.*

<http://www.forskningsradet.no/servlet/ContentServer?cid=1088708154038&pagename=ProgNett%2FPage%2FHovedSide&pageid=1088708154038&siteid=1088708148849>

GiT end ev:

Norges forskningsråd (2002): *Kjønn i endring. Programstyrets egen vurdering.*

<http://www.forskningsradet.no/servlet/ContentServer?cid=1088708154038&pagename=ProgNett%2FPage%2FHovedSide&pageid=1088708154038&siteid=1088708148849>

PCUL's invite to Voksenåsen Oct 12-13, 1998:

<http://www.uib.no/kul/>

### **Books, Reports & Articles**

Hark, Sabine (2005) *Blurring Boundaries, Crossing Borders, Traversing Frontiers. Inter- and Transdisciplinarity Revisited*. Paper at the Workshop of the EU-funded research project “Disciplinary Barriers between the Social Sciences and the Humanities” in Turku/Åbo – Finland, June 9-11, 2005.

Holm, Erling Dokk (2000) *Da forskningen forlot parnasset: fortellingen om formidlingen fra KULT*. Oslo: Pax.

Holm, Ulla & Mia Liinason (2005) *Sweden – National Report on Disciplinary Barriers between the Social Sciences and the Humanities*.

Krebs, Rebecca, Siouti, Irini, Apitzsch Ursula and Silke Wenk (2005) *Germany – National Report on Disciplinary Barriers between the Social Sciences and the Humanities*.

Widerberg, Karin, Hirsch, Silje and Ida Hjelde (2005) *Norway – National Report on Disciplinary Barriers between the Social Sciences and the Humanities*.

Widerberg, Karin (forthcomming) *Disciplinization of Gender Studies. Old Questions, New Answers? Nordic Strategies in the European Context. NORA*.