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Media and communication studies in Sweden

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Abstract Media and communication studies is a comparatively young academic discipline in Sweden. The subject's establishment began with the 1960s—a time when the expansion of mass media led to a bigger demand for analysis, education and critical reflection. Along with that, political and commercial interests in more knowledge led to commissioned research, another considerable factor in the subject's development and institutionalization. The field was brought forth by humanistic and social-scientific strands, and some actors conveniently travel between these two since the demarcation lines are less pronounced in the North. Currently, roughly around 250 scholars are active in the field, with about 200 of them organized in DGPuK's Nordic sister organization FSMK. Media and communication research in Sweden is also greatly oriented towards the broader Nordic context, institutionalized for instance through the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom). For scholars, the labour market is comparatively open, not only for other Nordic academics but also for entries from countries outside Scandinavia. For students, the field provides a rich smorgasbord of general and highly specialized programmes or stand-alone courses of variable length offered in both Swedish and English. This article aims to inform about the history and the contemporary conditions of Swedish media and communication studies, with a personal note based on own experiences.

Keywords Media and communication studies · Sweden · Nordic collaboration · Academic labour market · Undergraduate and postgraduate education

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1 Introduction

Sweden's higher education system comprises 16 universities and 31 university colleges, which are comparable to universities of applied science in the German academic system. Some university colleges, such as Södertörn University Stockholm, also have the right to award doctoral degrees in specific subjects (cf. Forskningskommissionen n.d.). According to a database operated by the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom), 28 of these higher education institutions conduct research or offer study programmes, as well as stand-alone courses in media and communication studies, journalism, or related subjects such as media technology, media production, or film studies.[1]

By international standards, the field is still considerably young, and similar to the situation in Germany, differences exist in how the subject of study is understood. While social-scientific communication science and humanistic media studies represent two different disciplines in the German academic landscape, the demarcation line is less clearly pronounced in the north (cf. Hyvönen et al. 2018, p. 94). However, this delineation provides a functional heuristic to understand the structure of the field even in Sweden (cf. e.g. Lindell 2020; see also Bolin and Forsman 2000, p. 197). The field's establishment, institutionalization and its state today are explored in the following chapters of this contribution. The Swedish community is also closely connected to the broader community of Nordic media researchers. This larger regional context, institutionalized for instance through Nordicom and the biennial NordMedia conference, is also briefly outlined in this paper. In addition, light will be shed on recruitment processes, working conditions and educational offerings before the conclusion wraps up with a short outlook at challenges the field currently faces from my perspective.

This text builds extensively on the chronicling work done by experienced Nordic scholars and contains my own reading of the contemporary field. Of course, such an overview requires a commentator to be selective and superficial. Being not fully naturalized in the field can help to describe structures, yet it can be tougher to understand all the codes and narratives. The reader is therefore warmly encouraged to delve further into the literature in the list of references—which also contains further readings in the English and German language. If comparisons are made, they usually refer to the academic system in Germany.

2 The development of the field

The formation of today's institutionalized media and communication research in Sweden was initiated in the 1960s (cf. Hyvönen et al. 2018). Before that time, media were an area that scholars in other disciplines were interested in—and reportedly, there was not much interaction between them until platforms for exchange, such as a dedicated association, had been established in the 1970s (cf. Hyvönen et al. 2018, p. 91; Weibull 2015, p. 129). Literary studies have the longest tradition of media

[1] https://nordmedianetwork.org/resources/institutions (assessed: 30 July 2021)

studies, having founded their humanistic strand with a predominantly historical perspective at first (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 127). One of the pioneers of press research, active in the decades around 1900, was Otto Sylwan, a scholar of the history of literature who started his academic career at Lund University and continued at the University of Gothenburg. In addition, linguistic studies of printed and broadcast media had been conducted at Gothenburg and Lund, as well as in Stockholm (cf. p. 127). However, it was not until the 1950s that the development from fragmented media research in bordering disciplines to a field with an own identity and academic institutionalization gained decisive momentum. Accordingly, publications chronicling the field's history tend to focus on the decades after World War II. The 1950s to 1970s were years of considerable change in the Swedish media landscape (cf. e.g. Hyvönen et al. 2018, pp. 86–88; see also Weibull and Wadbring 2020) and brought important impulses for the field's development. Politically, these were decades of dominance of the Social Democratic Party (SCB/Statistikmyndigheten 2021).

Sweden is known for its strong newspaper tradition, but due to strong competition the country experienced, like other Western countries, a decline of outlets from the 1920s until a period of extensive deaths in the 1950s (*tidningsdöden*). While 237 newspapers were being published in 1949, their number shrank to 186 in 1960 (cf. Hernelius 1961). The economical disruptions in the press market led to the establishment of press subsidies in 1969. But it was also around this time that the strong personnel and content-related ties between the media and politics started to dissolve: Party-political loyalties and the recruitment of staff from within their respective political camps had shaped newspapers' everyday work; critical voices therefore felt that Sweden urgently needed journalists who were willing to serve as watchdogs and scrutinize those in power (cf. Weibull and Wadbring 2020, p. 288).

The concentration of the press market coincided with the golden age of the radio and the birth of television (cf. Weibull and Wadbring 2020, p. 55). Sveriges Radio was founded as *AB Radiotjänst* in 1924 and owned by a consortium of the newspaper and radio industry (p. 50).[2] Radio was intended to educate (cf. Weibull and Wadbring 2020, pp. 51, 288) and particularly popular on the local level, where it was fully established in 1977 (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 133). The first regular television test broadcasts were conducted in 1954 and were followed by a parliamentary decision to further develop the medium in 1956—similarly operated by the radio broadcaster and financed through license fees (cf. Weibull and Wadbring 2020, pp. 59–60). At the beginning of the 1960s, TV was held responsible for the disruptions in the newspaper sector, even though the press had a solid position on the local advertising market and its accumulated circulation did not shrink until the public service monopoly ended in the 1980s (cf. pp. 46–47; Hyvönen et al. 2018, pp. 86–87). The 1970s were described as "the last decade for the traditional Swedish media landscape" (cf.

[2] Nowadays, Sveriges Radio, Sveriges Television as well as the educational offering Sveriges Utbildningsradio are owned by a foundation as decided by the parliament in 1993, when some of the previous owners (which were then stakeholders from social movements, the industry and the daily press) did not want to continue their engagement. As of 1997, the broadcasters' shares are managed by the *Förvaltningsstiftelsen för Sveriges Radio AB, Sveriges Television AB och Sveriges Utbildningsradio AB*. The foundation's 13 board members are nominated by the political parties and appointed by the government. They then appoint the board members of the three broadcasters (cf. Förvaltningsstiftelsen n.d.).

Weibull 2016, p. 57; own translation). At this time, public service TV had become the leading mass medium. Accordingly, the number of employees at Sveriges Radio increased from 2480 in 1965 to 4288 in 1975 (cf. p. 58). Since the political desire was to maintain the traditional Swedish media model (cf. Weibull and Wadbring 2020, pp. 288–289), the TV monopoly held until 1987. That year, a satellite channel (TV3) was introduced, but operated from Great Britain to circumvent Swedish law (cf. p. 289).

In the wake of these developments, public interest in and discussions of the effects of mass media, journalistic professionalism, and independence grew from the 1960s onwards. And with these developments and discussions, the demand came for education. At the same time, a general transformation of academia and higher education took place (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 130). The 1960s witnessed an increased demand for advanced university study, something Swedish academia was not prepared for at the time (cf. p. 131). Higher education in journalism was duly initiated and courses on media and communication were established, especially in the social sciences (cf. p. 130). The government had decided to give birth to such a faculty by separating it from the humanities in 1964 (cf. p. 127). New teachers had to be recruited, through which institutions expanded and local profiles emerged (cf. p. 131). However, only after 1977 were universities granted the autonomy to initiate new study programmes, and it was not until 1993 that they could appoint new professors on their own initiative (cf. pp. 131–132).

The field grew not only due to the popularity and increased demand for education in the media. State- and industry-commissioned studies—which could also be literature reviews to understand the state of the art—became important incubators for academic media research in Sweden. The field's formation was also described as "to a large extent [...] a pure *effect* of politicians and the media industry wanting to be better informed on issues such as media influence, media ownership and the composition of media audiences" (Hyvönen et al. 2018, p. 88). During 1965 and 1975, it was estimated that research councils (public funding) financed approximately 40% of externally funded research projects, government agencies financed around 25%, foundations 20% and public inquiries and corporations together 13% (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 138–139; based on Kronvall 1976). A noteworthy institution engaged in media research, for instance, was a unit for psychological defence (*Beredskapsnämnden för psykologiskt försvar*) that had been established in 1954 and initiated a number of studies on media and propaganda which were carried out by sociologists, political scientists and linguists (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 129). Other examples were commissioned public inquiries (*utredningar*) on the different media, since "considerable Social Democratic faith was placed in media policy instruments for steering media change in a desired direction" (Hyvönen et al. 2018, p. 88). Lennart Weibull (2015, p. 140) observed the positive effects of the external funding which helped the field to develop theoretically and methodologically, while paying back through the advancement of knowledge. However, he also acknowledges critical voices, who felt that researchers (especially social scientists, who benefited the most) had a naïve view of their role and the external influence on their research models. According to Weibull, it took until the 1980s for commissioned research to be questioned (p. 140).

Important impulses for the advancement of media research also came from non-academic, often social-scientifically oriented, research groups. From 1964 to 1993, Sveriges Radio ran a department for audience and programme research (SR/PUB) to evaluate and legitimize their programmes, but a number of studies had already been conducted before its official installation (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 129; Bolin and Forsman 2000, p. 190). Sveriges Radio's research department, the universities of Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Lund were responsible for the largest share of the research projects listed in Nordicom's research catalogue in 1989, the rest was scattered over the field, conducted at an additional 35 institutions (cf. Weibull 1992, pp. 22–23). In addition, commercial media and opinion research had emerged (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 130).

Meanwhile, the development of academic institutions was highly dependent on individuals, especially on their commitment and "their ability to create interdisciplinary research platforms" (Weibull 2015, p. 141; own translation). Locally active research groups had been formed in already existing disciplines, especially in sociology and political science (cf. p. 141). Initiatives to establish media research as an academic subject in the 1970s, however, were slowed down by the minister of education out of economic considerations, concerns that media research could thereby lose its diverse and interdisciplinary character, and uncertainty about the institutional support by the universities (cf. pp. 145–151). The first media-related subject to be academically institutionalized in Sweden had therefore been film studies, which had gained popularity through "a growing discursive and aesthetic interest in modern mass media's relationship with ideology and politics" (Hyvönen et al. 2018, p. 93). Rune Waldekranz became the first professor of film studies at Stockholm University in 1970 (cf. p. 93). The first professor in mass media research was installed at the University of Gothenburg after continuous pressure by members of the Social Democratic Party and a decision by the parliament in 1979 (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 151). The selected candidate, the media sociologist Karl Erik Rosengren, affiliated his position with the department of political science (cf. Bolin and Forsman 2000, p. 194) and was among the first Swedish media researchers who actively had an international presence. Also in 1979, Kjell Nowak, a behavioural scientist with roots in economic psychology, founded a centre for mass communication research at Stockholm University, where in 1991 he became a professor of mass media (cf. Lindell 2020, p. 112; Weibull 1999). Shortly before that, in 1986/87, a professorship in sociology (with a focus on communication) and a research institute for information science had been established at Lund University (cf. Bolin and Forsman 2000, p. 194). The first professor in journalism, Stig Hadenius, was appointed at Stockholm University in 1990. Hadenius held a PhD in history and conducted media research in political science (cf. Lindell 2020, p. 112). These developments in the 1980s finally provided substance for the new subject.

3 The institutionalization and contemporary structure of the field

By 1989, a majority of Swedish universities had media professorships installed (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 152). That year, a conference of education coordinators in Uppsala took the decision to name the subject media and communication science (*medie-*

och kommunikationsvetenskap, or MKV) (cf. p. 153). The first generation of PhDs in MKV were academically born in the early 1990s (cf. Bolin and Forsman 2000, p. 195). During this decade, the number of scholars in the field "increased dramatically" (Carlsson 2007, p. 223). However, as different academic traditions were feeding into the new discipline's establishment, lively discussions about the core and boundaries of the subject took place, resulting in some interesting archived self-reflections (cf. e.g. Bolin and Forsman 2000; or an anthology edited by Carlsson and Lindblad 1992). Already in the formative years, "many different interpretations" (Hyvönen et al. 2018, p. 88) existed of what Swedish media and communication researchers defined as their object of study (media) and how they would best approach this object methodologically (cf. pp. 90–91). On the one hand, a "descriptive (and quantifiable) social and political science tradition" (p. 91) focused on traditional mass media. On the other, "a more speculative and idea-based humanistic research tradition" (p. 91) understood media along with, for instance, Marshall McLuhan, as basically everything that can extend human agency. As in Germany, American behaviourism shaped one strand of media research, while European critical theory traditions influenced the other (p. 93). The Frankfurt School, for instance, "had been introduced to a Swedish readership during the late 1960s" (p. 94), and works by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse were translated into Swedish. Jürgen Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* had even been read and discussed in Sweden while still in the German language. "Most of these (and other) publications were a perfect fit for the ideologically critical left-wing public opinion—and Swedish humanists alike" (Hyvönen et al. 2018, p. 94). The late 1960s came therefore with an interest in textual analysis and ideological critique (cf. Bolin and Forsman 2000, p. 196). In parallel, a "linguistic turn" took place which nurtured text-oriented media studies based on structuralism and semiotics (cf. p. 196). The early 1980s also brought a "cultural turn", with "an increased interest in questions of meaning and reception" (p. 196, own translation). Nordicom's former director, Ulla Carlsson (2007, p. 225), observed that this cultural turn had brought scholars from both traditions closer together. Independent of their background, media researchers "increasingly trained their focus on the roles media play in cultural processes, on the media's potential to create meaning in a broader sense, and on the adaption of media messages to modes of understanding commonly applied to cultural phenomena" (p. 225). Nowadays, it would no longer be easy to "to tell the difference between work in the two traditions" (p. 225).

The shape of the discipline was formed in this tension between quantitative-social scientific approaches ("administrative research") and qualitative humanistic approaches ("critical research"). It is a structure that can still serve as a heuristic to map Sweden's media and communication research landscape (cf. Lindell 2020, p. 112; for the provenience and meaning of these two terms, see Katz and Katz 2016). According to Carlsson (2007, p. 223), the field nowadays is "characterized by extreme diversity and extensive specialization", something which can also be challenging for education (cf. Bolin and Forsman 2000, p. 197). A field's demarcation is necessary to harmonize educational goals (cf. p. 197; Bolin 2010, p. 5). But the negotiation of what is accepted or not also determines resources, power and bases on a hoped-for persistence in the future. Regarding the external attribution of

relevance, Hyvönen et al. (2018) note that in the early years, it "was the empirical-analytical sciences that were given priority by the Swedish government" (p. 95). The "governmental interest in media research peaked" in the 1970s (p. 96). During the period of media research's establishment as an academic discipline in the 1980s and 1990s, "the faith in the ability of political governance to regulate mass media development waned" and "the attention that media research was given from official institutions slowly faded" (p. 96). As this interest ebbed, the relevance of research councils and foundations grew (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 155). Today, the power in the field is conceived as quite balanced between "administrative" and "critically" oriented media research (cf. Lindell 2020; see also Bolin 2010). Humanistic scholars are "more represented among the Swedish Research Council's and Riksbankens Jubilieumsfond's beneficiaries, and over half of the field's professors rely on either critical, semiotic, or sociocultural perspectives" (Lindell 2020, p. 119). According to a recent field analysis by Johan Lindell (2020, pp. 120–121), Sweden's contemporary power elite in MKV consists of scholars active in the subfields of journalism studies and cultural studies (Göran Bolin at Södertörn University Stockholm, Monika Djerf-Pierre at the University of Gothenburg, and Christian Christensen at Stockholm University); scholars in the subfield of political communication (Jesper Strömbäck and Bengt Johansson at the University of Gothenburg as well as Lars Nord at Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall); and, in between these strands, André Jansson (Karlstad University) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg).

All these scholars are connected to the field's two pioneering institutions, that is, they are currently affiliated with or received their PhD at Stockholm University or the University of Gothenburg (cf. Lindell 2020, p. 120). While the long-established universities, Lund and Uppsala, are not represented within the affiliations of today's power elite, they offer popular courses and programmes (cf. p. 121). The biggest cohorts of PhD students, however, are still found at the universities in Gothenburg and Stockholm, with around ten to fifteen PhD students, and, more recently, also in Karlstad. Karlstad was the seventh institution in Sweden to receive the right to award doctoral degrees in the subject in 2002 (Johansson 2002).

Almost all agents involved in the institutionalization of the discipline were socialized in the founding period (from the 1960s to 1980s), had been involved in the government's contract research and commissioned reporting, worked for media organizations, or had "in other ways been engaged in contexts where their research had served interests external to academia" (Hyvönen et al. 2018, p. 97). The mix of academic and practical backgrounds led to additional labour pains in the subfield of journalism studies and education (cf. Nygren 2020). The relationship between theory and practice had "never been easy—on the contrary, it was marked by a mutual distrust" (p. 43; own translation). Some journalism educators even opted for the establishment of two subjects: practical journalism and journalism studies (cf. p. 43). Today, journalism programmes at higher education institutions provide both practical and theoretical courses—reflecting the requirement formulated by the Swedish Higher Education Act that academic education should build on scientific ground and proven experience (cf. p. 44). Slight tensions can still emerge, for instance, when the broader orientation of a study programme is discussed. For example, how should the three years of a bachelor's programme be divided between practical journalistic and

academic work? Additionally, glitches can also come with different epistemologies: "The question is not *if* but *how* normative journalism research should be" (Hadenius 1992, p. 78; own translation). In academic settings that require thesis supervisors and examiners to be two different persons, the answer to this question can bear relevant implications.

Depending on the departments' self-conceptions and educational ideas, individual backgrounds can be quite homogeneous but also quite diverse. If we take Södertörn University Stockholm as an example, while the Department of Media and Communication Studies mostly gathers scholars socialized in the very same subject, the Department of Journalism follows the subfield's multidisciplinary tradition and houses an ethnologist, a historian of ideas, a linguist, scholars in media technology, and media and communication—and in addition, roughly the same number of colleagues are (former) journalists. Departments are sometimes organizationally located at the Faculty of Social Science—as at the University of Gothenburg, which also became the national hub for quantitative research—and sometimes within the Faculty of Humanities as at Stockholm University. At Örebro University, Media and Communication Studies are found under the joint umbrella of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, while at Södertörn University, Media and Communication Studies follow the humanistic tradition and are institutionally separated from the subject Journalism (located at the School of Social Sciences) as well as from Media Technology (located at the School of Natural Sciences, Technology and Environmental Studies). Film studies, journalism and media and communication research reside under the same institutional roof at Stockholm University, in the Department of Media Studies.

Most often, MKV is considered the umbrella, under which subfields such as journalism studies fall (cf. Nygren 2020, pp. 46–47). This is the case, for instance, at Mid Sweden University, Linnaeus University (Växjö/Kalmar) and Karlstad University. The biggest department of its kind at the University of Gothenburg, however, emphasizes the subfields equally (Department of Journalism, Media and Communication). While journalism studies are one of the major subfields in Swedish media and communication studies, the discipline is further composed of the typical subfields also known in international contexts: cultural studies, media history, strategic communication/organizational communication, political communication and, of course, "a blend of the above or an interdisciplinary approach" can be found (Lindell 2020, p. 115).

Active media and communication scholars are organized in the Swedish Association for Media and Communication Research (*Föreningen för svensk medie- och kommunikationsforskning*, or FSMK). In 1976, a number of Swedish scholars gathered at the Leicester conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) for a first constituent meeting of what in 1977 became the Swedish Association of Mass Communication Researchers (FSM), with Kjell Nowak as the first chair (cf. Weibull 1999). Within a few years, the interdisciplinary interest organization had already attracted 150 members (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 144). Together with Nordicom—which will be discussed in the next chapter—the association had been considered an important element in the consolidation of the field's identity by holding it together and providing it with a foundation (cf. e.g.

Bolin and Forsman 2000, p. 195; Weibull 2015, p. 153). In 1981, FSM became FSMK, and nowadays, around 200 of the approximately 250 actors in the field (cf. Lindell 2020) are active members of the association (Föreningen för svensk medie- och kommunikationsforskning n.d.a). FSMK holds an annual symposium at which invited speakers and panellists present contemporary issues of media and communication research that are further discussed with the attendees (Föreningen för svensk medie- och kommunikationsforskning n.d.b). It supports PhD students by offering travel grants, sponsors the International Communication Association's Young Scholars Network, and also bestows a Dissertation Award. For young postdocs, a newly established mentoring programme is about to start (currently for those who identify as female). FSMK also serves as an information dissemination hub regarding members' ongoing research projects, job announcements, and so forth.

4 Swedish media and communication studies in the nordic community

Together with its sister organizations in Denmark, Norway and Finland, as well as scholars in Iceland, FSMK takes part in organizing the biennial Nordic media and communication conference (NordMedia) (Föreningen för svensk medie-och kommunikationsforskning n.d.a). The conference is considered an important hub for exchange and networking in the Nordic region which is why the reviewing process aims at inclusion rather than at selection. NordMedia travels between the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). The first conference in 1973 attracted 82 participants (Nordenstreng et al. 2014, p. 19). Today, several hundred participants attend. While in the past, most keynotes and paper presentations were held in Scandinavian languages, the conference later shifted to English as a consequence of international (for instance, Baltic) researchers' interest (p. 23). NordMedia starts with a one-day pre-conference for doctoral students, followed by the main, three-day programme panels for eleven divisions and four temporary working groups (TWG). Covered areas include (1) Audience Studies, (2) Environment, Science and Risk Communication, (3) Journalism, (4) Media and Communication History, (5) Media, Globalization and Social Change, (6) Media Industries, (7) Media Literacy and Media Education, (8) Organization, Communication and Promotion, (9) Political Communication, (10) Television and Film Studies, and (11) Theory, Philosophy and Ethics of Communication. Four temporary working groups engage in Game Studies (TWG1), Gender and Media (TWG2), Media, Communication and Health (TWG3), and Visual Communication and Culture (TWG4) (cf. NordMedia Network n.d.a).

The idea for the NordMedia conference was born at a regular meeting of journalism teachers in the Nordic countries (cf. Nordenstreng et al. 2014, p. 19), a network that is still active. Today, the journalism teachers' biennial meeting carries the name NordJour Conference and is organized by the Nordic Collaboration Committee for Journalism Education (*Nordiska samarbetskommittén för journalistutbildning*), a collaboration platform for academic journalism schools carried by 21 member institutions (three each from Denmark and Finland, one each from Greenland and Iceland, seven from Norway and six from Sweden). Apart from the organization of

NordJour, the Committee awards mobility grants for journalism students and educators, and recently started to organize webinars. While NordMedia shifted to English, the Committee's working language is still *skandinaviska*, the "mixture of the spoken Scandinavian languages" (Nordisk journalistutbildning n.d.). Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians understand each other reasonably well. Even in Finland, Swedish is an official language and taught in school, as well as being the native language of a linguistic minority (*finlandssvenskar*). The Committee and Nordicom are currently personally linked via Maarit Jaakkola, the Committee's chair and Nordicom's co-director.

Nordicom is also involved in the organization of the NordMedia conference and has documented it since 1979 (NordMedia Network n.d.b). The information centre was established some years earlier (1972), against the backdrop that "there was a common interest among Nordic newspaper publishers, broadcasters and researchers in gaining a better overview of mass media research that had emerged during the 1960s" (Weibull 2015, p. 142–143; own translation). Originally just an information centre, it quickly became a platform for networking and was considered "the glue of Nordic cooperation" (Nordenstreng et al. 2014, p. 26). Nordicom is located at and financially supported by the University of Gothenburg. Other funds come from the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Swedish Ministry of Culture. In addition, a position at the University of Bergen is sustained by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture. The strategic partnership with the Nordic Council of Ministers contains these three sub-mandates (cf. Nordicom n.d.a):

First, Nordicom should "collect, synthesise, and disseminate knowledge about media development in the Nordic region" (Nordicom n.d.a). Over the years, Nordicom has assembled an impressive database and documentation of developments in the Nordic media sectors. Certainly, this is why Nordicom is called a "knowledge center" (Nordenstreng et al. 2014, p. 26), even though comparative research sometimes has to collate and compare data "that are not always directly comparable—for good or for bad" (p. 22). Nevertheless, Danish scholar Kirsten Frandsen concludes: "This part of Nordicom's activities has been and still is among the most vital—particularly from a Danish perspective, as we here have benefitted from a strong tradition of using quantitative approaches to media within the Swedish research community" (p. 22).

Second, Nordicom should initiate and publish literature on media research with a Nordic focus. This mandate is manifested in the regular publication of open-access journals and books.

Third, Nordicom has the assignment to "create and stimulate contact surfaces and collaborations among Nordic media researchers and between Nordic and international media researchers" (Nordicom n.d.a). For this purpose, Nordicom provides, for instance, a freely accessible database that lists contact details and self-descriptions of Nordic media researchers (currently numbering 621) on the NordMedia Network website.

The mission for which the Swedish Ministry of Culture grants annual funds to Nordicom through the state budget consists of the collection and documentation of statistics, such as on media ownership, market structure and conditions in Sweden (cf. Nordicom n.d.a). Herein, Nordicom cooperates with the Swedish Press and

Broadcasting Authority in the production of their annual report series "Media Development: Media Economy" (cf. Nordicom n.d.b). The authority is also one of the stakeholders of the Swedish Media Barometer (*Mediebarometern*), an annual survey of media usage of the Swedish population for which Nordicom took over the responsibility from SR/PUB after 1993 (cf. Nordicom n.d.b). The centre "also cooperates with the Swedish Media Council on issues concerning children, youth, and media" (Nordicom n.d.b): In 2020, Nordicom became a member of the national network for media and information literacy (*MIK Sverige*) and is now responsible for its academic platform, the Academic Forum for Media and Information Literacy Research. Nordicom had already been gaining expertise in this area for quite some time: In the 1990s, the centre was actively involved "in the establishment of *The UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children Youth and Media*" (Nordenstreng et al. 2014, p. 22). Communication and collaboration between Nordicom and UNESCO had been active in several areas over the years (cf. Nordenstreng et al. 2014).

UNESCO had also hatched the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), which is considered by some the "international umbrella" of the Nordic (regional) conferences (Nordenstreng et al. 2014, p. 19). In the 1970s, when Swedish media researchers "started to discover each other" (Weibull 2015, p. 141; own translation), it was primarily IAMCR that attracted them as participants—most of its conferences were held at destinations not too far from their home. As IAMCR conferences served as platforms for collaboration between Swedish media researchers, it is no wonder that FSMK's foundation was incubated there (cf. p. 143). Many Swedish scholars, especially those with a background in the humanities, see IAMCR as one of the most relevant associations they would like to have a membership or engagement in, for instance, by (co-)chairing a division or presenting at its (nowadays, annual) main conference.

5 Recruitment and working conditions

Judging from the number of institutions and agents, the Swedish field of media and communication studies is quite large and diverse compared with other countries of roughly the same population (e.g. Austria). It is also quite internationalized. Even back in the 1950s and 1960s individual social scientifically oriented media researchers were visiting the US and returning with scientific impulses and organizational ideas (cf. Weibull 2015, p. 128). In smaller institutions, meetings and work such as teaching are predominantly conducted in Swedish, but in bigger, more internationalized departments, English can be sufficient, at least in the beginning. However, as usual with job appointments abroad, language skills are a great advantage and can even be asked for in job advertisements. When applying for a position at a Swedish higher education institution, it is particularly important to understand how the system works. For instance, instead of having two terms and a longer break in between, the Swedish system is organized into academic years. Academic years start at the end of August, end in mid-June, and consist of two terms (autumn and spring) which are divided into four five-week periods each. There is no break be-

tween the autumn and the spring term, apart from the Christmas holidays, which come towards the end of the autumn term. In addition, there are differences in how teaching is conducted in Sweden, as compared to Germany. These differences should be accounted for when applying for a post.

1. Teaching is organized in courses that contain both seminars and lectures. One course is taught after the other (block course structure) and usually fills one to two of the four periods mentioned above. If applicants list a lecture in journalism studies in their application, without hourly specifications, Swedish recruiting committees will most likely think that this was a 2-hour session in one block course, not a 15-week long class.
2. In Sweden, a course is developed once (that is, a fixed syllabus and literature list) and then usually repeated term after term or year after year. Of course, individual sessions can be adapted over time after student evaluations or teacher assessments, but overall, a course structure is quite fixed once it has been approved and installed. Even though course plans in Germany are not totally developed from scratch (since they are based on study regulations and module descriptions), they are considerably more thought of on-the-fly, term after term, since most courses are not offered repeatedly. The routine of adapting module descriptions in the German academic system allows teachers a considerable degree of freedom in setting topical foci and putting together reading lists.
3. The Swedish system differentiates between teachers and course managers. At many places, courses are taught collaboratively but managed by only one or two colleagues. For instance, a course in empirical methods may feature one colleague who teaches a session (e.g. a lecture and an accompanying seminar) on interview techniques, while another teacher is responsible for sessions on qualitative or quantitative content analysis. The course manager not only books rooms before the course and registers grades after it but also ensures that the course content and examination are harmonized between the individual teachers. In the German system, a teacher usually performs both roles at the same time.
4. Depending on the position applied for, having experiences in teaching, course development, course administration, and administrative duties will be an advantage if not a requirement in the recruiting processes. Therefore, it is important to outline separately how often an applicant developed, managed, or taught a course. It is not uncommon for Swedish institutions to use software such as Retendo to diligently track the individuals' workload (measured in hours). Thus, it is also not uncommon to even provide an estimation of how many hundreds of hours in total an applicant has of teaching experience, for instance.

While the German academic system has several bottlenecks—from PhD student to postdoc, from postdoc to tenured professorship—it is tougher in Sweden to enter the system. A doctoral position's funding must be safeguarded for four years before a university can advertise it, and aspirants are usually required to submit research proposals with their application. In recent years, funding institutions have considerably reduced opportunities to apply for the funding of doctoral positions in grant proposals. Thus, most likely, PhD students can apply only for institutionally funded positions. Once they make it through the competition (depending on the location and

the position's description, there can be more than 20 applications), PhD students are usually full-time researchers, conduct individual research projects, and must attend PhD courses (the number varies). Teaching duties can be taken on (mostly voluntary) but must not exceed 20% of a full-time position. PhD students are examined at smaller steps along the way, and the thesis defence comes after its publication. In the Department of Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University, for instance, PhD students have a "60% seminar" (a little more than half-way through) and a "90% seminar" (almost done), in which they receive external feedback on their texts. More input can be received through participation in the Swedish Doctoral Students' Network (TRAIN). TRAIN is sustained by departments that offer a PhD programme in MKV. At the annual TRAIN symposium, PhD projects are discussed with peers and seniors. The network also uses resources efficiently by organizing joint, recurrent PhD courses. In addition, it is quite common for Swedish PhD students to attend summer schools offered by the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).

After the dissertation, it is helpful to have managed to get an (externally funded) postdoc project, for example, through the international postdoc grant of the Swedish Research Council (the acceptance rate has been around 20% recently—the statistics are reported by the Council after the decisions have been made). Otherwise, it is usual to work as a free teaching agent (*timlärare* or *adjunkt*), but temporary employment is only allowed for a certain period of time (see the Employment Protection Act/*Lagen om anställningsskydd*). Even though teaching is not mandatory as a PhD or externally funded postdoc, it is beneficial to take over teaching duties, since the next (tenured) step, a Senior Lecturer position, requires a fair amount of teaching experience.

Advertised Senior Lecturer positions usually result in fewer applicants than for a PhD position (again, depending on the position's description and the location). Two more specialized recruitment processes I followed had seven and thirteen applicants, another more general job description resulted in 33 applications. Depending on the department's resources and the pool of candidates, it is even possible that more than one person is hired. The positions typically come with a fairly heavy teaching load. Depending on the institutions' resources—with universities having deeper pockets than university colleges—Senior Lecturers teach between 70% and 80% of their work time, 5–10% is usually allocated to meetings and administrative duties, and another 10–20% to research and personal development. Regarding teaching, and unlike the German system, teaching time considers both classroom duties but also preparation hours as well. It differs from institution to institution how many hours one receives for teaching duties, but usually, the calculation considers different levels of effort a teacher must put into preparations of lectures versus seminars, or supervisions versus examinations. Via externally funded research grants, Senior Lecturers can scale up their research time. Their contracts would most likely not allow for a complete elimination of their teaching load, but lowering it to around 25% should be possible. Young and mid-career scholars are highly dependent on successful grant applications if they want to stay on top in research (or maintain temporary positions as project researchers).

Positions for professors are rarely advertised. However, PhD students can get tenured at their alma mater if they successfully apply for a Senior Lecturer position

and then continue to apply for promotions. The first step Senior Lecturers take is to become a Docent (a title equivalent to Associate Professor). The process works quite similar to a *habilitation* in Germany, yet it is an application for a promotion. The application contains additional publications that would qualitatively and quantitatively equal a second book, describes the own pedagogical approach, lists teaching experience on all levels and research projects. These documents are then reviewed by two external reviewers. If the evaluation is positive, the applicant receives the title Docent, a pay rise, and perhaps internally funded added research time. However, the position (lecturer) remains the same. The application for a full professorship may follow additional years of earning scientific, educational, and other relevant work merits. Professors usually receive more salary and institutionally funded research time. However, the option for such a promotion is not automatic; whether a promotion to a full professor is possible or not is decided by the institution.

Applications for regular, tenured academic positions are submitted digitally and managed by the human relations department. Most likely, the applicants will find a template for the application's structure in the submission system, which they will be asked to follow. Due to the principle of openness of public administration (*offentlighetsprincipen*), applications to public higher education institutions are considered public documents (*allmän handling*). This means that everyone has the right to request access to and read the applications, as well as the external reviewers' assessments of the candidates (which most often include a suggested ranking or a singling out of the top candidates for the vacant position). If the reviewers' assessments are not sent over to the applicants automatically, it is wise to ask for them before the trial lecture or presentation since one can then address aspects or correct misunderstandings in the interview with the recruitment committee. Finally, the HR specialist assigned to the recruiting process will ask the successful applicant for two references (if names and contact details had not already been provided with the application).

6 Studying the field in Sweden

In Sweden, every lecturer can find their spot: Swedish higher education institutions offer general but also highly specialized study programmes. While this can create obstacles for students transferring from one institution to another (cf. Bolin and Forsman 2010, p. 197), it also allows them to find courses and programmes tailored to their individual interests. Undergraduate courses and programmes are often taught in Swedish and postgraduate offerings in English. It is even possible to find courses for distance learning, especially by smaller and geographically remote higher education institutions.

Applying for a study programme in Sweden is centralized: All applications run through the website antagning.se. The platform provides information about available courses and programmes and, via the website statistik.uhr.se, acceptance statistics from previous application rounds. Prospective students can not only apply for programmes but also for modules of them or independent stand-alone courses. Thus, credits are an important "currency" in Sweden: 7.5 credits equal a five-week period, 15 credits two periods, and one term counts for 30 credits. Bachelor's programmes

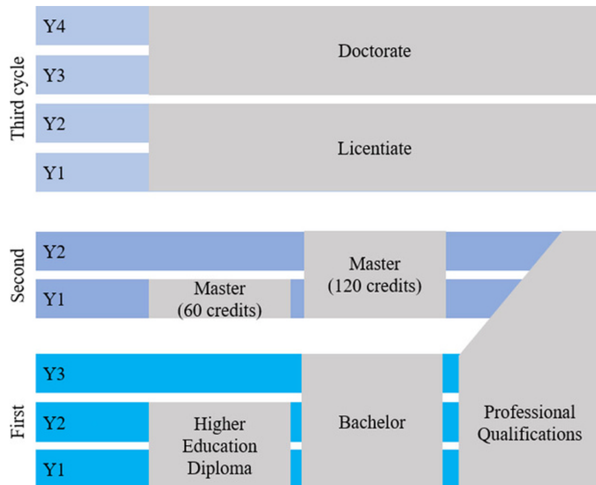

Fig. 1 Higher education in Sweden. (Source: https://www.universityadmissions.se)

are composed of 180 credits and the main subject is built of A, B and C level courses. Master's programmes can comprise either 60 or 120 credits (see Fig. 1). In more applied subjects, it is also possible to continue with a practically oriented education based on a bachelor's degree (e.g. Journalism for Academics, a one-year programme at Södertörn University). The third-cycle education can be finished after two years with a licentiate or after four years with a doctorate (see, for instance, the description of the third-cycle education in media and communication studies at Lund University[3]).

At antagning.se, the applicant will find the term "media" in two different subject categories (own translations): One subject category is *journalism, information and communication* which includes educational offerings in journalism, media and communication science, media history, strategic communication, archival and library science. The second subject category, *art, design and media,* is broader and includes (besides more distant subjects like architecture, dance, arts, music, drama, or fashion) educational offerings in design, aesthetics, film studies, photography, writing/composition, media production and media technology.

According to statistik.uhr.se, the most popular undergraduate programmes in *journalism* in autumn 2020 were Media, Communication and Journalism Studies offered at Uppsala University (the first choice for 358 applicants), Journalism and Media Production at Linnaeus University (104), Journalism at Lund University (80), and Journalism and Digital Media at Södertörn University (75). On the postgraduate level, Investigative Journalism at the University of Gothenburg was highly sought after (61), followed by the International Master's in Journalism at Södertörn University (28) and Journalism Studies at Stockholm University (24, conducted in Swedish). Applicants interested in *media* can find quite a range of study programmes—the younger the higher education institution is, the more likely the programme will fill a niche and go beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries. Interesting, specialized offer-

[3] https://www.kom.lu.se/en/education/forskarutbildning/ (assessed: 30 July 2021)

ings can be found at Malmö University (an undergraduate programme in Media and Communication Studies: Media Activism, Strategy and Entrepreneurship) or Karlstad University (a postgraduate programme in Geomedia Studies: Media, Mobility and Spatial Planning). Besides the mentioned Media, Communication and Journalism Studies programme at Uppsala, the highest number of first-priority applications in autumn 2020 went to the undergraduate programme in Media and Communication Science at the University of Gothenburg (272); IT, Media and Design at Södertörn University (223); and Media, Communication and PR at Örebro University (209). On the postgraduate level, most first-priority applicants were attracted by Media and Communication Studies: Culture, Collaborative Media, and Creative Industries at Malmö University (188/86) and Global Media Studies at Stockholm University (81).

Even though the Swedish Public Employment Service and the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations assess the situation in journalism and communications for the next years as competitive (cf. Arbetsförmedlingen n.d.; Saco/Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation 2020), educational offerings in the field are generally quite popular.

7 Summary and conclusion

The initiation of media and communication studies in Sweden, which happened during the 1960s and 1970s, was "far from an intra-academic endeavour" (Hyvönen et al. 2018, p. 88). While curiosity about media-related issues had already been aroused in other disciplines, it was especially the changes in the media landscape and political interests that hatched the institutionalization of media research—through the thirst for qualified staff and the commission of data collections, reports, and inquiries. Nordicom became an important hub and documentation centre for these research activities. By delivering scholarly knowledge for policymaking and media businesses, Nordicom had a relevant role in both the formation and the generation of a "general awareness of media and communication studies as an autonomous field of research" (Nordenstreng et al. 2014, p. 22). This field grew from around 130 active researchers in the 1980s (cf. Weibull 1992, p. 23) to around 250 actors nowadays (cf. Lindell 2020).

Sweden is recognized for its capability in balancing ideologies. "[C]lassical liberal notions of the press as an independent and monitoring 'fourth estate'," are synchronized with "social responsibility ideas with necessary relationships between the political system and media system to maintain diversity and public service in broadcast media" (Nord and von Krogh 2021, pp. 353–354). The country, known for early press freedom and freedom of information, high newspaper circulation, and strong public service orientation opted for press and media subsidies but passed no law against media ownership concentration (p. 354; see also Nord and Grusell 2021, p. 113). Similarly, social scientific "administrative" and humanistic "critical" research can coexist within the same field which not only expanded considerably in recent decades but also experienced a renewed significance. Developments in the application of artificial inteligence, the threat of information warfare—which certainly

contributed to the government's initiative to reinstall an authority for psychological defence (SOU/Statens offentliga utredningar 2020)—and concerns for journalists' security and autonomy are only a few issues that the Swedish community of media and communication scholars works on and discusses these days. The challenges contemporary society faces in the areas of our subject are plentiful.

For a country of around 10.5 million inhabitants, the study opportunities are diverse, especially due to the option to apply for and take individual courses of varying lengths. Offerings in distance education and in English make Sweden an interesting option for foreign students. Perhaps, they will even come to stay: In the last couple of years, the Swedish system brought forth fewer PhDs, mostly due to reduced opportunities to acquire external funding for such positions. If one is willing to accept what working in the north means—a more economically permeated research life, a potentially higher teaching load and no automatism regarding institutionally granted sabbaticals, less sunlight in the winter and shorter nights when summer peaks—a scholar's life can be quite good in Sweden. Promotions lie in one's own hands, funding opportunities are ample for (especially smaller scale) grant proposals and one can get around using English quite well, at least for a while. Gender equality is also quite advanced in Sweden, even if the academic merit system still makes us wait for a while until women are equally represented in the field's power elite. On the receiving end, recruitments from abroad will always increase competition and come with an investment, but they can also be refreshing infusions to enrich scholarly discourses (see also Carlsson 2007, p. 223), especially in smaller scientific communities.

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