

## National report for Sweden

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Contribution to the European report:

Stald, G. and Haddon, L. (2008) *Cross-Cultural Contexts of Research: Factors Influencing the Study of Children and the Internet in Europe*. A report for the EC Safer Internet Plus Programme, 2008.

### Universities and Disciplines

Depending on the source checked, there are slightly more than 30 universities and university colleges (i.e. where you can get degree but not a PhD). Media and communication studies can be found in at least 20 universities and university colleges. It first appeared in 1981 in Stockholm, but became more widespread as a discipline in the 1990s. That said, a number of people within other disciplines such as the social sciences and humanities had conducted research on the media before this period.

It is worth noting that many studies collected in the EU Kids Online repository were conducted in humanities, social sciences and pedagogy. Half of the 18 studies did not come from media and communications studies. We have journalism, informatics and data and system science (which is more functionally orientated looking at how systems work), media techniques (i.e. how to make audio-visual content) and art and design.

### National Data Collected

The Swedish Radio and Television Authority, part of the Government that gives out licenses, partly funds the collection of data about the internet, but they do not collect its own data nowadays. Originally the research department of Swedish Radio and Television collected data about media use (from 1979-93), but when it ceased to exist Nordicom (Nordic Centre Information and Documentation) took over this responsibility. This is an independent Centre for Media and Communication Research based at Goteborg University. It produces a yearly report called 'Media Barometer' based on interviews with people about what TV they watched, which channels they watched, whether they used the Internet, etc. This is now paid for by various bodies including various newspapers, the Post Office, a Government Department and Swedish Public Service Radio and TV. The Media Barometer survey covers a 9-79 year age range and always shows some of the data by age e.g. 9-14, 15-24 etc. So we have some figures for younger groups. The Media Council repeated its study in 2004-2006 focussing on children of 9-16 years of age. It is called 'Media and Kids', and includes Internet use. The Council is planning to continue this every 2 years

### Institutional processes in applying to conduct research

If want to study children up to 15 years old you need permission from parents or care-givers. In addition, there are ethical obligations, but these are not laws or rules. There may be sensitive questions that it is not suitable to use with children – e.g. involving showing sexual content. There is no particular stage that all research proposals have to go through but yes, they have to be checked by one's own department – they need to be signed by the head of the department.

### Pressures to conduct research

If you are employed as a lecturer you are required to put in all your time into teaching which adds up to 400 hours a year. It is good to apply for research money since you can free yourself from teaching – for instance the teaching hours may be reduced by 50%. Universities are sympathetic to this because they appreciate that too much teaching has its drawbacks. In addition, conducting research enables you to progress in terms of your career e.g. to Docent (Reader) or Professor and this is good for the university as well. On the other hand, no one

says that you *must* research, you will not be dismissed if you do not – there is just the sense that it is desirable. There is no pressure to cooperate with industry – it is not necessary to get funding from industrial sources. Generally there is some talk about it being desirable and there are some instances of cooperation.

### **Factors influencing the orientation of research**

Industries seldom approach universities for research. When Public Service Radio and Public Service TV wanted to publish their history, they approached a university for 25 researchers to write this history. There have been some other cases like this but usually the media industry pays for its own private research by market research companies, producing data which they do not make public. In general, there is a gap between the media industry and researchers. Sometimes there are instances of government ministries approaching academics for research. The general Research councils do not approach universities for research. But in Sweden there are some Research Councils that have a special focus – e.g. on working life, the Baltic Sea Research Foundation (looking at countries around the Baltic Sea), the Knowledge Foundation (interested in IT). These topics are the constant focus on these bodies rather than having particular programme lasting a few years like the PICT programme in the UK. Nordicom asked the media industry to pay a little for the Media Barometer research. Society Opinion Media (SOM) asks the main newspapers for some money. Hence there are examples, but it is not common.

### **National Research Traditions**

Both quantitative and qualitative traditions are strong traditions in our country. Research with mass media began with the first one was in 1928, this was a study of the radio (i.e. a study of people who paid the licence fee). This was followed in 1940 by another study of the radio and in the 1940s by studies of book reading and cinema. But studies only really increased dramatically after the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war. The first study on the internet was in 1995.

### **Sources of Funding for Research**

Thinking about media research in general, a good deal of money is paid by the media industry to look at things such as ratings, etc. and the universities do not know about this. If we compare academic research with the media industry's own research, they may put more money into research than the Government – but we do not have figures for this. Commercial companies do not usually fund research. The data on funding of research on children and the internet shows a very clear pattern. Those studies focussing on risks are paid for by the EC and the Government (mostly via the Media Council). University studies do not focus on risks at all but instead consider the Internet user as an active person asking how young people use the Internet for their purposes, how it helps shape identity, etc.

### **Political initiatives influencing research**

The Media Council studies risks. It receives certain general directives from the Government – e.g. to study children and the Internet – and implements these. As far as regulations are concerned there have been few new legal changes with regard to the Internet and there have not been changes in general media regulations. In terms of Government initiatives to try to encourage the Internet in schools there has been pedagogical research, originally academic initiatives, because of programmes in schools undertaken by the Government e.g. examining the usefulness of IT in schools. The Knowledge Foundation has money for researching IT in schools and produces yearly reports on learning and IT in schools. There is some pedagogical research on how teachers experience IT training, how many teacher training colleges take IT courses, etc. The Knowledge Foundation also looks at teachers' and directors' attitudes to IT use in school – this is more a kind of evaluation. There is no research related to a specific campaign. The Media Council was involved in SAFT and there have been several attempts to measure whether children are engaged in more risks than earlier. So there is more of an ongoing evaluation of this issue - and if awareness increases it is assumed that the campaigns were effective. The Media Council is the EU Node of the Safer

Internet plus Programme and in hence in continuous contact with European Commission – so it sees documents, but there is no evidence of a reaction to a specific document.

### **Particular debates and concerns about children**

There is a general concern and public debate about the active participation of children in civil life. There is a wider discourse reflecting a fear that it is dangerous for children to go out. Parents do ferry their children around in the car to sports centres, etc. but this was because of logistics, because it was often impractical for children to travel to these places, not because it was dangerous.

### **Case Studies**

Cecilia is currently conducting a study of 17 year olds and 45-44 year olds in Stockholm and in St Petersburg. This is not only about the internet but also covers other media use, leisure habits, socio-economic background, attitudes to consumption and advertisements, attitudes to society. In other words, it is a large study of lifestyles.

There are many who are optimistic about the idea that Internet will make society more democratic – but the hypothesis in this study is that other factors in society themselves shape internet usage. The 45-55 year olds in Russia grew up in Soviet period, whereas the 17 year olds did not, so it was useful to compare these. There has also been some change in Sweden between the time when these generations grew up, although it was not so radical. The 4 groups could have different views of society and evaluations of democracy. In a mediated society it is important to see if there is any contribution to these views from the media and from Internet use. The project uses a survey and focus groups. In general in Sweden these are sometimes combined, but not always. The age range was selected keeping in mind several practical considerations. You can find 17 year olds in schools whereas in the case of older young people, it can be harder to locate them. Secondary schools have 16-18 year olds. 18 year olds have many exams, and so they have less time to participate in research. It is therefore easier to get the schools' permission to approach 17 year olds. 16 year olds may be too young: the study wanted to look at children who use the Internet more, which is more true of 17 year olds than 16 year olds. 17 year olds are also nearer to adulthood. There was a previous study of 17 year olds by a colleague in 1999 so they could also compare the current results to the findings some years ago. Studies are funded by the Research Council – commercial companies would not fund this type of study.