

RESEARCH NETWORK ON THE HISTORY OF UNIVERSITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Pieter Dhondt

From the 1980s, historiography of higher education was widened in three respects: chronologically, thematically and geographically. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries replaced the Middle Ages as the main period of interest. Research questions were no longer limited to institutional issues and more attention was paid to the university in relation with the surrounding society. Finally, historical overviews of an indigenous institution were supplemented by comparative studies of the institution in a national or even international context. Already in 1997, the American historian Sheldon Rothblatt recorded an increasing interest in international relations between university cultures.¹ Nordic historians of higher education have followed this trend of a geographical widening to a lesser extent and only occasionally the local and national boundaries have been crossed.

In the beginning of 2007, the *Research network on the history of university and higher education in Finland* was established at the workshop “Yliopistohistoriallinen tutkijatapaaminen” in the Helsinki University Museum Arppeanum, among other reasons, to meet this deficiency. At the workshop, which was organised by Laura Kolbe, scholars of different Nordic and mainly Finnish universities presented their research: John Peter Collett of the Forum for University

History in Oslo; Marjatta Hietala of the large-scale research program “Scholars, science, universities and networks as factors making cities attractive” at the University of Tampere; Toivo Nygård and Jussi Välimaa of the University of Jyväskylä; Matti Salo of the University of Oulu; Kari Immonen of the University of Turku; and a number of researchers of the University of Helsinki.

During the meeting, several participants realised that it would be very useful to continue these kinds of contacts on a more regular basis. Therefore, a small working group was established, consisting of Kolbe, Välimaa, Panu Nykänen of the Helsinki University of Technology, Michaela Bränn and Pieter Dhondt, both of the University of Helsinki. The aim of the working group, and of the network in general, is to create a “university history forum” for Finnish (and foreign) researchers on the history of universities and higher education to encourage future collaborative workshops, projects and publications.

One of the first achievements of the network was setting up a website and an e-mail list (operative from the summer of 2007) of interest to university historians in Finland and other Nordic countries: <http://www.helsinki.fi/historia/ylhist>. On the website as well as on the e-mail list, national and international conferences and meetings are announced (supplemented by an archive of previous events), together with information with regard to current research. The website offers the possibility for all individual researchers and research groups, working on the history of universities and higher education in Finland, to present their own project, announce new publications and the like.

A second important realisation of the network was the organisation of the second University History conference in Finland on the 17th and 18th of April 2008 in Ot-

aniemi, of which a selection of the papers is published in this special issue. A dozen of Finnish scholars, a large delegation of Swedish researchers and representatives from Norway, Estonia and the Netherlands got the opportunity to present their ongoing research. Surely with regard to encouraging the contacts between different scholars in the field, the conference (and thus the network) realised one of its main objectives.

Thirdly, since June 2008, the website of the network gives access to a continuing bibliographical database of publications on the history of higher education in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden from 1977 up to the present day, in collaboration with the international journal *History of Universities*. The ambition of the journal is to collect a continuing bibliography on the history of higher education throughout the world, starting in 1977. In this bibliography the Northern European countries have always been covered together, taken care of by many different scholars of different countries in the previous years. However, most often the researcher in charge focussed on references from his/her own country, what caused an imbalance between the different Nordic countries in the contributions in subsequent volumes.

In consultation with many collaborators from all the Nordic countries, the bibliography will be collected in a more systematic way, covering Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish publications in an equal balance. To this end, the editor of the bibliography can make an appeal to an extensive network of more than 150 scholars in all these Nordic countries. In addition to the publication in the database on the internet, newly added references will still be published twice a year in *History of Universities*.

The advantages of the database in comparison with other existing (library) cata-

logues are threefold. Firstly, books as well as articles in books and journals are included. Secondly, it offers more and/or other search possibilities, e.g. "location", which covers the publications with regard to the history of university and higher education in a specific city/institution, "country" or "language". Thirdly, the database offers the possibility of adding an abstract to the references, what makes the system certainly more attractive to the user. The internet database is developed by Tietokannat.fi and financially supported by the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation.

The easier search for and accessibility of publications of scholars, the enlarged contacts through the meetings of the network and the increased communication by the e-mail list should stimulate future collaborative and especially comparative research, not only between Finnish scholars mutually, but also with colleagues at other Northern European universities and institutions. All this should enable us to take up the historiographic challenges to university history as described by the Norwegian historian Robert Marc Friedman,² and so to attain new insights and perspectives in the history of universities, student life, scientific and technological developments, nation-building, the formation of elites and other related themes. In this way, the connection to international tendencies in current university history will be completed.

¹ Rorthblatt 1997, 156.

² Friedman 2000.

Research network on the history of university and higher education in Finland
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For more information on the research network, its e-mail list and the bibliography, please visit www.helsinki.fi/history/ylhist.

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Literature:

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OUR WORLD IN TRANSITION NEW CHALLENGES FOR UNIVER- SITY MUSEUMS AND THEIR PARENT ORGANISATIONS

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From the late sixteenth century onwards, object-based research and teaching spread over the European universities, leading to the establishment of botanical gardens, anatomical theatres and astronomical observatories.¹ As Vesalius' and Bacon's methods for research, enquiry and teaching were widely adapted, and the travels of discovery and exploration brought in numerous hitherto unknown objects from remote areas of the globe, collections of naturalia and artificialia emerged, both private and at the universities. The donation of such collections to the University of Oxford led, in 1683, to the establishment of the Ashmolean Museum, Europe's first purpose built museum open to the public. The Ashmolean Museum accommodated not only space for the collections of geology, zoology, ethnography and antiquarian objects, but also space for teaching and demonstration and even a chemical laboratory.

This kind of "mini academy", bringing together collections, staff and teaching, proved to be an extremely successful model that has been copied by hundreds of universities all over the world. As the collections accumulated, the museums became the keepers of the material archive for academic research and teaching. The fame of the collections could be such that they were used to attract the best professors, travelling scholars and students. Object-based research and teaching reached its high point