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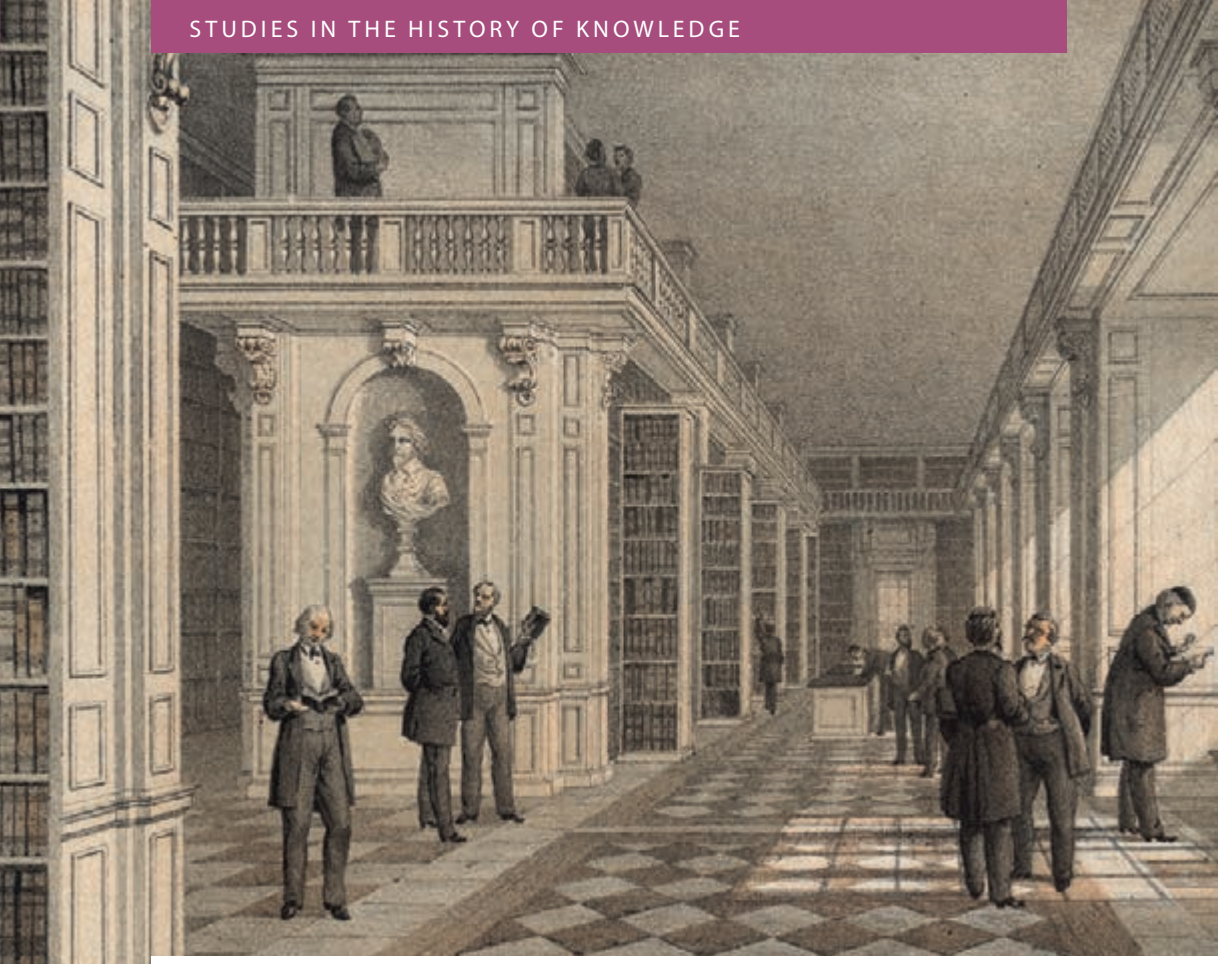

Edited by Anders Ekström and Hampus Östh Gustafsson

The Humanities and the Modern Politics of Knowledge

The Impact and Organization of the Humanities in Sweden, 1850-2020

Amsterdam University Press

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1 Introduction

Politics of Knowledge and the Modern History of the Humanities

Anders Ekström and Hampus Östh Gustafsson

Abstract
The history of the humanities needs to move beyond the focus on traditional disciplines and historicize notions regarding the impact and organization of the humanities in a long historical perspective. The present edited volume, based on case studies of Sweden in the modern period, provides an important contribution to such an endeavor. This introduction proposes an analytical framework by special reference to "knowledge politics," a concept that allows a flexible and aggregated examination of how societies have valued and politicized the organization, balancing, and circulation of knowledge on a broad scale. The national case in point provides illuminating insights into how the humanities over time had to relate to various regimes of legitimacy and enables comparisons on an international scale.

Keywords: history of humanities, politics of knowledge, modern society, impact, organization, boundaries, regime of legitimacy

The Shifting Roles of the Humanities in Modern Society

The modern history of the humanities displays a multitude of legitimizing claims for the value and societal impact of humanistic knowledge. Sometimes, these claims have conflicted, reflecting a fundamental tension between reactive and generative strategies employed for the use – and defense – of humanities research and education. It may be asked whether humanities scholars have been associated with tradition or progress, elites

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or outsiders, ivory towers or public intellectuals, the past or the future, and thus critique or construction of present and future societies. The societal roles, positions, and identities of the humanities have, indeed, been of a complex and often ambiguous character, indicating that the humanities may be particularly sensitive to the emergence of new political constellations and regimes of legitimacy. The very need of defining disciplines and their boundaries signals uncertainty about their institutional and societal value, and intensifies in periods of epistemological change. However, in the case of the humanities, such normative claims are regularly made on an aggregated level – speaking not of individual disciplinary formations but of *the humanities*, thus referring not only to their relation to the social or natural sciences but to fundamental issues about the necessary bases of knowledge in modern society.

In this book, we address the shifting status of the humanities through a national case study spanning two centuries, starting in the mid-nineteenth century. The empirical focus on Sweden as a case where the humanities eventually got heavily questioned as a part of the modern project enables us to develop an extended but still coherent historical analysis, inviting critical comparisons with the growing literature on the *history of the humanities* from around the world. Given its polemical context, it is no surprise that much of this literature has been selective and even anecdotal. This is now changing with the emergence of a new orientation of this historiographic field, which also promises to transcend the tradition of disciplinary history and approach the humanities from the perspective of a broader history of knowledge, thus paving the way for more thorough historicizations.

This perspective also points to important differences. For instance, a common claim in normative debates has argued for the formative role of humanities knowledge and education in democratic political systems.[1] While this certainly makes sense in the American context with its strong tradition of liberal education and political republicanism, the claim is misleading when applied to European sites where German notions of *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Bildung* have had a longstanding influence on how "the humanities" are being perceived. In such cases, it might be more relevant to ask why the humanities maintained a stronger legitimacy in pre-democratic and elitist contexts while the emerging social sciences seemed to flourish with the breakthrough of political democracy in the twentieth century. A fine-grained historical perspective is required in

1 Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*.

order to note and make sense of such shifting conditions for the legitimacy of various forms of knowledge in modern societies.

In this book, we conceive of such negotiations and long-term changes as key to the politics of knowledge. The Swedish case, which in this respect was anything but an exception in comparison to other Scandinavian and continental European countries, shows how the humanities were instrumental to the building of modern societal institutions, political movements, and comprehensive areas of professional education in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, however, the sense of future-making rapidly shifted toward science and medicine, and later technology and economy. In the postwar period, it became increasingly unclear whether democratic society – in its (Social Democratic) welfare appearance – really was capable of absorbing subjects like history, philology, and literature. The very rationale of the humanities was thus put under pressure.

This renegotiation – and contest – of their social contract is approached from several angles in this edited volume, focusing on the shifting roles and societal applications of the humanities over time by posing the following questions: How have the humanities been defined and delineated? What has it meant, at specific times and in specific contexts, to mobilize the humanities for engaging with societal problems? In which ways has the production of humanistic knowledge been organized in order to meet such ends? These investigations will hopefully stimulate a reflection on the conditions for the impact and organization of the humanities today, at a time characterized by changing epistemological boundaries, complex global emergencies, and mounting pressure on academic knowledge to demonstrate its societal value.

Writing New Histories of the Humanities

The above questions have attracted increasing attention in recent years from scholars active in a wide range of historically oriented academic fields. Inquiries have been made into the validity of common claims in defense of the humanities and how they have been formed historically.[2] Rightly, it has also been pointed out that it is no coincidence – and not the first time – that we see a turn to historiographical queries and narratives when a branch

2 See e.g., Bate, ed., *The Public Value*; Belfiore and Upchurch, eds., *Humanities in the Twenty-First Century*; Bérubé and Ruth, *The Humanities*; Bulaitis, *Value and the Humanities*; Small, *The Value of the Humanities*.

of knowledge finds itself under threat. Indeed, the history of individual disciplines, and various reorientations and turns within disciplines, is a pervasive genre for making normative claims about the identity and preferred future of particular fields of academic knowledge production.[3] The politics of canon making and the delineation of "classical" theory has also been the focus of important work in the history of the social sciences.[4] In a related fashion, the advocates of the new history of the humanities have depicted current historiographic initiatives as an active effort to strengthen the humanities in the face of present challenges.[5] While the global discourse of the so-called "crisis" in the humanities is, by no means, a new topic, current efforts to legitimize these disciplines are supported by an increasing number of attempts in recent years to examine the historical development and present state of the humanities and adjacent branches of knowledge in more systematic and ambitious ways.[6]

The field of history of humanities is currently going through a characteristic disciplinary formation through the creation of independent institutional platforms, networks, and canons.[7] Launched by computational linguist Rens Bod with Dutch colleagues, the field has been formed at the intersection of history of science, history of knowledge, and history of education and universities.[8] As a consequence, previously heterogeneous fields of research have been integrated in promising ways, opening up new alleys of investigation and re-interpretation of classical questions. Obviously, histories of the humanities have been written before, *avant la lettre*, but not with the same concentration and confidence as displayed by history of science and medicine.[9] Useful parallels might also be drawn to the more advanced

3 The historical dynamic and politics of the disciplinary formation of a "cultural turn" in the human (or "cultural") sciences in the 1980s and 90s is discussed in Ekström, "Den falska återkomsten."

4 Connell, "Why is Classical," pp. 1511–1557.

5 Bod et al., "A New Field," pp. 1–2.

6 Recent examples of global investigations include Ahlburg, ed., *The Changing Face*; Holm, Jarrick and Scott, *Humanities World Report*. For historical examinations of the crisis discourse, see Östh Gustafsson, "The Humanities in Crisis"; Reitter and Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis*.

7 The field is primarily represented by the conference series Making of the Humanities, running since 2008, and since 2016, the journal *History of Humanities*. One recent issue, 4, no. 2 (2019), included a theme section on "Classics of the Humanities," indicating an aspiration to create a canon of a new field.

8 See e.g., Bod and Kursell "Introduction," p. 337; Daston and Most, "History of Science," pp. 378–390; Dupré and Somsen, "The History of Knowledge"; Marchand, "Weighing Context."

9 Here, one can mention relevant journals such as *History of the Human Sciences* as well as broader publications outside of the English language area, such as *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeshichte*. Apart from the journal *History of Humanities*, recent years have also seen the

versions of the history and sociology of the social sciences that have been developed in recent years, occasionally categorized as SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities) in order to correspond to the well-established STS (Science and Technology Studies) and display fundamental mechanisms involved in the shaping of the human sciences as we know them today.[10] Historical research on the social and human sciences has, moreover, converged in discussions about public intellectuals and the history of academics and public spheres.[11] Obviously, there is much to gain from anthropological and sociological perspectives and methods that have been commonly employed within the historiography of other branches but only rarely applied in cases where the humanities constitute the primary object of study.[12] History of the humanities has thus been described as a missing piece in a wider puzzle of the history of knowledge.[13] Hopefully, the present volume will provide an impetus for a more multifaceted understanding of the function of humanistic knowledge in modern society.

Collecting eleven case studies ranging from the nineteenth century up until the present situation, this volume explores arenas where the value of the humanities was manifested and challenged, such as cultural, educational, and research policy, and also emphasizes the relationships between and public attitudes toward specific disciplines, such as philology and pedagogy. The societal function of the humanities is thus considered from a wider perspective of knowledge politics in order to thoroughly historicize notions of impact and organization that tend to be taken for granted. A number of key concepts that regularly have been used in the history and sociology of science, such as boundary work, co-production, and impact, will be introduced and employed in order to illuminate the historical function of the humanities in a multifaceted way.[14]

inauguration of new book series, such as Palgrave Macmillan's "Socio-Historical Studies of the Social and Human Sciences." These are some examples indicating the new energy that has been injected into history of the humanities and adjacent fields of research.

10 See e.g., Fleck, Duller and Karády, eds., *Shaping Human*, and also Larsson and Magdalenić, *Sociology in Sweden*; Thue, *In Quest of a Democratic*; Wisselgren, *The Social Scientific Gaze*.

11 See e.g., Eliaeson and Kalleberg, eds., *Academics as Public Intellectuals*; Fleck, Hess and Lyon, eds., *Intellectuals and their Publics*; Small, ed., *Public Intellectual*.

12 Cf., Leezenberg, *History and Philosophy*, pp. 128, 250.

13 Bod et al., "A New Field," p. 6. The potential cross-sections of history of humanities and history of knowledge are for instance illustrated in a recent forum section of *History of Humanities* focusing on circulation of knowledge. See Hammar and Östling, "Introduction."

14 These and related concepts play increasingly important parts in studies on knowledge politics and the history of the humanities, as illustrated by the emphases of a number of recent special sections in relevant journals. See e.g., "The Two Cultures Revisited: The Sciences and

Historicizing the Humanities and Their Boundaries

"The humanities" is a term in the plural. The historical and heterogeneous character of the included disciplines should not be overlooked. Still, such an awareness needs to be balanced with an interpretation of these disciplines as constituting one more or less – although unstable and shifting – integrated area of knowledge, or as a specific discursive formation. In this book, we argue that this is especially important in contexts where the humanities have been conceived of as a unity and delineated in relation to other umbrella concepts such as the social, medical, or technical sciences. Indeed, the administrative use of such categorizations permeates the management and organization of modern universities. They come alive in complex processes of institutional decision making, long-term priorities, and traveling templates for resource allocation. The aggregation of disciplines is equally important in the history of research and educational policy, and increasingly so when the politics of knowledge took on a systemic character in the twentieth century. Contemporary impact definitions, institutional innovation, and calls for interdisciplinarity also tend to activate a notion of the humanities that emphasize their internal coherence.

Since the humanities have been conceived that way in practice, historical inquiries must pay attention to the implications of this use of terminology while still not reducing the humanities into a monolith. By encouraging a balanced view of this broad spectrum of definitions, the present volume strives to go beyond the standard history of disciplinary formations, epistemological turns, and the long-standing tradition of approaching the past of the humanities through the lens of reactive critique. The general lack of detailed and systematic empirical investigations into the shifting legitimacy of the humanities has limited the perspectives of current discussions on their relevance and prospects.[15] In particular, the recurring discourse on the so-called "crisis in the humanities," which itself became a decisive force in the homogenization of the humanities in postwar societies, would benefit from a more nuanced and historically sensitive understanding of the mechanisms that altered the role of the humanities in the past. This

the Humanities in a Longue Durée Perspective," *History of Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2018); "Societal Impact in the Social Sciences and Humanities," *Research Evaluation* 29, no. 1 (2020). For recent studies on the historical impact of the humanities in Sweden, see Salö, ed., *Humanvetenskapernas verkningar*.

15 Obviously, a few comprehensive empirical studies have been conducted, focusing on the development of the humanities in particular national contexts. See e.g., Eckel, *Geist der Zeit*; Mandler, "The Humanities in British Universities."

is an argument about avoiding anachronisms and nostalgic narratives, but it is also an attempt at grasping the problems of the present through a better understanding of the past. In order to articulate the impact of the humanities with respect to their position in a wider hierarchy of knowledge and shifting political alliances, they need to be historicized beyond the trajectory of individual disciplines.[16]

The boundaries of the humanities obviously have not been of a static character. Several contributions to this volume emphasize this aspect by addressing how the humanities were (or were not) demarcated as a specific area of scholarship, and as such defined and organized in different ways. Here, it is essential to clarify the conceptual history of the humanities and outline the specific connotations of the Swedish use of terms. As the Swedish term *humaniora* has been closely associated with the German *Geisteswissenschaften*, the juxtaposition between the humanities and science has not been as obvious as within the English language area.[17] Furthermore, the distinction between the humanities and the ideological concept of humanism has been highlighted as particularly blurry.[18] Throughout the book, we demonstrate how investigations of historical examples of ongoing conceptual and institutional boundary work are fundamental for understanding what the humanities are and do – and how this has far-reaching consequences for how the identities of humanities scholars are being shaped.[19] This includes examples of how humanities scholars have attempted to escape the infamous "ivory tower" as well as detailed case studies of the co-production of humanistic knowledge between academic and public spheres.[20] The book also highlights the "invisible" humanists that were embedded in alternative infrastructures outside of the university, investigating how they contributed to the impact and circulation of the humanities in institutional and societal

16 Our argument thus supports a recent trend that emphasizes the need to *articulate* rather than *justify* the value of the humanities. See e.g., Bulaitis, *Value and the Humanities*, pp. 3, 229, 245; Collini, "On Not 'Justifying'," pp. 24–53; Emmeche, Pedersen and Stjernfelt, eds., *Mapping Frontier*.

17 It should be noted that the Swedish term for the humanities, *humaniora* (apart from Scandinavia, this term also surfaces in Germany and the Netherlands), is still somewhat narrower than the English arts and humanities (or French *les sciences humaines/humanités* or German *Geisteswissenschaften*). Primarily, it served the function of gathering a specific set of disciplines at the so-called faculties of philosophy.

18 See Elzinga, "Humanioras roll," p. 239, and cf. Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, xvi.

19 For an introduction to the concept of boundary work, see Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries*, and also Abbott, "Things of Boundaries."

20 Jasanoff, "The Idiom of Co-Production"; Shapin, "The Ivory Tower."

contexts where other forms of knowledge have been seen as dominant, for instance on the paperback book market, in a Christian *Teilöffentlichkeit*, and in Swedish defense research.

By pointing to the diversity of strategies of legitimization and contexts of relevance for the humanities, this book uncovers the humanities as a dynamic concept dependent on a wide range of interconnections. Hopefully, this will transcend reductive interpretations of their history that habitually rely on binary models such as the notion of "the two cultures."[21] Despite the influence of the wider concept of *Geisteswissenschaften*, the concept of the humanities as a specific category of knowledge was actively contrasted with natural science in a characteristic dichotomic fashion, in particular after a reform in 1876 that split the faculty of philosophy in Swedish universities in two parts. It should be noted, however, that throughout the modern era, the humanities themselves consisted in many sub-cultures. The very meaning of humanistic inquiry was indeed dependent on competition and collaboration between various cultures of knowledge throughout the modern era.

The definitions and interpretations of the humanities were also conditioned by the spectacular expansion of knowledge and its institutions in Western societies. What in the late twentieth century was alternatively labeled the *knowledge society, knowledge sector*, or *knowledge economy*, was a very different environment from the family-like and aristocratic culture of erudition that shaped the emergence of the humanities disciplines in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To understand the shifting roles and impact of the humanities it is therefore crucial to appreciate the changing environments and scales of academic knowledge production in the modern era.

Marginalization in a Context of Expansion

The marginalization of the humanities has typically been represented by critique from within, defending a particular version of the tradition of the humanities, and typically lamenting poor funding, disciplinary decline, and loss of status in the public mind. Even today, there is an anecdotal and nostalgic tendency in the reactive defense of the humanities, which builds on the preconception of humanities education and research as carriers of

21 Snow, *The Two Cultures*. See also Bouterse and Karstens, "A Diversity of Divisions"; Hamann, "Boundary Work," pp. 27–38; Krämer, "Shifting Demarcations," pp. 5–14; O'Neill, "The Humanities beyond Interpretation," p. 71; Ortolano, *The Two Cultures*.

lofty ideals that were better understood and supposedly more fully practiced in less democratic societies. This form of critique has little to offer if the goal is to understand the role of knowledge in modern societies. Indeed, the remarkable expansion of research and higher education in postwar industrial societies makes any comparison with the small-scale and elite-oriented structure of nineteenth-century European universities difficult and even awkward.[22]

The shift of volumes and balances in the orientation of higher education and research in the twentieth century, especially after World War II, did nevertheless involve a process of marginalization of the humanities as compared to their societal role and impact in earlier periods.[23] But this development did not consist in a diminishing number of humanities programs and disciplines, or decreasing funding. For example, in Sweden the number of professors, students, and departments in the arts and humanities grew rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s. The expansion continued with the establishment of a number of new universities and university colleges in the 1970s and 1980s. The increase in humanities education and research in Western universities in the second half of the twentieth century was also fueled by the incorporation of vocational education into the university system. The professional focus of humanities studies eventually shifted toward journalism and media, the public sector, heritage institutions, the culture industries, and the ever-expanding education system. In Sweden as in many other countries, this development coincided with an alleged feminization of the humanities, and higher education more generally, which was accompanied by a familiar pattern of shifting social status of the professions and areas of study that women entered.[24]

The marginalization of the humanities in the second half of the twentieth century was thus not a matter of downsizing; it was an effect of the introduction and much more rapid growth of other areas of knowledge, especially economics, medicine, and technology.[25] According to some commentators, this was the advent of the "mass university" with increasing proportions of higher education, and eventually research, being devoted to the academization of vocational training and applied knowledge.[26] However,

22 Cf. Ekström, "A Failed Response?"

23 Östh Gustafsson, "The Discursive Marginalization"; Östh Gustafsson, *Folkhemmets styvbarn*.

24 Cf. Rosenberg, "Women in the Humanities."

25 Comparative perspectives on this development can be drawn from Collini, *What Are Universities For?*; Ekström and Sörlin, *Alltings mått*.

26 See e.g., Trow, *Twentieth-Century Higher Education*.

as others have pointed out, it was also one of the major and most successful reforms of "old school" welfare politics, which emphasized the importance not only of social but epistemological inclusion in the democratization of knowledge.[27]

In contemporary Sweden, this history of expansion is currently visible in a staggering number of approximately forty universities and university colleges, which compares to the number of cities in the country with over 30,000 inhabitants. In 2019, 44 % of the population between the age of 25–64 had taken post-secondary education with 28 % of the same category having three or more years of higher education, which represents almost a two-fold increase in less than two decades.[28] Today, it has become apparent that the growing number of institutions for higher education drives a process of diversification that makes it increasingly difficult for policy makers to approach universities as one "sector" or "national system." As a result, several smaller institutions tend to seek legitimacy through specialization. This creates different conditions and possibilities for humanities research and education on local grounds.

One response to increasing diversity and changing institutional and societal incentives is reflected in the rise of humanities-driven forms of integrated knowledge production. On the one hand, new research orientations and institutional niches have formed around, for instance, the digital, medical, and green humanities, with new expectations being attached to the integrated role of the humanities in research agendas that address transformative processes of social, political, and environmental change in contemporary societies.[29] On the other hand, the language of interdisciplinarity has been favored by local managerial schemes of shifting priorities, down-sizing through mergers, and reallocation of resources to large scale technical infrastructures and financially more profitable areas of education. To work on these tensions, and how they play out in local contexts and national systems, we need to approach the history of the humanities not only through their disciplinary formation and traditions of critique, but from the broader perspective of a history of the entire apparatus of knowledge politics.

27 Cf. Ekström, "A Failed Reponse?"

28 https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/utbildning-jobb-och-pengar/utbildningsnivan-i-sverige/, September 1 (2020) [accessed November 17 (2020)].

29 This development is further traced and discussed in Ekström, ed., *Tvärgående kulturforskning*; Ekström and Sörlin, *Alltings mått*, ch. 10; Ekström and Sörlin, *Integrativa kunskapsmiljöer*; Sörlin, "Humanities of Transformation," pp. 287–297.

Three Layers of Historical Analysis

For a genuinely historical analysis of the development and shifting balances of the humanities in any country it is crucial to get the proportions of expansion and marginalization right. Indeed, this is also key to any form of normative critique that strive to identify the potentials for a different role of the humanities in the future. In this book we tentatively suggest and develop a conceptual scheme that distinguishes between three different time spans and levels of analysis.

The first is the long-term development of the humanities as distinct from the natural and social sciences in the broad framework of the history of the *modern organization of knowledge*. By this we refer to the period in European history of knowledge from the late eighteenth century to the present, and the emerging institutional arrangements, disciplinary formations, and continuous construction of boundaries between the objects and practices of the natural, social, and cultural sciences. This historical layer, which invites analyses of the institutional and infrastructural framework of scientific knowledge production, and how its volumes and dimensions shifted over time, is crucial for understanding how the idea of the administrative and epistemological coherence of the humanities was shaped and defined in the modern era.

In order to approach the humanities' complex embeddedness in and connections to other parts of society, we propose a second, and flexible, perspective of *knowledge politics*. When we speak of knowledge politics, we refer to how societies have valued and politicized the organization and division of different branches of knowledge, for example in debates and reforms both inside and outside of universities about priorities between different areas of knowledge. In Sweden, this aspect became increasingly important from the mid-nineteenth century with the formation of a public system of education, and the conflicting visions of the role of knowledge in modern society that were articulated in the context of emerging political movements around the turn of the twentieth century.

Likewise, the term knowledge politics is used to capture broader aspects of the shifting knowledge bases and coalitions in twentieth-century societies. The relative status of the humanities was not only reflected in the changing history of professions, disciplines, and the orientation of higher education and research policies. It was also foregrounded in the shifting understanding of the cultural and political impact and expectations of different forms of knowledge in the future. In nineteenth-century Sweden, humanities knowledge was closely associated with the formation

of new social and political institutions and elaborate ideas about the progressive function of education in society with a special emphasis on the moral elevation of citizens. The humanities (classical studies in particular) acquired a normative position in politico-administrative as well as educational milieus, defining the concept of *Bildung* and dictating a general conception of the societal value of knowledge that the natural sciences sought to match.[30] In the twentieth century, and especially from the 1950s onward, this authoritative role was adopted by the expanding social and engineering sciences while the humanities were increasingly construed as reactive and backward-looking. Our concept of knowledge politics attempts to delineate such long-term and ongoing shifts in the composition of modern knowledge in order to explore how they influence the present.

A third layer of analysis concerns *knowledge policy regimes*, which form the basis for the legitimacy of various forms of knowledge in society during certain periods.[31] The concept of regime obviously calls for some caution. Here, it is used to refer to dominant but not exclusive ideas about the preferred development and priorities of research and higher education as they are explicitly stated in, for example, public policies, university strategies, steering and incentive schemes, managerial practices, and funding programs. It is essential to perceive such regimes in a reciprocal and interconnected way, and not as policies having a one-directed influence on the direction and organization of knowledge, or conversely.[32] We thus interpret intellectual and societal legitimacy as being co-produced.[33]

In contrast to the long-term institutional and infrastructural history of knowledge and broader shifts in knowledge politics, the third level of analysis operates in a time frame of decades rather than centuries. We further argue that to speak of regimes, it is necessary to inquire how such regimes translate into particular modes of knowledge production. This level of analysis therefore brings a particular emphasis on the institutionalization of a modern politics of higher education and research in the twentieth century, and especially the establishment of policy-making frameworks

30 Hammar, "Classical Nature."

31 The term politics of knowledge is employed in connection to regimes in a similar way in Domínguez Rubio and Baert, "The *Politics of Knowledge*," p. 3.

32 See e.g., Slagstad, *De nasjonale strateger*, who used *kunnskapsregim* as a concept in order to identify various constellations of power, knowledge, and values in modern Norway, but with an emphasis on how such regimes were characterized by specific types of knowledge dominating political institutions.

33 Jasanoff, "The Idiom of Co-Production."

and procedures after World War II.[34] In the Swedish case, contributions to this volume distinguish and relate to a series of overlapping policy regimes in postwar society, from the nationalistic and future-oriented policies developed in the context of emerging institutions of the welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s, to the no less futuristic focus on societal challenges and sustainable development in the 2010s and 2020s.

A National Trajectory of Disputed Legitimacy

Many examples of histories of the humanities have focused on specific national trajectories of particular disciplines. It is therefore promising that new research within this emerging field explicitly encourages comparative transnational approaches, not least in order to decentralize the traditional Western conception of the humanities.[35] But to enable comparisons on an integrated level of the history of *the humanities*, empirical studies of national contexts are still crucial, especially if the purpose is to develop a coherent theoretical analysis as outlined in the previous section. Sweden has indeed provided a stage for a large number of heated debates on the societal legitimacy of the humanities – in the past as well as in recent decades. The national orientation of this volume thus provides a rich material for investigations into the relationship between the humanities and shifting policy discourses and regimes in a comparatively long historical perspective.

Starting out in the mid-nineteenth century, when the national university system was still small scale and humanities disciplines were generally embodied by a single (male) chair professor at the specific universities (that is, Uppsala and Lund), contributions to the present volume (Hammar; Jansson) demonstrate how knowledge in the humanities was the object of a wide-ranging societal circulation and broad appreciation. To a large extent, this impact was guaranteed through the characteristic Swedish

34 We thus use the regime concept in a slightly different way from recent literature on temporal regimes, e.g., Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?*; Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*; Jansen, *Hidden in Historicism*. Cf. Pestre, "Regimes of Knowledge," pp. 246–250, who claimed that 'the past four of five centuries have witnessed successive and heterogeneous *regimes* of knowledge production connected to particular social institutions and values; and that the problem now at hand is principally one of trying faithfully to characterize those regimes in their complexity and contradictions.' For previous attempts to analyze the shifting roles of the twentieth-century humanities in Scandinavia in terms of consecutive regimes, each spanning over a couple of decades, see Larsen, "Holistic Philological," p. 143; Sörlin, "Humanities of Transformation," p. 291.

35 Bod, *A New History*. See also Denecke, "Comparative Global."

system based on education of civil servants, which for a long time solidified a close relationship between the humanities and education/pedagogy (see Landahl and Larsson's chapter). By adopting such a professional identity, graduates in the humanities took on influential roles in various domains of the public sector, most importantly as secondary school teachers (often holding doctoral degrees). As Isak Hammar's chapter displays, teaching in the humanities was for a long time closely tied to an ideal of classical humanism – in some cases the humanities were basically equated with classical languages and learning. With several reforms of education, however, the classical paradigm within the humanities was overthrown as new orientations emerged that were increasingly central to the humanistic curriculum, for instance, modern languages.[36]

Ambitions to modernize the humanities were eventually taken to the extreme in the second half of the twentieth century as several disciplines changed names by replacing the suffix "history" (e.g., *konsthistoria* or *litteraturhistoria*) with "science" or "scholarship" (*konstvetenskap* or *litteraturvetenskap*) – a process analyzed in Johannes Siapkas' chapter. The Swedish government successively aimed to expand its control of the university sector, ultimately creating incentives for a professionalization and reformed organization of humanities education and research. This process was also fueled by the expansion and increasing societal application of the sciences, for instance reflected in the creation of an alternative program (*realia*) in secondary schools. Pressure from positivist ideals forced humanities scholars to rethink their epistemological foundations. Should they strive to legitimize themselves in the same vein as their counterparts in the sciences, or should they instead demarcate the humanities as a separate realm of inquiry?

Ongoing scholarly specialization materialized as the traditional faculty of philosophy at Swedish universities was split into two sections in 1876, for the humanities and the sciences (and mathematics), respectively. This separation was judged necessary in order to administratively handle the expanding university system, and was eventually permanented in the twentieth century. Another decisive reform was then implemented in 1964, creating a faculty for social sciences independent from the faculty of the humanities. This parting had been preceded, however, by the foundation of a separate research council for the social sciences in the 1940s. Research in the humanities, in its turn, was financially supported by an alternative and allegedly old-fashioned fund (Humanistiska fonden) since the late 1920s,

36 See e.g., Hammar and Östh Gustafsson, "Unity Lost."

but it was not until the 1950s that the humanities got a "proper" research council of their own (see Ekström's chapter).[37] The overall impression is that the humanities struggled to keep up with other branches of knowledge that were more directly embraced by politicians and administrators for fulfilling the long-term, progressive visions of the welfare project as these were launched by liberals and social democrats from the early twentieth century onward, as well as with large-scale international initiatives for mobilizing scholarship in the postwar period (see the chapters by Östh Gustafsson and Widmalm).

In spite of becoming much more diverse with the foundation of new universities, and by hosting a substantial part of the so-called student expansion in the postwar years, humanities faculties were in general not regarded as key to the transformation of Swedish society in the twentieth century. Instead, they were frequently associated with traditionalism and an outdated concept of *Bildung* [bildning]. This long-term trajectory toward a position of outdatedness was immensely complex, however, and, as proven by several chapters in this book (Östling, Jansson and Svensson; Andersson and Larsson Heidenblad; Bertilsson), needs to be nuanced and challenged. Just like in several other Western countries, the humanities were promoted as indispensable for compensating for the deficits of technology in modern society.[38] For instance, the fact that the research councils for the humanities and the social sciences merged in 1977 indicates how new currents began to alter the politics of knowledge by the end of the twentieth century through an increasing focus on interdisciplinarity or integrative research collaborations, as is highlighted in Ekström's concluding chapter. The broader attempts to mobilize human sciences paved the way for a more holistic understanding of the challenges faced by modern societies.

By focusing on the Swedish humanities in their shifting intellectual and political context from the nineteenth century until today, the contributions to this volume generate a concentrated exposition of the dynamics that shape the societal legitimacy of knowledge. This enables chronological comparisons and more elaborated considerations regarding the interplay of local circumstances and more general contexts of knowledge production in the humanities. Recent studies on the twentieth-century transformations of the humanities, like Vidar Grøtta's systems-theoretical analysis of postwar humanities education in Norway, demonstrate the value of national case

37 Östh Gustafsson, *Folkhemmets styvbarn*, p. 126–127.

38 Cf., Marquard, *Transzendentaler Idealismus*. See also Kampits, "Geisteswissenschaften wozu?," p. 65; Weingart et al., *Die sog. Geisteswissenschaften*, p. 13.

studies as long as they are informed by a sophisticated use of theory.[39] Local and national trajectories of knowledge politics cannot simply be reduced to effects of general international currents, even if the overall ambition is to contribute to a wider transnational or global understanding of the history of the humanities. Furthermore, the dichotomy between the national and the international in many cases proves to be false.[40]

The national context probably has been the most important level for the organization of knowledge in the modern period.[41] For a long time, the humanities were perceived of as a national concern, and according to the common view of their history, these disciplines were intimately bound to the construction and preservation of national communities and identities. It is therefore not uncommon that their challenges today are interpreted as consequences of the ongoing process of globalization. Nationalistic claims, however, have continued to form an integral part of the legitimizing discourse of the humanities. In recent decades, several countries have begun to adopt a kind of neo-national or nativist politics of knowledge. Late capitalist policies in the 1980s and 1990s, which claimed to address the emerging "knowledge economy" of a globalized world, were also surprisingly nationalistic in its rhetoric and practical outlook, a seeming paradox which is further discussed in Ekström's chapter. More generally, rather than focusing on cultural impact in a traditional sense, the postwar period saw an increase of economically oriented claims that were not always compatible with the elitist and traditional strategies of legitimization in the humanities.

The case studies on the impact and organization of the humanities included in this volume illuminate such general patterns of change that may be identified in most Western countries. This is also the case when it comes to reactions from the humanities against an experienced need of adapting to new policy regimes. In line with perspectives that emphasize the increasingly integrative character of knowledge in society, demands on scholarship to explicitly demonstrate their societal value seem to have gained currency during the twentieth century.[42] Most literature agree that the humanities used to enjoy a more solid societal legitimacy during the

39 Grøtta, *The Transformation of Humanities*.

40 Not least, this proved to be the case in the context of the polarized atmosphere of the Cold War that stimulated internationalization of research as well as national competition. See e.g., Franzmann, Jansen and Münte, "Legitimizing Science," p. 22.

41 See e.g., Jordanova, "Science and Nationhood," p. 195; Shumway, "Nationalist Knowledges."

42 See, for example, the debate in the early 2000s regarding so-called "mode 2" production of knowledge: Gibbons et al., *The New Production*; Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons, *Re-Thinking Science*.

nineteenth and early twentieth century. In Sweden, humanities scholars at that point regularly took on influential positions in national politics and other central institutional contexts. Even if recent scholarship strives to demonstrate how knowledge in the humanities still played an important part for different sectors of society in the postwar era, this impact was not always publicly acknowledged and sanctioned. In this respect, the histories of the humanities presented in this volume might be read as exemplifying fundamental changes of relevance to the humanities in various geographical contexts. But there are also aspects that might seem counterintuitive and make the Swedish case stand out.

Sweden as Exception or Exemplum?

Almost as a general rule, Sweden is portrayed as an exception on international arenas of knowledge as well as politics – not least by Swedes themselves, as they often voice the notion of their own country as being the most "modern" in the entire world. Very recently, international media have noted Sweden's (at least allegedly) distinctive way of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. This is just one example of the country's seemingly long history of entering a special route and thus being conceived of either as an exemplary "model" or a discouraging example by the international community – in latter decades seemingly turning from utopia to a "dystopian vision of the future" in the eyes of its neighbor countries.[43]

Notions of national exceptionalism have been embraced many times before, not least in terms of a self-asserted neutral role on the geopolitical arena in the context of the Cold War, offering a so-called "Third Way" between Capitalism and Communism. In terms of intellectual influence, Sweden's longstanding dependence on the German academic community shifted toward an Anglo-American orientation during the interwar period. Immediately after World War II, English was introduced as the primary foreign language in Swedish school curricula as the US turned into a role model and symbol of a future tied to the advance of liberal democracy.[44] This Americanization had a clear influence on the postwar politics of knowledge in Sweden as it generally supported the rise of social sciences and implied a turn away from the characteristic German tradition of humanistic inquiry. The oscillation between the German and American models of scholarship

43 Strang, Marjanen and Hilson, "A Rhetorical Perspective," pp. 13–14.
44 E.g., Östling, *Nazismens sensmoral*, pp. 212–213.

makes the Swedish in between-case illuminating, not least as previous literature has tended to focus, somewhat insularly, on Anglo-American or German contexts separately. Here, the history of the humanities in Sweden may function as a bridge, enabling new dialogue between otherwise detached strands of historiography.

The postwar era did also see a fascinating development of an influential narrative of Swedish exceptionalism regarding the state of the humanities. In the 1970s, it was claimed that these subjects were set aside in Swedish society to such an extent that it was asked, in a report published by the national research council for the humanities in 1973, whether "Sweden was the only country in the world to have discovered that scholarship in the humanities and theology no longer had any real value for the cultural and societal development."[45] A discourse of marginalization, and eventually of profound crisis, emerged relatively early in this national context – up until then often regarded as a social democratic haven. The negative narrative of exceptionalism regarding the humanities thus functioned as a forceful contrast to the common narratives about Sweden as an international exception in positive terms, marking the beginning of a widespread critique of welfare state-systems in general. Still, it must be asked why the humanities did not feel at home in this progressive welfare state *par excellence* that held such wide acclaim on the international stage?[46]

In domestic debates Sweden was even described as a "developing country" regarding the state of the humanities, as noted by Anna Tunlid in this volume. Looking at sheer numbers, the public support for research and education lingered far behind comparable countries in Scandinavia and North-Western Europe in the 1970s.[47] In contrast to countries like the United States, where the humanities seemed to experience a golden era of public democratic prosperity in the years immediately following World War II, the humanities did not seem to be of any central concern to Swedes in their everyday lives.[48] This interpretation of a unique lack of legitimacy for the Swedish humanities was not solely developed in the postwar era, however. Even previously, it had been suggested that there existed a specific kind of progressive Swedish modernism, inclined to promote and romanticize

45 *Humanistisk och teologisk forskning*, p. 18. In original, the quote reads: "att Sverige som enda land i världen skulle ha upptäckt, att humanistisk och teologisk vetenskap inte längre skulle ha någon verklig betydelse för den kulturella och samhälleliga utvecklingen."

46 Musial, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model*, pp. 9–10, 14–15, 233; Pierre, "Introduction."

47 *Humanistisk och teologisk forskning*, pp. 15–18.

48 Lönnroth, "Är kulturvetenskap obehövlig?"

ideals of (social) engineering rather than fields oriented toward the study of moral and cultural aspects of existence.[49]

Is it perhaps so, then, that Swedish society has been particularly hostile to the humanities? While it is essential to not reproduce this historical self-conception straight off, the fact that the Swedish humanities have struggled for such a long time to justify themselves indicates that this national case might be of general interest for inquiries into the shifting societal roles of the humanities. By looking at particular instances where the function and value of the humanities were put at stake, this volume sheds light upon central mechanisms to the development of the modern humanities that may be readily put in transnational comparison with other, probably more well-known (e.g., American, British, or German) histories of the humanities. The unstable legitimacy of knowledge is not only examined from an intellectual point of view, but necessarily analyzed in the context of specific societal conditions and political constellations at certain points in time. This approach toward the humanities as fundamentally embedded in society provides an important contribution to the history of the humanities – hitherto dominated by an introverted and disciplinary focus. Long-term changes to the legitimacy of the humanities, we argue, will not be properly grasped if the wider context sketched in this introduction is lost out of sight.

Contributions and Outline

Taken together, the chapters of this volume – authored by scholars from various fields such as history, intellectual history, history of science, history of education, economic history, book history, classical studies – richly demonstrate the interconnections and overlaps between the different levels of analysis outlined above. The national scale enables us to discuss the development of the humanities over a long time span without losing empirical coherence, focusing both on discursive continuities, individual actors, and institutional change. The book is divided into three sections, following a general chronological structure, but also with the aim of emphasizing some of the major themes that have influenced the modern trajectory of the Swedish humanities.

The first section on emerging disciplinary divides dwells into the history and shifting constellations of the humanities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It might seem a paradox that the volume

49 Cf., Hansson, *Humanismens kris*, pp. 76, 160–161, 170.

starts out with a chapter on efforts to legitimize the natural sciences in the nineteenth century as Isak Hammar highlights a number of journal debates on the relationship between different cultures of knowledge and how epistemological hierarchies were discussed. The scholarly periodicals he examines clearly were of an inclusive and collaborative character. While an educational ideal of "classical humanism" had been at the center, reflecting a general prioritization of disciplines such as classical languages within the existing knowledge regime, the journal eventually turned into an arena for questioning the dominance of classical languages and humanistic *Bildung*. It is thus important to nuance golden age narratives of the nineteenth century, but at the same time, Hammar's study exhibits how humanistic knowledge was broadly mobilized on a national level and thus filled an intrinsically generative function in a political as well as cultural context. A similar aspect is underlined in Martin Jansson's chapter on how philological knowledge was applied in the context of a major Swedish Bible translation that was motivated by a series of institutional reforms around the turn of the century, clearly working as a temporalizing agent, or a force of change, rather than being associated with preservation and tradition. This complex process, which saw the Bible treated as a boundary object, can thus be interpreted as an – perhaps counterintuitive – example of philology functioning as a co-producer of modernity, displaying how a generative mode of the humanities could materialize.

At the same time, the humanities were dissociated from other forces held as indicative of the modern project. This is pointed out by Joakim Landahl and Anna Larsson as they ambitiously map the changing and historically contingent relationship between the humanities and pedagogy from the 1860s to the 1960s. Emphasizing the shifting nature of academic boundaries, they point out how pedagogy was institutionalized and separated from humanistic disciplines and rather formed coalition with the emerging social sciences. This process of reorganization had grave consequences as the humanities lost a crucial link to education, diminishing their impact on future mass-markets of teaching activities. This finding indicates how the societal legitimacy of the humanities was exposed to new challenges in the twentieth century. One such challenge is addressed in Johannes Siapkas' chapter as he elaborates the contested position of classical studies in the context of twentieth-century Sweden and the social democratic welfare politics. Through the combination of two cases studies, Siapkas directs our attention to, first, the actions of classicist Erik Hedén who sought to bridge the ideals of classicism and social democratic ideology, and, secondly, the characteristic renaming of several humanities disciplines in order to

reconcile them with the new requirements of the postwar welfare state. Siapkas' example of this peculiar pattern of relabeling disciplines is the switching of names from Classical archaeology and ancient history [*klassisk fornkunskap och antikens historia*] to Ancient culture and societal life [*antikens kultur och samhällsliv*], with the purpose of making the discipline seem more up to date.

Numerous scholars in the humanities apparently felt a pressure to revise their time-honored strategies of legitimization as emerging ideals of knowledge politics in the 1950s and 1960s seemed to reject claims to any possession of superior moral authority, which had been common in more elitist, bourgeois contexts. In the second section, centering on the legitimacy and contested places of the humanities in postwar Sweden, Hampus Östh Gustafsson illuminates tensions marking the relationship between the humanities and democracy. This scrutiny has direct bearing on current debates on the role of the humanities in society, as it has become popular to claim that these disciplines have a special importance for the safeguarding of democratic values (in the shape of a Socratic "gadfly"). Contrary to some of the assumptions of this discourse, Östh Gustafsson's chapter manifests how the humanities struggled to develop new strategies in order to establish their legitimacy in more horizontal terms, compatible with the strong egalitarian ideals of the welfare state.

At the same time, it is essential not to reduce the knowledge politics of "the welfare state" into a monolith. Even if ideals of rational planning and egalitarianism were characteristic elements, it is imperative to track the complex expressions of welfare knowledge politics over multiple institutions and arenas. Accordingly, Johan Östling, Anton Jansson, and Ragni Svensson consider the presence of the humanities in the postwar society through an analysis of specific types of public arenas, exemplified via the emergence of new paperback series and the activities within a Christian *Teilöffentlichkeit* that enabled a broad societal circulation of knowledge in the humanities. The perspective they provide brings well-needed nuances to the common-place (though discursively real and immanent) narratives of postwar decline and crisis regarding the humanities.

The endeavors to highlight generative contributions of humanistic knowledge during the second half of the twentieth century should not make us overlook that the humanities were put under severe pressure at the time, on a national as well as international level. Sven Widmalm brings attention to a grand Nobel Symposium organized in Stockholm in 1969 in order to tackle acute problems from a global perspective. Despite invitations to and the cross-cultural ambitions at this occasion, the humanities clearly

did not make an impact in this case – something that Widmalm interprets in the light of the emergent crisis discourse, the rise of radical ideological movements, and the formation of critical theory at the time.

However, a number of humanities disciplines were simultaneously mobilized and found practical applications in contexts that saw pressing societal issues being addressed. This is demonstrated in the volume's third section. Jenny Andersson and David Larsson Heidenblad's chapter eventually addresses the role of humanities and social science reasoning in the postwar construction of Swedish future studies. The idea that human knowledge and knowledge about a "human system" could be brought to bear on societal problems and used to forge a new approach to the future is illustrated through case studies of two influential scholars, historian Birgitta Odén and geographer Torsten Hägerstrand. Their work reflects how new conceptualizations were made regarding the role played by the human sciences, for instance as issues of value in (and for) human development were emphasized. This indicates the importance of looking at broader postwar ambitions to develop cross-disciplinary approaches of relevance to planning and policy.

In the context of more recent impact and policy regimes, Fredrik Bertilsson's case study reveals how knowledge associated with the humanities was developed and applied in contexts outside of the university, which have been regularly overlooked as sites for knowledge production in the human and cultural sciences. Bertilsson's example is Swedish defense research, arguing that this type of practice-oriented research did not abide to academic distinctions between the human, social, and natural sciences. The case study should be read as a reminder that the impact of the humanities may very well be re-evaluated once focus is shifted from the traditional academic sphere to more unexpected arenas in society.

In a subsequent chapter on legitimizing discourses of the humanities in the 1980s and 2000s, Anna Tunlid pictures the state of the humanities in public debate and research policy from a comparative stance, looking at particularly intensive phases that saw crisis rhetoric being employed on a broad scale. Showcasing the recurring tensions between seemingly opposing persona and strategies of legitimization, particularly between chivalry ideals of enlightenment and more radical notions of a critical role, Tunlid's study tracks how the valuation of the humanities shifted in the context of knowledge politics that, in the early 2000s, increasingly focused on economic growth, usefulness, internationalization, and scientific excellence.

In a final and concluding chapter, Anders Ekström points to the long-standing orientation toward integrative knowledge production, social responsibility, and communication as a central track in the history of the humanities. In contrast to this trajectory, however, Ekström recognizes the emergence of an orientation toward reactive critique in humanistic knowledge production and self-reflection, which coincided with the great expansion of the university sector in the decades after World War II. With this larger picture taken into account, and reflecting on more recent shifts in policy regimes, it is possible to outline the difference between these two key trajectories in the history of the humanities and how they play out in different institutional niches and impact models in the early twenty-first century. Today, Ekström argues, these aspects of the history of the humanities take on a new and formative potential as universities are required to articulate and cultivate their identity as public institutions.

Successively characterizing a national politics of knowledge, and eventual regimes of legitimacy, throughout almost two centuries, the contributors to this volume highlight important patterns and shifts regarding crucial topics of intellectual boundaries, coalitions, organization, and impact in and beyond academia. This concentrated history of the humanities should speak directly to anyone interested in the past, present, and future prospects of knowledge and also bring new perspectives regarding its potential role in society. The alleged marginalization of the humanities throughout the twentieth century is indeed a complex issue that might be interpreted in different ways. Knowledge in the humanities was certainly applied and appreciated in many concrete contexts, but an explicit and long-standing discourse of crisis was nevertheless segmented in the postwar decades and through the implementation of democracy and welfare reforms that radically altered the conditions of knowledge politics.

Still, the humanities underwent an unprecedented expansion throughout the modern era. Today, humanistic knowledge permeates basically every corner of society, even if their influence obviously could be strengthened in many cases. From an international point of view, it is imperative to note that the Swedish crisis discourse emerged relatively early and despite the ongoing expansion of research and higher education. This points to the importance of taking the particular political conditions of individual national cases into account. As indicated by the contributions to this volume, specific political constellations and ways of organizing knowledge had a deep impact on the alternating opportunities for securing the legitimacy of the humanities. Further research should preferably look closer at comparable trajectories of various forms of knowledge in other geographical contexts.

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