

February 4, 2021

Nordic added value: NOS-HS Aims and Objectives

Brief history

The precursors of NOS-HS were established in the 1960's with the goal of providing a collaborative platform for administrators and researchers working in the humanities and social sciences (henceforth, HS) within the Nordic research councils and academic communities. The main goals have always been to promote exchange of information between the research councils, supporting new researcher-driven networks at the Nordic level, and supporting joint Nordic publications. NOS-HS is now becoming a committee which is administered by NordForsk, which is a timely change. A permanent location of the administration provides stability, increases visibility, cost effectiveness and is more functional in the current legally formalized institutional landscapes.

Committee aims and objectives

The overarching aim of NOS-HS is to foster Nordic added value in the humanities and social sciences. Nordic added value is here understood as defined by NordForsk: <https://www.nordforsk.org/how-does-research-cooperation-lead-nordic-added-value>. That is, there are two main categories of Nordic added value: i) because the research collaboration is taking place in the Nordic region, and ii) because the research can only be carried out in the Nordic region. The humanities are especially well-suited for contributing to Nordic added value given that their subject of research is intertwined with the common cultural, historical, and linguistic heritage of the Nordic countries. In the social sciences, the common design of most Nordic societies calls for collaboration because political ties, long standing collaboration, common institutions and coordinated information gathering create a unique opportunity to carry out social research needed for the communities. Both fields contribute to knowledge through local analysis in cross-Nordic contexts and collaboration is vital for international impact.

Workshop grants have been the main funding instrument to support bottom-up research and facilitate Nordic collaboration in recent years. Previously, NOS-HS have had various funding instruments, including a scheme for research projects (NORDCORPS), a scheme which at the end had a very low success rate due to limited funding. Since this provided little by way of added Nordic value, it was terminated in 2014. The funding instrument has undergone two formal evaluations (2012, 2020) both concluding that workshops offer a versatile response to the needs of the HS cross-Nordic research community. They achieve Nordic added value by concrete outcomes such as formative and mature networks, joint publications, national and international grant applications. In the *Gaia* report on dynamics of Nordic research cooperation (2017, p. 44), over 60% of the identified disciplinary networks were in the fields of HS. The workshop grants have contributed to Nordic collaboration by providing a low budget and medium risk platform for cross-disciplinary researcher-initiated cooperation based on joint research interest and problems built through personal contact and trust. External evaluators suggest that this unique instrument should be continued but they also suggest that possibilities for follow-up support for the most successful networks are considered (2020). It is also important to discuss how to best optimise the workshop grants (the size and number of grants, type of support offered, etc.).

Administrative collaboration and knowledge exchange have been an important part of NOS-HS activities. Information has been shared with the aim of improving the quality of administrative, evaluation practices and procedures in relation to supporting HS research. Three main avenues of exchange have been established. First, in NOS-HS meetings news from each national research council are presented, policy updates, strategic and organizational changes. Focus has been on sharing information on administrative and evaluative procedures. Second, seminars on science-policy issues (e.g., impact, open access publications) have been held by NOS-HS in cooperation with others. Third, exchange visits between research councils to support professional development.

Journal grants were originally supported by four of the five research councils (excluding IS) and run by a separate sub-committee, NOP-HS. Changes in the publication system and the increased focus on Open Access have led to changes, and the current framework of supporting Open Access journals will not continue beyond 2021. An unsuccessful pilot evaluation of NOP-HS funded journals in the field of Education was conducted in 2017. The need for a more general mapping exercise was discussed in 2019, and it was commissioned in January 2021. The task is to investigate how publishing across the Nordic countries can be supported as a way of increasing Nordic added value, in particular given the move towards Open Access. Providing stronger platforms for dissemination of collaborative efforts and the critical mass needed to increase the quality and international impact are important goals moving forward.

Realising Nordic added value

The Committee has realized its objectives through funding schemes that support Nordic collaboration based on networking among researchers and joint Nordic journals with open access. The level of trust, shared heritage and institutions are preconditions that have through collaboration enhanced quality of existing research and created new dynamics and innovative ideas. A critical mass has been created through opportunities for sharing ideas, which are needed to participate in larger networks and apply for international funding. The humanities and social sciences have a relatively strong standing, and they are recognized as important areas of inquiry in the Nordic countries. This solid ground and fertile cooperation of researchers and funding bodies has the potential to increasingly contribute to international collaboration needed to face global challenges.

Thematic Framework

The NOS-HS committee's main aim is to promote research within the fields of humanities and social sciences in the Nordic countries. In addition, it also provides a venue for sharing information and facilitating cross-Nordic collaboration between the research councils and their administrations. The focus is on supporting flexible bottom-up research and facilitating Nordic collaboration between researchers at different stages of their careers and international connections. NOS-HS also aims to contribute to policy work, research strategies and promote high quality open access publishing in the humanities and social sciences.

Developing NOS-HS within NordForsk

In the years to come, the committee will continue to refine its funding mechanisms. It will be important to ensure a good relationship between the bottom-up nature and the cost-effectiveness of the grants. The following measures will be considered:

- Consider how to best realise Nordic added value in the context of the humanities and social sciences, including how to increase the role of NOS-HS as a policy advisor and facilitator.
- Reconsider the relationship between the funding given to each grant and the number of grants awarded in order to increase the cost-efficiency of the workshop grants.
- Rethink the notion of networking, among others by allowing innovative ways of establishing and sustaining networks.
- Explore new ways of supporting Open Access publishing in the humanities and social sciences.
- Facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange between the research councils and between the councils and NordForsk.

Approved by the NOS-HS committee in the 4 February 2021 meeting.