

Institute for Advanced Social Research (IASR), University of Tampere / Tampere3

Evaluation Report

1. Introduction

During its 16-year existence, IASR has undergone major transformations, largely due to the multiple changes in its academic environment, including the renewal of university legislation in Finland in 2009. Its growth and development have to some extent been slowed down by the regrettable education sector funding cuts made by the current Finnish government. Presumably the most fundamental change is still to come, as the new Tampere University will be established as a fusion of three originally separate organizations.

We see these changes primarily as an opportunity and not only as a threat to existing structures and research funding. A future IAS (which we call IAST³ for practical reasons) is to be based on the outstanding achievements of the existing IASR and should extend these to the entire university in an interdisciplinary umbrella structure. It will connect the potential of the new seven faculties for specific research questions, and the unique selling points of the new university in national and international comparison will become widely visible. This structure, which brings researchers together and rewards joint and international projects with funding (and in particular sabbaticals), is indispensable especially for the initial phase of the ambitious merger of the existing universities. On the long run the IAST³ will be the place where disciplinary excellence and academic freedom come together with curiosity and openness for changing perspectives in interdisciplinary research projects.

2. Evaluation

The traditional and also current IASR focus on the study of society has been a reasonable choice, also given the history of UTA and its distinctive role within the Finnish academia. It should be made explicit, however, that this does not mean that IASR would only host social scientists. Society can be investigated from a number of different academic viewpoints, and not only social scientists but also, e.g., traditional humanists (such as historians or literary theorists) can study society in their

own ways. This frame will become even much larger when the new scenarios for IASR and IAST³ are considered.

Professor Risto Heiskala notes in his letter that IASR has not been as active in dissemination as many other IAS. This is understandable given the scarce resources, but it would be important to pay attention to this in the future. It is equally important to build an internal scholarly community by bringing the IAS fellows together for internal seminars and informal activities as it is to open the institute into the enviroing academic community by organizing conferences, workshops, and guest lectures. This, however, requires considerable resources. It might be noted that while IASR has one full-time administrative person, the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies (HCAS) had, at the peak of its flourishing (before the funding cuts and the reorganization of the UH admin structure in 2016), as many as eight full-time admin specialists, each with their distinctive roles.

At the same time, IASR and HCAS have somewhat different profiles, given the focus of IASR on society and of HCAS on the humanities and social sciences broadly. These different profiles will become even clearer if IAST³ is enlarged and strengthened to cover all areas of the new university.

2.1. Scientific/scholarly quality and impact: 4

IASR has certainly achieved its basic goals very well, despite the various challenges of its academic environment (and the many changes involved). The bibliometric data shows that IASR fellows have been more active in (especially) international publishing than many of the other relevant comparative groups in the Finnish academia. Its researchers are also inter- and multidisciplinary, and their work has a recognizable impact in society.

One practical problem in assessing the quality of publications is caused by the fact that the system seems to track only those still at UTA. It is our impression that the foreign fellows who have left the UTA do not appear in the statistics. The JUFO publication rankings are used responsibly and appropriately (not for evaluating individuals but for evaluating the large pool of publications produced by IASR fellows in comparison to publications by other relevant groups of scholars in Finland). Of course, a more extensive survey would include relevant non-Finnish groups and their publications, but it is understandable that this would be very hard to realize. Perhaps, however, it would be possible to compare IASR to, say, HCAS and TIAS (Turku Institute for Advanced Studies) within Finland? Another relevant comparison would be to, say, Academy of Finland Centers of Excellence in the fields of social science.

2.2. Internationality: 3

In the beginning, IASR was rather national. Only relatively recently has it grown into a genuinely international IAS. The UBIAS membership (2014-) is a clear recognition of this. With increased resources, IAST³ could in the future even compete with HCAS for the role of the leading Finnish IAS.

We were particularly impressed by the quality and the engagement of the younger scholars (senior research fellows, postdoctoral fellows) who were enthusiastic about the collaborative work (such as joint discussion of working papers) and their integration into the faculty, too. We realized that the excellent supervision and research structure guaranteed by the actual director, are a decisive advantage for recruiting scholars for Tampere and the Finnish university system in general.

2.3. Research environment: 4

Up to now, UTA has offered IASR a good academic environment and appropriate working conditions in spite of considerable budget cuts since 2014. The philosophy of the current directorate has turned out to be extremely supportive for intellectual exchange and fostering career steps for the younger fellows, while the senior fellows and the professors form a kind of intellectual backbone for the institute. Given the current changes in Tampere and in the Finnish academia generally, the panel was faced with strong worries about how conducive its current environment is to high-level research. The academic future of IASR largely depends on how skillfully the new leadership of Tampere University will guide the new institution.

3. The future scenarios (and other recommendations)

In the following section we will discuss and comment on the three scenarios as presented by Risto Heiskala and describe a possible fourth one.

Given the changes in the process of creating the new university, the institutional perspective will render it unlikely that scenario (1) will be chosen, although there is considerable support for it among the existing fellows. It seems to us that simply scaling up the current IASR is hardly a realistic option.

Under scenario (2), IASR would operate within a more comprehensive structure, the New Social Research (NSR) umbrella. One problem here is how the temporary Academy of Finland profiling funding can be turned into permanent structures. In any event, this is analogous to the plans at the UH to establish an SSH Research Center, though in Helsinki the HCAS won't be turned into a unit of the new Center. That would sacrifice the autonomy of the IAS, so such a scenario is not recommendable at UTA either.

In the second option, one problem is that if all research – at least all top-level research – in the NSR area will be hosted by the new center or its programs, research and teaching will be to some extent separated from each other. This creates a problem regarding the traditional roles of a research university based on “Humboldtian” ideas, especially the inextricable intertwinement of research and education and the requirement of research-based teaching. If option (2) is chosen, this should be done in such a way that the Humboldtian values are not sacrificed.

Scenario (3) comes with three different streams or units within the overall research institute.

If the institute were to operate on three different campuses, this would practically speaking mean that the UTA would host three semi-autonomous IASs. The panel and some interviewed academics think that in such a structure, it is unlikely that interdisciplinary encounters between SSH scholars and medical or engineering scientists, for instance, would function very smoothly, except perhaps in some special cases. No artificial interdisciplinary structures should be forced upon the researchers in this option by excessive top-down measures.

In the traditional areas of IASR, i.e. the study of society, fellow recruitments should still focus on individual scholars. It is one of the key criteria of genuine IASs that fellows are recruited on the basis of rigorous individual review. Furthermore, IAST³ should continue and considerably strengthen its (currently minimal) practice of recruiting also professorial fellows. The sabbatical system for professors doesn't function properly at Finnish universities, and IAST³ should do its share in this regard.

A fourth scenario is suggested by the evaluation panel.

The definition of future faculties provides a perfect basis for an interdisciplinary matrix structure. All seven faculties offer a space for outstanding interdisciplinary projects, the formulation of research questions and approaches to their potential solutions that would be advantageous to locate in an independent institute such as the IAST³. Social science, for example, seems to us predestined to act as a link between medicine and sciences, information technology and architecture. Only an

IAS offers a platform for interdisciplinary dissertations and research projects that go beyond pure exchange of methodology.

It therefore seems reasonable to substantially expand the existing structure of the IASR and to add some funding lines to it.

While the IASR fellowship program in the study of society and its open research culture are an indispensable strength, programs supporting interdisciplinary projects should also be offered at all academic levels. This would produce the intellectual and social glue which, according to the evaluation panel, is of central importance for the cohesion of the new university.

These additional research topics open up a field for questions which are extremely relevant for the future of our societies, such as the role of algorithms in medicine and their consequences for a reform of medical studies. The latter will be an important field of research of international importance for education and culture.

According to all international experience, a special feature of successful interdisciplinary research projects is that they do not arise in a top-down procedure. This raises the question for the evaluation committee to what extent the “missions” of the research strategies of the future university should be decisive for the IAST³. We believe that the opportunity for completely new research perspectives lies precisely in a free bottom-up process.

The proposed expansion of the institute would also support an experimental phase for reorientation of the university, in which new future research areas can be evaluated with little additional effort. The IAST³ would function as a breeding ground for ideas and projects linking two or more faculties.

This might have another positive effect. Since frequently interdisciplinary activities are avoided due to career plans in academic qualification, taking up interdisciplinary responsibilities as described would allow for a “giving back” to society by comprehensive use of public investment.

As the previous IASR has proved its worth in its objectives limited to the social sciences, it will serve as the basis of a future umbrella structure for the promotion of individual and interdisciplinary research at the doctoral, postdoc (senior fellows) and professor levels in all seven faculties of the university. It will be headed by a director who could be appointed by the rector after proposition by all faculties following a public call for proposals. This would guarantee the support of the academic community.

There will be two funding principles and several possible funding lines that should combine two scopes: excellent research of individuals within their disciplinary field as well as interdisciplinary collaboration within groups. According to experience, the latter is much more time consuming and also more risky for the participants. Therefore, concrete incentives should foster the latter type of research within IAST³; some possibilities are given beyond.

1. The **funding principles** define who can apply for research funding, namely for:
 - a. outstanding individual projects in all subjects (in principle as before in the IASR);
 - b. interdisciplinary group projects that their members design across faculties also in order to strengthen the profile and unique selling points of the university. It is strongly recommended to earmark a certain amount of the allowances (e.g. 1/3) for such projects and, while selecting, to bear in mind that it is easier to develop individually a convincing project in one's own discipline than to constitute an interdisciplinary research group and formulate a joint project that convinces reviewers who may favour disciplinary approaches.
2. The **funding lines** indicate the formats that can be funded:
 - a. individual support of a maximum of six months for permanent employees and 12 months for researchers who do not have a permanent position; quotas in favour of foreign fellows are conceivable;
 - b. individual support for a further six months for permanent employees and 12 months for researchers who do not have a permanent position, provided that the project is transferred to interdisciplinary and/or international cooperation; quotas in favour of foreign fellows are conceivable;
 - c. collective funding of one year for the preparation of (international) graduate schools, projects aiming at, e.g., Centers of Excellence or ERC grants, with the option of an extension if this makes sense for the monitoring of the project. Such collective projects may remain under the umbrella of the IAST³ or become the responsibility of the faculties.
 - d. Further funding lines can be added to these suggestions.

It could be proposed to the Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters (for instance), or other high-profile national institutions, that their senior and distinguished members (either local ones or non-local ones, too) could play a role in selecting the projects. In addition, preselection in the faculties (or by the university research commission) is possible if the number of applications exceeds a number to be determined. This would allow comparing projects within very different disciplines.

The IAST³ will be a research centre with a headquarter, which will be made available at a new location by the city of Tampere and can host larger seminar events. The centre will not, however, host all the fellows who can continue their research in their labs, offices or libraries. The centre essentially will host the staff, foreign fellows, if possible fellows not needing lab infrastructure, and events of IAST³.

The interdisciplinary minimum exchange will take place at the centre through a two-hour weekly seminar in the semester followed by a dinner in which all fellows participate by presenting and critically discussing the individual or collective projects in a comprehensible way.

The panel members had different experiences with an Advisory Board composed of external and international members. It can be helpful in legitimising and advising an IAS and enhance its visibility on an international level. One may ask whether the result really justifies the considerable corresponding expenses for flying in and hosting the board members. They should have clear duties and be, e.g., involved in seminars and lectures during their visits, if IAST³ decides to establish such a board.

Compared to the IASR, the proposed structure will drastically increase the number of researchers who can apply for funding. Starting at the level of doctoral training, it will be open to all researchers at the university and to foreign applicants as well. To this end, Tampere University must allocate substantial resources at least equal to the previous IASR share of the budget of the University of Tampere. Ideally, it should be 2% of the total Tampere3 budget. The panel expects that additional ways are explored to enhance the budget of IAST³ by philanthropic and program-oriented funding.

Tampere, June 21, 2018

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