



Vetenskapsrådet



THE FUTURE OF SWEDISH RESEARCH!

**OVERVIEW 2014
ARTISTIC RESEARCH**

THE FUTURE OF SWEDISH RESEARCH

The Swedish Research Council developed a series of overviews and analyses in 2014 which serve as the foundation for the Board's summary conclusions and recommendations on research policy choices to promote Swedish research in the coming 5 to 10 years. This project is designated "The future of research" and will be summarised in a final report in the summer of 2015. As a whole, the material serves as the foundation in the documentation the Swedish Research Council is compiling for the government's upcoming research bill in 2016.

Overviews have been put together for the following seven research domains:

- humanities and social sciences
- natural sciences and engineering sciences
- medicine and health
- educational sciences
- artistic research
- development research
- research infrastructure

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OVERVIEW 2014

ARTISTIC RESEARCH

THE COMMITTEE FOR ARTISTIC RESEARCH

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FOREWORD

The artistic research overview is part of the knowledge base that the Swedish Research Council has compiled to provide a basis for decisions, in preparation for the government's upcoming research bill, and to enable scientific councils, academic councils and committees to set priorities. It can also be used as reference material in the research sector.

Swedish artistic research is competitive also at the highest international level. This situation is largely the result of early and relatively comprehensive initiatives taken by the Swedish Research Council, the universities and other higher education institutions. As the overview clearly shows, the field has undergone a dynamic development in recent years. At the same time, there are great challenges that need to be addressed, which primarily concern the need for stronger research environments at the universities as well as shared research environments.

The overview consists of four parts and one appendix. Part one summarises the artistic research and its different disciplines. Part two presents a number of practical recommendations as regards the development of artistic research in its entirety. Part three describes Swedish artistic research in relation to the international field and part four presents the general challenges in the field of artistic research. A great deal of work needs to be done, for instance when it comes to structures, career opportunities and quality criteria. The appendix contains the subject-specific descriptions of the different art forms.

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SUMMARY

Artistic research refers to research in the artistic field. This field should be seen as a faculty area with a broad spectrum of exploratory practices such as visual art, fine art, photography, music, theatre, dance, choreography, performance, circus, architecture, design (including product design, interaction design, participative design, visual communication and so on), textile art, craft, film, moving images, audiovisual media, literature/literary composition and curatorial practices. Traditional subject boundaries hardly reflect the dynamic developments in the field, but they do highlight the diversity of expertise, methods and research interests. The focus of the research usually transcends these subject boundaries, either artistically or thematically, with the field being shaped not only by the specifics, traditions and courses of the various art forms, but also by exchanges and ongoing hybridisation.

Artistic research is rooted in art as a creative form of knowledge and an exploratory practice. Closely related terms include artistic practice-based or practice-driven research, research through art and art-based research. The research is conducted through artistic work, supported by investigative methods and the formation of theories, all of which may also be drawn from other areas of research. The purpose is often to highlight artistic production and knowledge processes, questions pertaining to the expression of the art, its terms and sensory, narrative and performative aspects of art. The research involves contextualizing artistic projects, developing research methods and theories, and art in interaction with materials, history and society.

The interests, themes and problems of the research are artistic and often practice-related – empirical, pedagogical, critical or emancipatory. It is not uncommon for the research to be about identifying specific artistic processes of creation, manifestations, interpretations, conceptual stances and interactions with objects and materials. Alongside discipline-specific questions and methods, research themes that combine different art forms are increasing. The themes are often expanded to take in the historical, social and existential contexts of the art relating, for example, to social functions and changing public realities (new open, collective spaces and public contexts, digital and physical forums for debate and so on), constructions of the subject, norm critique, quality-enhancing processes, medialisations, the expanded roles of art and artists in contemporary society, and through artistic research methods to illuminate socially related and academic issues. Collaborative projects linked to other research areas are becoming increasingly frequent, showing opportunities to combine artistic practice and research with fields such as medicine and health, science and technology or research in the humanities, social sciences, gender studies or educational sciences.

Artistic research often takes as its starting point the scope for the art to shed light on value-related and communicative questions concerning creation of meaning and quality. The research methods tend to be action-oriented, performative and interactive with artefacts and the surroundings. This is sometimes described as “through the making”, where the researcher is an active participant in the investigative process. The rooting in an artistic practice is strong, and art-based research often draws on the artists’ experience, professional expertise and creative ability. The research usually proceeds in combinations of systematic, exploratory, creative, experimental, action-oriented and speculative working methods through artistic creation and analysis, staging, simulation and modelling, critical innovation and reflection, and theory formation. Experiments, simulations, performances, modelling, variation and hybrid forms, critical innovation and reflection, and theory formation provide an important foundation for the generation of knowledge. Experimentation can be employed more systematically to test a hypothesis, through analytical processes or in more exploratory and speculative ways. The research may also be conducted as a dialogue with critical theory or other fields of research, and many artistic researchers adapt qualitative methods borrowed from phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethnography, narrative methods, action research and so on. The border between research based on art and research based on science is thus fluid, varying between different artistic projects.

The investigative work often uses multimodal or multimedia forms of representation, documentation, communication and presentation – objects, exhibitions, concerts, performances, films, sound recordings, literary works, materials, art objects, urban spaces, text, etc. – which form a key part of research processes and of the presentation, publication and dissemination of research results. Also included here is the process of developing a theory and concepts out of a practice-based methodology. Using several forms of representation

also places particular demands on documentation, communicability, archiving options, publication, transparency, quality control and infrastructure. A continuous quality discussion on research methods and the formulation of problems constitutes a key part of structuring artistic research, and its significance also spills over into other fields of research.

Artistic research and postgraduate education at Swedish academic institutions emerged in the 1990s and experienced a breakthrough around 2000, with a specific artistic research doctorate constituted in 2010. The artistic research and postgraduate education have expanded strongly and undergone a considerable improvement in quality since the turn of the millennium, not least through what in international terms was the Swedish Research Council's early investment in network building for artistic research collegia (2000–2005), research projects (from 2003), a national research school in design (the Swedish Faculty for Design Research and Research Education, from 2008) and a national artistic research school (Konstnärliga Forskarskolan, from 2010). With support from the Swedish Research Council Formas, there are also now national research schools in architecture (ResArc, from 2011) and landscape architecture (APULA, from 2010).

Overall, Swedish artistic research holds a very strong position internationally and has a relatively long research tradition. Today, artistic research is conducted at the majority of universities and artistic seats of learning, sometimes in collaboration with other academic institutions. The field of research is shaped to a large degree by individual projects and doctoral theses, and there is considerable interest in higher artistic education at postgraduate level. Even as the exchange of knowledge with other fields of research grows, there is a considerable need to establish stable research environments and national networks in the artistic sphere, to strengthen career paths for young researchers, to develop specific subject depth and to identify broad, thematic research topics.

The social relevance of artistic research has so far been relatively overlooked. In today's knowledge society, artistic endeavours and forms of communication play an active and necessary role in critically examining contemporary phenomena through practice-related perspectives and capacity for re-interpretation. Artistic research and artistic practice contribute to innovative forms of expression, cultural output, critical examination of and new thinking on issues such as democracy, the development of industries and services, globalisation, and not least issues touching on values, quality, learning, and processes of knowledge and innovation. New technologies prompt multimodal forms of communication, models of thinking and ways of working, within which artistic research has natural and important tasks to perform. So-called creative industries and creative processes, to which artists bring their expertise, now form an important part of the business world and, in this area, artistic research is required in the form not only of applied knowledge development and innovation, but also critical reflection and basic research. Artistic research is thus of very high and growing relevance to (1) artistic practices in society; (2) artistic education; (3) business and society in a wider sense; and (4) the research establishment, where artistic research can help to develop multidisciplinary themes and methodologies. Artistic research also has particular potential to lend more depth to discussions on quality, expanded concepts of knowledge, and forms of publication and communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE FOR ARTISTIC RESEARCH FOR THE FIELD AS A WHOLE

The growing social relevance and strong international standing of Swedish artistic research needs to be built on. The field saw a phase of rapid development in 2000–2010. Strengthening and moving the field forward over the long term will demand the prominent establishment of different types of artistic research environment, providing sufficient critical mass, stability and excellence. Five types of strategic initiative are therefore required:

- 1) **Develop stable and prominent research environments** – The research is currently driven forward via individual projects and there is a distinct need to develop both subject-specific and thematically multidisciplinary research environments and research groups. The academic institutions have a clear responsibility when it comes to these processes, but financial support is also required. Our suggestion is for a framework grant of sufficient size – and with a separate application process – to develop 3 or 4 research environments.
- 2) **Strengthen career paths for young researchers** – At this time, the field has a large number of new PhD graduates and numerous ongoing doctoral students. However, there is a distinct lack of career paths for young researchers. There needs to be a focus on younger researchers through different forms of support, covering both short and long timeframes, from short development grants, mobility grants and postdoctoral positions for new graduates (both nationally and internationally) to longer-term career support for young researchers.
- 3) **Build up internationalisation** – Swedish artistic research has a leading reputation internationally. However, that international reputation varies across the different subjects and needs to be examined more carefully so that it can be further strengthened. Contact with the other Nordic countries is vital. The proposals here are a) increased contact at the level of public authorities; b) an in-depth survey of networks and the need for internationalisation within academic institutions and subjects; c) implementation of special measures, based on the survey, to increase mobility, etc.; d) extra investment in strengthening Nordic collaboration by initiating a conference on strategic perspectives and research funding.
- 4) **Increase opportunities for collaborations with other fields of research** – Artistic research often has a theme that transcends disciplinary boundaries. Collaborations across subject boundaries are already occurring, but the forms of support for these need to be strengthened. There are mutual opportunities to develop partnerships between different artistic subjects, and with research in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in educational sciences, gender, natural sciences and technology, medicine and health. Themes that particularly involve artistic research should be identified and supported.
- 5) **Move forward the debate on quality development, subject classification and publication** – The question of the field's classification and subject categorisations is highly relevant and the debate needs to continue. Ongoing quality discussions are key to the development of artistic research. Current subject classification, quality concepts, quality criteria and forms of assessment need to be discussed and developed, along with options for publication. The Swedish Research Council's ongoing Focus project and SwePub should be followed up, and possibly expanded in the artistic field.
- 6) **Survey and support the need for infrastructure for artistic research** – Artistic working processes and forms for reporting results through exhibitions, performances and so on, often demand considerable resources. Investment in infrastructure is therefore required. There needs to be a specific survey of the infrastructure within artistic research, including institutions' funding responsibilities, funding needs and opportunities for co-financing.

THE BREAKTHROUGH OF RESEARCH IN THE FIELD FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Swedish artistic research has a strong reputation internationally, not least due to the systematic establishment of research funding and postgraduate education, which has few equivalents abroad. Swedish artistic research maintains high standards, has an equal gender distribution among researchers and displays great breadth, from studio-based, exploratory and experimental investigations of personal processes to norm-critical and action research-oriented projects. Extensive international contact has long been in place among art practitioners in the separate subject areas, which is a strength when it comes to internationalisation of the research. However, the degree of internationalisation varies considerably from subject to subject, as well as from one institution to another, and in some cases the international exchange is stronger than the contact between the various Swedish academic institutions.

Swedish artistic research has long been active internationally in developing the field, not least within the European networks ELIA (The European League of Institutes of the Arts), SHARE (Step-change for Higher Arts Research and Education) and SAR (Society for Artistic Research). There is also an ongoing international discussion on revising the subject titles and subject levels in the Frascati Manual: Proposed Standard Practice for Surveys on Research and Experimental Development (OECD 2002). Of particular significance is the newly launched platform and publication *parse* (Platform for Artistic Research Sweden), which has international reach and is run through the University of Gothenburg. There are also subject-specific contact networks and forms of publication, within which Swedish research maintains a leading role. The question of assessment and quality is strategically one of the most central issues in the field of artistic research, but also the most difficult to resolve. This topic is receiving intensive international attention, with Sweden as an active participant in the work.

Nordic collaboration is also important. There are parallel developments within the Nordic countries, but also structural and subject differences. The exchange of knowledge on subject content, development and structure in the Nordic region needs to be improved.

TOMORROW'S CHALLENGES FOR THE FIELD

The future challenges and opportunities for the field lie primarily in the increasing significance of art and artistic ways of working, as well as their integration into the knowledge society. The greatest challenge in this respect lies in the field being able to make the leap from the initiation phase of 2000–2010 to becoming an established part of the research community, in close interaction with artistic practice and in dialogue with other fields of research. The field is still largely being built up through research projects, doctoral and Master's degree work, increased international exchange and through gradually establishing academic research environments. Conferences and publication opportunities in various forms of representation and media are growing rapidly, both nationally and internationally. The research environments still tend to be small and vulnerable, and there is a lack of established subject-specific research environments and national networks, as well as thematic and multidisciplinary environments that can respond to relevance in society and continue to build the strong international reputation of Swedish artistic research.

The number of doctoral students is growing strongly. There are currently around 100 doctoral students in research education, and about the same number have recently acquired their doctoral degree. Postgraduate education and academic research are thus developing in parallel, and there is also considerable interest in research among students at Bachelor's and Master's degree level. There is, however, a serious lack of researchers at postdoc level and the career paths for young researchers are as yet rather insubstantial. Some cultural institutions offer potential career paths for artists and artistic researchers, but the artistic seats of learning often have limited research funding and tend to lack institutional opportunities for young researchers.

In boosting its development over the long term, the challenge for artistic research is to develop stable research environments that have sufficient critical mass and high quality, and that are both subject-specific and thematically multidisciplinary. National networks, meeting places and supervisor exchanges within postdoctoral education need to be strengthened, new publication channels need to be established and increased internationalisation is required. Another focus is on resolving the key issue of career opportunities for new PhD graduates, for example through improved postdoc opportunities, nationally and internationally. If artistic research is to be strengthened and its potential for interaction with other fields of research increased, subject depth and multidisciplinary development need to be improved. The academic institutions have main responsibility in this area, but it is also important to identify forms of support that can serve as catalysts, including thematic initiatives across subject and field boundaries that actively make use of various capacities in artistic research and that can strengthen contacts with other fields of research.

Quality concepts, quality criteria and forms of assessment need to be discussed and developed, along with options for publication. In order to ensure quality and flourishing growth in research over the long term, it is also important to develop quality criteria that are more relevant to the field of artistic research. Wide-ranging discussions are already under way on this topic, for example with the Swedish Higher Education Authority, libraries, colleges and university institutions. Within the Focus project, the Swedish Research Council has already begun work on reviewing the conditions for quality assessment of artistic research.

The question of the field's classification and subject categorisations remains relevant and the debate needs to continue on this, as well as on issues of documentation, archiving and publication. This applies, not least, within the framework of the ongoing SwePub project – to categorise, document and archive non-text-based and artistic research results – and in the work on revising the Swedish standard for classifying research subjects. With the huge diversity of forms in which the field manifests itself, the question of documentation, archiving, publication and dissemination of the research results is key. Opportunities for publication of artistic research with peer review vary considerably between areas; in general, however, they remain few, although the situation is improving rapidly. There is also a growing acceptance of research with an artistic focus in established forms of publication, which contributes to exchanges between different research traditions.

Artistic working processes and forms for reporting results through exhibitions, performances and so on, often demand considerable resources. Investment in infrastructure is therefore required. It might also be worth investigating the possibility of developing forms of support for infrastructure based on collaboration with institutions and independent practitioners in the artistic field.

This work to effect change is, above all, about stabilising the position of artistic research within universities and colleges, as well as career opportunities for young researchers. Added to this are questions of internationalisation, quality assurance and validation, publication forms and infrastructure. There is a need for greater resources and more funding forms for artistic research, but also a lively dialogue between the authorities tasked with supporting Swedish research, higher art education and research organisations, practising artists and representatives of other fields of research, public institutions, and the worlds of business and politics.

The Swedish Research Council is a governmental agency under the Ministry of Education and Research. Within the Research Council there are separate decision-making bodies. In 2014 these scientific councils, advisory bodies and committees compiled overviews of trends and challenges in six different research domains and an overview of research infrastructures in particular. The initiatives taken within the scope of “The future of Swedish research” are part of the Swedish Research Council’s measures to support and strengthen researcher-initiated fundamental research, point out strategically important areas and promote an effective research system. These initiatives are taken on a recurring basis in the run-up to the Government’s Research Bills. The full versions of the overviews were published (in Swedish) in 2015. The final report from the project is called: Direction to the Future Swedish Research System: Goals and Recommendations.



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The Swedish Research Council has a leading role in developing Swedish research of the highest scientific quality, thereby contributing to the development of society. Besides research funding, the agency advises the government on research-related issues and participates actively in the discussions to create understanding of the long-term benefits of research.