

## Musicology as Independent Research?

PEDER KAJ PEDERSEN

As of 2011 there is no member representing musicology on *The Danish Council for Independent Research | Humanities* (in the following referred to as 'FKK', Forskningsrådet for Kultur og Kommunikation. Musicology is not excluded from the academic disciplines funded by the council; however, as there will be no music scholar among the members of FKK (15 members reduced to 12), all applications for funding of musicological projects will be sent to external review, and the council's decisions will be based on external reviews as far as the academic aspects of the projects are concerned.

It is, of course, disconcerting that musicology will not have a voice when decisions for research grants are made – disconcerting in the same way as the fact that independent departments of musicology at the Universities in Copenhagen, Århus, and Aalborg have disappeared and were included in larger interdisciplinary departments in the latest years.<sup>1</sup> The situation is challenging for musicology but it must be viewed in a broader context including the humanities in general, and there is no call for Danish musicologists to take the role as fragile victims lamenting an assumed lack of respect for the virtues of musicology or whatever reaction might offer itself. As member of FKK representing musicology for six years (2005–10), I have witnessed Danish musicology in a process of renewing itself as far as subjects, theories, methods, and organization are concerned. Grants given to musicological projects by FKK during my membership include one major collaborative research project comprising senior and junior researchers (Ph.D., post doc.), as well as several Ph.D. studentships (in relation to research training programmes at the universities), some individual postdoctoral fellowships, a few individual research projects at senior researcher level, and a number of smaller grants as subsidy for research networks, academic conferences, and journals.<sup>2</sup>

1 Cf. Michael Fjeldsøe, 'Viewpoint: Will Musicology Survive?', *Danish Yearbook of Musicology*, 34 (2006), 9–11.

2 Cf. 'Audiovisuel Kultur og den gode lyd. En kvalitativ undersøgelse af relationen mellem (og forestillingen om) "den gode lyd" og "den gode oplevelse"', collaborative research project (2009–12) managed by Ansa Lønstrup, Aarhus Universitet ([www.avlyt.dk/om\\_avlyt/](http://www.avlyt.dk/om_avlyt/)). Other projects are reported in *Danish Yearbook of Musicology*, 37 (2009), 79–80 (Anne Dvinge, 'Jazz – a Cosmopolitan Vernacular: National and Transnational Narratives of Identity and Tradition' (postdoc.); Jens Hjortkjær, 'A Cognitive Theory of Musical Tension' (Ph.D.)), *Danish Yearbook of Musicology*, 35 (2007), 71–72 (Sanne Krogh Groth, 'Two Music Cultures – One Institution. Swedish electro-acoustic music from 1965 to the late 1970s' (Ph.D. diss. defended June 2010), Mads Krogh, 'Hip Hop Culture as Musical Practice: Analyses and Discussions' (postdoc.)).

On the other hand, the volume of research and the number of researchers has decreased, whereas the differentiation concerning institutional affiliation has grown. Musicological research is carried out in the new interdisciplinary departments at the universities of Copenhagen, Århus, and Aalborg (the latter including research in music therapy, a subject which recently has experienced a breakthrough in the research council system); in the interdisciplinary Performance Design environment, Roskilde University; at the University of Southern Denmark; at The Danish School of Education, Aarhus University; at The Royal Library; and at the academies of music in cooperation with researchers at the universities (Århus and Southern Denmark). Part of the musicological research is funded by the basic fundings ('basis-midler') at the universities and from private sources such as Carlsbergfondet, and musicologists are involved in the voluminous infra-structure project LARM (Radio Culture and Audio Infrastructure, with a grant of 25 m. DKK, running from 2009). The support for musicological projects through FKK is only one part of a complex pattern of financing musicology but it still is an important part as it is supporting projects initiated by researchers, so-called 'free', that is independent research as opposed to strategic research, dependent on politically determined or institutionally defined strategies. 'Free' research in the humanities (including musicology) is under pressure and is facing special strategic problems of its own.

#### RECENT POLITICAL CHANGES OF THE DANISH ADVISORY AND FUNDING SYSTEM FOR RESEARCH

The reduction of the number of members of the FKK is one of the consequences of a national political agreement in December 2009 including all the political parties in Folketinget, resulting in a revision of the legislation on the Danish advisory and funding system for research.<sup>3</sup> The unanimous political agreement (including organizational aspects and changes not to be dealt with here) was following up on an evaluation of the research council system published in the summer of 2009. The evaluation stressed the fact that the rate of success for members of the councils applying for grants were substantially higher than for non-members in a way that implied a touch of illegitimacy to the procedures of the research council system, if not outright accusing members of nepotism and cliquishness. It is a fact that the average rate of success for members is more than double as high as for non-members. As a closer analysis did show, however, high rates of success for members were not conditioned by membership as such but was founded on qualifications independent of the membership, the point being that council members were, and should be, picked among competent if not excellent researchers and that membership of a council hardly did reduce the academic competence or excellence of the researchers appointed. High rates of success had been the case before membership and after membership as well.<sup>4</sup>

3 See *Bekendtgørelse nr. 1064 af 6. september 2010 Lov om forskningsrådgivning m.v.*

4 See the study, 'Analyse af succesrater for rådsmedlemmer i Det Frie Forskningsråd før, under og efter rådsmedlemskab' (15 March 2010), made under the auspices of The Board of the Council

In addition to this principal point, it should be noted that among the five branches of the Council for Independent Research the FKK had the lowest rate of success during membership (21%).

One could argue – and it was argued – that the research council system had functioned well, had made legitimate decisions with a reasonable low resource cost compared to other countries and, as a member of the Jimmy Carter administration has been quoted for saying, ‘If it aint broke, don’t fix it’. Was lack of legitimacy a real problem or not? Even if the politicians, in the opinion of the Council for Independent Research, were barking up the wrong tree, the political parties found it appropriate ‘to further strengthen the quality and legitimacy’ of the processes and decisions of the councils. The instruments for doing so were 1) to appoint several members with an international research background to the councils within the Council for Independent Research; 2) an expanded use of external reviewers, primarily organized as external assessment panels; and 3) to reduce the number of members of the five councils from 90 to 60. The third point was modified before the final decision in Folketinget, so the reduction of members ended up being from 90 to 75 members. A further point in the political agreement was that the councils should give larger grants (e.g. collaborative research projects) rather than smaller, and that Ph.D. grants (Ph.D.s in relation to research training programmes at the universities) should not be supported by FKK but (except from the so-called ABM institutions, Archives, Libraries and Museums, under the auspices of the Ministry for Culture) were allocated to the universities, as well as the kinds of activities at which the smaller grants previously had been targeted.

Given the decisions on the political level, the Council for Independent Research as such and the individual councils including the FKK had to face the challenge of taking a stand on how to reduce the number of members. The board of Council for Independent Research decided on the quantitative distribution of the reduction of members, leaving a number of 12 members to the FKK. After intense discussions within the FKK who searched for criteria for making this reduction, an agreement was made that the quantity of the portfolio of applications within the different subjects should be the main criterion, and since the smallest number of applications has been in musicology, linguistics, and philology, and since the present members from those three subjects were among members of the council whose mandates were expiring, no new members from any of those subjects should be appointed.

#### THE BASIC PROBLEM: STAGNATION OF RESSOURCES, INCREASE OF REQUIREMENT

The basic problem concerning independent research in the humanities, whatever the subject, is: 1) that research within the humanities and the social sciences is disadvantagedly compared to the natural sciences; and 2) that the resources for research

for Independent Research and addressed to the Parliament Committee for Development, Science, and Technology (Folketingets Udvalg for Udvikling, Videnskab og Teknologi). The survey covers 2001–9.

generally tend to be allocated to strategic research and to a very small degree to independent research. The last two years (2009–10) of my FKK membership resembled a veritable *danse macabre* not only for musicology but for highly qualified research in the humanities in general. The most important and acute problem for independent research in the humanities is that whereas the number of applications and the size of the grants applied for have been growing rapidly, the resources allocated to independent research in the humanities has been rather constant or at least not substantially growing.

|                                  | 2004  | 2005  | 2006  | 2007  | 2008  | 2009    | 2010    |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|---------|
| Number of applicants             | 224   | 270   | 268   | 272   | 228   | 334     | 474     |
| Number of grants                 | 61    | 61    | 65    | 54    | 57    | 72      | 73      |
| Total amount applied for, m. DKK | 517,2 | 645,7 | 617,8 | 653,5 | 741,7 | 1.079,4 | 1.384,7 |
| Total amount granted, m. DKK     | 93,8  | 97,4  | 98,4  | 100,7 | 119,4 | 126,5   | 125,3   |
| Rate of success %                | 18,1  | 15,1  | 15,9  | 15,4  | 16,1  | 11,7    | 9       |

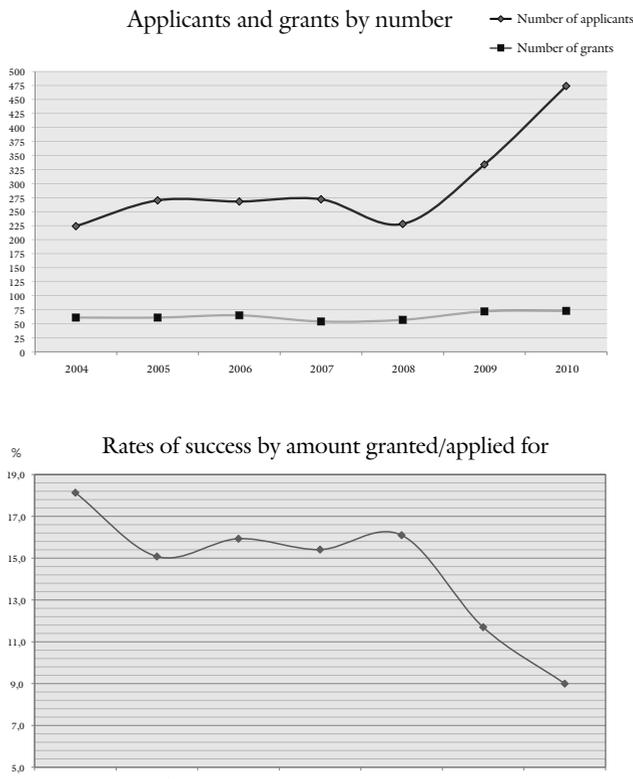


Fig. 1. Number of applicants and grants, and rates of success in FKK main round of grants 2004–10. Source: Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation.

The above figures illustrate both the simple nature and the gravity of the problem. While the rate of success (grants allotted/grants applied for) in 2004 was 18.1 per cent, and during the first four years of my membership (2005–8) moved between 15.1 and 16.1 per cent, it dropped to 11.7 per cent (2009) ending with 9.1 per cent (2010). This tendency made the final prioritization of qualified projects extremely difficult, given that only very few of a number of highly qualified applications in all subjects, including musicology, obtained grants. For larger, collaborative research projects the rate of success has been 11 per cent (2009) and 9 per cent (2010), and for postdoc. grants a little higher, 12 per cent (2009) and 10 per cent (2010). FKK's budget has almost been constant and the number of grants has been within the interval of 54 and 72 during 2004–10. The number of applications, however, has grown substantially, beginning in 2004 with 224, rising to between 228 and 272 in 2005–8, reaching 334 in 2009 and finally 475 in 2010.

#### MAKING THE CASE FOR MUSICOLOGY?

There is no sign of substantial change in the political and economical conditions for the humanities, on the contrary, as recent press accounts indicate.<sup>5</sup>

What would the solution for Danish musicology be? The problem might deserve discussion in relevant forums, and it is more than 15 years ago that a strategic status on Danish musicology was made; that is the 1994 conference on Danish musicology towards year 2000.<sup>6</sup> The Danish Musicological Society has tried to put principal themes on the agenda through the annual symposia including subjects such as 'Danish Musicology in the 21st Century' (2004), 'Music-Analytical Themes in Danish Musicology' (2005), 'Music History Challenges for Danish Musicology' (2006), and 'Musicology between Visibility and Scholarly Legitimacy' (2007) but the outcome in terms of strategies for research have been limited.

In my opinion, the keywords are quality and collaboration. The lifeblood of musicology in Denmark is independent research initiatives exploring both what the community of researchers find necessary to explore and what society at large should know and could benefit from knowing, about the role of music and musical life in a modern mediated global culture. We must collaborate on research agendas and projects crossing departmental and institutional borders; we must develop projects in which senior and junior researchers collaborate; we must work on an international level in musicology; and we must disseminate the results not only through academic publications scoring bibliometric points but also through channels with a broader audience. Besides cooperation and quality a third thing is needed: a certain degree of resilience.

5 As an example, see 'EU-forskning: EU nedprioriterer humaniora og samfundsvidenskab', *Information*, 19 January 2011, first section, 12.

6 Documented in Finn Egeland Hansen (ed.), *Rapport fra seminar den 11. maj 1994. Dansk musikforskning frem mod år 2000* (Statens Humanistiske Forskningsråd, 1996). Strategic considerations have been made by my predecessor as member of FKK, Ansa Lønstrup; see Lønstrup, 'Viewpoint. Strategier i musikforskningen?', *Danish Yearbook of Musicology*, 31 (2003), 9–15.