Dissertations on Organization and Management in Estonia and Finland 1960-1989

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Abstract

This paper analyses 28 Estonian and 33 Finnish doctoral dissertations on organization and management published between 1960 and 1989. The paper reviews their content and leading theme, methodology and main contributions. The principal thrust of the paper is to compare the evolution of organization and management research in Estonia and Finland and review the impact of the social context of the two countries acting under different economic principles and surroundings. The main conclusion of authors is that organization and management research agendas emerged at a similar time and pace in both countries and developed at a comparable pace and quality. However, the Estonian contributions were more focused in terms of topics while the Finnish counterparts provided topically more fragmented theses with no mainstream appearance. The paper reveals that in Estonia it was still possible to perform organization and management research of considerable quality despite Soviet occupation.

Journal of Economic Literature Classification Numbers: M10, N01, Y40

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1. Introduction

Between 1960 and 1989, in both Estonia and Finland around 30 doctoral dissertations were published on organization and management. The field of organization and management is one of the few research areas related to business, on which it is possible to perform a direct comparison between countries operating under different economic systems, Finland being a market economy and Estonia operating under the Soviet Union with planned economy. In many other areas of business research, for instance marketing, finance, entrepreneurship and macroeconomics, research in Estonia was nonexistent or incomparable content wise.

During the observed period, the Soviet Union and therefore Estonia had enacted a two tier system of dissertations. The lower tier was labelled a “candidate” level and the higher as a DSc. Only 3 of the 28 dissertations analysed belonged to the latter. As under Estonian legislation dissertations of both tiers have been recognised as belonging to the Ph.D. category, they will be treated as such and as equal to the Finnish Ph.D. level.

The choice of period under surveillance is positioned between 1960 and 1989, because during this period the researches of both countries were acting under comparable circumstances. Before 1960 there was not much administrative research in neither of the countries and after Estonia regained its independence in 1991, the research landscape of the country changed dramatically.

During the thirty year period, some research on topics related to organization and management were also performed in the fields of sociology, psychology, law and political sciences. This paper focuses on dissertations performed from an administrative point of view. The paper reviews the majority of such dissertations completed during the period, but makes no claims towards being all encompassing and exhaustive.

The Estonian dissertations were defended at Estonian universities and research institutes as well as abroad. The Finnish dissertations were defended at Finnish universities only. The Estonian dissertations are in both Estonian and Russian, Finnish dissertations in Finnish, Swedish and English. The analysis of dissertations was performed either in the form of manuscript of the paper or books compiled by the authors themselves. The focus of the analysis was on the main theme or topic, theoretical frame of reference, research design and target population, methods and methodology, results and implications. Appendix 1 includes the titles of Estonian dissertations in English and Appendix 2 their counterparts in Finland. As a special note it has to be mentioned that the translation is approximate due to the intranslatability of some specific terms related to planned economy.

2. The 1960s, the Start of Research in Estonia and Modest Development in Finland

1963 can be regarded as the starting point of administrative research in Estonia. In that year, Raoul Üksvärav, the later leader of research in the field, a docent at the Tallinn Polytechnical Institute (now Tallinn University of Technology) at the time, laid out the main plans for his doctoral dissertation. Subsequently he spent the next academic year (1963-1964) as an exchange scientist at the University of California (Berkeley) and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Üksvärav 1988). In 1967, Raoul Üksvärav defended his thesis titled „Majandusorganisatsioonide ülesehituse ja juhtimise probleemid Ameerika Ühendriikides” (translation in Appendix). As at that time there
were no restrictions or explicit requirements related to language or volume, the dissertation was written in Estonian and comprised two volumes on 927 pages.

The dissertation by Raoul Üksvärav gave an exhaustive overview of the development of organization and managerial thought and practice in general and especially in the United States up to mid-1960s. Professor Üksvärav became the leader in the field and the supervisor of many later researchers for the whole 30 year period. The end of 1960s saw the completion of two more candidate dissertations. The title of the first dissertation by Mati Tamm read „Use of Working Time by Executives and Managers in State Owned Farms in Estonia”. The dissertation focused on the allocation of managerial time and made suggestions for improvements of managerial job in large farms. The title of the second dissertation by Madis Habakuk was „Formalisation of Administrative Decisions at Individual and Group Level”. The dissertation focused on decision-making at group and individual level mapping the specifics and making comparisons between the two levels. These three dissertations, being of very varying themes, laid a good foundation for providing rich variety in later research.

In Estonia, the end of the sixties and the seventies were a prosperous period in management research, teaching and consulting. Important signs of this were the establishment of the Chair of Organization and Management at Tallinn Polytechnical Institute, development and implementation of a production management curriculum and a lecture series on management launched in all university curricula.

On the Finnish side, interests in empirical work in organization and management were stimulated through the new methodological openings introduced by sociology after WW II. There were only a few dissertations in the late 1940s, but some half a dozen in the 1950s such as the dissertations by M. Koivisto, P. Koli, V. Laakkonen, P. Seppänen and J. Siipi all focusing on various issues in work organizations – but actually not a single one in country’s four schools of economics and business administration existing in the 1950s. Unfortunately this interest in work organizations didn’t continue in the 1960s and almost disappeared in the politically stormy late 1960s and 1970s among sociologists, who had earlier been pioneers in this field.

There was not much progress in the 1960s when the number of dissertations in business administration did not increase. Oiva Laaksonen’s dissertation „The Executives of Finnish Business Life” in 1962 was presented at the University of Helsinki, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences (written in Finnish). He worked later as a professor of organization and management at Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration in 1968-1989. In Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration (Helsinki), Sven Kock’s dissertation „Management and Motivation” (written in Swedish) was an opening in the field of management and organization in 1965 (the differentiation development of business schools from traditional „Business Economics I and II” introduced this new field actually only in 1970 in Finland).

A typical very modest development path can be recognised in the case of Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration. The first doctoral dissertation presented in this school, which gained a university status in 1911, was in accounting in 1937 in the German language. After WW II, in the late 1940s, four doctoral theses in all were published and another four in the 1950s. None of these represented the field of organization and management. The accumulation in the 1960s was not much better: seven dissertations in all, none of them in the field of organization and management or administrative studies. All but one of these seven doctoral theses were written in Finnish and included an English summary.
The first chairs in the discipline in Finland in the schools of economics and business administration were created in the mid 1960s under the title „Economic Sociology”. This meant also methodological input brought in by empirical sociologists. The positivist survey approach with multivariate analyses dominated the field. This meant also an increasing Anglo-Saxon impact, although the Scandinavian links (Sweden and Denmark) were popular particularly among the Swedish speaking scholars. The names of the chairs changed in the turn of 1960s and 1970s when the first variants of „organization and management” were introduced.

3. 1970s – Enacting a Wider Research Perspective and Greater Variety of Themes

The seventies of the last century saw the completion of at least ten dissertations in Estonia. The thesis by Hillar Kala (1970) studied work allocation and co-operation at the level of enterprise (plant) management. The thesis by Jaak Leimann (1972) looked at production management of machine and apparatus building enterprises. The thesis by Albert Vendelin (1972) concentrated on system analysis and decision-making. Madis Välja passed his thesis (1973) on management principles of co-operative concerns. Teo Saimre investigated advertising organizations and their administrative concerns and defended his thesis in 1975. Kostel Gerndorf developed and introduced a method for procedural analysis in his thesis. Ants Kulo and Bruno Saul defended their theses in 1975, the former concentrating on management issues in the construction industry and the latter expanding on administrative themes in communication organizations. In 1976, Aivo Reiner completed his thesis on the concentration of production operations and forming associations of industrial facilities. The last on the list is the thesis by Ülo Pärnits on order making activities of executives and managers.

One of the main reasons for greater variety in research themes was the different background and rich experience of authors. Whilst the authors of the first theses in the 1960s had academic background and worked at universities, the authors of later theses had mostly an industrial background. Many of them completed their theses as a by-product beside their working activities as high level managers (Madis Välja, Albert Vendelin, Ants Kulo, Bruno Saul, Ülo Pärnits). Many of the theses concentrated on organizational design (structure and layout) issues. One of the main theoretical thrusts which laid the foundation for their theses was that of structural determinism.

The 1970s introduced some new approaches and methodologies in Finnish dissertations. There were mainly two inspiring sources: Harvard Business School, where three (C. Junnelius, L. Ahlstedt, A. Miettinen) out of the 10 PhDs from the 1970s have studied (Appendix 2). Other two studied (G. Sevón, R. Tainio) at Stanford Business School. A further major impact came from SIAR (Scandinavian Institutes of Administrative Research), founded in Sweden in 1966. This institute saw its most important mission to show that research and consulting could stimulate each other and theoretical knowledge can be used to solve practical problems. The SIAR approach stemmed from and further developed the actor-oriented action research tradition. It also appreciated interpretative case research rather than positivist survey tradition from its foundation on.

The first SIAR inspired dissertation in Finland was Christian Junnelius’ multiple case study based thesis on investment process in different types of organizational structures, published in 1974. The SIAR contributors’ publications are numerous (Carlsson 2000) and qualitatively well equal to those by university scholars –
if not higher. The SIAR staff operated in many aspects as predecessors of research conducted in the field of organization and management. For example, the case method became fully accepted as a dissertation methodology in Finland only decade or two later. All in all, SIAR’s influence was seen directly (two more dissertations in the 1980s) as well as indirectly because of the university links maintained particularly in Sweden and Finland. Later SIAR became famous for „the SIAR School of Strategic Management,” which was successful even in the highly competitive U.S. consulting market.

The themes, research designs and methodologies employed in Finnish dissertations in the field of organization and management varied greatly in the 1970s. There were no mainstream but rather single theses. Decision making was a popular topic (Lindström, Junnelius, Sevón, Haglund) although methodologies varied, and personnel management was another one with the same variety of methodological approaches (Tainio, Kivikko, Miettinen, Ahlstedt). However, a positivist tradition still dominated in spite of some new openings presented. At the same time, a further effort particularly in Finland was to create an identity of its own for „organization and management” as a separate discipline differentiating from other more established business research areas such as accounting and marketing. The background theories of this brand new discipline came typically more often from social sciences than from economics.

4. 1980s – a Considerable Expansion in Research Activities


The end of the decade saw a further expansion in the spread of themes. Boris Kirt defended his thesis (1988) on the strategic management of production. The dissertation by Vladimir Maslov (1988) was on product portfolio management. Based on his longstanding management consulting experience Jaak Leimann defended his thesis on consultancy based approaches to management in 1989, the same year seeing the completion of theses also by Ants Kikas on the development of organizational structures, Erik Terk on strategic decision-making and Ants Aamer on organizational development.

In a number of cases the theses drew on earlier research (decision-making, organization design). In line with overall trends new themes sprang internationally in administrative research: personnel management, organizational development, strategic management and management consulting. Majority of the authors worked in universities or consulting organizations. Most of the theses were completed on the basis of training and consulting work.

The amount of Finnish dissertations almost doubled in the 1980s totalling 19. The variety of themes, theoretical bases and methodological solutions further increased rather than were positioned around some mainstream approach. By using loose criteria, five dissertations can be categorised to organizational structure, organizational
development or organizational change (Santalainen, Routamaa, Korolainen, Tuominen, Ropo). Another set (Kyläkoski, Harju, Lahti, Haahati) concentrated on strategic management and two on technological change (Juuti, Woiceshyn), while the rest represent a wide variety of themes from organizational communication to symbolic management.

To summarise, the 1980s mostly indicated a continuation of what had been accomplished during the previous decades. Although the number of doctoral dissertations increased, the fragmented landscape was still there with neither clear schools of thought nor mainstream methodological consensus. It was more about diversity than order. Typical of the decade was that new very small units without critical mass were established in various parts of the country. Proper supervision of doctoral students was by and large missing and great many PhD candidates were on their own. Furthermore, a great majority of doctoral students were preparing their theses on part-time basis (the phenomenon is still there two decades later, although there are major improvements in terms of international contacts, doctoral schools and methodological courses). A good number of solutions were borrowed from „the neighbours” such as sociology, behavioural sciences, economics and statistics (this is actually not a sin but highly recommended especially for new disciplines looking for their identity).

5. Overview of Theoretical Bases and Research Methods

Organizational theories in the 1960s and 1970s were strongly embedded in structural determinism. Organizational processes were less investigated and the OD movement had just started in the late 1960s in the U.S.A. Systems theory and systems thinking were also growing strong and were used in various contexts. By employing rather loose criteria, Table 1 indicates much more focused topical dissertations in Estonia compared to the counterparts in Finland during the observed time period. It is somewhat curious that there were no more dissertations in strategic planning during the period in spite of the central economic planning. However, when systems analysis, structural determinism oriented and decision making focused dissertations are added up, they cover some 40 per cent of all doctoral theses published in Estonia between 1960 and 1990.

In Western world, some landmarks in the field of strategic management can be noted (the concept was introduced only in 1978): Igor Ansoff’s „Corporate Strategy” was published in 1965 and Michael Porter’s „Competitive Strategy” in 1980 and „Competitive Advantage” by the same author in 1985.

Table 1. Topics of Dissertations in Management and Organization in Estonia and Finland in 1960-1989

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>EST</th>
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<tr>
<td>Systems analysis/systems thinking</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational theories</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning/management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Mgmt/Personnel Mgmt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory of mgnt activities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>33</td>
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</table>
It is even more difficult to try to classify methodologies employed in the dissertations presented in those years. We can state, however, that positivist surveys including such data collection procedures as questionnaires and interviews together with the use of multivariate analyses dominated in both countries throughout the period. It is interesting to notice that the case method as a research approach was introduced in both countries at the same time in the early 1970s. Experimental and quasi-experimental research designs were also administrated in both countries in a few dissertations.

6. Orientation of Theses, Their Theoretical Results and Practical Implications

Universal theories are seldom developed in business studies unlike in natural sciences. There are a number of „middle range theories” stemming usually from social sciences or economics. Great many are „local theories” or so-called replica studies in nature although according to the expectations each doctoral dissertation is supposed to include „new scientific knowledge”.

However, doctoral dissertations are seldom developers of genuine new theories. Rather they tend to test existing ones with new samples and contexts. Mostly they provide incremental improvements or small scale contributions to theoretical aspects if anything theoretically new at all. In a typical dissertation coherence between the theoretical frame of reference and empirical results achieved qualifies it as an academic thesis.

Comparison of the two countries in terms of the theoretical and practical implications of the dissertations during the observed time period indicated again the more coherent (less fragmented) orientation of Estonian theses compared to their counterparts in Finland. This can not be explained by a slightly higher number of Finnish dissertations, but is a typical characteristic of the sample. The Estonian dissertations seemed also to be stronger in terms of their practical implications and recommendations for the business community. This might be due to the supervisory instructions in Estonia. On the Finnish side there were no shared or common rules concerning this issue. Another reason was that in Finland there were many doctoral students who had never been working outside university, which was not the case in the Estonian context.

7. Impact of Dissertations and Further Career of Authors

Unequivocally the most important and of greatest significance among the doctoral dissertations on management and organization was that of Raoul Üksvärav. His work was what ignited passion and inspiration in many a researcher, lecturer and consultant. As a major step his work gave the push to start subscribing to international scholarly journals and to establish co-operation with researchers in the Soviet Union and abroad, in Poland and Finland.

Professor Üksvärav and his fellow researchers became acknowledged lecturers and speakers and were renowned consultants (Gerndorf 2006, Leimann 2005). In 1978, the Chair of Organization and Management reached its prime with over 30 full-time faculty members teaching, researching and consulting. In the later period international contacts flourished. Management research also expanded beyond university walls with
the establishment of several research and consulting centres and training facilities, headed by some of the authors listed in preceding chapters.

Several authors continued their work as high level executives, several of them as members of the Government of the Soviet Republic of Estonia (A. Vendelin, B. Saul). At the end of the 80s, many of the authors joined the Estonian independence movement. Already at the beginning of the nineties, in the newly freed Estonia, Raoul Üksvärav became a member of the Parliament, Jaak Leimann became the minister of economic affairs in three Governments and Madis Habakuk established a private business college. Ülo Pärnits joined the ranks of successful businessmen, Peeter Kross became a rector and Erik Terk a leader of a newly established research institute. Raoul Üksvärav was awarded an honorary doctor’s title by the Turku School of Economics.

With today’s standing (Spring 2008) roughly a third of the authors are active in business and another third work for universities. Many are retired and unfortunately three have passed away.

In Finland, 1970s were ‘a golden age’ of universities in the sense that new ones were set up in the late 1960s, more resources allocated on all universities and a good number of new chairs in organization and management were created. Student intake increased rapidly. This meant also that the former ‘elite universities’ became ‘mass universities’. There was actually a shortage of competent candidates for the newly established chairs in the 1970s and 1980s, and several rather young scholars were nominated as associate or full professors.

When looking at the career paths of the 33 persons who doctorated from mid-1960s to 1989, there are 80 per cent who became professors. 12 per cent worked later as (full-time) consultants and only 6 per cent moved to business. This is very typical of a newly established discipline where presumably only the second generation tends to show more variety in their professional choices.

The US maintained to be the most favoured pre- and post-doctoral incubator: 36 per cent of these 33 persons have spent a minimum of one year in some US university, many of them several times. The UK and Scandinavian countries come next, but to a less extent. There were only a few longer visits in earlier dominating German speaking countries. Three persons from this group have passed away and 9 retired.

There are two organizations of importance worth mentioning in this connection. The European Institutes for Advanced Studies in Management (EIASM) was established in Brussels in 1971 to operate as an academic meeting point and network for European scholars in the first place. It has arranged a great number of topical workshops, doctoral tutorials and provided a venue for sabbatical visits. Through Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration Finnish scholars in organization and management had the advantage to attend all EIASM’s activities from its foundation on. Another community SCANCOR (Scandinavian Consortium for Organizational Research) was established in September 1989 and thus its impact focuses beyond the period studied in this paper.

8. Summary and Conclusions

The doctoral dissertations presented in Estonia and Finland in the field of management and organizations between 1960 and 1990 represent a rather fragmented landscape, particularly in the case of Finland. A reason for this fragmentation was established through founding many small departments, which made it difficult to develop a research culture and to attract foreign visitors for longer working periods. The field was still at
its initial and emerging stage in both countries lacking by and large ambitions to carry out leading edge research of international repute, publish in top-level journals and to build basis of sustained global excellence. The units have performed a more regional role focusing rather on knowledge brokering role and educational mission: to train students as well as possible. In comparison, the Estonian counterparts seem to have focused more on direct usefulness to the business community and practical business implications.

Higher education tends to integrate international management and business research community, which has been mainly US-driven since the Second World War. In both countries, the system opened up to the world to pull for stronger academic excellence rather late. In the case of Estonia, the opportunities under the communist regime were very limited. In this context it is amazing to notice that there was relevant and good quality research in organization and management in Estonia during the period from 1960 to 1990.

The first three decades of development in the field of organization and management research can be analysed from the point of view of role differentiation. In terms of academic excellence doctoral dissertations constitute a basis for further scholarly development. In both countries the early development seems to be stronger in practice theories than in general theory building. This is particularly true in the Estonian case where the published dissertations were mostly close to the business community. In Finland we can see a bit more accumulation of empirical work within the framework of existing theories during the same time period, maybe because of easier access to international research community.

The second role is that of national uniqueness. Both Estonia and Finland have a privileged location to do certain types of research such as studies benefiting from a geographical proximity (e.g. Russian, Baltic and Nordic collaboration) or from specific industrial sectors such as construction or energy efficiency. However, these themes were not much seen in a broader sense in the dissertations studied, but mostly have focused rather on narrower national or location issues.

For both countries, research strengthening national identity has played an important role for social and institutional legitimacy in their post-war development. The responsiveness to the needs of regional and local business communities are important drivers of employment and growth and can facilitate funding, local and regional social ties and provide further a sense of anchoring. A strong national identity works also as a stepping stone to international bridging and co-operation.

It is natural that the greater number of units in Finland had a tendency to position themselves differently and gave priority to one mission or another. A general trend in both countries was a shift from a German tradition (and a Soviet one in Estonia) to an Anglo-Saxon one. In Finland this general trend has surrounded itself with a considerable intake of new doctoral students who never accomplished their studies and a set of other fragile and sometimes dysfunctional extensions, such as acting professors and a variety of small units in small universities, in response to regional development policies. This has allowed growth to happen, but it has been quantitative rather than qualitative, leading to fragmentation and instability in the doctoral education, which did not work in favour of research excellence. As an indication, Estonia with the population of less than a third of that of Finland, was able to produce about the same amount of doctoral dissertations in „organisation and management” area at the same quality level as its northern neighbour.
References


Appendix 1
Estonian Doctoral Dissertations on Organization and Management in 1960-1989

1. R. Üksvärav (1967) Structure and Management of Business Organizations in the USA
5. J. Leimann (1972) Improvement of Production Management in Heavy Industry
6. A. Vendelin (1972) System Approach for Decision Making at Top Management Level
7. M. Välja (1973) Improvement of Production Management
9. K. Gerndorf (1975) Analysis of Procedures in Industrial Firms
10. B. Saul (1975) Organization and Management in Communication Sector
13. Ü. Pärnits (1979) Order Formation and the Chain of Command Giving
15. T. Elenurm (1980) Implementation of New Organizational Structures
17. E. Oja (1982) Improvement of Management by Organizational Development
20. K. Türk (1985) Reduction of Turnover and Achievement of Stable personnel in Trade Organizations
21. D. Üksvärav (1985) Improvement of Control Function in Manufacturing Companies
Appendix 2

Finnish Doctoral Dissertations on Organization and Management in 1960-1989

1. O. Laaksonen (1962) Managers in Finnish Business Life
2. S. Kock (1965) Management and Motivation
8. L. Kivikko (1977) Opportunities to Develop Creative Activities among Managers and Planners
9. A. Miettinen (1978) Organization and Maintenance of Training Results
10. L. Ahlstedt (1978) Functional Specialization and Mobility in Career Development
15. V. Routamaa (1980) Organizational Structuring
27. L. Åberg (1986) Information Seeking Structures in Work Organizations
30. J. Woiceshyn (1988) Technological Change in the Context and Dynamics of the Firm
33. A. Ropo (1989) Leadership and Organizational Change

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