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## More than a decade as a senior cultural scientist

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### Abstract

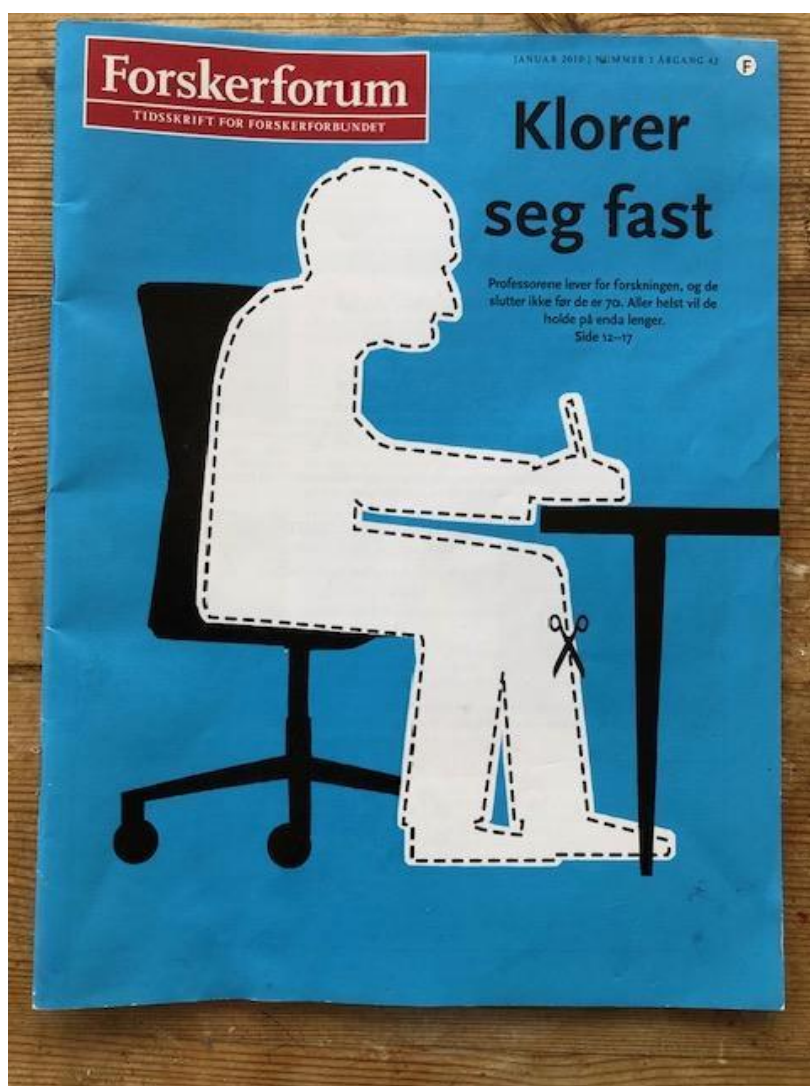
As a senior scientist I have had many fulfilled research years during the time 2011-2023. In this paper I want to highlight the way I was able to turn a problematically perceived situation, after being a retired scientist, by finding a new way of doing research that is still ongoing today. I am writing about this to encourage other scientists not to give up when facing a situation of being turned down when applying for funding or an academic position or being a pensioner. I also want to strike a blow so that managements at institutions within universities and colleges as well as ministries and politicians should see senior scientists as a research and mentoring resource in the future that must be taken care of, utilized and given reasonable research opportunities.

**Keywords:** Academic life, auto ethnography, interdisciplinary research, scientific academies, senior scientist.

### I Having to leave a working professional academic life

In 2011, at seventy years of age, and after more than thirteen years at the University of Oslo, Norway as an active ethnologist/cultural historian, I became a senior scientist. This meant that I had to leave my teaching and supervising responsibilities and my office just like that, when I

wanted to remain active still keeping my university position. The Oslo University paper *Uniforum* published, on March 11<sup>th</sup> 2010, an article based on a lengthy interview with me. The headline read "Refuses to retire". One of the quotes from the interview stated: "It is a pity if all the knowledge and experience, accumulated by senior scientists over a long time, should be lost for the university when these scientists retire". Also *Forskerforum*, representing the Norwegian Union *Forskerforbundet*, had an article published in 2010 (issue # 1) on my struggle to remain in office. On the front page of this issue, I was shown in a schematic drawing with caption 'Holding on'. The report itself has the title "No stopper in the system". I am quoted saying: "It is age discrimination if we have to leave our position just because we turned 70. Doing research is not just a job it is a life style. I mean that it is a disaster if this life style is forcibly discontinued just because you crossed a certain line of age".



**Figure 1.** Cover *Forskerforum* 2010/1.

Legally, there was in Norway, according to the "Law on age limits for public servants and others" (Lov om aldersgrenser for offentlige tjenestemenn m. fl.) section 2-3, a possibility for an additional 2 year extension of a position after turning 70. The decision was for the department to make. The Head of the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS) let me know that the department had no need for an extension of my position. However, the Head of the Department made sure that I got a salary rise in order for me to get an increased pension pay level. Obviously this was supposed to be seen as a compensatory gesture of goodwill.

Thus, in January 2011 I faced a totally new situation with no job position. To stop doing research was for me absolutely unthinkable. In order to cope with the mental pressure, I had, during the spring of 2011, to see psychiatrists and psychologists for advice and even be on psychiatric medication. Further into 2011, I started to realize that I needed to find new ways of doing research. In this paper I want to highlight the way I was able to turn a problematically perceived situation around by finding a new way of doing research that is still ongoing today in 2023. I am writing about this to encourage other scientists not to give up when facing a situation of being turned down when applying for funding or an academic position. I also want to strike a blow so that management at institutions within universities and colleges as well as ministries and politicians should see seniors as a research and mentoring resource that must be taken care of, utilized and given reasonable research opportunities.

## **II To continue being part of an academic network**

Doing research is time consuming. For a senior scientist, teaching and supervising responsibilities typically come to an end, which allows for more time doing research. For a senior scientist the personal economy issue is also usually covered by the pension. On a theoretical level, a senior scientist has accumulated a large bank of scientific experience which is very helpful when starting new projects.

A senior scientist needs to be able to keep his/her contacts in the academic community. At the University of Oslo an office was established giving senior scientists access to a computer and a shared office space. I took advantage of that possibility up until the covid19 pandemic in March 2020 caused this to stop. During the time of the pandemic, my everyday science work was dominated by my work place from home and contacts with the scientific community via

Zoom. It is essential for senior scientists to have access to email, IT-services and messages to Emeriti and this is applied throughout Oslo University. It should be a basic right for all retirees in Sweden as well.

To be able to participate in digital seminars and meetings over Zoom presents new possibilities to keep up with contacts in the scientific community (Gustavsson 2022b). Regarding ethnologic source material, there has been a positive development as much material has been digitalized. The scientist can now from his/her office download large amounts of material.

### III Scientific Academies

Scientific academies become increasingly important for seniors. In 1987 I was accepted member of *The Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy for Swedish Folk Culture* (KGAA) and *The Royal Society of Humanities and Sciences in Uppsala* (KHVSU). Those Academies have in part approved and provided funding for my publication expenses.

It was of great significance when I in 2011 was accepted member of the *Strömstad Academy. Nordic institute for advanced studies*. ([www.stromstadakademi.se](http://www.stromstadakademi.se)). The new thing was that the Strömstad Academy has an interdisciplinary profile. Members represent all the different disciplines at a university. Focus was on natural sciences and medicine. Just to imagine that I was able to work on issues around the pandemic together with medical doctors and other natural scientists (*Pandemier* 2021)! That sure has broadened my ethnological view.

Strömstad Academy was founded in 2008 by some natural scientists that had recently become seniors but wanted to continue doing research. I became a Board member and serve as Pro-Vice-Chancellor since 2017. This means that I have the responsibility for publications of anthologies, monographs, the writing series *Acta Academiae Strömstadiensis* (AAS), and the monthly *News Forum*. As a Pro-Vice-Chancellor I, together with the Vice-Chancellor, am also involved in the planning of a four day long Science Festival in Strömstad each summer.



**Figure 2.** The author in the middle of the picture is installed as professor of ethnology in 2011 by Vice-Chancellor Lars Broman on the far right. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.

## IV Publishing

### 1) Anthologies

At the Strömstad Academy I have been assigned to head the work on publishing anthologies. The first one, entitled *Barnbarnens århundrade – berättelser om en ny framtid*, (*The Grandchildren's century - Stories of a new future*), 2016, is a publication where scientists in the Academy are looking to the future and what might happen in their respective disciplines at the end of our century. This was totally new to me who instead, as a culture historian, almost always have been looking back in history. In this anthology, I brought up the issue of tombstones as a cultural heritage. If we today are not taking care of our tombstones, our grandchildren will not find any memories in the graveyards. Then things will be as in old times when only grass was growing on the anonymous grave hills.

The next anthology in 2019 had the theme *Hälsa och miljö* (*Health and environment*) with the

pediatrician Gudmund Bergqvist and me as Editors. The authors were scientists in medicine, pharmacology, natural sciences and social sciences and me as the only humanities scientist. I focused on the time when the first provincial medical doctors came to the rural areas after the tough cholera outbreaks in Sweden 1834. Their yearly office reports, that are available in digital form (<http://www.ep.liu.se/databas/medhist.sv.asp>), are an invaluable source. The doctors also struggled with folklore healers that were highly trusted among country people (Gustavsson 2017a).

The next medically oriented anthology *Pandemier-dåtid och nutid för framtid (Pandemics-past and present for future)* was published in 2021. I was able to highlight historical aspects by analyzing how the various cholera epidemics during the 1900s affected the population. The annual reports from provincial medical doctors became a significant source along with folklore records made right after the cholera outbreaks. Some informants told about their own experiences or what they had heard from parents and grandparents. Handling of dead bodies from people that had passed away after a short time of illness was a sensitive problem to deal with in those times of crisis. The deceased had to be put in primitive coffins as soon as possible and taken to newly set-up cholera graveyards, still today serving as a cultural heritage (Gustavsson 2020b).

In the anthology *Forskarkarriärer (Research careers)* from 2020, thirteen scientists from various disciplines talk about prosperities and setbacks in their pursuit of a successful research career. It has been about rising from difficulties and finding a way forward. Together with a researcher in didactics, Åsa Morberg, and teacher trainer, Carl E. Olivestam, I edited this anthology and wrote myself about 'How to reach a successful humanistic research career?'. I have experienced both headwind and downwind at different universities in Sweden and Norway. Sometimes you get the funding and the position you applied for and sometimes not. A successful scientist must look ahead for new opportunities.





**Figure 3.** Cover of the anthology *Forskarkarriärer 2020*.

The anthology *Värderingar. Värdekartor som ett försök att fastställa socio-kulturella vädret i världen* (*Values. Value maps as an attempt to determine the socio-cultural weather of the world*), published in 2019, was edited by teacher trainer Carl E. Olivestam, assisted by me. Olivestam wrote about values in the Swedish school from a perspective of changes. I myself highlighted how texts and symbols on tombstones, as well as on internet memory sites in Sweden and Norway, for humans or domestic animals that passed away, can express values (Gustavsson 2019a, cf Gustavsson 2011).

## 2) Monographs

In addition to the anthologies, I have published several *monographs*. In the 2010s they were published by Novus forlag and the English counterpart Novus Press in Oslo. Most of the production was published in English to be able to reach contacts in the international research community outside the Northern countries. The latest book from Novus Press deals with historical changes in alcohol interactions across the Swedish-Norwegian border (Gustavsson 2019c). This border was closed during the Norwegian alcohol ban in 1916-1927, as well as during the second world war when smuggling of alcohol from Sweden to Norway occurred. This book was part of the projects *Cultural meetings of the border* and *Alcohol and sobriety in the Nordic countries during the 19th and 20th centuries*. Because of the covid19 pandemic, the border between Norway and Sweden was again closed in 2020-2022 (Gustavsson 2022a). This prevented the Norwegians from going to Sweden to buy cheap alcohol, which had been going on since the early 1990s, when also tourism to the Swedish coastal county of Bohuslän markedly increased.

In the 2020s I have published monographs, in Swedish as well as in English, at the Strömstad Academy Press. The Academy can offer help with layout, translation, language text reviews as well as providing contacts with well established businesses for printing, mainly in Lithuania. The investigations have been about studies on coastal culture (Gustavsson 2021c) and different use of alcohol such as total abstinence, moderate drinking and improper use (Gustavsson 2021a). Regarding improper use during the early industrialization era in Sweden, I found invaluable sources in the collection, at the Swedish Nordic Museum, of working class memories from the time of 1945-1959 (Gustavsson 2023). Here you can find some self-experienced stories about improper alcohol use not least among navvies that were doing construction work on the Swedish network of roads and railroads. The latest monograph from 2022 ties into the previous studies on pandemics, as I, guided by newspaper articles, could learn about the consequences for those living along the Norwegian-Swedish border. The fact that Norway closed down their country border for almost two years, from March 17th 2020 until February 12th 2022, caused a lot of trouble with the testing for virus on those Swedes commuting to work in Norway. It also caused a total interruption in Norwegian border trade and tourism in Bohuslän (Gustavsson 2022a). This book has the potential to form the basis for further political discussions to better cope with future crisis situations in the event of pandemics.



## V Auto Ethnography

In the early 1970s I was trained both in ethnology and history to keep an objective view. The scientist should be a neutral individual and someone observing the reality that was studied in field observations or materials from the archives. Later a more subjective research view emerged in ethnology. An absolute truth established once and for all was not possible to accomplish. The scientist as a subjective person had influenced both the choice of topic and the analyses. Auto ethnography became a useful concept. The idea is that the personal background of the scientist plays a role for choice of topic and for the understanding of collected material. The digital Swedish journal *Kulturella perspektiv (Cultural Perspective)* had an issue with this as a theme in 2021 (*Kulturella perspektiv 2021*). A colleague of mine, the folklorist Ebbe Schön, published in 2012 his autobiographic book *Fotspår på röd granit (Footprints on red granite)* (Schön 2012). This inspired me to publish a corresponding book with auto ethnographic signs. Already in 2013 *Bondekultur i möte med akademisk kultur i Sverige och Norge (Peasant culture meets academic cultures in Sweden and Norway)* was published (Gustavsson 2013a). My personal background in farmer culture has affected me more than I first had expected. In particular this is so regarding among others the interest in folk religion, use of alcohol, tombstones, folk tales, coastal culture marked by cultural encounters, tourism etc. A more elaborated version of this book was published by Strömstad Academy in 2019 (<http://stromstadakademi.se/AAS/AAS-62.pdf>). The book wants to make it clear to a wider public that the researcher is not a neutral person in his investigations but has many social and cultural preferences that influence both subject selection and analyses.

## VI Reviews and peer review

To review newly published scientific literature, such as doctoral theses, on a regular basis contributes to keeping the scientist updated on current research. Seniors have the advantage of not having to worry about collecting publication points. I am a regular reviewer in English in *ARV, Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* and *Ethnologia Scandinavica* (ES) and in Swedish in *Rig. Kulturhistorisk tidskrift, Svenska landsmål och Svenskt folkliv* (SvLm) and the Norwegian *Tidsskrift for kulturforskning* (TfK) (Gustavsson 2020).

It is part of the scientific collaboration to act, for free, as a peer reviewer of articles prior to publication. If no one stands up as a peer reviewer, this whole system collapses. Here, seniors are a real resource for the university world. I receive these kind of assignments both from

Northern countries and internationally, among others from the digital journal Sustainability where I have been a peer reviewer on issues about tourism in different parts of the world (<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability>). The same applies to the digital magazine Religions <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/>.

## VII Scientific networks

Another way of staying à jour with current research is to actively participate in scientific networks in areas relevant to the scientist's own area of expertise. One of my research areas has been on tourism history. This first resulted in my book, published in 1981 with the title *Sommargäster och bofasta (Summer guests and permanent residents)* (Gustavsson 1981), based on a project with the theme *Cultural contacts in Bohuslän's coastal areas*. In 2013 I presented new research data in the publication *Resident Populace and Summer Holiday Visitors. Cultural Contacts between Harmony and Conflict in Nordic Coastal Regions* (Gustavsson 2013b). This publication came 32 years after its predecessor *Sommargäster och bofasta (Summer Holiday Visitors and Residential Population)*. There had been significant changes regarding tourism over this time period. One thing that in particular stood out in the early 2010s, compared with the 1970- and 1980s, was that from the early 1990s a large number of Norwegian tourists had come to visit the coastal areas of Bohuslän. The new investigations were carried out within the project *Norwegians meeting Bohuslän*.

In 2015 "Nordiskt nätverk för turismhistoria" (Nordic network for tourism history) was initiated, headed by the historian Wiebke Kolbe in Lund. The first anthology published within this network appeared in 2018 with the title *Turismhistoria i Norden (Tourism history in the Nordic region)* with Wiebke Kolbe as Main Editor and me as a Co-Editor (*Turismhistoria* 2018). My contribution in this book was entitled "Turisternas möte med lokalbefolkning" (Tourists' meeting local people) (Gustavsson 2018).

When in more recent years I have been doing investigations about folk healers and about cholera in the 19th century (Gustavsson 2018 and 2021b) I have been part of a network for medical history (<https://nnhsh.wordpress.com/2015/02/08/medicinshistoriskt-natverk/>, <https://seagate.sunet.se/cgi-bin/wa?A0=MEDICINHISTORIA>).

Folkloristics has been an important area of research for me. In 1979, I published *Folklore in Community Conflicts. Gossip in a Fishing Community* (Gustavsson 1979). In 2017, I summarized my folklore investigations in the publication *Folkloristic studies in Scandinavia*.

*Personal research experiences and reflections* (Gustavsson 2017). At a folkloristic congress in Vilnius Lithuania in 2013, the international network *Belief Narrative Network (BNN)* was initiated. I was a member of the Board up until 2021. This network has over hundred folklorists from all over the world. Each month a digital webinar takes place which then is available at the network website (<http://www.isfnr.org/belief-narrative-network.php> [http://isfnr.org/files/archiv/bnn\\_Gustavsson\\_Anders.pdf](http://isfnr.org/files/archiv/bnn_Gustavsson_Anders.pdf)).

At a symposium in Ålborg 2010, the network *Nordic Network of Thanatology (NNT)* was created, being a network covering research about death. I was invited to be part of the management of this network. In order for researchers outside the northern countries to be able to participate, all contributions and presentations have been in English, and prominent international scientists have been invited to participate. In 2011, I published my investigations on death in a book entitled *Cultural studies on death and dying in Scandinavia* (Gustavsson 2011). Here you can find studies on tombstones for both deceased human beings as well as domestic animals. Rituals around sudden death at sea or on the road, or through murder or homicide, are analyzed. From memory pages for deceased humans and domestic animals on the internet, you can learn a lot about existential ideas in our time regarding what happens after death. As for the domestic animals, it could be about the 'cat heaven'.

At a symposium in Uppsala in 1993 an international executive committee on studies in Folk Religion was initiated. I was the first director throughout the 1990s. After that, I have continued participating in meetings every third year. The last one took place in Berlin in 2023 under the theme Religious Utopias. Several of my sub-projects were published in 2012 in the book *Cultural Studies on Folk religion in Scandinavia* (Gustavsson 2012). Here the role of religion in Swedish everyday life, with special focus on the peasant society, is studied. Through records and field work I have investigated the life and imaginary world in several Free Churches both in Sweden and Norway during the 1900s. A Nordic network for investigations on Nordic revival movements have existed throughout all of the 2000s. This network has arranged several meetings with follow-up publications (<https://polinstitutet.fi/elfte-gangen-gillt-for-kjempegrejt-nordveck-konferens/>). I participated in a meeting in Copenhagen 2022 under the theme of "Kristendom over grænserne" (Christianity across borders). My contribution was about 'The ecumenical border-crossing of the charismatic Oasis Movement in the 2010s' (cf Gustavsson 2016). As an Ethnologist I am interested both in the history and in new religious movements and how they develop over current time.

## VIII Forces behind scientific work

How has this scientific work, as described above, been possible to carry out over thirteen years as a senior scientist? From younger research colleagues, previously being my students, I have at seminars in the 2020s been told: “You are still very active. How can you manage that?” An anthropology colleague wrote in April 2023: “Very inspiring to see how productive you are”. This made me reflect on what can be behind the fact that a senior scientist still can maintain a significant level of research work. In the digital research database Cristin.no my whole scientific production over the years 2011-2023 is available (<https://wo.cristin.no/as/WebObjects/cristin.woa/wa/fres?sort=ar&la=en&action=sok&pnr=22909>).

### 1) *The brain as a resource*

Brain researchers have lately found that the brain continues to develop still in later age. Thus, seniors can still be expected to be a scientific resource. An example of how the brain also works when you are asleep, I had one morning in April 2020, right at the beginning of covid19. I got the idea that “You (I) should start planning an anthology about pandemics”. There and then it became a question of sending out a call to other scientists in the Strömstad Academy. They were invited to participate in the planned anthology. I got a positive response as more than ten scientists from different disciplines declared an interest in submitting contributions. The work started, me being the project leader. One year later, in April 2021, the book *Pandemier – dåtid och nutid för framtid (Pandemics-past and present for future)* was completed.

The brain is also active when you are physically active. Quite often when I am out walking in the nature, I get ideas for interpretations of the investigations that I am working on. It can also be about new research themes that I should start working on. One example is the idea about studying vaccination against covid19 (Gustavsson 2022a). Considering the fact that some individuals refused to accept the offer of a new vaccine that became available on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020. I had the idea that I should look into how the small pox vaccine, available during the 1800s, was received by individuals at that time. Against cholera, that I studied earlier, there was no vaccine (Gustavsson 2021b).

Another example of inspiration I got when again out walking in the nature. Based on the fictional book *Den moderna inkvisitionen (The modern inquisition)*, 2023, written by the Business Economist Rune Wigblad and dealing with the vulnerability of researchers relative



to the power structure at universities and colleges, I had the idea for a new anthology. Several scientists could write about their personal experience under the theme: *The researcher and the power structure at universities and colleges*. This work is now up and running.

## 2) *Physical activity and health*

Over the years I have prioritized daily physical activity by walking or biking. Locally on Orust I often get the question: “Are you biking today?” Nordic walking has also become more common lately. It strengthens the arms and muscles and is a valuable option now when there no longer is a lot of snow in the southern parts of Sweden. When I first started Nordic walking, I got a lot of “Did you forget to bring the skis?” Now I don't get that kind of comments any more, since it has become kind of trendy to do the Nordic walking. Physical activity is something that the researcher can choose and thus get the opportunity for better fitness and clarity of thought, which are so fundamental in all research.



**Figure 4.** The author on the left with walking sticks out in the forest in 2012. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.

### 3) Previous scientists as role models

I have been inspired to continue doing research by previous seniors that have been active doing research well into old age. My supervisor Nils-Arvid Bringéus in Lund published his last book at the age of ninety. The church historian Hilding Pleijel in Lund wrote books still well into his nineties. This is also true for one of the great scientists in ethnology in Europe, Hermann Bausinger in Tübingen, Germany. I heard him give a greatly appreciated talk at the international ethno-folkloristic congress of the *International Society for Ethnology and Folklore, SIEF*, in Santiago de Compostella in Spain 2019. Bausinger was then 93 years old. Why would I stop doing research when previous scientists successfully maintained their research activities for so long? At the same time, I can become a role model for younger researchers. You can be an active researcher well into your years. I have sometimes been told by middle-aged researchers that "it's amazing that you can be so active in a publishing context". I have been able to notice that it has become a spur for them as well.

## IX Final Comment

Despite uncertain odds in the beginning of 2011, I have had thirteen fulfilled research years during the time 2011-2023. I have been able to advance earlier areas of research and I have found new areas of research. Maybe I can be a role model for other scientists to keep their research going also as seniors. There is a definite advantage in that both for research and for the researcher personally. I would like to call on the managements at departments in universities and colleges to look at senior scientists as a research resource which it is about exploiting in the future and therefore giving them reasonable research opportunities.

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