THE GAME PLAN
OF THE FUTURE

Universities need new environments

THEME COURAGE

Meet:
The humanist
Erland Mårland breaks
down boundaries

The innovators
Five people with the courage
to make changes

The risk-taker
Making a difference in the world

The challenger
Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede
solves the riddle of protein

The search for identity
Po Tidholm about
Umeå's transformation

The price of creativity
A discussion about
creativity and risk-taking

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THE ART OF CHOOSING YOUR OWN PATH

WHY DO WE TAKE RISKS? Seeking new paths, believing in our ideas and continuing despite grim conditions or being gravely doubted. As vice chancellor of one of Sweden’s most northern comprehensive universities, I am surrounded by persistent and creative people who have chosen their own path.

There are young people here who have left their families to seek knowledge through encounters with new people. There are researchers and teachers here who for decades have persistently refused to let go of a challenging issue and have laid the basis for breakthroughs in their fields of research. They look for new angles, new explanations and new questions. They have the courage to be sceptical and question things. At the same time they also have the courage to rely on other people’s knowledge — and on their own capabilities. They are not afraid of trying out ideas with uncertain outcomes. Seeking new approaches in the field of education and research calls for courage, persistence and stamina. This approach can lead to leaps in knowledge and creativity that will allow us to meet society’s big challenges.

BUT THE ROAD to real breakthroughs in knowledge is often paved with adversity — major setbacks that mean we must have the courage to fail in order to succeed. We need dynamism and the courage to cross boundaries, realise the feasibility of new and unexpected collaborations and to tackle what is completely unknown and uncertain.

But if we are to dare to fail we also need security and the right conditions, or at least adequate ones. Clarity and the possibility of a long-term plan for your future career create an attractive opportunity that actually offers sufficient security. You need a permissive and generous environment that encourages experimentation and investigation as well as reflection and consideration. As Vice-Chancellor, I see my most important challenge being the creation of long-term conditions that give you the courage to fail. I am convinced that this approach gives prominent researchers and teachers the prospect of a really attractive future at Umeå University.

IN THIS ISSUE of Think, you can follow our work on the creation of attractive conditions and environments at Umeå University — environments for new, interdisciplinary encounters that encourage creativity and risk-taking. You will also get to meet courageous individuals whose thoughts are new and different — people with the courage both to succeed and to fail.

This year we are receiving the confirmation that Umeå is a city that does not shrink from standing out. Our city has received the prestigious recognition of being named European Capital of Culture 2014, and achieving this status has required the courage to put the unknown to the test. In this issue of Think, we are thus jumping into the depths of cultural and humanitarian issues. Just like education and research, culture can create new perspectives and contribute towards new solutions.

I wish you an inspiring read!

LENA GUSTAFSSON
VICE-CHANCESOR

PHOTO: ELIN BERGE
More ways into the teaching profession

TO OBTAIN A FUTURE shortage of qualified teachers, more ways into the teaching profession are needed. In autumn 2014 Umeå University’s School of Education will thus be starting a one-year programme aimed at students who already have a Master’s and wish to quickly gain a teaching qualification. Umeå University will thereby become one of Sweden’s first universities to offer supplementary pedagogical training at an accelerated pace. The target group is principally students accustomed to studying who are qualified in one or two science subjects, though other subjects may also be included. “We are simply trying out more methods of teacher training. For many people who have already studied at a college of higher education for several years, starting a long programme of study is not an option. Those who want to switch to teaching are now getting a better option,” says Maria Löfgren, Vice-Chancellor of Umeå University’s School of Education.

Roasted chips become green coal

IT IS OBVIOUS to most people that the forest plays an important role in Sweden’s future energy mix, but the method of energy extraction is undergoing constant development. One of the most interesting technologies is production of so-called green coal. The Umeå-based company BioInnovex took a new step in the investment in green coal when in October 2015 it started construction of a demonstration plant in reflection that is to be completed by mid-2017. The technology means forestry residue will be roasted to form chips at 200–250°C, using a method known as torrefaction. The result is a dry, energy-rich biomass that can be used in HPL plants. The material can also be gasified and converted into fuels and green chemicals. The high energy content and ease of transportation are the two major advantages of the technology. BioInnovex’s plant is to produce two tonnes per hour, and is a scaled-up version of the company’s pilot plants, which have been in operation since 2009 and are being financed by the forestry group SCA. The company has its origins in a joint venture between Umeå University and the research environment at BioEnergy—a top-level research venture in the field of bioenergy.
Demographically divided India

MODERN ULTRASOUND technology and financial pressure has led the Indian state of Uttarakhand to focus on forestry. One Indian area in which female foetuses are aborted more often than males has something to do with the gender distribution. These are the findings of Anand Krishnan, who for his dissertation has collected data from people living in the area’s 28 villages since 1992.

Anand Krishnan works as a doctor and public-health expert at the Centre for Community Medicine, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. He gained his PhD in autumn 2013 in the Department of Public Health and Clinical Medicine, Division for Epidemiology and Global Health, Umeå University. According to Anand Krishnan, in order to deal with the problem the Indian authorities are working on controlling access to technology for gender determination of foetuses, but it appears that this is rather reinforcing the situation of girls being a financial burden for families.

There are also links to other socioeconomic problems, such as parents’ education and caste.

“The results show that families in the richest and best-educated group have the most gender-based abortions performed. Furthermore, baby girls in these families are at greater risk of dying during the first month of their life,” says Anand Krishnan.

PATIENCE AND QUICK ACTION

The Norway spruce’s genome make-up, opened up (momentum new possibilities for forest use, according to Stefan Jansson)

Previously an issue into trees’ genetic material combined with rapid technological developments through Stefan Jansson and his research colleagues to a decision. It was time to come to grips with Norway spruce trees. Our Swedish forests contain about 32 billion Norway spruce trees, and every year a further 250 million new ones are planted. This makes the Norway spruce Sweden’s most important plant in economic terms. Spurce trees’ genetic material is huge—seven times greater than that of humans. A full mapping of the Norway spruce’s genome has thus long been impossible. This situation changed in spring 2013, however, when Stefan Jansson, Pär Inversson and Ove Nilsson, professors at Umeå Plant Science Centre (UPS), and their colleagues presented the results of a three-year research project that solved the riddle of the Norway spruce’s genetic material.

The new knowledge makes it possible to ascertain the properties of individual Norway spruces at a very early stage. It creates completely new conditions for forestry tree breeding, as it will be possible to use DNA to select trees with the requisite properties, e.g. Norway spruces with the best chance of survival that can resist frost, rot and large pine weevils. It also facilitates adaptation of Norway spruces to various processing, e.g. production of paper pulp,” says Stefan Jansson.

Stefan Jansson mustered the courage to tackle the Norway spruce via the poplar and the aspen.

The Norway spruce’s genome make-up, opened up (momentum new possibilities for forest use, according to Stefan Jansson)

“Won’t be easy to do. But the results are so promising that we are already preparing a new project,” he says. “I am sure that it will be a renewable activity that we can find new applications for the poplar. And the results of this research are also very interesting for forestry tree breeding. We are now working on the next version of the genome, which will be even better.”

SUSANNE GLENNEGÅRD

New method detects doping

THERE HAS BEEN A LACK of techniques to detect doping in Umeå until now. Umeå researchers have now developed a completely new method of analysis. By using a number of biomarkers in the blood, it is possible to detect whether an athlete has taken any type of performance enhancing drugs.

In contrast to the widely used method of analysing urine, the method is said to be far more effective as it can detect the use of drugs even before they appear in the urine. If doping has been used during a competition, the researchers can also detect the drugs that have been used.

The method, which is based on ultrasensitive detection of small biomarkers in the blood, was tested on volunteers after a week of fasting. They were given a standard meal, had a prolonged period of exercise, and then were given placebo medicine or a mixture of a number of performance enhancing drugs.

This was followed by a control period of 14 days without any drugs. The volunteers then returned, and the researchers could detect the presence of drugs in the blood with an accuracy of over 90%.

Winston Churchill

‘It’s of great advantage to make the mistakes from which one can learn as early as possible.’

Pod radio for academic discussions

OVER 100 EPISODES of the podcast Mediespanarna have now been released since the premiere in August 2016. At the microphone is Jesper Enbom, Faculty Programme Director in the Dean’s Office of the Faculty of Arts, and Jesper Ebborn, Lecturer in the Department of Culture, and Media Studies at Umeå University. “Thanks to its quick form of publica-
Bold fish can affect the ecosystem

FOUR RESEARCHERS FROM Umeå have previously shown that fish that take illegal drug residues tend to be greedier and bolder — the possible ecological consequences of this are now going to be examined in a scientific study that Jonatan Klaminder, an environmental scientist at Umeå University, has jointly carried out a pilot study with. He is worried about how the healthcare sector will tackle the challenge of more and more older people and dementia suffers.

It was a brave step when Thoreau focused on aging and the situation of older people under the auspices of the GERDA Study — a comprehensive research project focusing on aging and the situation of older people under the auspices of the Swedish Research Council — and Jonatan Klaminder, consultant and Professor of Geriatrics at Umeå University, was among those who have specifically looked at developments in the Swedish province of Västerbotten, and the trend is clear in the group age 80 and above the proportion of people with dementia has increased by a surprising 40 per cent in just five years. The incidence of depression has also increased. Several factors are of importance, one being the fact that people are living longer.

The link with cardiovascular diseases is also clear. There is a medical paradox in the situation whereby you survive one disease only to get another one, says Thoreau. It is worked out how the healthcare sector will tackle the challenge of more and more older people and dementia suffers.

Knowledge of how to deal with these patients is scarce, leading to many incorrect assumptions, the consultant says. This situation can be prevented with sensible political decisions and improved knowledge base for patients. There is a need for a scientific and political impact. Demonstrating the impact can be prevented with sensible political decisions and improved knowledge base for patients.

Thoreau was fascinated by the way plants are able to withstand such a tough climate and survive every winter after a short summer, whilst we would last a few days in the same climate, despite our warm down jackets. "It was only when I'd been working for some time as a plant ecologist that I realised the potential of research in arctic areas," says Eva-Lisa Saks. "It was during a lecture at Umeå University in the Netherlands that a professor of plant ecology showed images of plants in a bare and cold environment. Ellen Dormapel was absolutely transported. "It was a five-year venture, and we will be providing results that show the consequences for the ecosystem. The follow-up study in the facility to commence in autumn 2014," says Jonatan Klaminder, and he continues: "It is only when you can demonstrate effects at an ecosystem level that environmental problems have a scientific and political impact. Demonstrating a mechanism is crucial — we're already doing that — but we now have to prove that this mechanism means in a bigger context."

And Ellen Dormapel has a PhD in plant ecology. At Umeå University in Abisko she is researching ecosystems in arctic areas and how they are affected by the ongoing climate change. One of her ground-breaking findings is to show how a warmer climate can increase the conversion of carbon stored in the ground.
EDUCATION’S NEW CHALLENGES

Digitalisation and the tough competition for students and researchers is creating a new playing field for universities. In order to tackle the challenges there is now a need for environments that stimulate creativity — and Umeå University is at the forefront.

TEXT: JOHAN WICKSTRÖM PHOTO: ELIN BERGE

The classic lecture theatre has basically remained unchanged since the Middle Ages. It was conceived with a focus on the teacher, without a thought for the possibility of any discussion in the room. The increase in seminars and laboratories in the 19th century brought some modifications to this arrangement, but university learning environments basically changed very little until the early 21st century.

A transformation of universities is now in progress all over the world. Lecture theatres are giving way to flexible, interactive, dynamic teaching rooms—and pedagogic practices are changing in pace with technology. Those at the forefront are above all American universities such as MIT, the University of Minnesota and Stanford University.

“The trend is clear. In the USA there are around 100 institutions that have active learning classrooms with interactive environments and no rostrum at the front,” says Malcolm Brown, the director of the Educause Learning Initiative in Washington.

In Sweden the universities are still in infancy in terms of developing these environments, and apart from Umeå University few of them have...
The students want to be more involved and experimental in their learning, and this calls for new types of room. “The aim is to enable the students to better understand of why that answer is right, and find out the right answer but also gain an understanding of what happens when two chemical substances react.”

At NTU all classrooms have been converted to allow students to exchange ideas. The lecturer is to become ‘one of Europe’s leading universities in terms of innovative physical and virtual environments’ by 2020. “This venture comprises two components. We’re developing learning environments. The students want to be more involved and experimental in their learning, and this calls for new types of room. We’ll be creating these interactive focus environments in order to increase the collaboration between researchers, students and other groups of society, e.g. companies and schools,” says Anders Fällström, Umeå University’s pro-vice-chancellor.

“This is a natural development for us. Umeå University has always led the way in terms of teaching methods. We were amongst the first to offer distance and network programmes, and we’re the first in Sweden to be making such a big investment.”

What is driving the shift towards more innovative learning environments is rapid technological developments and digitalisation combined with increased globalisation. Add to this the fact that the generation of the 1980s and ‘90s, which got very far. Inspired by developments in the USA, Umeå University is now building five interactive environments – representing an investment of over SEK 71m. The objectives are ambitious, the university trend. Using your mobile or computer you can very quickly pick and choose free courses from the world’s leading universities, e.g. Yale and MIT.

A completely new playing field is thus being opened up. To cope with the fresh challenges and hold their own against the ever tougher competition for students, the universities need to develop their learning environments and their pedagogic toolbox. Nanyang Technical University (NTU) in Singapore is one of the international universities at the forefront when it comes to new teaching practices. The teaching rooms are interactive and flexible, and all lessons are recorded and posted on the net (see article on p. 13).

According to Daniel Tan, NTU assistant professor at NTU and is responsible for the Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching. Anders Fällström, Umeå University’s pro-vice-chancellor says Daniel Tan, who is an associate professor at NTU and is responsible for the Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching. Another factor that sets NTU aside is its investment in innovative teaching environments. For example, all majors are recorded and immediately made available as webcasts.

“The aim is to enable the students to better absorb the information by seeing the lecture again,” says Daniel Tan, who is an associate professor at NTU and is responsible for the Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching. “The students can now take place whereby many students learn using the web and from each other — so-called e-learning. The role of teachers is fundamentally changing. “Teachers used to be in the foreground. A gradual shift is now taking place whereby many students learn using the web and from each other — so-called e-learning. The role of teachers is fundamentally changing.

“All the teaching rooms at NTU have been converted to allow students to exchange ideas. The lecturer then becomes more of a facilitator – someone who facilitates and controls learning,” he says.

A popular pedagogic concept that has recently been coming into use is the clicker teaching. This involves the students listening to lectures on the net prior to the classes, which instead focus on practical exercises and tasks whereby the students can collaborate and seek the teacher’s help if necessary. “The traditional teaching roles are changing as a result of the A completely new playing field is thus being opened up. To cope with the fresh challenges and hold their own against the ever tougher competition for students, the universities need to develop their learning environments and their pedagogic toolbox. Nanyang Technical University (NTU) in Singapore is one of the international universities at the forefront when it comes to new teaching practices. The teaching rooms are interactive and flexible, and all lessons are recorded and posted on the net (see article on p. 13).

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“The traditional teaching roles are changing as a result of the new types of room,” says Daniel Tan. “The principle is for the sound level in the lecture theatres to be a little on the loud side, to allow students to exchange ideas. The lecturers, on the other hand, become more mobile, and move from one group to another to see how the discussions are progressing.”

The pedagogic approach has also changed in pace with the advent of new tools. On starting their courses at NTU all students are given a clicker device, which is to be used actively in the teaching situation. It breaks the monotony, gets quiet students to react and provides good feedback.

Daniel Tan gives an example. During a chemistry lecture the students may be asked what happens when two chemical substances react. In the initial response maybe 40 per cent give the correct answer. They are then given the opportunity to discuss the matter in groups for a few minutes, after which there is a repeat vote. The frequency of correct responses then increases dramatically.

“This method means the students not only find out the right answer but also gain an understanding of why that answer is right, and very importantly, why some answers are not. It clears common misconceptions that learners of new concepts often have. We help the students teach themselves.”

EVER SINCE IT OPENED its doors in 1952, Nanyang Technical University, NTU, in Singapore has quickly risen on the international university ranking lists. Important factors in this are the availability of money and a political will.

“We’ve received money to recruit the best researchers from the USA and Europe, and that is incredibly important. You also have to be able to combine education with creative research,” says Bertil Anderson, who is the president of NTU (and who incidentally began his academic trajectory at Umeå University in 1968).

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“The aim is to enable the students to better absorb the information by seeing the lecture again,” says Daniel Tan, who is an associate professor at NTU and is responsible for the Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching. At NTU all classrooms have been given a makeover. The classical set-up of a rostrum and students looking up to the lecturer has been replaced by rooms where the students sit clustered in six groups, with a screen connected to each group’s table.

“The whole teaching process has become more social. The students are more active and collaborative with each other,” says Daniel Tan. “This method means the students not only find out the right answer but also gain an understanding of why that answer is right, and very importantly, why some answers are not. It clears common misconceptions that learners of new concepts often have. We help the students teach themselves.”

The new centre for learning – Learning Hub – that is to be built at NTU (Nanyang Technological University).

All the teaching rooms at NTU have been converted into dynamic interactive spaces.
new technology. It used to be the teacher who delivered the content to the students—now it can be the other way round. The students prepare and present the content whilst the teachers become coaches,” says Malcolm Brown.

In the Social Sciences Building at Umeå University three converted teaching rooms forming part of the first stage of the investment in creative environments have recently begun to be used. The rooms have different designs, but have a number of features in common: tables with wheels, several large digital screens and a whiteboard or two along the sides. All this is combined with a bright and airy design.

“We can have a professor here from, say, Stanford, who gives the lecture via a video link. The students can ask questions in the meantime, and when the lecture is over the teacher can take over and continue the discussion in the teaching room,” says Bengt Malmlors, who develops pedagogic practices at the university.

“This creates more opportunities for the students to be active and collaborate more. You can write straight onto the screen here, for example, and can save your notes. It works like a giant iPad,” says Bengt Malmlors, pointing to a 150” display on one of the walls.

Lisbeth Lundahl, Professor of Pedagogic Practices and one of the driving forces behind the venture, wants to play down the flashy element of the new learning environments that are now gradually being developed at Umeå University.

“These are not ‘display rooms’ but everyday environments for learning. There are currently so many obstacles, e.g. the cramped and noisy conditions. The important thing is for the halls to be more user-friendly and flexible, and for the teachers to quickly be able to adapt them on the basis of new pedagogic situations,” she says.

HE IDEA OF THE NEW LEARNING environments at Umeå University is to improve the quality of both education and research. But despite more universities trying out innovative learning processes there has not as yet been much research that shows clear results.

“The research into learning has chanced about education at a lower level, and there has been very little concerning higher education. Our investment in creative environments also includes examining the learning process in the new premises compared with conventional teaching rooms, and seeing what the results are,” says Lisbeth Lundahl.

Developing pedagogical practices in the new environments will be a major challenge.

“The physical environment, the technology and the teachers—all three components must be optimal. But the most important is the teachers. We will be carrying out extensive further training of our teachers,” says Anders Fälström.

The Swedish-based property company Akademiska hus, which owns over 60 per cent of the country’s university and higher education buildings, is financing part of the research linked to the venture.

“This research is important to us. We have to understand the universities’ needs and monitor trends. We can apply the results here in Umeå and our other universities,” says David Carlsson, regional director of Akademiska Hus, which owns over 60 per cent of the country’s university and higher education buildings.

“I don’t believe in ‘one size fits all’—differentiation is important. You need to create environments for a number of different society’s needs—and to meet the challenges with forward-looking courses. Another important part of UCN’s vision is to create environments that inspire the students. Rosan Bosch, who works at the interface between design, architecture and art, has taken as his point of departure UCN’s key principles of openness, dialogue and innovation, and has transformed them into physical environments.

The emphasis has been on creating many different types of peripheral environment outside the teaching rooms: small spaces where the students can work individually and exciting larger areas that encourage collaboration and discussion. One of these collaborative environments is framed by red wooden sculptures six metres high. There is also a Speakers’ Corner here where anybody who so wishes can share an interesting subject.

In the Middle of Umeå University

UCN is a professionally oriented university with about 20,000 students and three campuses in Denmark: Hjørring, Aalborg and Thisted. A wide variety of programmes—up to Bachelor’s level—are available here, e.g. in IT, design, nursing, the environment and technology. The aim is to develop courses in close collaboration with the world of work and with forward-looking courses. Another important part of UCN’s vision is to create environments that inspire the students. Rosan Bosch, who works at the interface between design, architecture and art, has taken as his point of departure UCN’s key principles of openness, dialogue and innovation, and has transformed them into physical environments.
“Environments that are creative are about creating meeting places that transcend departmental boundaries and disciplines. Historically, this factor has been key to progress in research.”

situations. Sometimes it’s good to move about, so as to activate the brain, sometimes the students have to work on their own and sometimes you need environments for discussions.”

As leading knowledge hubs the universities should actually be leading this development towards innovative environments, but they aren’t,” says Rosan Bosch:

“Many universities have a false sense of security, but not doing anything is also a choice. The teacher is by far the most important component, but the design can facilitate and stimulate learning processes,” she says.

“Environments that are creative are about creating meeting places that transcend departmental boundaries and disciplines. Historically, this factor has been key to progress in research. You only need to think of the buzz of creativity in Vienna during the first decades of the 20th century, with Freud and Wittgenstein, or the cafés in Lviv in Poland in the ’30s, where a group of researchers developed the modern mathematics that formed the basis of much of the technology we now use every day. Umeå University’s investment includes building three interactive focus environments—sorts of meeting places for researchers, teachers, students and the rest of society where the various parties will be able to cross-fertilise each other.

“They will be boundary zones between the different disciplines that will facilitate encounters between the different academic fields. And they will be open to the rest of society—you’ll be able to select people from outside,” says Patrik Svensson, a professor at Umeå University and the person in charge of Humlab.

Humlab is an innovative meeting place where researchers and students meet at the interface between digital information technology and the humanities. The digital tools have opened up completely new possibilities for the humanities and have created a new discipline: digital humanities. This new field was most recently investigated at an international workshop at Umeå University in December 2013, during which the participants created their own experimental research expression, e.g. glued origami paper with circuits, and during which the five top researchers who took part in the final panel participated directly from different parts of the world.

What the new focus environments will be like has not yet been definitively established, but Anders Fällström gives an example:

“If we take the results from all the major instruments in the fields of chemistry, physics and biology and show them on displays at a joint meeting place, exciting things may happen. It may also be a way of making the natural sciences more attractive to schoolgoers, which is also important for the future,” he says.

There is much to support the idea of this type of environment becoming increasingly important in terms of attracting both researchers and students—and in the long term it will also facilitate the results of new research.

A concrete example is the global news item about how drug residues in waste water are creating social, bold fish—a story presented by the journal Science at the beginning of 2013. This was a chance result, having started as a conversation between a chemist, two ecologists and an environmental scientist in one of the corridors of the Chemical Biological Centre at Umeå University.

The universities are undergoing a transformation in pace with the development of society. Patrik Svensson makes a comparison with the old banking palaces. They used to be associated with cash, but nowadays there is no actual money left in the banks—just ones and noughts in the server halls.

“We must also transform and develop in order to create the optimum conditions for education and research. It is our responsibility as a university to meet society’s challenges,” says Patrik Svensson.

SOLJA KRAPU and ALEXANDRA A ELLIS have together been investigating the concept of courage. Solja is a poet and author resident in Umeå. With a make-up licence she depicts life as seen from an everyday angle. Alexandra is a photographer and freelance in Umeå and its environs, and wants to arouse feelings with her pictures. She is interested in the human angle and in making poetry out of everyday things.

“Courage is sailing to the edge of the world, not being afraid of encountering the dragon, and despite everything saying that the world is round and is rotating and the emperor is actually naked. Courage is letting them laugh. Courage is having the pluck to bring about a transformation, change, stand up, stand out, not give up. Eating of the fruit. Courage is going beyond your own boundaries. Following your dream. Letting go. Standing firm. Confessing. Courage is feeling the fear but doing it anyway.”

TEXT: SOLJA KRAPU PHOTO: ALEXANDRA ELLIS

Creative meeting places have been a key factor in creative research and art. Montmartre in Paris is an historic example.
A girl was shot in the head for speaking her mind in a blog. And what she said was that girls should be allowed to go to school. She was shot in the head. For real. They tried to kill her in the school bus. When she woke up from the coma she said there was now nothing left to be afraid of and she said girls should be allowed to go to school.

Hi mum, it's nice here in Sweden. Everyone greets each other when they meet in the stairwell. There's a laundry room. Ordinary people don't have weapons in their flats — apart from the ones that hunt elk, that is, and they have to have them locked up in special cabinets. Anyway, I've arrived here now.
Sussi cut off the blood flow to the heart, and the cold liquid was injected. That is how she got the heart to stop beating and cool down. Its temperature was now below 15°, and it could go without blood for an hour or two without incurring any damage. So she just needed to sew one end of the new blood vessels to the coronary arteries and the other end to the aorta.

See through a wall, cure diseases with mould, switch on a light without a flex, make a call in the middle of the forest, drill for oil on the moon, dive down into a volcano, read thoughts, peel a banana, shoot faster than your own shadow, lift a bridge, travel through time, have faith that they will pull you up to the surface when you tug the cord. Out of 20,000 mad thoughts, one or two may be true.
You cannot try out parachuting from the barn roof.
WHAT IF THE HUMANITIES RULED

Financial crises, climate threats and healthcare challenges. Major social issues cannot be measured in economic terms alone. Addressing them requires the humanities which can provide more perspectives. These perspectives need to be pushed forward in society, industry and commerce, according to Erland Mårald, Professor of the History of Science and Ideas at Umeå University.

AT 1.45AM on 15 September 2008 the world’s markets changed direction. The application by Richard Fuld, CEO of Lehman Brothers investment bank, for protection against bankruptcy started the financial crisis that is still affecting companies worldwide and that has shaken the economies of entire countries.

The main reason for the collapse was the unsecured mortgages that the American state heavily subsidised from the 90s onwards. As a result of the state’s support for the subsequent explosion in loans, the banks were able to take bigger and bigger risks and sell the loans in various packages to other financial players. But when the loan terms were tightened up and house prices simultaneously started to fall, the crash started.

And ultimately it was hard to see the full risk — who was left holding the Old Maid? — even though more and more commentators were warning about bubbles.

‘Financial WMDs’ was how the renowned financier Warren Buffett described speculative trading in unsecured loans.

With a larger number of critical and reflective people in the financial profession and in the social debate the crash could perhaps have been avoided. All the signs had, after all, been there for a long time — but developments often take their own course, guided by instrumental considerations and tunnel vision towards unclear but potentially lucrative ends.

WHEN ERLAND MÅRALD gave his inaugural speech as the new Professor of the History of Science and Ideas on 20 October 2012 he cited the financial crisis as an example of why more humanists are needed in society and in industry and commerce — and more humanities subjects are required in all educational programmes:

“Students must be taught to broaden their horizons, identify different values and question accepted truths, and must be brought to reflect on the economy’s means and objectives, in order to avoid further economic collapses,” he said to the 50 or so people gathered in the Humanities Building’s auditorium.

Over a year later we meet in the same building at Umeå University. Surrounded by overladen bookshelves in his office, Erland Mårald fishes out a printed version of the inaugural speech from one of the shelves.

“People who study the humanities often stand at a distance and have a fear of coming in contact with that which they are studying,” says Erland Mårland.
more rail traffic was a good thing — many of the media started reporting on the project more and more critically, as serious new information came to the fore. “Our remit was to investigate what other factors were worth for those involved in building the tunnel. This was a reference to soft factors such as environmental, cultural and social values,” says Erland Mårald.

“The assignment started in June 1996, and study was to be completed as early as by October. After a few days a big box landed up in Erland Mårald’s research room. It was full of decisions, construction documents, permits, facts etc. I supplemented this documentation with newspapers articles and other peripheral material, and I then sat down and worked on it for the rest of the summer.”

A clear picture of the project slowly formed. By and large, all decisions were made before all the impact assessments had come in. And when impact assessments became available they were used as arguments for tunnel construction rather than to identify possible problems and disadvantages of the tunnel. And the strategic objective was so strong and prestigious that it was impossible to withdraw after work had commenced.

“There was an environmental concept behind the project — expanding the railway. The decisions were thus taken very quickly: but all the problems were actually known beforehand: it was known that there were fissures in the rock, that the water content was high, that the drill would not cope with the job and that Rocca-Gil was poisonous,” says Erland Mårald.

Despite all these troublesome facts, no alternative options were presented. The problems were described as ‘engineering challenges’ that were being taken on willingly, without any further details of the solutions being provided.

“Before Rocca-Gil was used a large number of different sealants were tested. Rocca-Gil had proven to be toxic in a Japanese study. But they might thought Japan wasn’t the same thing as Sweden.”

And what about the other values the study was supposed to be dealing with?

“They simply disappeared in bureaucratic and technical jargon, according to Erland Mårald and Sverker Sörlin’s report. It simply wasn’t possible to link them to the social benefit was being assessed solely in terms of cost-benefit analysis. In their summary they emphasise the need for a critical perspective in order to avoid similar events, which is not a negative and destructive approach but is instead a constructive approach where the beneficiaries can efficiently be identified and described.”

“These conclusions were not, however, emphasised sufficiently. Erland Mårald had hoped for a reaction — but nothing happened. It should be mentioned in parentheses that the drilling of the Hallandsås Ridge was finally completed on 4 September 2013.

“The economic crisis has actually affected American university courses. Several leading schools of economics have introduced courses in critical thought and contextual reasoning, and that is of course positive,” he says. Erland Mårald’s basic thesis is that overarching social challenges such as health, integration, globalisation, the environment and democracy are issues that cannot be measured and explained solely in economic and institutional terms. Dealing with them calls for knowledge about human thought processes, traditions, concepts of the world and the social dimensions of knowledge.

Most major social issues include a very large number of complex factors, and there are seldom clear, straightforward answers, but there are always different opinions — good or bad opinions — that can be compared with each other.

And that is where humanists come in: we need them to analyse sets of problems, point to parallels and emphasise various perspectives, i.e. to deal with difficult interpretational conflicts. “Humanists have often been slightly marginalised. They provide perspectives, descriptions and explanations — and they think this should indirectly lead to democracy and a cultured and better society,” says Erland Mårald, who has used the expression ‘star of contact’ in this context.

“People who study the humanities often stand at a distance and have a fear of coming in contact with that which they are studying. It’s different for scientists: they’re secure in their methods, and have a fear of coming in contact with that which they are studying. The measure of everything. Humanistic and northern parts of the ridge, from Förslöv to Båstad.

It should be mentioned in parentheses that the drilling of the toxic substance Rocca-Gil. Following initially strong public support — most people thought

This sounds good in theory, but how is it when put into practice?

Erland Mårald has tried going beyond boundaries. As a research student he and — of all people — Sverker Sörlin, his then professor and then supervisor, were in 1998 asked by the so-called Tunnel Commission to carry out a special study of the Hallandsås Ridge. “I’ve said it before, but it bears repeating: SEK 10bn and 20 years of difficulties could have been saved if a humanistic approach had been adopted,” Erland Mårald says with a laugh.

In the experience of the investigation nevertheless gave Erland Mårald many ideas for new research. After completing his doctoral thesis — about cyclical approaches to agriculture in the 19th century — in 2000 he went on studying environmental crime on behalf of the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå). The concept of environmental crime is something new. In the 1950s and 60s dumping of waste in the countryside was widespread, and few people cared about it. Environmental awareness started to develop in the 60s, but there was no criminalising legislation to support it, and there were no sanctions or punishments. This became clear when the Reni scandal broke in the mid-70s, when it was discovered that the company, located in Tockomarps in Skåne, had buried hundreds of casks of hazardous substances in its area. The casks had rusted through and the toxins, e.g. phenol acids, had trickled out into the ground.

“It was not possible to use the new environmental laws to bring an action against it. Reni; it was not necessary to try to interpret sections of old laws. Not until 1981 was there a law on environmental crime, but there were few prosecutions and even fewer convictions. Hallandsås Ridge became a kind of turning point in this respect. New functions such as that of environmental prosecutor then came into being. (Erland Mårald) wrote a book on the subject: Svenska miljöbrott och miljökränkningar 1960—2000 (Swedish environmental crimes and environmental scandals 1960—2000).

The environment is a special subject at the interface between humans and nature. We affect the environment and the environment affects us in an interaction that is hard to analyse. Current climate issues exemplify the multifaceted problems that
Think no.1 2014

“Scientists and technicians should not have a monopoly on environmental issues. They are, after all, very much cultural and social matters.”

cannot be resolved using scientific methods alone. In the world of science they are usually referred to as wicked problems, or as Erland Mårald calls them ‘insoluble problems’.

“The boundaries between knowledge, politics, the economy and commercial interests are extremely fluid and interlinked. And issues such as the climate may in the long term lead to imbal-

aces and crises. But there are no right solutions to the problem; there are only different paths of action. And it is not the case that more science will always resolve the problems. There are basically also value issues that need to come to the fore if progress is to be made,” says Erland Mårald.

SINCE THE HALLANDSÅS ridge scandal, society has hardly become any easier to analyse and understand. On the contrary, there are increasing challenges of all levels in pace with digitalisation, globalisation and climate threats.

Future Forest – a major interdisciplinary project in collabora-
tion with industry and other players – now comprises a large part of Erland Mårald’s research. The objective is the development of methods and tools to deal with future challenges in forestry.

The background is that the role of the forest is in flux. For a long time pulp and timber were the main products. But the forest is now so much more, encompassing such things as environmental and climate issues, energy resources and aesthetic values.

One example of the forest being a hot issue is the journalist Maciej Zaremba’s series of articles in the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter in 2012, entitled Skogslivet [The forest we inher-

ted], which went on to be a prize winning book. In these articles Zaremba identifies the Swedish forest as an industrial plantation and timber repository where ethics are neglected. Since 1993 alone over a million clear fellings have been approved in Sweden.

“There are a huge number of things we want to get out of the forest, and that conflicts of interest. Zaremba’s articles show how explosive the situation is when social and aes-
thetic values are forgotten.”

Future Forest brings together a number of researchers and play-

er with totally different interests who endeavour to shed light on interdisciplinary problems. The project involves political scientists, historians of ideas, and foresters, ecologists and chemists.

“In Future Forest we have developed a dialogue process the aim

of which is to find constructive ways forward in the face of wicked

problems. It’s about understanding each other’s perspective and positions.”

Once concrete issue is the consequences of climate change. In the long term the Norway spruce in southern Sweden will be

rife. How is this to be handled? Can new tree species be planned in

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THE CREATIVE

WHETHER IT BE Shakespeare or the comedy group Klungan, no context is off limits for Birgitta Egerbladh when she is directing people on stage.

“I’m interested in people, and above all their shortcomings. We all have our weaknesses and defects. Things do not always turn out the way we intended. This is what keeps things alive, and what gives us creative freedom.”

Her stories are as often—if not more often—presented through physical movements than through words. Individually, body language gives her a big source of inspiration.

Body languages is said to communicate a greater part of our communication. 70 per cent is body language, 20 per cent tone of voice and 10 per cent words. It is an exciting way of expressing ourselves using our body.

Birgitta Egerbladh’s approach developed when she switched her focus from the dancer to the person behind the dancer. The beginning of her rehearsals is completely open, without any script or rules, but with a theme to be investigated and a carefully chosen group.

“When the subscriber is me, and as a follower of Aristotle, I look at the audience through the same eyes as the characters do,” Birgitta Egerbladh says. “That is the way I look at the audience and the characters in my work.”

“During the initial period I create the basis of my dance-theatre language using movement exercises and improvisation. Theatrical ideas are then developed both with and without a text. It is an investigative process whereby the material develops on stage in close dialogue with the participants.”

As a combined choreographer, director and composer Birgitta Egerbladh is unique in the Swedish theatre world. She has had the will to create ever since she started dancing and making music as a child.

“What grandma said, about an undemocratic and brutal Sweden, was crucial to my development. My life as an artist started back on my grandmother’s kitchen sofa when he listened to stories from her childhood—stories about her vulnerability during her childhood, about being disowned by society because she said ‘Father unknown’ in the parish register. There and then, without her knowing it, the theme of his future life as an artist began to grow.”

What grandma said, about an undemocratic and brutal Sweden, was crucial to my development. My art is about stories—jump between different media— but the content is always the same.”

Much later in life Knutte Wester sought out places where he met people whose histories have become artworks. During his final year at Umeå University’s Academy of Fine Arts he decided to have an open studio in a newly opened refugee camp in Boliden.

“That year turned out to have a big influence on me. The refugees’ story were the starting point for my artworks, which were about being rejected, deported and exiled. Their stories have become metaphors in my art.”

In Boliden he met the refugee boy Gzim, whose story was turned into the film Gzim Rewind. When Swedish Television showed it they were inundated with letters from people who felt greatly affected and recognized themselves in the vulnerability depicted.

“Many people, including several who did not even have any personal experience of being a refugee, were deeply affected by the feeling of being an outsider.”

“The driving force behind Knutte Wester’s art is not pushing themes. He creates because he cannot do otherwise.”

“I sometimes need to throw myself into real life and be shaken up. I’m seeking a creative force when I involve other people in my artistic processes, and I force myself into situations and stories I have no control over.”

BIRGITA EGERBLADH is a choreographer, director and composer. Since 1991 she has worked at Stockholm City Theatre, the Royal Swedish Ballet, Mariinsky Theatre (St Petersburg), Folketeateret, and Umeå City Theatre. The awards she has received include the 2007 Guldbagge Award, Sveriges Dagspressens 2004 Thula Prize, Roger and the 2003 Theatre Critics’ Grand Prix. In 2013 Birgitta Egerbladh became an Honorary Doctor of Umeå University’s Faculty of Humanities.

THE CONNECTING THREAD in Knutte Wester’s art is an artist started back on his grandmother’s kitchen sofa when he listened to stories from her childhood—stories about her vulnerability during her childhood, about being disowned by society because she said ‘Father unknown’ in the parish register. There and then, without her knowing it, the theme of his future life as an artist began to grow.

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Knutte Wester gained his MFA in Fine Art at Umeå University’s Academy of Fine Arts in 2003. His work is mainly concerned with society and he has many artistic assignments for public environments. At the 2007 Cannes Film Festival he was one of five international jury’s special citation for the film Gzim Rewind, which was also nominated for the Oregon Award for Best Swedish Documentary 2002. During the period 2003-14 his exhibition Itinerant Nominata is being shown at Valdres Art, Eskilstuna Museum of Art and Karlstad Art Gallery. Knutte Wester was recently awarded the Swedish Church’s Culture Grant.

THE STORYTELLER

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“IT’S AN OVERWHELMING FEELING” when colleagues all over the world suddenly realise the importance of your research and adopt your new field of research,” Emmanuelle Charpentier explains.

“When I’m in the middle of a tornado—though in a good way,” she says with a laugh.

In her research into how bacteria defend themselves against attack Charpentier has discovered how aspects of their immunological defence can be used as tools for manipulating DNA. Research groups all over the world are currently examining how CRISPR, as the phenomenon is known, can be used as a number of areas—not least in gene therapy for serious diseases. We are in the middle of a CRISPR craze, according to the journal Science.

Things were different in 2008, when Emmanuelle Charpentier became aware of the significance of CRISPR. She had just started travelling to and fro between Vienna and Umeå in order to transfer her research northwards, and she needed to think about what she actually wanted to devote herself to over the coming years. At the time CRISPR was only being investigated by a handful of researchers. But she thought it seemed interesting.

“Unlike many other researchers I’ve taken care to change the focus of my research now and again. This requires a degree of courage, but changing subjects is also very instructive, in the very same way as it is stimulating to move from one country to another and to switch research environments. It’s been important to me. You get practice in finding the right approach to new questions, and you often think more freely when you come from outside.”

With the help of colleagues both in her own lab in Umeå and internationally, Emmanuelle Charpentier has in recent years charted the mechanisms in connection with CRISPR, and has gradually realised its potential as a tool for changing DNA. Research groups all over the world are currently examining how CRISPR, as the phenomenon is known, can be used as a number of areas—not least in gene therapy for serious diseases. We are in the middle of a CRISPR craze, according to the journal Science.

“CRISPR is not the first tool for genetic engineering, but it makes the work much quicker and easier,” she says. There is still much research to be done, but in the long run the technology may be of enormous importance, across a number of areas. Emmanuelle Charpentier believes she’s only just started to deal with new drugs against a number of genetic diseases for which there is currently no treatment, e.g. Huntington’s disease and cystic fibrosis.

EMMANUELLE CHARPENTIER

EMMANUELLE CHARPENTIER was born in 1955 at the University of Poitiers, founded in 1962, and has since then alone research at the École Polytechnique and Harvard University in New York. In 2004 she transferred her research to the NIH, becoming the Institute’s first European Director at Umeå University. She now directs the work between Umeå and Harvard. In Germany, where she has been a professor since 2001, Emmanuelle Charpentier was awarded an Alexander von Humboldt Professorship, one of Germany’s most prestigious research prizes, for 2014.

PATRIK LANTTO

WHEN PATRIK LANTTO was 16 he wrote his history dissertation he did not know which subject to choose. “Write about Sami history,” they said in the department. Twenty years have passed since then, and Patrik Lantto is now a professor at Umeå University’s Centre for Sami Research, of which he is the director.

“It was hard not getting involved. I feel there’s a great need for Sami research, since in the long term we can’t get rid of prejudices and ignorance regarding the Sami and Sami culture.”

During his work with the foundation Patrik Lantto encountered the authority Lappväsendet, established in 1885, whose Lapp sheriffs controlled and governed the Sami population. When he realised the authority was hardly mentioned anywhere he decided to write a book.

“Sami research was a crucial part of Sami policy for 85 years. Very few people know the authority even existed. It’s an unknown part of Swedish history.”

Many people think if Patrik Lantto has hit the nail on the head regarding the power relationship between Lapp sheriffs and the subordinate Sami in his book. One former Lapp sheriff even got in touch, saying it was a good, well-substantiated book.

“I’ve tried to judge the individuals, but I’m critical about the exercising of power.”

Patrik Lantto does not think his research is controversial, but he his encountered resistance within his own academic sphere.

“I’ve closely encountered resistance within academia, where some people cannot see the value of Sami research. My research includes the necessity of looking at Sweden in a different way.”

CeSam collaborates globally with countries that have similar problems related to indigenous populations. Patrik Lantto thinks several of them have got much further in their work. In Canada, New Zealand and Australia, for example, you need to have passed special ethical tests in order to be allowed to research into certain subjects, including indigenous populations.

“It’s research ‘with’ instead of research ‘about’, as in Sweden. There’s more opportunity for the research to benefit Sami groups more if you discuss these issues in advance.”

Sami issues must be emphasised in Swedish politics, according to Patrik Lantto. “Samis must be emphasised in Swedish politics, according to Patrik Lantto. There have not been any real developments since the Sami Parliament’s position, exploitation of land, psychosocial health etc. Sweden is constantly receiving international criticism for its Sami policy.”

PATRIK LANTTO, Professor of History, Director of CeSam. Has received the Sami Parliament’s Peace Prize, bestowed in collaboration with the International Association of Swedish Sami, which will be dealing with the Sami Parliament’s position, exploitation of land, psychosocial health etc. CeSam collaborates globally with countries that have similar problems related to indigenous populations. Patrik Lantto thinks several of them have got much further in their work. In Canada, New Zealand and Australia, for example, you need to have passed special ethical tests in order to be allowed to research into certain subjects, including indigenous populations. “It’s research ‘with’ instead of research ‘about’, as in Sweden. There’s more opportunity for the research to benefit Sami groups more if you discuss these issues in advance.”

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The evolutionist

Visualising and analysing large quantities of data and thereby finding unexpected connections or structures used to require enormous resources. But with today’s computer power it is absolutely viable. ‘Big data’ is one of the hottest topics in the information world right now, and Jevin West sees great opportunities in the technology, which he finds reminiscent of evolution in the natural world.

“As a biologist I look to nature for models and metaphors to help explain this new digital world we live in. Yes, I do think that the internet has things to learn from biology. People who study the dissemination of memes in the social media borrow extensively from evolutionary biology. The structure of knowledge on the internet can be broken down hierarchically like the tree of life. Computers and websites can be infected by viruses that the ‘immune system’ has to respond to. So yes, there are lots of conversations that computer scientists and biologists should be having,” he says.

Jevin West is an assistant professor at the University of Washington Information School, or iSchool, as it is simply known. He was a postdoctoral fellow at Umeå University’s Icelab, where his supervisor was Martin Rosvall, who has developed software for clustering big information networks.

On the basis of Rosvall’s structural mapping website mapequation.org Jevin West has created the service Eigenfactor.org together with the co founder and biologist Carl T. Bergstrom. The aim of Eigenfactor.org is to interlink and visualise quantities of scholarly articles in various ways.

“In this network nodes represent the tens of millions of scholarly papers over the last three hundred years, and the links are the hundreds of millions of citations.”

Jevin West points out that the strength and opportunities of ‘big data’ can also entail threats, above all with regard to integrity. Companies and authorities can now easily collect data about us, e.g. through card transactions, social media and internet use. This means that services and offers can be adapted and improved, but it also means ever greater access to and mapping of our private lives.

“This is something we have to be aware of. We have to accept developments and recognise the opportunities, but we must also not be afraid of adopting a critical approach,” says Jevin West.

Jevin West is a biologist, and has been an assistant professor at the University of Washington since autumn 2013. In his work there he is building on the research into information networks that he devoted himself to at Umeå University. His research group recently received $38m of funding. The money is to be used to develop education and research in the field of computing.
War, poverty and natural disasters. The major global challenges require human input. Meet three people who have gone out into the world and made a difference— all of them based at Umeå University.

I T WAS THROUGH a group trip with her Pentecostal community that Ellinor Ädelroth first went to Bukavu in eastern Congo. The group was to visit a day care centre for children with disabilities that the community had supported. But Ellinor Ädelroth made a detour and visited the city’s university, Université évangélique en Afrique (UEA).

“I asked the vice-chancellor if they had enough teachers for their medical students. ‘Why are you asking that?’ he said. I explained that I’d like to help, being as I’m very knowledgeable in that field,” Ellinor Ädelroth says over a phone call from Bukavu. At that time— in summer 2008— Ellinor Ädelroth was a Professor of Pulmonary Medicine, Consultant and Head of the Department of Public Health and Clinical Medicine at Umeå University, with responsibility for 200 employees and 120 doctoral students. She thus had a lot to do and held a course in pulmonary medicine for future doctors— with an interpreter and an unreliable power supply for the PowerPoint presentations. Ellinor Ädelroth then returned to Umeå and visited the city’s university, but nevertheless offered to return to Bukavu. The following summer she packed her bag, travelled down to Bukavu, in an enclosed area with a lovely garden. She gets a chauffeur— or Le docteur, as he is usually known— has built up a special department for the victims of rape, 250 of the 450 hospital beds being reserved for these patients. Thus far over 33,000 women have been treated there.

The women suffer doubly from the assaults: apart from the serious physical injuries they are usually rejected by their families after the rape, as they are then deemed unclean and ashamed. The hospital thus becomes like a second home for these women. For several years Dr Mukwege— who has also been an honorary doctor at Umeå University since 2006— has travelled all over the world to inform people about the violent developments in his country and plead for the need for increased international intervention.

In autumn 2011 she was on the General Assembly of the UN, and bemoaned “the ear-splitting silence and lack of courage within the international community”. He has received a number of prizes for his work, including the Palm Prize and African of the Year, as well as the Right Livelihood Award 2013, commonly known as the alternative Nobel Prize, and he has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

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War, poverty and natural disasters. The major global challenges require human input. Meet three people who have gone out into the world and made a difference— all of them based at Umeå University.

BUK AVU IS NO ORDINARY PLACE to work. In beautiful surroundings on the border with Rwanda, the city is in the middle of one of the most dangerous areas in the world, and harbours around half a million war refugees. The latest civil war in Congo, which broke out in 1998, has thus far cost six million lives. The conflict, which is basically about the country’s rich mineral reserves, has taken more victims than any war since World War II. At the same time, around two million women have been raped and tortured— most of them young girls. These mass rapes have become part of the warfare tactics.

At Panzi Hospital the manager Denis Mukwege— or Le docteur, as he is usually known— has built up a special department for the victims of rape, 250 of the 450 hospital beds being reserved for these patients. Thus far over 33,000 women have been treated there.

The women suffer doubly from the assault: apart from the very serious physical injuries they are usually rejected by their families after the rape, as they are then deemed unclean and ashamed. The hospital thus becomes like a second home for these women.

For several years Dr Mukwege— who has also been an honorary doctor at Umeå University since 2006— has travelled all over the world to inform people about the violent developments in his country and plead for the need for increased international intervention.

In autumn 2011 she was on the General Assembly of the UN, and bemoaned “the ear-splitting silence and lack of courage within the international community”. He has received a number of prizes for his work, including the Palm Prize and African of the Year, as well as the Right Livelihood Award 2013, commonly known as the alternative Nobel Prize, and he has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

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Umeå reinforces peace profile

PEACE AND CONFLICT RESEARCH was established after World War II as a reaction to the horrors of that war. The research examines the causes of wars and armed conflicts, as well as the prerequisites for peace. Umeå University is one of four Swedish universities to have peace and conflict research as a programme—a way they established in 1989. Since spring 2013 Umeå will be reinforcing its profile in the field of peace building by establishing a new professorship in the subject. "The professorship will contribute towards reinforcing Umeå University’s position as an international and national knowledge centre for security research, crisis preparedness and peace building," says Anders Lidström, Professor in the Department of Political Science, for security research, crisis preparedness and peace and conflict research.

IT ALL STARTED AT UMEÅ UNIVERSITY, WHERE MONA FOLKESON BEGAN ON THE PROGRAMME INTERNATIONAL CRISIS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN 2001. She has always been adventurous and interested in environmental issues, back in secondary school she wrote an essay on how the Swedish armed forces were equipped to take part in international interventions.

"But I’ve never had a clear strategy in terms of getting where I wanted – I’ve always chosen to do what feels right at the time. I’ve wanted to seek out the unusual – and this programme was pretty unique, featuring a good combination of theory and practice," she says.

MONA FOLKESON WAS NON-EVENTfully hooked after the period in Lebanon. She subsequently helped out in disaster situations in Iraq, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria and Indonesia, where she in various ways coordinated aid. In Iraq, for example, she was involved in moving a refugee camp.

Since 2008 she has also been registered with UNDG, the UN’s international disaster force, which can call in staff at very short notice.

"They rang me in conjunction with the typhoon in the Philippines in the autumn, but since my husband was travelling to the Philippines at the same time, and as we have two small children at home, I was unable to take part this time. But at some stage in the future I’ll doubtless go out into the field again,"

Mona Folkesson and her colleagues sought protection in a bunker before they were able to return to Tyre, the city where they normally lived. They then had to endure ten days of air attacks before a UN-chartered ferry evacuated them to Cyprus.

“When I was in the middle of the events I felt no fear. It’s only afterwards, when you relax, that the feelings catch up with you. You’re so focused and high on adrenaline,” she says.

"I’m probably a bit humble as regards how good we have it in Sweden. It’s easy to forget that. Even though we now have a relatively comfortable life in Dar es Salaam, there are still daily power cuts and a high level of crime, making life a little complicated. And as a Swede it’s hard to even begin to understand how many people are having to live in the aftermath of various disasters.”

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SECRETARY OF STATE COLIN POWELL’S STATEMENT TO THE UN THAT THERE WERE CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS IN A FEW IDENTIFIED FACILITIES IN IRAQ WAS INCORRECT. I’D BEEN THERE MYSELF. THINGS FELT HOPELESS.”

It was Ola Claesson’s mother – resident in Umeå – who lured her son back home when she saw the job at FOI was vacant. After gaining his PhD in chemistry at Umeå University in the early 80s Ola Claesson had spent most of his time working at the CBRNE Centre. This work involved investigating and perfecting combination processes in gas turbines all over the world. But now that FOI needed someone with a PhD in physical chemistry he thought it sounded an attractive challenge. The work involves testing protective equipment and developing models for gas adsorption by active charcoal, but it also involves field work.

In 2000 the US was looking for inspectors to go to Iraq, to see whether Saddam Hussein still had WMDs. Attracted by all the international attention, Ola Claesson applied and was accepted. Ola Claesson was given responsibility for a local inspection team in Mosul in northern Iraq.

“We had a lot of facilities to look into. A facility could comprise 40 to 50 buildings spread out over an area of several square kilometres – and the time pressure was immense.”

For one of the assignments Ola Claesson’s group was to go to Erbil, in the Kurdistan region on the Turkish border, to check up on a university as part of the hunt for weapons.

“When we left we were stopped en route by 40 or so soldiers. We were made to leave our vehicles, and had guns aimed at us. We had a list of facilities to look into. A facility could consist of 40 to 50 buildings spread out over an area of several square kilometres – and the time pressure was immense.”

During four months of intensive searching the weapons inspectors made a single finding: six dusty artillery grenades containing mustard gas right in the middle of one of the facilities. The centre initiates and coordinates national and international research & development projects and carries out exercises – often on behalf of the EU and the UN.

“When we got back home Ola Claesson felt shaken. He was not given a debriefing, and it was six months before he felt reasonably normal again.”

Ola Claesson now has part-time (30 per cent) posts at the CBRNE Centre, and his work includes training and marketing.

“I think there’s a growth in the market for services like this, e.g. training of emergency personnel. There aren’t that many organisations of this kind in Europe – and we have a good reputation in Umeå, not least through Åke Sällström’s work.”

Behind the centre are Umeå University, Umeå University School of Business and Economics, the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) and the Swedish Fortifications Agency.

extreme environments bring decisions to a head

Ola Claesson, Doctor of Chemistry, works at FOI and CBRNE

JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT (on 31 July 2008, 29 mountain climbers started their ascent of the world’s second highest mountain, K2 (8,611 metres), on the border between Pakistan and China. Two days later 11 of them were dead, probably as a result of so-called summit fever: the participants were obsessed by their goal, and decided to continue despite the obvious risks.

“It’s a kind of group pressure whereby conflicting opinions are not allowed, even if you can see that the goal is unrealistic. People continue climbing, and focus on the partial goal of getting to the top – but forget about getting back. We’re actually talking about non-decisions, which are in fact decisions of a sort,” says Markus Hällgren, Professor of Organisation Theory at Umeå University’s School of Business and Economics. The K2 expedition forms part of the TripleED project, which Markus Hällgren is heading. In TripleED the research group is examining decision making and organisation in extreme environments, e.g. during mountain climbing or in emergency medical care.

“It’s very exciting studying the decisions made in this kind of environment. They actually involve the same mechanisms as in ordinary organisations, but everything becomes so much clearer in extreme contexts.”

During spring 2013 Markus Hällgren and four research colleagues travelled to Nepal to join an expedition going up Mount Everest. “For me it was the fulfilment of an old dream. We filmed and wrote up the various phases of what happened, and carried out structured interviews before, during and after the expedition,” says Markus Hällgren, though he suffered from altitude sickness at a height of 4,600 metres and had to turn round and go down. After a couple of days, however, he was on his feet again, and caught up. But he did not go with them to the summit – instead remaining at 6,000 metres. “It’s too early to draw any conclusions from our material from Mount Everest, but one observation is the nature of the decision making process involving leaders and participants: the participants come up with these decisions and look up to the experienced leaders, whilst the leaders shape the decisions back to the participants. Another interesting observation is the bureaucratisation of extreme issues – they are incredibly well organised. Yet it’s astounding that one allows totally unprepared people to go up mountains,” says Markus Hällgren.

Markus Hällgren and his colleagues are now sitting in their offices with over 1,000 cleaned A4 pages, 200 hours of interview recordings and 30 hours of videos. It is a very substantial body of material that Markus and his research group have gone through.

“There’s quite a bit to be processed before we can draw any conclusions. And we will also be receiving data from emergency healthcare. The latter is another type of extreme environment where wrong decisions can also have fatal consequences.

“Summit fever is easily transferred to ordinary organisations, which also have projects that can easily lead to tunnel vision: the employees only see the goal, not the risks – and few people have the courage to oppose. The decisions are seldom straightforward – they are often constraints after the event.

“There’s much to be learned from our studies,” says Markus Hällgren. TripleED will be continuing until 2015, and before that the conclusions will be presented.

“In my opinion, the ability to reflect on your decisions after they have been made is the key to organisational success.”

Markus Hällgren, Professor of Organisation Theory at Umeå University’s School of Business and Economics.

“When we looked at the Yougoslavia conflict – in the pre-ethnic era – we were lost. But not anymore, with the ethnicisation of extreme issues.”

Markus Hällgren enjoyed the role of a mountain climber in his youth – and he keeps on climbing personally too: last year he reached the second highest mountain, K2 (8,611 metres) on the border between Pakistan and China.
MAYBE IT IS THE VERY WILL to try out her ideas that has taken Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede on a physical and mental journey as a researcher and professor at several American universities and has also brought her to move home to Sweden. She is now Professor of Biological Chemistry at Umeå University, and in the long term the results of her research may provide answers to questions about diseases such as cancer, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s.

I meet Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede in the Department of Chemistry at Umeå University’s Chemical Biological Centre. She shows me around her lab, where large analytical instruments and equipment share space by the researchers in her research group. She talks enthusiastically about her research and creates a vivid picture of her activities. At the same time she describes how her direct manner and the leadership style she cultivated whilst in the USA can sometimes be considered off-putting, though that is hard to understand when we meet. Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede rather seems to be someone who has the courage to be open about her weaknesses.

Looking at her career in retrospect, it may seem that it was marked out right from the very first start — from her studies at Chalmers University of Technology and her academic career in the USA through to her move back home and her role as a professor at Umeå University. But according to her, there has never been any connecting thread in her life.

“I’ve never thought I would have an academic career or become a professor. I think one step at a time, and never know whether I’ll cope with the next one,” says Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede, and talks about her initial period in the USA as a holder of a post-doctoral scholarship.

She researched for two years at Caltech, and saw that her American colleagues were starting to seek academic careers. Her own friends from Chalmers back home in Sweden usually went to various companies.

“But I felt I wanted to try becoming a professor — it sounded exciting! For a bit of fun I applied for such jobs, to see what my chances were. I was then invited for an interview, after which it became serious.”

Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede’s area of research is how proteins fold. Proteins consist of chains of amino acids that are activated by folding up in a unique manner — and in the same way each time. It is when the folding is not in accordance with the predetermined plan that diseases like Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s may occur.

Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede never releases an uninvestigated idea. Once an idea has taken root it has to be tried out in practice. After 12 years abroad in a very competitive work climate, she is back in Sweden where she hopes her research will contribute towards curing life-threatening diseases.

THEME: COURAGE

PROTEIN GURU
CONSTANTLY ON THE MOVE

“The most courageous thing I’ve done, apart from throwing myself down a rapids without knowing whether I’d reach dry land just to show I wasn’t afraid, was taking the job as professor in New Orleans. It was like entering a whole new world, and I was all on my own with an enormous assignment. But I managed. I’m proud of that!”

TEXT: FREDRIK WASS
PHOTO: ELIN BERGE
“IF RESEARCHERS CAN UNDERSTAND PROTEIN FOLDING DOWN TO THE MOST MINUTE DETAIL, THEN A NOBEL PRIZE AWAITS.”

mined pattern that various types of disease can occur. Pernilla and her colleagues are thus researching into what governs the way proteins fold, how quickly they do so and how different proteins bind different types of metal atoms in the body. Metals are an important part of many proteins’ function, but they must be controlled within the body, as free metals are dangerous.

“If researchers can understand protein folding down to the most minute detail, then a Nobel Prize awaits,” she says without blinking.

Pernilla produces two small test tubes containing proteins from a plastic bag of various models. One of them binds iron and is red. Another is blue and binds copper.

“I made these proteins myself back in 1993. As they bind metal they are very stable.”

In several of her research projects she has collaborated with researchers from other disciplines at Umeå University. According to her there is something of a unique Umeå spirit—an openness between the various faculties and departments. This is something she was not used to from her time in the USA.

“In the USA things were completely different. We closed the door there and competed with each other. It’s easier to get rid of people there, and many people who move to the USA to study or work want to sweat, and are incredibly driven. Even though there are many universities, it was a tough system. The career path within American academia is well defined, but the bar is high at every step.”

Like many high performers, Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede is driven by the need to prove herself to the world and demonstrate to herself what she is capable of. She makes an enterprising impression, and wants to achieve new things and always cope with fresh challenges. But there’s a negative side to this. In her late teens she suffered from anorexia, and eating disorder patterns can still occur in conjunction with major life changes.

“I realise I’ve had dips every time I’ve taken big decisions. I have to act as role models for other women. Pernilla describes how she often feels if researchers can understand protein folding down to the most minute detail, then a Nobel Prize awaits, " she says without blinking.

What would you be doing if you were not a professor? "I don’t want to be anything else. I’ve always felt that I’m doing what I like doing, and that I’m doing it because it’s fun. But if I were no longer to be a professor I would become a secondary-school chemistry teacher. Sweden really needs a greater number of able and enthusiastic chemistry teachers!"

Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede studied civil engineering at Chalmers University of Technology, did a PhD in physical chemistry, was a postdoc at Caltech in California, became an Assistant and then Associate Professor at Tulane University in New Orleans, and then became Professor of Biochemistry at Rice University in Houston. Moved back to Sweden five years ago to take up a post of Professor at Umeå University. She has published over 170 scientific articles, a book and several popular articles.

“Things went well for me in New Orleans, but Rice University in Houston is a better school than Tulane, so it was a new challenge. I was afraid of failure—of not living up to what they expected when they met me and saw my CV. I thought ‘Am I really as good as I appear?’ But I now have a far better insight into myself and the way I handle it.”

When Pernilla changed employers and transferred to another university in the USA, she was going to a much higher-powered assignment. She was spurred on by her will to cope with that too.

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At the same time, she herself may feel the need for support—which is unusual for someone in her position. In the USA she was a mentor as part of a programme that helped young women seeking to become researchers. Career choices vs starting a family was a more important issue for her American colleagues than for her colleagues in Sweden.

“In Sweden women assert themselves differently. In the USA it was more a case of ‘Do I dare have children?’ I now have two children of my own, and want to be able to show I can be a good mother and a good researcher at the same time. The pressure seems huge. Sometimes things go well, but sometimes when I talk about the matter to encourage others I feel totally empty afterwards. Does what I say myself actually work?”

AFTER MANY YEARS in the USA Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede and her husband had established themselves in Houston. The elder child would soon be of school age. Returning to Sweden was a big decision.

“When my older daughter started kindergarten we realised how American everything was getting. The school was excellent, but I had no idea about the American school system and did not know how I would be able to help my children through it. My husband and I started to wonder whether the children should become Americans or Swedes. We had to make a choice over the next few years.”

Pernilla noticed that Umeå University was seeking seven

“IF RESEARCHERS CAN UNDERSTAND PROTEIN FOLDING DOWN TO THE MOST MINUTE DETAIL, THEN A NOBEL PRIZE AWAITS.”

Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede

PROFESSION: Professor of Biological Chemistry

LOCATION: Department of Chemistry at Umeå University

OTHER INTERESTS: Family, yoga, running and spinning, plus many commitments on committees and panels, as well as secondary engagements.

What were you last moved? “A while ago I gave a doctoral thesis in which a student I do not know thanked me in her acknowledgements for an inspiring lecture during her final years at school. It led to her choosing a career in research. It felt absolutely marvellous. I was also delighted when the children in my twelve-year-old daughter’s class said they wanted me to go with them as an accompanying parent on their school trip.”

I don’t have that many hobbies, but I do train—and I do it to relax. I do body balance, body pump and spinning, and run a lot in the summer. When I run I hit on ideas and sometimes get my best insights.

“I’ve done yoga now and again over the years. I realise it’s good for me to calm down for a while.”
Sweden doesn’t have as many driven students, and doesn’t spend as much time on research, but we can be smart and can collaborate on an interdisciplinary basis.

professors of chemistry and decided to apply. She got one of the jobs, and after she and her husband had visited Umeå they decided to move. She now works in Umeå with new local start-up companies, and manages an investment company that is partially linked to the university.

“Since coming to Sweden I’ve relaxed more and felt better. In the USA everyone pushes themselves a bit too much. Colleagues think you should get a nanny so you can work more. At the same time I thought I was not spending enough time with my children. Whatever you did, it felt wrong,” she says, and continues:

“In Sweden, looking after your own children is more acceptable. In the USA everyone pushes themselves a bit too much. Colleagues think you should get a nanny so you can work more. At the same time I thought I was not spending enough time with my children. Whatever you did, it felt wrong,” she says, and continues: “When Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede moved back to Sweden and started work at Umeå University she noticed people were more open and friendly.

“People were happy about each other’s success. I think it’s precisely through its unique collaborative approach that Sweden can make breakthroughs in the research world. We don’t have as many driven students, and don’t spend as much time on research, but we can be smart and can collaborate on an interdisciplinary basis. But you have to be an independent researcher and stand by your own two feet — that’s something that mustn’t be forgotten.”

“Uniting something that can only happen elsewhere like Umeå University, where people get the opportunity to chat and work with other across disciplinary boundaries.”

Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede is driven, and it is evident that she is committed in many different contexts, going beyond her basic remit. When Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede moved back to Sweden and started work at Umeå University she noticed people were more open and friendly.

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Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede is driven, and it is evident that she is committed in many different contexts, going beyond her basic remit as a professor. She has strong opinions and is not afraid of taking initiative and pushing issues she is passionate about.

“I quite often talk to our vice-chancellor about various important issues. I want to help improve the Swedish research system. Umeå University and the Department of Chemistry. My experiences from the USA can sometimes be useful. If nothing else, I’ve learnt to speak about and stand up for what I believe in. At the moment I feel I should try to improve things on a higher level and not just focusing on my own research,” she says.

“And maybe it is secondary commitments that make for both short-term and long-term perspectives as a researcher. It’s actually what I actually like working on something that spans several years and does not produce any quick results.”

“A large part of it is about always following up how things are progressing within projects. The response to a scientific question is often a large number of consecutive experiments that cannot be predicted from the outset. You look at the students’ results, see what has happened and make plans. The students do experiments in the lab nearly every day, and sub-goals are then achieved over maybe a few weeks,” says Pernilla Wittung-Stafshede, adding that during her fifteen years as a professor she has had sixteen students, but she has gained their PhD with her as supervisor.

“Exercising control over mass production. The period of doctoral studies lasts at least four years, and involves close personal interaction between the PhD student and the supervisor. And then I teach to some extent and also take on a lot of commitments for other researchers from different departments of the university who together showed how the behaviour of fish changed when anaesthetics were added to aquarium water, mimicking the levels to be found in a normal seawater. The behaviour of the fish changed dramatically, and they became far bolder. The results were a real talking point, and the news articles quickly attracted a billion readers on the Internet.

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When education and research are growing nearly all over the world and knowledge is flowing more and more freely, universities cannot be regulated as if they were customs stations.

A reform in this area must be conceived on the basis of Swedish circumstances – and must be much broader and more sophisticated than any of the government's reforms hitherto. It must above all be based on the universities having the remit of providing the whole of society – and not just the key commercial areas – with knowledge. A plausible answer is also needed to the question as to what is good about independence. There is an answer. The world's foremost universities are very independent. Anyone who, like me, has recently witnessed the inaugeration of a university vice-chancellor in the USA – in this instance at Princeton – will immediately realise how this institution saw its role in the world to constantly develop, contribute to and improve its reputation. Ownership is not the most important factor, but without the independent power to create, change and revise, the task is impossible. They also have a lot of capital of their own as a basis for their independence.

There should be a re-evaluation. What can a process be like whereby universities and colleges of higher education can contribute to the design of a new management model? What changes are the most important? How, for example, can you increase the freedom to start and run educational programmes – and at the same time improve the quality of education? How can you combine independence with a striving to broaden recruitment that benefits the whole of society? Can you proceed at different speeds?

Important questions, and the answer to them is often diversity. If there are various ways of being a university or a college of higher education, you can utilise the independent power to get better at what you want to be good at. A period of excessive emphasis on universities' economic role has come to an end, to judge by all the signs. New work is now commencing, and it is a big undertaking. The nature of the universities and colleges of higher education of the future is a democratic issue.

When education and research are growing nearly all over the world and knowledge is flowing more and more freely, universities cannot be regulated as if they were customs stations.

The government's now abandoned proposal was to make all universities and colleges of higher education into foundations. This aroused debate, including how the independence of research would be guaranteed. Sverker Sörlin, a historian of ideas and author, thinks a major rethink is needed. Any reform has to be based on universities and colleges of higher education providing the whole of society with knowledge. It is a matter of finding the right balance between freedom and control.

When education and research are growing nearly all over the world and knowledge is flowing more and more freely, universities cannot be regulated as if they were customs stations.

The nature of the universities and colleges of higher education of the future is a democratic issue.
Is Umeå in Norrland?

It is cultural capital year in Umeå. The indigenous inland population have been hired by German event fixers and are lighting fires on the river ice, and the new gallery is called Utopia. The city is making itself prominent for this period of transformation and is ready to sell itself in the global marketplace, establish itself on the map and communicate its narrative. You might consider Utopia a rather pretentious name for a building where you can buy generic-brand clothes, skin-care products and hamburgers, but this is a new era, and such is the spirit of enterprise in this city that is currently undergoing its most dramatic transformation ever. The following description was posted on the gallery’s website before anyone at the advertising agency responsible realised the text was something of a liability: ‘Where the Ume River’s roaring waters and the silent, expansive ocean meet, there is a place like no other— a zone inspired by the magic that casts its spell over the enchanted forests, the wide open spaces and the thundering river. We see mighty and magical waters in the bays, and the golden tinge of cloudberries thriving here and enriching the area, and are captivated by a peerless and majestic beauty round about us. We have at last found the place we were looking for— somewhere where dreams can be realised. A land of myth within the country— a place in the heart of Umeå.’

It is now that you realise Umeå has severed the hawsers to the harbour of reality and has set off. This city encompasses forces keen to tell the story about the kind of place it is— about how it arose and where it is located. The problem is that Umeå is indisputably in Norrland— this huge area of the country north of the Dal River and south of the river forming the boundary with Finland. Norrland is a problematic concept, because though few inhabitants of Norrland would admit it the region has come to be an area onto which southern Sweden projects its dreams of wilderness, of authenticity and of a genuine yet hopeless wasteland. This 60 per cent of the country has come to be a kind of mirror that the modern nation holds up— a reference that makes what is modern even more modern and what is urban even more urban. Nobody expects there to be an urban lifestyle in Norrland itself. Because it is in the nature of things that it is not going well for Norrland. The view of this part of the country embraces a self-defiling colonial policy, as Norrland is seen as a land of raw materials, justice is yet unattainable. It’s like a dance with a predetermined choreography. The centralised power grabs things for itself and the people of Norrland complain.

The First Body to colonise Norrland was the church. During the 14th century the river mouths were conquered to allow salmon fishing, which created important income. Hilbert Nordland had been relatively autonomous, and the historians cannot properly say whether it was Trondheim in Norway or Uppsala in Sweden to which allegiance was sworn. The absence of a nobility and an upper class also made ownership of this huge area involved an open question. There is much to indicate that the whole of northern Sweden was the common land of Hälsingland, right up until Gustav Vasa, the king of Sweden during the first half of the 16th century, gestured with his whole hand and exclaimed “All that is desolate shall fall to God and the Crown!” and in one fell swoop conquered the whole of northern Sweden. It maybe seems superfluous to go back to far, but Norrland’s situation and position has a history, and if you are to understand Umeå’s place you must first comprehend what Norrland is.

Whilst in the core areas of Sweden towns and cities were built, unions entered into and wars waged, developments in the north...
were for a long time slow, but as from the 17th century basic visions began to be formulated. When silver ore was found in the interior of Västerbotten the councillor Carl Bonde wrote a letter to the chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, who was in Germany at the time on matters of war, and related excitedly that by virtue of this discovery Sweden had now found its own ‘West Indies’. Sweden had ambitions of becoming a major power, but despite attempts in this regard had not succeeded in embellishing its situation with any distant colonies. All the other major powers had colonies, but at that time Sweden had just one unsuccessful colony, by the River Delaware, which lasted a mere seventy years. So when the idea of calling Norrland a colony arose, offering the country an opportunity to rescue its dignity, nobody protested. The silver deposits soon proved to be of a very inferior quality, and the attempt at colonization—which typically enough included enslaving the local indigenous population—came to naught. But the seeds of the idea had been sown, and policy for Norrland had now gained a direction.

Norrland would come to be the colony that Sweden was lacking. During the 17th century Norrland’s coastal towns were established one by one: Sundsvall, Piteå, Luleå and Umeå were all created in 1621, the main reason being that the Crown wished to concentrate trade and bring in new taxes. But it took a very long time before the towns grew and their size and trading levels approached those of the towns of southern Sweden. No bourgeoisie or proper business class developed until towards the end of the 19th century. There was too much pressure to pay tax, and legislation known as the ‘Bothnian trade constraint’ prevented the towns from doing trade with towns and cities south of Stockholm without the capital taking the surplus value. The towns of Norrland had no value of their own:

Umeå had a mere 960 inhabitants at the beginning of the 19th century, and was little more than an undeveloped central settlement.

What has characterised Norrland is work and mobility. In society as a whole this has not been the result of slow, dynamic processes—villages, localities and communities have rather arisen around exploitation, in turn controlled by a need for raw materials on the part of the central power or the capital. Financial resources and more skilled personnel have come or without exception come from outside, from the south, whilst it has been possible to source the workforce locally or from the region. But despite at times intensive immigration from the rest of the country people have in a very short time settled and cultivated a geographic identity based on place. Perhaps precisely because Norrland’s community has been created on the basis of arbitrariness and external influence, people have made an effort, put down roots and created a narrative around the location—one that is often even stronger than in other parts of the country.

Colonisation gained pace when during the course of the 19th century people realised the actual value of Norrland’s natural resources. Mechanisation coincided with an increased need for raw materials, and new markets developed abroad. It became increasingly evident that it was Norrland’s riches that could lift Sweden from its position as a poor nation on the periphery and make it into a wealthy European state. People started looking to the north, and

“But Umeå has succeeded. Umeå is hungry, wants to grow, conquer, become big, bigger, the biggest. There is agreement on this within political leadership and the opposition, and within the property companies that dominate the city.”
Norrland became our own USA, the Sami became our own American Indians and exoticism celebrated new triumphs.

The region’s natural resources, the Sami and the rest of Norrland’s population were comparable to unprocessed raw material that could only be refined, shaped and converted into culture and modernity with the aid of educated southerners and their money. After a very heated debate at the end of the 19th century, the state seized the felling rights over those who defended local ownership and growth that was more peasant-driven and cautious. The forestry companies with those who supported large-scale intervention were victorious and bought up a third of Norrland. The state seized the felling rights and consortia took charge of the minerals. A remoulding both of the community and of future living conditions stopped growing in 1970—all apart from Umeå.

HE ROLE OF THE TOWNS

In Gävle the focus was on shipping, the region’s administrative centre vs periphery conflicts that characterise towns and their neighbouring island areas. Umeå was simply not sufficiently powerful, and the interior and the rest of the region was far too rich. It was not until the 70s that Umeå overtook Skellefteå in terms of size. Umeå is now an island of growth in an ocean of ruin. Norrland is no longer growing, and it has not done so for many years. Industry is still doing well. Forestry, hydroelectric power and ore are generating huge revenues, but since the only money that stays in the region is payed out by the state, all industries have undergone revolutionary mechanisation and rationalisation, many of the old jobs have vanished. Service based communities are the winners in today’s tax system, and only Umeå has succeeded in becoming such a community. Maybe because it has never been possible to equalise town and industry, maybe because there has been an investment in knowledge transfer, maybe because it has never been a successful part of Norrland’s social democrat culture. There was perhaps a dump, but Umeå is now growing, whilst Norrland is going into decline. All the towns and built-up areas stopped growing in 1970—all apart from Umeå.

Umeå is a gleaming spaceship in the valley of the shadow of death. It is a city in the ascent—releasing itself from its Norrland fetters and purposefully heading for the urban community of the global middle classes.

Conceptual residential areas, schools, leisure facilities and hotels were built—anyone travelling in the interior of Norrland today can see the relics of these welfare years everywhere. Umeå is a gleaming spaceship in the valley of the shadow of death. It is a city in the ascent—releasing itself from its Norrland fetters and purposefully heading for the urban community of the global middle classes.

The perspective was the typical one: a well mean-

“Norrland became our own USA, the Sami became our own American Indians and exoticism celebrated new triumphs.”
“There is an enviable lack of concern about Umeå’s expansion, or you could call it nonchalance.”
urban environment and become the growth engine for the entire region. It applies to the whole of the city.

**Umeå Finally Got Its University** after a fairly protracted dispute with the state. Norrland was deemed to be a land of raw materials, and it was long considered unnecessary to invest money in teaching the people of Norrland anything other than how to drive logging trucks. The inauguration of the university in 1965 drove growth that was already on the upturn. Between 1960 and 1990 the city’s population doubled, and its grand aim is currently 200,000 inhabitants. This is the so-called ‘lock city’, the consequences of which people do not like discussing. The interior is emptying, and the city is filling up. Or to be more precise, suitable parts of the interior are being transformed into leisure areas and other areas are being turned into production areas for the forestry and minerals industries, and wind farms can be erected on particularly windy mountains and hills. There is an inestimable lack of concern about Umeå’s expansion, or you could call it nonbalancing.

Modern city planning was above all characterised by the will to cast reality in a mould and the desire for cities to reflect man’s image at that time. For a long time no-one believed you could think any further, i.e. people believed the very thought they had just arrived at would be deemed to be the truth for all eternity. Postmodernism changed all this. People now see usually see reality and history as a changing process. Something as costly and slow-moving as city planning must of course take this into consideration. One way is to create free areas, allowing public spaces and their inhabitants to guide the process dynamically and thereby create a kind of spontaneous concentration. This can actually work as a kind of description of the urban lifestyle – a small-scale approach, a tendency to change and diversity. The opposite to the Hötorgstom or Hallonbergen areas in Stockholm – places where you can often only live and move around in a predetermined manner. Modern man flows from these places, and is now seeking environments that allow involvement. Old working-class environments with a high population density are now being gentrified by a middle class who want to live a flexible urban life.

Umeå could have been such a city. The Cultural Capital Year could have been the equivalent in terms of events. It instead seems that the city is establishing itself as a modern version of the locked city. Public environments are disappearing in favour of private ones – businesses that charge take priority over publicly financed ones. It is a global trend, but bearing in mind Umeå’s role as Norrland’s only urban option, things could have been resolved differently. It is also a city that since the 90s has been characterised by a unique DIY culture: obstinacy, political drive and genuine people-based creativity. That is Umeå’s real strength – together with the university’s dynamic reputation as a refuge for the Left. It does not even need to be true, but if enough people believe in this picture, then the energy will in any case be there.

Umeå could have done with more public indoor areas where consumption is not a condition, but the city instead seems to be striving to phase out small-scale elements. Its creed is ‘culture-driven growth’ – a motto that unifies politics, industry & commerce and the management of Capital of Culture Year. What does it even mean?

The banal explanation is the existence of a guitar museum.
and the fact that the new library also happens to be a hotel, and the more advanced one is that culture should create ‘attractiveness’. The idea is for culture to be Umeå’s unique contribution to the world, but the problem is of course that the same mistakes are being made with cultural infrastructure as with civic infrastructure. Structures and monuments are being built that lock in and restrict, and that at the same time make use of the very resources that could be used for real culture.

People in Umeå are very angry about this. There are maybe not many of them, and the majority are perhaps looking forward to their Utopia and the fact that IKEA is on its way, but that’s the way it is with culture— it is never advanced one is that culture should create ‘attractiveness’. The idea is for creating Garnishing of platters for the urban middle classes.

When the young women left Norrland’s interior, the population started to shrink. Umeå went against the tide. For over a hundred years the city has succeeded in attracting women, and it has been undergoing constant growth for just as long. The young women are determining the future.”

Svenska Dagbladet. Published 7 June 2015.

“The criticism is not directed at the event or the year’s programming per se. It is rather aimed at the general line of development that Umeå is adopting by bearing the title Capital of Culture.”

altstella.com

“A point of departure was the research that shows that culture also benefits a region’s development and growth. Culture lifts people and communities up and makes us more open and curious to change.”

Svenska Dagbladet. Published 15 Dec 2013.

“First comes the decision to manifest a cultural centre by the river, and then the content is dropped in. Where is the overarching needs analysis and the outlook for the future?”

Västerbottens-Kuriren. Published 14 March 2011.

The discussion about Umeå, the city’s history and its future has intensified in connection with Umeå being Capital of Culture 2014. But this has actually always been going on, and will continue to do so long after 2014.

In Umeå there is scope for this discussion. Keep thinking at tank.umu.se

“For Västerbotten the end of 2013 will be especially interesting, and not just because the much-discussed Capital of Culture Year will start to deliver. Moreover, it’s now nearly twenty years ago that Västerbotten’s current population record was set.”

Västerbottens-Kuriren. Published 4 March 2013.

“A repeat of the magic involved in establishing Umeå University does not seem likely.”

Västerbottens-Kuriren. Published 13 May 2013.

And yet I breathe out in Umeå. I feel at home, and enjoy being able to reach out and be a lifestyle consumer. The interior is demanding in that creating garnishing of platters for the urban middle classes.

Rose hips from Jörn, a steak from a farm outside Lycksele, berries from the city’s much-discussed Capital of Culture 2014. But this has actually always been going on, and will continue to do so long after 2014.

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And finally, there is possibly an explanation for the fact that I am the person writing this text. I write about Norrland—which very few people do, for some reason. I have published a book comprising articles on this part of the country that I have written for the daily press and magazines over a period of nearly twenty years, and have called it ‘Norrland’. It has made a considerable impact, and I have thus got to travel even more in this part of the country to talk about the book and write even more about Norrland and the issues concerning this region. Many of these trips have taken me through the interior, where I have appeared at public libraries, eaten pizza and slept in hotels with needle-loom carpeting and pine wall fittings before continuing to the coast—in many instances to Umeå itself. I have experienced this process countless times, and it is always just as strange and sudden. The cultural, social and financial gulf widens with each month that passes, as the interior gets poorer and Umeå swells. It is an unpleasant and tragic development, and I find it short-term and wrong. A city should not be an island; it needs a context. Umeå is on its way to distancing itself from its culture, and what is replacing it has no independent value. Specificity— whatever it is and wherever it is in the world—is being threatened with annihilation by a generic middle-class culture.

And yet I breathe out in Umeå. I feel at home, and enjoy being able to reach out and be a lifestyle consumer. The interior is demanding in that way. You become narked, and there is nowhere you can buy an identity. You have to be generic. •

The municipality’s strategy has long been the opposite. With the very aim of indicating growth and modernity, the principle has been not to talk about Norrland when Umeå has been sold to outsiders. Neither has Cultural Capital’ year wanted to establish culture in a northern context; if you look at the programme you will see it includes modern culture of the kind you will now find in Ljubljana, Leeds or Boston. The Sami are of course included, but maybe rather as an ethnic group than as creators of culture. This aspect is naturally sensitive. They do of course create high class culture, but in a country that I have written for the daily press and magazines over a period of nearly twenty years, and have called it ‘Norrland’. It has made a considerable impact, and I have thus got to travel even more in this part of the country to talk about the book and write even more about Norrland and the issues concerning this region. Many of these trips have taken me through the interior, where I have appeared at public libraries, eaten pizza and slept in hotels with needle-loom carpeting and pine wall fittings before continuing to the coast—in many instances to Umeå itself. I have experienced this process countless times, and it is always just as strange and sudden. The cultural, social and financial gulf widens with each month that passes, as the interior gets poorer and Umeå swells. It is an unpleasant and tragic development, and I find it short-term and wrong. A city should not be an island; it needs a context. Umeå is on its way to distancing itself from its culture, and what is replacing it has no independent value. Specificity— whatever it is and wherever it is in the world—is being threatened with annihilation by a generic middle-class culture.

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It is of course gratifying, and a great honour. The first time I visited Umeå University was in 2007, in conjunction with the establishment of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL). Right from the start I was impressed by the feeling of community here.

I have experienced warm and strong support and have made good friends, whom it is always nice ever to meet.

Umeå is far to the north of most of Europe, but I do not feel it to be a city far from the centre of events. The people I have met make the advantages of living in a small community whilst at the same time doing work and research of an international standard. Many other remote places use their geographical location as an excuse for modest ambitions. It is not at all like that in Umeå. When I was at a seminar with researchers in the field of literary studies, I found the literary scene in Umeå vibrant and lively.

I have visited Umeå University a number of times over the past decade, and it is a unique place for doing research.

When we started the EMBL collaboration with Sweden I was aware that Sweden has a completely different idea about who is ready to take on the role of researcher in charge. At EMBL we consider a 35-year-old with a PhD to be ready for the work, whilst in Sweden, as in Norway and Finland, researchers are not deemed to be ready until they are in their 40s. So when I assessed the candidates to gather my Swedish colleagues I thought their chances were too old and they thought mine were far too young.

No, no shock, though I did feel cultural envy. I fell in love with simplicity and beauty in architecture, food and music. They are to be found everywhere in Umeå. I love singing, and will never forget the time I stood on a chair and sang during the ceremonial dinner. That would never have been possible at a similar event amongst academics in the USA. I also envy Umeå’s multilingualism — a fantastic quality in these global times.

I am fascinated by the great feeling of solidarity I will always have with you of all the wonderful friends I have made here.

I have been hosted by the EMBL three times in the USA. This includes issues concerning multi-culturalism. Many other remote places use their geographical location as an excuse for cultural envy. Three honorary doctors of Umeå University talk about their experiences of the university and share impressions and surprising lessons they have learnt.

The university from another angle

What are your impressions of Umeå University? I was surprised at the similarity of the problems and challenges faced by Sweden and the USA. This includes issues concerning multilingualism and multiculturalism.

I am always equally impressed and surprised by my colleagues. I have had the opportunity to collaborate with people who are very commitment and have valuable ideas regarding my area of research. It has been invaluable.

It is a huge honour. Being invited and having this very special relationship with Umeå University makes me feel very select. There is no university anywhere else in the world from which the conferment of an honorary doctorate would make as much.

It is gratifying that the university is still carrying out important research in the field of literary studies. I found the literary scene in Umeå vibrant and lively.

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Honorary PhD in the Faculty of Arts.

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When we started the EMBL collaboration with Sweden I was aware that Sweden has a completely different idea about who is ready to take on the role of researcher in charge. At EMBL we consider a 35-year-old with a PhD to be ready for the work, whilst in Sweden, as in Norway and Finland, researchers are not deemed to be ready until they are in their 40s. So when I assessed the candidates to gather my Swedish colleagues I thought their chances were too old and they thought mine were far too young.

No, no shock, though I did feel cultural envy. I fell in love with simplicity and beauty in architecture, food and music. They are to be found everywhere in Umeå. I love singing, and will never forget the time I stood on a chair and sang during the ceremonial dinner. That would never have been possible at a similar event amongst academics in the USA. I also envy Umeå’s multilingualism — a fantastic quality in these global times.

I am fascinated by the great feeling of solidarity I will always have with you of all the wonderful friends I have made here.

I will take with me friendship and a sound, productive collaboration with all researchers — everything from new doctoral students to leading professors. These experiences motivate me to continue researching.

Iain Mattaj
Professor and Director General of EMBL (European Molecular Biology Laboratory), Germany.
Honorary Doctor of the Faculty of Medicine.

What are your impressions of Umeå University? It is a huge honour. Being invited and having this very special relationship with Umeå University makes me feel very select. There is no university anywhere else in the world from which the conferment of an honorary doctorate would make as much.

It is gratifying that the university is still carrying out important research in the field of literary studies. I found the literary scene in Umeå vibrant and lively.

When I was at a seminar with researchers in reading and writing from Umeå University I was surprised at the similarity of the problems and challenges faced by Sweden and the USA. This includes issues concerning multilingualism and multiculturalism.

I am always equally impressed and surprised by my colleagues. I have had the opportunity to collaborate with people who are very commitment and have valuable ideas regarding my area of research. It has been invaluable.

Allan M. Findlay
Professor of Geography at the University of St Andrews, Scotland.
Honorary doctor in the Faculty of Social Sciences.
Research and artistic activity have much in common. Creating something that does not already exist, the will to examine and critically review events and contexts, thorough knowledge of the processes of creativity and thought and the courage to drive innovative processes.

Think asked Eric Schüldt to examine the source of creativity and the inherent opportunities and consequences, in a discussion with Elisabeth Rynell, Anders Johansson, Sofia Anner and Kristofer Steen.

ERIC SCHÜLDT: Before the discussion starts I wanted to briefly take a look at the word ‘creativity’. No skill is as highly regarded nowadays as the ability to be creative. Creativity is nearly always portrayed as being something entirely positive. Something ground breaking. Progress. A smart solution to a tricky problem. Personally, however, I have long felt there is something weird about the word creativity. Because the more I have learnt about people’s creativity the more I have realised that doing something – creating – has always entailed risk. And creativity has often met with great resistance. Really creative ideas have nearly always been opposed initially. Maybe this is because creativity is something that questions the status quo, turns things upside down and forces us to see the world afresh? I think we should bring these thoughts about creativity and its price into today’s discussion.

ES: What would you say is the reason for this development?
AJ: I sometimes think it is the deep connections that have the greatest potential to change things in the long term. ER: That is actually very true. But it does not really have that much to do with opinion forming.

ES: What do you do to let go?
AJ: Hmm, in one respect there is still great scope. But on the gloomy—or realistic—side, it is clear that that scope is in many ways under threat.

ER: I think we should bring these thoughts about creativity and its price into today’s discussion.

ES: What would you say is the source of creativity and the inherent opportunities and consequences, in a discussion with Elisabeth Rynell, Anders Johansson, Sofia Anner and Kristofer Steen.

ERIC SCHÜLDT is a radio producer and writer on culture. He has been the programme manager for a number of different programmes on Swedish Radio, including the multi-award-winning Schüldt i P2.

ELISABETH RYNELL is an author and honorary doctor in Umeå University’s Faculty of Arts.

ANDERS JOHANSSON is a literary historian and teach at Umeå University. He is also a writer on culture for the newspaper Aftonbladet, and is on the editorial board of the magazine Glänta.

SOFIA ANNER is the CEO of the Umeå based company Kreator. She studied chemistry and project management at Umeå University.

KRISTOFER STEEN is an opera director and guitarist in the Umeå based band Refused.
“I do not think that literature that often succeeds in toppling a government. But I think all art basically upholds the fragile idea that everything could be different.”

ANDERS JOHANSSON

education, including in Sweden, and I think that would be a dangerous road to go down. I am convinced that universities as they stand – pretty autonomous, publicly financed institutions where you can study free of charge – are some- thing the majority of the population want to retain. It is incredibly important to defend the form they take.

KS: What would you say is the connection between the words ‘criticism’ and ‘creativity’?

AJ: I think all criticism worthy of being described as such is also creative activity. And I think that in the same way creativity includes a kind of built-in criticism, after all, it entails criticizing the ideas you had beforehand. Both ‘creativity’ and ‘criticism’ can be understood as events, whereby a subject confronts an object – and both sides change.

ES: I would like to welcome my third guest, Sofia Anner. You run a company called Kreator, but you have also been an active contributor to Umeå’s cultural life. What is Kreator?

SA: We are a network for various creative players. At the moment we are doing a great deal of work on moving images, and one of our ventures is doing a great deal of work on moving images, and one of our ventures is doing a great deal of work on moving images, and one of our ventures is doing a great deal of work on moving images, and one of our ventures is doing a great deal of work on moving images, and one of our ventures is doing a great deal of work on moving images, and one of our ventures is doing a great deal of work on moving images.

KS: Our fourth and final participant in this discussion is Kristofer Steen. What isyour background like?

KS: You used to play in the Umeå based band Refused – my own all-time favourite band. It is incredibly important to defend the form they take.

What do you do to get people to understand you?

SA: I try to explain things as well as I can! But then I also believe that you simply need to keep your cool and allow things to be a part of the process when talking to someone.

It is important for me to lose no time in finding people who have also seen what I see, so you can form a team in which you can exchange thoughts and ideas and be supported in this process.

In the projects you have run, when have you encountered the most resistance?

SA: I do a lot of work in network form – I gather people so as to see what we can do together. Resistance between individuals and the collective often arises in the process. I think that when we do things together we get much, much further. But it does involve a tug of war.

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What is the transformative force that lies concealed within music?

KS: Indeed – the music we are now talking about shares a kind of ur- gency, quality. But what it is urging the recipient to do is entirely up to them. With Refused I came across many people who said our music made them do this, that or the other. That kind of thing is interesting and flattering, but for me it is the music itself that is the goal. The actual music is everything. You cannot measure the force of music on the basis of the third-party actions it leads to.

This brings me to a friend who plays in a band. He was asked ‘Why do you do it?’ He replied: ‘To topple the government.’ That was his modest objective.

What would you say is the connection between the words ‘criticism’ and ‘creativity’?

KS: ‘Criticism’ as a word has got different meanings. I think all criticism worthy of being described as such is also creative activity. And I think that in the same way creativity includes a kind of built-in criticism, after all, it entails criticizing the ideas you had beforehand. Both ‘creativity’ and ‘criticism’ can be understood as events, whereby a subject confronts an object – and both sides change.

ES: And what is your own background like? I said you had ‘long been an active contributor to Umeå’s cultural life’. What does that mean?

SA: Since I moved to Umeå I have been involved in various forums. We have a number of major clients within the municipality and amongst major private companies.

Anders Johansson

The transformative force that lies concealed within music is something that has always existed. The risk of overem- phasising the internal is that it leads in a very individualistic direction. I guess this ties up with what Sofia is saying about the conflict between the individ- ual and the collective: maybe there is a need for a culture that is reduced to one primarily building up one’s inner world.

ER: When we talk about the ‘inner world’ this can be interpreted in various ways. But what I mean is the subjective element. You collect your material from your deepest subjective side when you work creatively. Equally, those receiving the art react at their own deeply subjective level. This is where this encounter across time and between places arises, and I see here a funda- mentally democratic appeal.


SA: But it is not a matter of the difficulty of encounters in general – Co- ming from a different perspective but still being able to find an actual area of mutual understanding?

ER: For me this inner world is of a pretty fluid and organic nature. Encounters with a very tangible and well defined external world can easily result in a collision.
It is unclear who is in charge, and people are constantly seeking roles. However, the distribution of roles is clear. In smaller group contexts there is a lack of clarity: it is unclear who is in charge, and people are constantly seeking roles. Staging an opera is an incredibly complicated activity. But everyone has a pretty clear idea of their role. This sort of creates a feeling of calm.

Could one say there is a clear hierarchy? KS: Yes. There is a fairly old-fashioned role distribution – that is very much the case.

How does it feel to be at the top? KS: The actual leadership aspect is not something I reflect on; implement any ideas is what appeals to me. But it would be extremely trying if we were a group of people who were always attempting to find out who was in charge.

People now tend to say that the big ideologies are dead, and that it is hard to achieve collective outcomes. We live in an age of the individual. As Kristofer says, can any change start. Instead start to see your own lack of freedom. Only when you flow with this illusion about individuality and the freedom to make the various choices by various structures. A real change would require us to see through this illusion about individuality and the freedom to make the various choices by various structures. But I understand your scepticism, as I believe that freedom of the individual change – even if those opportunities are not equally distributed.

But what are the chances of individuals changing their surroundings nowadays? KS: Many people, including family and friends, have asked me that. I am an individual who has big opportunities to bring about change. But I understand your scepticism, as I believe that freedom of the individual change – even if those opportunities are not equally distributed.

It is hard to relate to the word at all.

SA: How about you Sofia? How did you find what we are trying to pin down here – the language, the approach, the form of expression? SA: I agree that it is a process, but for me it is a bit the same as asking “Who are you?” or “How did you find yourself?”. My language is so inextricably linked with my identity – the person I am destined to be. So I think it is rather a matter of making a discovery – realizing where you get resistance from your inner self.

But is it not getting to the bottom of who you are maybe one of life’s big tasks? KS: I sometimes think that what creativity should lead to is a form of self-reflection that is actually really, really useful. And that self reflection can spread out like rings in the water and can lead to social change …

And our time has nearly run out. But we must still try and get one final question in, so I would like to refer to the big issue: Why is change necessary?

A: Change is maybe the same as life, and is thus probably necessary or inevitable. But in that case it is perhaps almost more important to emphasise that something permanent is also necessary. If everything was in a permanent state of flux we would not even be able to talk to each other, or even exist.

We live in an age of the individual. As Kristofer says, can any change start. Instead start to see your own lack of freedom. Only when you flow with this illusion about individuality and the freedom to make the various choices by various structures. A real change would require us to see through this illusion about individuality and the freedom to make the various choices by various structures. But I understand your scepticism, as I believe that freedom of the individual change – even if those opportunities are not equally distributed.

Retention is harder. Change comes whether you want it or not. KS: I think we need them both. And for me change is necessary simply because it is nice. It is enjoyable when something happens.

Our time is up. Thank you Elisabeth Rynell, Anders Johansson, Sofia Anner and Kristoffer Steen for coming in for this discussion. My name is Eric Schildt.

“Being a lot of work in networking models. I gather people to see what we can do together. Resistance between individuals and the collective often arises in the process.”

SOFIA ANNER

“I do a lot of work in networking models. I gather people to see what we can do together. Resistance between individuals and the collective often arises in the process.”

SOFIA ANNER

“But I notice that the less effort I make, the better things actually work. That is when I find my own language – my own path.”

KRISTOFFER STEEN

The price of creativity and the craft of thought: An interview with Kristoffer Steen. The concept of author and identity was recorded on 5 December 2013 at the production of A Torkel & Ame絕的 Podcast. To listen to the entire discussion in Swedish you go to: finn.umea.se/podcast
BOOKS THAT INSPIRE COURAGE
Mattias Lundberg makes a selection from the bookshelf.

Advice, tips and encouragement—you sometimes need to brace yourself for a situation that requires you to go that extra mile. Mattias Lundberg, docent in Umeå University’s Department of Psychology and the initiator of the popular event Psychological Salon, recommends books that inspire courage.

Mattias Lundberg is a versatile psychologist, psychotherapist and docent in psychology who likes examining new ways of disseminating academic knowledge. He creates the video podcast ‘Rock’n’roll research’, tours the show together with stand-up artist and presenter Janne Bylund and has initiated a talkshow with a focus on psychology. Mattias Lundberg thinks breaking with social and cultural conventions requires courage.

‘Both personally and in my job I’m about not being afraid to believe in your idea and act on it. But you should also have the courage to backtrack and admit you’re wrong when you make the idea is not sound.’

Psychological Salon
The media have described Psychological Salon as psychology’s equivalent to the talkshow Skavlan. The relaxed format of this psychology-themed talkshow set in a pub has attracted a large and mixed public.

‘I started Psychological Salon in order to create an open discussion about what psychology is,’ says Mattias Lundberg.

Mattias Lundberg interviews three different people on stage. These guests have psychology as their common denominator and could, for example, be a member of staff from the Department of Psychology, a psychologist or psychotherapist or someone who has to adopt a psychological approach in their work, e.g. a policeman. The interviews alternate with music, and the public can eat and drink during the event.

He recently came out with his eighth book: Psychologiskt jobb — handbook for chefer och HR (Psychology at the workplace—handbook for managers and HR). Through his books he wants to make psychology easy to understand and more accessible.

The shadow of the wind
Carlos Ruiz Zafón (2005)

Zafón’s fantastic storytelling describes a number of human destinies in Barcelona, at the centre of which is the ten-year-old Daniel. As a reader you get to accompany him in his search for the answer to life’s riddles. Transforming dramatically gripping destinies into a tragicomic farce and yet succeeding in keeping the reader alert, Zafón does, requires courage.

The positive power of negative thinking
Using defensive pessimism to harness anxiety and perform at your peak
Julie K Norem (2002)

Passionism is often deemed to be slightly undesirable, but Norem describes it as a strategy for success. Using passionism to achieve your goals and achieve happiness is her message in this unusual book that everyone should read.
**Column**

In the land of opposites—on technology and ways of thinking

PADDLING ON a stand-up paddle-board is hard. The board — about the same size as a surfboard — is slippery, and I need to find my balance on my sandy feet and at the same time speed up, using my paddle and thrusting out into the bay to get a glance at a group of sea otters playing in the ocean. But first I need to get on my feet and stand up.

I am in California as a guest researcher at the invitation of the University of California in Santa Barbara. In my dissertation, I am investigating the Swedish website for poets, poeter.se. Despite the texts I am studying being in Swedish, my research has aroused people’s curiosity. It is as if the growing field of digital humanities, where you make use of digital technology and digital methods, acts as a language of its own.

The board glides slowly out on the waves. Below me in the clear water I can see the seaweed making its way to the surface. I get up into a standing position, gain speed, paddle, change grip, paddle.

California is a place of contrasts: on the one hand an IT mecca represented by Silicon Valley, and on the other hand a place that seems largely untouched by the ravages of time. You will find a relaxed pace, surfers, campers, farmers and Bohemians here, and you will encounter nature in the form of mountains, deserts, redwood forests and the ocean.

Author Dave Eggers’ latest novel, The Circle, criticizes our contemporary culture. In the novel, kayaking acts as a symbol for an escape from today’s digital society and the demands of constantly being online. Connected. The novel exemplifies the big buzz here in California of getting “off the grid”, which means getting offline to live your life without turning on your smartphone or constantly updating your status on popular social networking websites.

In The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains, Nicholas Carr formulates a closely related criticism on our digital presence. Carr argues that the Internet is changing the very nature of our thoughts, and posits that the brain’s elasticity is being affected, thereby having an effect on how we think and remember. According to him, we are finding it harder and harder to hold on to thoughts and create extended lines of argument after long periods of connection to the net.

But when you are paddling on a stand-up board — or, like Mae in The Circle, a kayak — there is nothing you can do but just paddle. You have to focus on the present, the here and now, otherwise you will fall into the ocean. (Yes, the water is COLD here.)

Carr and Eggers’ conclusions are similar to the discussions on how the digital world can affect and influence the way we read literature. A common argument in the debate is that the Internet can simply reduce our ability to read, as we are busy doing so many other things online like uploading photos, blogging and watching video clips.

Another way of looking at the literature of the digital age is seeing how sites such as poeter.se allow people to do more than just publish poetry. On the site you can discuss and comment on poems and establish relational ties with other poets. It is a social dimension that has actually always been important to poets, but on the internet it becomes visible. Poetry’s underlying promise to speak directly to the reader becomes a prerequisite. Establishing contacts with other people requires you to be active and visible yourself.

The poem becomes part of the rapid and spontaneous digital flow. But does this mean that poetry and thought processes are adversely affected? Surely an important and perhaps crucial aspect of thinking is not just looking for new arguments but are instead processing what we already know and see around us, and that we are seeking new vantage points, changes of perspective and surprises?

“Surely an important and maybe crucial part of the thought process is the fact that we are not just looking for new arguments but are instead processing what we already know and see around us, and that we are seeking new vantage points, changes of perspective and surprises?”

JULIA PENNLERT

postgraduate in literary studies, Umeå University