

Report from the 16th International Science Research Conference in Trondheim

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"Small is beautiful: a study of economics as if people mattered" is the name of Schumacher's famous classical book on alternative economic development. A rewritten version - "Small is beautiful: A conference on technology as if people mattered" - could also have been the slogan for the 1997 International Human Science Research Conference in Trondheim. The conference was small in numbers - around fifty participants - but still very worthwhile in academic quality related to the theme "Challenges to the Human Sciences in a Technological World."

The smallness of the conference had several reasons. Probably the main reason was the collision with the conference of the American Psychological Association (APA). However, this was unavoidable because of the busy arrangement schedule in Trondheim connected to the 1,000 years city anniversary, which left us with little choice. The cost of living in Norway as well as the distance of travelling could also have scared away potential participants. It could also be that the theme of the conference - "The challenges of Human Sciences in a Technological World" - appeared too distant from the interests of many Human Science scholars.

The Trondheim conference lasted five days. In the first evening, there was just an informal get-together in a restaurant at the harbour. The weather gods had provided us with extraordinarily good weather, which lasted throughout the conference. In fact, the whole of Norway had an unusual warm and sunny summer this year. Weather is, of course, not the main attraction, but still an important context for the experience of a conference, and we were lucky.

The first "real" conference day started with the customary welcome address. First, Birthe Loa Knizek wished everybody welcome, and second, Ingunn Hagen talked about the conference theme "Challenges to the Human Sciences in a Technological World: Understanding Post-modern Lifeworlds", addressing how now technologies - related to both communication and transportation - radically change the premises of human life worlds and experiences. Third, the Human Science Research "veteran", Steinar Kvale, spoke of the "History and future of the Human Sciences (in IHSRC)", thus setting the tone for the discussions to come.

Each conference day started with a keynote speaker. The first keynote speaker was the English pedagogue Peter Ashworth who spoke about "Socrates on Information Technology". He demonstrated how insights from the Greeks are still relevant for understanding now human technologies. The second keynote speaker was the well-known sociologist, Thomas Luckmann, now based in Germany. His theme was "On the Interpretation of Diagloue", where he demonstrated how insights from the humanities apply to analysis of conversations. The third keynote speaker was Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen, a Danish psychologist based in Norway. She talked about "Gender and

Identity Work", based on Freud's metaphor "the magic writing pad" she discussed the identity construction of young women.

Throughout the conference there were two parallel sessions, organized around the following topics: "Methodological issues", "Technology and experience", "Technology and human relations", "Moral and ethics", and "Technology and the body". Even with only two parallel sessions, it was sometimes hard to choose which one to attend. There were also two symposia, initiated by the participants. One was about "Preparing graduate students to conduct human science research", Jerry H. McClelland, Peter Ashworth, Karin Dahlberg, and Jane Plihal were the contributors. The second symposium had the title "Culture - experience - body", consisting of Birgit Gunnari, Birgit Nordtug, Hilfrid Braataas, Pino Kosiander and Sigrun Ertesvåg, all Norwegian Ph.D. candidates.

The Trondheim conference was characterized by diversity, both in topics addressed and background and nationality of the participants. There were interesting presentations related to methodological issues: Steinar Kvale spoke about "Research apprenticeship", and later about "Psychoanalytic therapy as qualitative research", Warren R. Lett talked about "Intersubjective inquiry". Ingunn Hagen, Marianne Christoffersen and Agnieszka B. Jarvoll had a paper about "How to study human routine actions", presented by Marianne and Agnieszka. Dana Ulveland talked about "The educational insignificance of technological attendere". Hennie de Vos spoke of "A phenomenological experience of fear within the context of South African violence". Further methodological papers included Ilja Maso's "Dreaming as a problem solving strategy" and Adri Smaling's "The relation between the researcher and researched".

In the session about technology and experience, Bill Bezdek talked about "Technology and selfhood". He was followed by Marc Briod who spoke of "Media and the early formation of imagination", Kurt Keller presented a paper about "The social games of using computer based artifacts"; and David Harrington had a paper about "Out of our senses: Philosophical and experimental ramifications of changing sensory modes".

Under the heading technology and human relations, Vigdis Granum presented her paper about "Nursing didactics". Suoranta Juha talked about "Pitfalls in cyperlearning". In the same session Aksel Hagen spoke of "Wireless care: Technologically mediated care in the emergency medical communication center". Moreover, Karin Dahlberg talked about "The human subject - a challenge in technological health care and education". "Technology and the individual's experience of life space" was the topic of Vance Peavy's talk. Takashi Saito spoke of "The way of breathing as the fundamental education method".

Another interesting heading was morality and ethics. Here Lane Gerber spoke of "Murdered compassion"; Paul Lövlund asked the question: "Is there a postmodern technological attitude?"; Jerry McClelland talked about "Threats and intimidations"; while Torill Elvira Mortensen was concerned with "Multi-media computer-games and reader-response theories".

In the session labelled technology and the body, Richard Alapack presented his paper about "Vanishing hickeys and the waning of adolescence". In the same session Adrian Mackenzie presented the paper "Sexual embodiment and technological materiality". Finally, Celia Roberts talked about "Unnatural nature: The politics of Hi-Tech anti-aging medicine".

Conference organizers are naturally not the most objective evaluators of a conference. Still, based on the feedback we have received from participants, we are tempted to conclude that the conference was quite successful. Due to its small size, there was time and atmosphere for fruitful intellectual discussions, and the social climate was nice and cozy. The conference itself was held in a hotel in the town centre, and our dinners took place at nearby restaurants. The conference dinner was a barbeque at "Munkholmen", an island outside the town harbour.

The fact that fewer participants than expected signed up for the conference had frustrated us during the planning process. It made the process more difficult, and also resulted in some economic problems for the conference. Had it not been for the generous economic guarantee from the Social Science Faculty at our university (NTNU), these problems would have become even more serious. However, it was comforting when the conference participants said that the smallness of the conference had made it especially worthwhile.

Wednesday it was time for the "Business meeting". The business meeting was partly a discussion among somewhat frustrated organizers, who had to fight with an anarchistic institution (a contradiction in terms) in the planning process and the participants, who obviously had had a nice time and could see advantages in anarchism. It was also a discussion of divergent and partly unrealistic expectations and demands about costs and conference structure and the organizers' obligation and will to fulfill these. There was no solution, but only a discussion in a friendly, but a bit tired atmosphere. This discussion hopefully did not undermine the enthusiasm of the next organizers.

Sitka, Alaska was announced as the site for the 17th International Human Science Research Conference, June 10 - 14, 1998. The theme will be "Heritages and Cultures", and the organizer is David Harrington. Sheffield was chosen as the site for the 1999 IHSR conference, with Peter Ashworth as the main organizer. University of Dallas' (Texas, USA) Rome campus had also been proposed, but not confirmed. (A confirmation fax had, however, reached the department while we were busy at the conference). Thus, in the business meeting Rome was suggested to be the site in year 2000).

Based on our experiences as organizers, we suggest that for future organizers, a small advising committee is appointed. Otherwise, the anarchy and loose structure of the IHSR organization could easily become a headache for future organizers. It would also be helpful if there were some guidelines for how to announce the conference, beyond the IHSR newsletter. We also think that new participants need to be made aware of the existence of this conference.

Finally, we hope to be able to publish the conference proceedings from the IHSRC in Trondheim. That way, the many interesting papers can be available to more people than those participating in the conference this year.