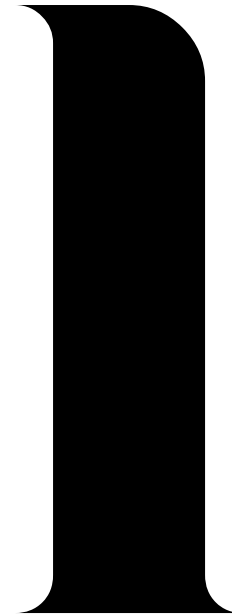


Circus Stories

Edited by Claes-Fredrik Helgesson

CIRCUS Interdisciplinary Insights



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CIRCUS

is (and has been) many things

I

SHARING SOME OF THE MANY STORIES OF CIRCUS
CIRCUS stands for *Centre for Integrated Research on Culture and Society* and is a centre within Uppsala University aimed at fostering cross-disciplinary research collaborations. As the name implies, CIRCUS is centred in the humanities and the social sciences. From this base, CIRCUS has a mission to facilitate collaborations that span the entire breadth of research at Uppsala University. The centre began to have permanent staff in 2019. However, several activities, as well as the necessary discussions and decisions, predate this starting point.

The aim of this book is to share some stories to illustrate what CIRCUS is about. It is important to us to include multiple vantage points and voices in this account. After all, a university centre like CIRCUS has many stories and facets: it has stories about discussions and key decisions; it has stories about the research and researchers it has engaged with; it has stories about the staff and others in the day-to-day activities; it has stories of what it is about; it has stories about specific events and key moments. The circus as a colourful metaphor is also there somehow, as part of an attitude if you like. We want to honour this diverse quality of CIRCUS by providing space for multiple vantage points, but without assuming the burden of needing to make this into a large, comprehensive account covering every perspective. We are here rather aiming to provide some important tiles in a much larger mosaic of stories.

The contributions to this volume thus seek to represent a few facets of CIRCUS. This opening chapter provides some initial orientation. The simple outline will set out some of the broader contours of CIRCUS and thus provide

some points of reference for how the subsequent chapters fit into the larger mosaic of CIRCUS.

CIRCUS IS THE RESULT OF A SET OF FORMAL DECISIONS

One way to describe an organisational unit like CIRCUS is to depict key formal decisions. For CIRCUS, many of the constitutive decisions were made in 2017. The first came in June, when the Humanities and Social Sciences Disciplinary Domain Board decided to ask the University Board of Uppsala University to establish CIRCUS. This board is the governing body of the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences, which is one of the three disciplinary domains at Uppsala University, the other two being the Disciplinary Domain of Medicine and Pharmacy, and the Disciplinary Domain of Science and Technology. The Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences spans six faculties, which in turn encompass a varying number of departments. The aim for CIRCUS, then, was primarily to span and facilitate collaborations across departments and faculties within this part of Uppsala University.

The University Board followed suit in November 2017 with a decision to establish CIRCUS under the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences. The centre was to be funded by the Vice-Chancellor and the disciplinary domain. A month later the formal instructions governing CIRCUS were decided upon:

CIRCUS is intended as both a platform and physical environment for the initiation and development of

problem-driven and thematic research collaboration across subject, faculty and disciplinary domain lines. CIRCUS complements the discipline-based structure of the disciplinary domain and is intended to follow up and support the initiatives from temporary forums and networks that researchers in the domain initiate across subject boundaries. The goal is to develop skills at UU [Uppsala University] for problem-driven research aimed at identifying and promoting studies on key cultural topics and contemporary problems in society. (Translated excerpt from Instruction for CIRCUS, HUMSAM 2017/18)

Constitutive decisions like these taken in 2017 were preceded by work, sometimes a lot of work. Chapter 3 presents an account of some of the efforts made by the working group that prepared the proposal to create CIRCUS. This account of the process indicates starting points of what became CIRCUS dating back to 2014 or even earlier. Chapter 3 further tells the story of the name and how the Old Observatory was identified as the place for the secretariat. The account of the working group's efforts provides more insight into the organisational ecology within which these decisions were prepared and made.

The decisions on which specific collaborative researcher initiatives to support are another category of formal decisions that are key to CIRCUS. Calls to apply for support for research networks within the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences were announced already by the above-mentioned working group in autumn 2016. This, it is worth noting, was before the name CIRCUS was

publicly coined and before the decision to create a formal centre. Such calls have been a central feature of CIRCUS with one or more calls being made every year. The applications are assessed by external peer reviewers and a decision on which applications to support is made by the CIRCUS board based on the review panel's joint assessment. Some of the voices of researchers supported by CIRCUS are provided space in chapter 4. In a broader sense, the very existence of these calls is a testament to how CIRCUS was constructed from the start to serve as facilitator of initiatives coming from researchers. A key feature of CIRCUS, in other words, is to support 'bottom-up' initiatives.

Further, another type of formal decisions concerns the manning of operations. This includes deciding on the first small task force in 2015 and then the larger working group starting in 2016, both headed by Anna Singer, Professor at the Department of Law and Deputy Vice-Rector of the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences. Another key manning decision came in spring 2018 when the first board of CIRCUS was appointed, with Anna Lindström, Professor at the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Languages, as the first chair. This is when CIRCUS truly became an organisational unit within Uppsala University. Finally, we have the staffing of the secretariat, where I was appointed the first Director of CIRCUS in autumn 2018, beginning to build the everyday operations from 1 January 2019, followed by further hirings to expand the CIRCUS team and provide capacity to develop and implement activities.

It had already been decided in the first instructions that CIRCUS would be formally evaluated after a few years of op-

eration. The evaluation subsequently performed involved a panel of three experts external to Uppsala University, who delivered their report in February 2022. After a little more than a year of deliberation and digestion within the University, the Humanities and Social Sciences Disciplinary Domain Board and the Vice-Chancellor decided that CIRCUS should continue for five more years (2024–2028) with a somewhat broadened mandate. CIRCUS, though still based on research in the humanities and social sciences, was instructed to develop research collaborations spanning the entire breadth of research at Uppsala University:

CIRCUS's overall mission is to develop successful interdisciplinary research of the highest quality for the benefit of humanity and for a better world. This is achieved by strengthening the University's ability to produce various forms of cross-cutting research through skills development and qualified support for researcher-initiated cross-cutting collaboration. CIRCUS undertakes activities that strengthen employees' ability to initiate and participate in such collaborations. CIRCUS also works to develop the organisational conditions for cross-cutting research collaboration at the University. Finally, CIRCUS also supports collaboration-intensive research projects. (Translated excerpt from Instruction for CIRCUS, HUMSAM 2023/114)

The bottom-up orientation in supporting cross-cutting research is still at the core. However, the new instructions indicated more clearly that this was to be complemented

by efforts that improved the conditions for such initiatives to take place. In brief, it stated that a bottom-up approach is not the same as a *laissez-faire* approach.

Describing an organisational unit like CIRCUS as a long series of formal decisions offers a particular outlook on organisational life. It provides a narrative made up of moments of formal decision-making through the lens of the records that document what was decided when, and by whom. Formal decisions are key events in the history of any centre, but they are far from conveying the full picture of what is and has been going on. This is why we have focused on other stories in this book, such as the longer and unsurprisingly more meandering story of the creation of CIRCUS in chapter 3, or the voices of the researchers engaged with CIRCUS in chapter 4.

CIRCUS IS MANY ACTIVITIES

Focusing on the quotidian is another way to understand a centre like CIRCUS. This would include the many seminar and workshop discussions that different groups of researchers have and have had in the meeting rooms Cassiopeia and Circinus at the Old Observatory where the secretariat of CIRCUS is based. (More information about the Old Observatory is provided in chapter 2.) A description of the everyday would further include the truly mundane, which nevertheless is also important, such as the regular preparation of coffee and tea for the essential *fika* breaks. It would further include the many preparatory meetings that are held when devising a workshop with and

for a group of researchers, when organising an interdisciplinary summer school, or indeed when planning for the annual CIRCUS Interdisciplinary Garden Party. Then there is all the communication to get the word out about what is going on.

Most such activities are prepared and performed by CIRCUS staff in collaboration with researchers. The Uppsala Lectures on Making Sense of Our Time are one such example. The idea for this series was brought to us by Jenny Andersson, professor at the Department of History of Science and Ideas, and Sofia Näsström, professor at the Department of Government. The first of these lectures took place in autumn 2022 with Lea Ypi, Professor of Political Theory at the London School of Economics. We have since hosted one such well-attended lecture per semester. Another example of how researchers are involved in shaping our activities was when we workshopped with a group of researchers on what an interdisciplinary summer school could look like in spring 2022. The first summer school was subsequently offered in August 2022. (For more on the summer school, see chapter 6.) A key point here is that the everyday preparation of initiatives and events is highly interactive and regularly involves researchers from different parts of Uppsala University. Here is a list of different kinds of events that are part of the everyday CIRCUS:

- ♦ Seminars and workshops within the research networks supported by CIRCUS (since 2019).
- ♦ Seminars for the groups developing cross-cutting research projects and grant applications (since 2020).

- ♦ Seminar series, workshops and conferences initiated by researchers and supported by CIRCUS after an application (since 2019).
- ♦ Seminars and workshops in the perennial series *Interdisciplinary Possibilities, Practices and Challenges* (since 2019).
- ♦ The annual symposium (since 2019).
- ♦ The annual Interdisciplinary Garden Party (since 2019).
- ♦ The Uppsala Lectures on Making Sense of Our Time (since 2022).
- ♦ CIRCUS Interdisciplinary Summer School (since 2022).

At CIRCUS, we are also keen to make learning and improving part of the everyday. We regularly gather information on lessons learned from initiatives and we also make use of surveys and end-of-project reports to learn how we can improve. Chapter 4 presents some of the feedback we have received from researchers in these surveys. During the pandemic we, like many others, learned how to hold meaningful events over Zoom. The pandemic even led us to try to develop a digital version of our annual Interdisciplinary Garden Party, where we sent out small boxes to registered attendees (see artefacts three and four in chapter 5).

Describing an organisational unit like CIRCUS as a long list of events and an endless list of everyday activities provides a quite different narrative compared to an account of formal decisions. The milestone decisions recede into the background, and a myriad activities are foregrounded instead. Looking at the activities complements the wide sweep of formal decisions with richer stories about what things look like in practice. This is why we included stories such as the one about the creation of CIRCUS Interdisciplinary Summer School (chapter 6).

♦

Whatever we say about the circus as an organization, about its economics or its anthropology, it is hard not to notice its strangeness. A social scientific description of the circus might somehow miss the myth, would fail to catch the very weirdness that it welcomes. Consider, for example, Rudy Horn, who would balance six cups of tea on his head whilst riding an unicycle, flick the sugar cubes in with his foot, and then finally flick the spoon into the top cup. ... Or Schmarlowski the animal trainer, who dresses a woman in a fur coat that suddenly dissolves into dozens of live polecats with a fox playing the part of a collar (Stevens 2004: 9, 22). This is the stuff of dreams, of surreal juxtapositions and motivations hidden by greasepaint. (Parker 2011, 557)

CIRCUS IS IDEAS

The CIRCUS acronym is evocative. It indicates a venue that provides the premises for the real artists qua researchers to perform, to meet one another and, perhaps, create “surreal juxtapositions”. The above quote is from a paper by organisation scholar Martin Parker in which he examines the nomadic organisation of the circus. Parker’s inquiry centres on how such a complex, peculiar and culturally laden organisation is both a business organisation and something that produces magic. In that sense, there is a great deal of similarity between such circuses and CIRCUS at Uppsala University. A circus and CIRCUS both involve a large number of differently skilled people who come together to produce something that may evoke awe. It requires collaborative artists and it requires those equally collaborative people who provide the right conditions for the artistry to occur.

It is possible to identify several ideas that are central to how CIRCUS emerged and evolved. One early core idea was that support for initiating and developing research collaborations across disciplinary boundaries can be organised through means other than the creation of new stable structures like thematic centres. This was expressed in the first instructions as the platform function and was central to the working group that brought CIRCUS into existence (see chapter 3). A related idea was that the facilitation of cross-cutting constellations ought primarily to be around themes that are researcher-defined. CIRCUS is a programme for finding new pathways for fostering research rather than a specific, thematic research programme.

Another core idea is to embrace the existence of multiple reasons why multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research

may seem interesting and rewarding for researchers. As Andrew Barry and Georgina Born put it: “Interdisciplinarity has come to be at once a governmental demand, a reflexive orientation within the academy and an object of knowledge” (Barry and Born, 2013). Cross-cutting research endeavours can thus aim to address key societal challenges in novel and productive ways. However, they can also, and equally legitimately, be driven by other motivations. This means that cross-disciplinary collaborations may need to take many forms, and that different situations and problems may influence the kinds of cross-cutting collaboration that are appropriate in a given setting. For CIRCUS this means that we need to facilitate collaborations by providing an appropriate mix of different forms of support and devise the support given the specifics of the situation.

Working in new constellations can require new skills. CIRCUS embodies the idea that we, as well as the researchers we work with, can accumulate and disseminate know-how and skills relevant for cross-cutting collaborations. We do this through activities for sharing experiences across our cross-cutting endeavours as well as through listening in on and disseminating insights from research about interdisciplinary research. This is the reason we arrange activities like the perennial seminar series *Interdisciplinary Possibilities, Practices and Challenges* as well as the Interdisciplinary Summer School (see chapter 6). Contributing to capacity building for researchers and the University as an organisation not only improves the likelihood of successful collaborations, it further improves the versatility of the University as a whole.

A final idea central to CIRCUS concerns the value of playfulness. This posits that it is deeply meaningful to give room to the joys of intellectual assemblies, such as indulging in wit and quirkiness. Joy is one way to summon the courage to try something new. It means caring about having a collaborative atmosphere that is inclusive and provides room for many to contribute, to ask questions, and to offer different outlooks. A key quality of worthwhile collaborative processes is that they provide situations where many can contribute and where differences are given and received with good intent and grace. Though we may not use greasepaint at CIRCUS, we still believe that playfulness can be part of the stuff that can make dreams and surreal juxtapositions into something amazing.

Ingrid Berg

CIRCUS

is a place with a history

2

AT THE OLD OBSERVATORY

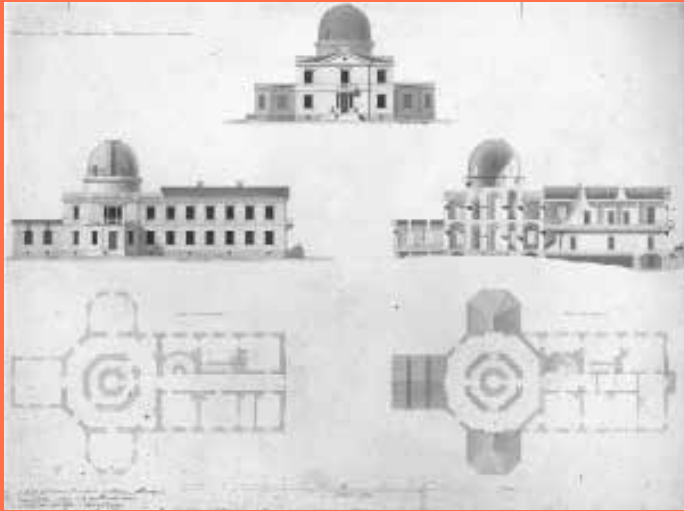
A CIRCUS is not only a centre for research and interdisciplinary collaboration in a metaphorical sense – it is also a physical place where researchers from different scientific backgrounds meet, workshop and mingle. The Old Observatory, where CIRCUS has been located since 2019, is an imposing, yet typical, building for an old university town. Imposing in the way we often view monumental architecture from the 19th century – an aesthetic colossus loaded with values from the era of great aspirations of *Bildung* and scientific progress. Typical in the way that similar types of buildings are found in many European university towns. In fact, monumental neo-classical and gothic architecture are signifiers of the above-mentioned values.

The Old Observatory was built in the heyday of the development of the natural sciences. It opened its doors in 1853 after almost a decade of construction on the outskirts of Uppsala. Here, astronomical observations could be made without the risk of light or smoke pollution. The Celsius Observatory from the 18th century, in the centre of town, had gone out of fashion and Gustaf Svanberg (1802–1882), Professor of Astronomy, was keen to erect a modern observatory and space for teaching.

The establishment of a new observatory in Uppsala was far from uncontroversial. In fact, Svanberg had to plead his case many times before the University Board. Construction was repeatedly delayed for lack of funding and the sight of the half-finished building was an eyesore to many passers-by. Svanberg's greatest adversary was Wilhelm Fredrik Palmblad (1799–1852), Professor of Greek and a loud voice on the Board. He argued publicly in the daily press that the

new observatory was pointless and too costly – besides, there was already a functioning observatory in Stockholm. Svanberg was forced to reply, and the fight was on. Old universities are often slow-moving ecosystems. At times they can relatively quickly adapt to change, whilst at other times a forward-looking vision meets with various degrees of conservative scepticism. Today, however, such academic fights are usually not front and centre in the daily press. Luckily for us, Svanberg eventually secured funding for the observatory and it became home to the Department of Astronomy until 2000, when the department moved to its new premises at the Ångström Laboratory. Today, the Old Observatory still has a functioning telescope which is open to the public for special viewings – a fact that CIRCUS has taken advantage of. During our annual Interdisciplinary Summer School, participants are invited to view the stars whilst contemplating the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary collaborations.

Since 2000, many University institutions and departments have been housed at the Old Observatory. CIRCUS is the latest organisation to enjoy and leave its mark on the building. With our meeting and workshop rooms, named Cassiopeia and Circinus, the Old Observatory has become a place where researchers gather in different constellations to work on joint projects and learn more about how they can pursue multi- and interdisciplinary research (and occasionally to look at the stars for a change of perspective).



Drawing of the plans for a new observatory at Uppsala University.



The Observatory, c. 1880.



The Observatory viewed from Kyrkogårdsgatan c. 1860 by the artist Eric Österlund (1812–1907).



Gustaf Svanberg, Professor of Astronomy, c. 1870–1880.



The Old Observatory in 2019.



New meeting room meets 19th century fireplace at CIRCUS in 2021.

Two suggestions for further reading about the history of the Old Observatory (in Swedish)

Frängsmyr, Carl. 2010. *Uppsala universitet 1852-1916, vol 2:2.* Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Uppsala: Edita Västra Aros.

Larsson, Milosz A. 1999. *Uppsala Observatorium. En jämförande analys av 1800-talets observatoriebyggnader i Berlin och Uppsala beträffande läge, plan och elevation.* B-uppsats. Uppsala: Konstvetenskapliga institutionen.

Claes-Fredrik Helgesson

CIRCUS

has a long history



HOW DID CIRCUS COME ABOUT?

What were the ideas and initiatives that paved the way for the creation of CIRCUS? What characterised the organisational setting at Uppsala University in the second half of the 2010s in which these initiatives emerged and took shape? What were the perceived problems and opportunities? With these questions, I set out to interview four persons closely involved in the efforts that led to the creation of CIRCUS. I wanted to know about the efforts and thoughts that had taken place long before I came to know about CIRCUS.

This chapter looks into the history of CIRCUS before it became an organisation, which I would like to date to the appointment of the board in April 2018. The aim of this history is to acknowledge the vision and efforts of those who were key in shaping what became the origins of CIRCUS. An additional aim is to recognise some aspects of Uppsala University's 'organisational ecology' that also played a key role in making CIRCUS possible. Like most things, a university centre like CIRCUS requires both a set of interlinked initiatives *and* a set of enabling contingencies. This text foregrounds efforts up to 2018 in the making of CIRCUS. This exercise of looking back further serves the auxiliary purpose of providing a glimpse into the organisational context of which CIRCUS subsequently came to be a part.

The core of this chapter is a brief oral history, complemented with access to minutes from working group meetings, key decisions and documents. The interviews were conducted in February 2024, with the difficulties that come with having a significant temporal distance to the events of interest. Focusing entirely on the interlinked initiatives and

contexts up to April 2018 provides a framework aimed at mitigating this challenge. My effort to detach this story from the present incarnation of CIRCUS is meant to keep the focus on the open question of what made CIRCUS possible and avoid sliding into assessment-oriented questions such as whether CIRCUS actually became the organisation envisioned. Addressing that question would certainly be a valid exercise, but would make it harder to learn from the earlier efforts. It would furthermore make me, as the first director of CIRCUS, since 2019, an inappropriate chronicler of this story.

The four persons I interviewed for this piece are Anders Ekström, Anna Lindström, Mattias Martinson and Anna Singer. They were all involved in one way or another in the key working group that preceded the creation of CIRCUS. They were also professors and representatives from four different faculties within the humanities and social sciences. Two of them – Ekström and Lindström – had come back to Uppsala only a few years earlier after positions at other universities, an experience which they independently now note as having contributed to giving them new perspectives on Uppsala University. Moreover, two of them – Lindström and Martinson – subsequently became members of the CIRCUS board in April 2018.

WORKING GROUP IN SEARCH OF NEW WAYS TO FACILITATE RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

In autumn 2016, there was a brief interview on the University intranet with Anna Singer, the Deputy Vice-Rector for Humanities and Social Sciences, about a newly opened call inviting researchers within the humani-

ties and social sciences in Uppsala to apply for funds to develop cross-cutting research collaborations. The initiative had been forged by a working group tasked with promoting research collaboration across the six faculties within the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences at Uppsala University. This working group was colloquially abbreviated AFFAF² and Singer noted in the intranet interview that the call was a pilot and that the domain leadership would visit Oxford and Cambridge later in the autumn of 2016 to look at other working models for stimulating cross-cutting research collaborations.

Our starting point has been the goal and strategies of the [Disciplinary] Domain [of Humanities and Social Sciences at Uppsala University], where we write that we should support and stimulate research collaborations across disciplines, faculties and domains. This is the model proposed by the working group in the spring to support initiatives from researchers in the best possible way for the Domain.¹

Anna Singer, autumn 2016 in internal news.

The AFFAF working group had begun in spring 2016 and is an essential element of what became CIRCUS. It included parts of the domain leadership and representatives from the faculties within the domain and it figures centrally in the key decisions that led up to the creation of CIRCUS. Singer headed the working group, whose other members included Shirin Ahlbäck Öberg, Anders Ekström, Nils Hertting, Mattias Martinson, Elisabet Nihlfors and Jane

Reichel. The creation of this group had been preceded by a smaller task force created in December 2015 and led by Singer, which had also included Lindström, Ekström and Hertting. They had begun mapping the many cross-cutting collaborations and initiatives that existed within the disciplinary domain and reflecting on how the domain could revise the support for such initiatives.

Singer had become acting Vice-Rector of the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences in September 2014. One of the tasks lined up for her was to review the goals and strategies of the disciplinary domain. This meant, in particular, reviewing how the domain could promote research collaborations across its six faculties. There had already been several initiatives over many years, mainly centres focusing on geographical regions. Yet by the time of the working groups, there was an inkling sense that this approach insufficiently addressed the long-standing objective of increasing cross-cutting collaborations as intended within the domain. There was thus a growing suspicion that some such efforts contributed to a further fragmentation of research within the domain, contrary to their actual purpose to bridge research across the departments and faculties:

You opened a waterhole and then everyone gathered around it, and when the waterhole ran dry, then everyone moved on. But the waterhole continued to be there as a fenced-in entity not providing any dynamism. This way of working did not promote dynamic collaborations.

Anna Singer, interview in spring 2024.

It was further recognised that the degree of success of such initiatives in actually serving as an open meeting place tended to become too dependent on the qualities of whoever came to lead them. The Forum for Advanced Studies in Arts, Languages and Theology (SALT) was also shut down around this time. SALT had been an effort to serve as a meeting place for researchers from three of the six faculties within the domain. In short, there were several indications that the then current *modus operandi* did not work sufficiently well in promoting sustained and growing research collaborations across the six faculties within the domain.

“What can we do differently to further promote cross-cutting research collaborations within the domain?” gradually emerged as a key guiding question. The report from the initial smaller task force in spring 2016 resulted in the Humanities and Social Sciences Disciplinary Domain Board appointing a proper working group, AFFAF, headed by Singer, Deputy Vice-Rector of the domain between 2014 and 2020. A shared and growing sentiment was that the previous efforts did not provide the proper conditions for lasting dynamic collaborations across disciplinary and departmental boundaries. There was further a shared understanding that future initiatives should depend less on specific individuals.

Several members of the AFFAF group had valuable experiences from working in cross-cutting settings. Nils Hertting, from the Faculty of Social Sciences, had experience from the multidisciplinary Institute for Housing and Urban Research (IBF). Anna Lindström and Anders Ekström had both, as mentioned, experiences from less siloed university settings in Sweden as well as abroad. Mattias Martinson, as Dean

of Theology, had proximity to a multidisciplinary research centre hosting the programme *The Impact of Religion: Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy (IMPACT)*. The centre called Centre for Multidisciplinary Research on Religion and Society (CRS) had been established several years previously at the Faculty of Theology. A bit later, from 2014 and onwards, Martinson had also been involved in establishing the Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies on Racism (CEMFOR), at the same faculty. This development at one faculty suggested that the funding landscape might be shifting more towards multi- and interdisciplinary calls, and that the domain would need to be better prepared to respond to such shifts: “There were more and more indications that it would be strategic to not just prepare disciplinary grant applications” (Anna Lindström, interview 2024).

The interviewees now, in spring 2024, further emphasised two more organisational elements as important in guiding the efforts that emanated in the proposal for the creation of CIRCUS. The first of these was that there was a largely new set of people in leadership positions within the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences. Singer recalled that this had energised efforts to realise the long-declared strategy of increasing cross-cutting collaborations. She and other interviewees also stressed that at the time there was a gradually strengthening sense of coming together among the six deans within the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences, compared with what had previously been the case. Moreover, there was a large continuity in this collective and the domain leadership moving forward from 2014–2015, which provided a more stable setting for the initial smaller task force and

subsequent working group to develop new ideas for how to foster research collaborations across the six faculties.

The other organisational element stressed by my interviewees concerned the standing of the members of the task force and working group. The group had had a diverse set of expertise, but had at the same time not been seen as strongly attached to or defending any specific previous effort or operational model.

I think it mattered that we who were in this group [AFFAF] were considered trustworthy. We were not colleagues who had run our own small research centres, and we were not linked to any particular ideology.
Anna Lindström, interview in spring 2024.

Singer herself reflected that the strong mandate for her work in this area had come from the fact that she was perceived as non-partisan. Lindström further recalled with great appreciation Singer's skilful and persistent work in forming the working group and providing productive conditions for progress without herself dominating the discussions. The latter point is noteworthy given that there was conspicuous resistance to realising ideas in this direction from several quarters within the University. This included people in leading positions as well as staff who had been involved in centres and fora that were now being de-funded.

This was the state of affairs in the autumn of 2016 when Singer announced the call inviting researchers at Uppsala to apply for funds to develop cross-cutting research collaborations. What happened next was the previously mentioned

trip to Oxford and Cambridge in November 2016. However, there is another important beginning and context to be recognised before I can attend to the important trip to the UK.

I HERE IS MORE THAN ONE BEGINNING AND MORE THAN ONE CONTEXT

The working group operated in a larger research funding and research policy context. The group perceived, as I have already mentioned, that changes were afoot in the national and international funding landscape. The research bill presented by the Swedish government every fourth year can serve as one example of this broader context. The bill published late in November 2016 stated:

The government foresees an increased need of specific initiatives to support interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial research and innovation to address the complex characteristics of societal challenges in Sweden as well as globally. (My translation, Swedish Government, Prop. 2016/17:50)

Statements like these, and accompanying research funding initiatives, can be seen as expressions of this broader context within which the efforts of the working group occurred. This is not the place to thoroughly explore the various broad research policy discourses and their shifting emphasis at the time of the work that lay the foundation for CIRCUS. However, these currents in the research policy arena form an important backdrop to the initiatives that paved the way for the creation of CIRCUS.

There was another and more concrete connection between the efforts of the working group and certain research policy discussions in the national context. That link is Anders Ekström. Ekström was part of both the task force formed in late 2015 and the subsequent working group. By then, he had already participated for many years in articulating the need for more *integrative* research approaches to address societal challenges in national arenas. He was preoccupied with modelling a future for humanities, at a time when the humanities were sometimes seen as irrelevant. An early expression of these efforts was in the book he had written with Sverker Sörlin and which had been published in 2012:

It would be possible for us to build the knowledge society of tomorrow with a more open and more integrated view of knowledge. We believe that such a change of research policy would make society more robust. (My translation, Ekström and Sörlin 2012, 31–32)

Ekström took part in arranging several national events around similar themes during this period. For instance, he and Sörlin arranged two workshops with the Swedish Research Council in January and March 2016 on integrative knowledge environments and how a research organisation along such lines would be better equipped to address societal challenges (Ekström and Sörlin 2016). These workshops were part of work they had been doing in this area for the Swedish Research Council since 2014. Their efforts in the national research policy arena gathered national stake-

holders as well as national and international expertise. It is well worth noting that two of the speakers at these events subsequently became external members on the CIRCUS board (Mats Benner and Lynn Åkesson).

Ekström had further encouraged members from the Uppsala working group to take part in these events. This, he recalled, “provided them with access to the wider context in which such discussions were held” (Anders Ekström, interview 2024). Ekström thus served as a conduit between the efforts in Uppsala and a national arena where broader research policy issues were articulated. Furthermore, and equally important, he was himself a forceful articulator pushing a vision for a more integrative approach in this national context.

The national and the Uppsala contexts were thus connected. Yet the governing concerns were not entirely the same. When I interviewed Ekström now, in spring 2024, he was careful to emphasise that his approach had differed depending on whether he was articulating these matters in the national arena or when taking part in the working group in Uppsala in his position as pro dean at the Faculty of Arts. The organisational concerns within the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences at Uppsala University were, he stressed, of no significance when he had talked in larger arenas about the need for integrative research for addressing societal challenges. The organisational aspects were more present, however, when reflecting on how to better leverage the potential for synergies in a broad but extensively siloed university like Uppsala. There was, he summarised, a need for “different arguments, in different roles and at different levels” (Ekström, interview 2024).

●● TRAVELLING TO THE UK IN A BLIZZARD

Another key moment in the work that resulted in CIRCUS began with representatives from Uppsala travelling to Arlanda Airport in a blizzard, as Anna Lindström recalled in 2024.

This is the previously mentioned trip to Oxford and Cambridge on 9–11 November 2016. Travelling were a group of deans and other members of the leadership of the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences at Uppsala University. This group partially overlapped with AFFAF and consisted in all of 12 people from Uppsala visiting CRASSH in Cambridge and TORCH in Oxford. CRASSH stands for *Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities* and had been established as part of the University of Cambridge in 2001 “with the objective of creating interdisciplinary dialogue across the many departments and faculties of the School of Arts and Humanities and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and to forge connections with science subjects.”³ TORCH, *The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities*, was then a more recently established (2013) hub that “...stimulates, supports and promotes research activity of the very highest quality that transcends disciplinary and institutional boundaries and engages with wider audiences.”⁴

Both these initiatives had been discussed as possible models of inspiration for the AFFAF working group. Anders Ekström arranged the visits at both places. He had been a visiting researcher at CRASSH in 2013 and had also established contacts with the recently established TORCH. Representatives of TORCH, including Victoria McGuinness, had also participated in the second workshop Ekström

and Sörlin had hosted in March earlier that year and both had been discussed in their subsequent report (Ekström and Sörlin 2016). The study visits to Cambridge and Oxford by the disciplinary domain leadership provided another link between the local efforts at the domain and broader discussions about new platforms for facilitating cross-disciplinary collaborations as expressed within the humanities and social sciences at these two respected universities. Again, Ekström was a key conduit in forging these links.

The trip entirely sold me on the idea of having a devoted supporting culture as it was expressed at CRASSH.

Mattias Martinson, interview in spring 2024.

All four persons I interviewed for this chapter were among the group visiting CRASSH and TORCH. They differ somewhat in whether they found TORCH or CRASSH more inspiring at the time for what was to be aimed for at Uppsala. Nonetheless, they all testify to the importance of this trip in providing momentum and shaping what later became CIRCUS. It felt, Ekström recalls, like a true turning point. The trip that started in a blizzard appears in hindsight as something of a ‘road to Damascus moment’ for the domain leadership and several involved in the AFFAF group.

At a meeting at the end of November, Anna Singer further reported to the rest of the AFFAF working group that Vice-Chancellor Eva Åkesson had expressed strong support for the idea of creating a new initiative to support cross-cutting research collaborations.

WHAT ABOUT THE NAME? AND THE PLACE?

The efforts appear to have gathered strong momentum at the beginning of 2017. The minutes from several working group meetings in spring 2017 cover a variety of issues like the need for a place for the initiative, discussions about how to staff something akin to what had been seen in Oxford and Cambridge, and discussions about the possible size of the budget. The interest in forming research networks and somewhat larger research programmes was also encouraging. By early 2017, the call had attracted 17 applications for support for research networks and 13 applications for research programmes. To the AFFAF group, and the domain leadership, this was a clear signal that the group was working in a promising direction. The group was now working toward devising a concrete proposal to put forward to the Humanities and Social Sciences Disciplinary Domain Board before the summer.

There was also a need for a name for the initiative, and possibly an acronym akin to TORCH and CRASSH. Possible names were discussed at a meeting in April 2017. Anna Singer remembers that she had put forward a name at that meeting, but that it had been easily outshone by the name proposed by Anders Ekström: *Centre for Integrated Research on Culture and Society*, abbreviated as CIRCUS. Ekström admits that he had had the name up his sleeve for a long time. He had kept it to himself in part to allow for a broader involvement in the group. In the interview in spring 2024 he further stresses that the notion of *integrative* research was important to him and that it represents something other than *interdisciplinary* research. Another important point of the name is that it indicates culture and society

as focal entities for research rather than humanities and social sciences as disciplinary areas of research. Mattias Martinson and Anna Lindström both reflect in hindsight that they were not as invested in the precise notion of *integrated* research and that other alternatives could have worked as well. However, all agree that CIRCUS was a striking acronym moving forward, with all that it suggested in the way of being a creative space for diverse ‘artists’. The initiative was baptised on 19 April 2017.

The plans continued to take shape during spring 2017, in preparation for putting a clear proposal to the Humanities and Social Sciences Disciplinary Domain Board before summer. It was further decided that CIRCUS should be organisationally placed at the level of the domain rather than at any of the six faculties within the domain. This appears logical in hindsight. Nevertheless, it deviated from the ingrained practice of attaching centres to a department at a faculty within the domain. The board approved the final proposal and asked the University Board of Uppsala University to establish CIRCUS. CIRCUS was then formally established by a decision of the University Board in November 2017. The instructions for CIRCUS were subsequently approved by the domain board in December 2017.

During 2017, the AFFAF group held meetings not only to discuss drafts of instructions, how to assess the applications for support for research networks or the recruitment of a future director for CIRCUS. During the autumn of 2017 they were also looking for a possible physical place for CIRCUS. Anna Singer recalled in 2024 that they had visited several possible buildings, but that it had all fallen into place when they had visited the Old Observatory. Like the

acronym CIRCUS, the idea of being at an actual observatory provided productive connotations. The idea of a favoured place solidified in early 2018.

The board of CIRCUS was appointed in April 2018. It included several people who had been involved in the preparations, such as Anna Lindström, Mattias Martinson and Nils Hertting. Lindström was elected as the first chair of the board. The agenda included the continued work of fully establishing CIRCUS and recruiting a director. The initiative had become a new formal unit within Uppsala University less than two years after the formative study visits to Oxford and Cambridge and around a year after it had been given its name.

SOMETIMES IT TAKES A UNIVERSITY TO CREATE A CIRCUS

In my view it is clear that what made CIRCUS possible was an intricate set of interlinked initiatives *and* a set of enabling contingencies. I have here identified in broad strokes how some aspects of the then present organisation became perceived as inadequate and how a group of people had gathered to explore other possibilities. I have more briefly noted that there were positions of resistance towards such changes within the organisation. However, it is notable how this group had secured a trusted status where they were not seen as pushing what could be perceived as self-serving agendas. Moreover, the group had conduits to broader research policy discussions and they were partly entwined with a new leadership at the domain. Over time, the sustained endeavours of the

group and favourable contingencies produced the idea of creating CIRCUS.

There is a broader lesson to be drawn from this story. A university is rarely, if ever, of one mind when it comes to organisational change. Uppsala University is no exception. It is more like a complex organisational ecology of varying outlooks, orientations and opinions. This means that aspirations for organisational change will elicit a variety of positions that aim to shape, promote or inhibit the endeavour. There is something deeply sound in this state of affairs. Disunity can promote reflective and constructive deliberations. It can, however, also foster knee-jerk suspicions of hidden ulterior motives on the part of those who hold a position that differs from one's own. Bringing an endeavour like the creation of CIRCUS to fruition might thus require a trustworthy and patient bridging of a significant proportion of the varying outlooks, orientations and opinions that make up the complex organisational ecology of a university like Uppsala University. This is a worthy lesson to take from the efforts of the AFFAF group led by Anna Singer.

FOOTNOTES

1. My translation. Internal web news dated 14 November 2016.

3. <https://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/about/> [accessed 7 May 2024].

2. Arbetsgruppen för främjande av forskningssamarbete.

4. TORCH Annual Review 2013–14.

Maria Pananaki

CIRCUS

is a large number
of researcher initiatives



INTRODUCTION

ICIRCUS has been serving as a platform for cross-cutting research collaborations, facilitating multi- and interdisciplinary work for over 250 researchers. Their efforts have given rise to many research initiatives, projects and collaborations. This chapter aims to explore the evolution of their work, highlighting the role CIRCUS has played in nurturing these endeavours.

The voices in these pages represent a composite of over 30 researchers who have collaborated with CIRCUS, sharing their insights and feedback in survey responses. These surveys were conducted and coded using Atlas.ti, software for coding and annotating large volumes of text. The reflections in this chapter are based on this collective feedback and are here presented through a fabricated panel conversation and discussion with the audience. While the names and department affiliations mentioned are fictitious (except for CIRCUS staff), they reflect the diverse range of faculties and disciplines involved with CIRCUS.

Imagine stepping into a room bustling with people talking at the Humanities Theatre. You notice a mix of familiar and unfamiliar faces from every corner of Uppsala University, finding their way to a seat. Will they claim a spot up front or settle at the back? Regardless of their choice, the stage is primed for a session of reflection and shared insights on interdisciplinary efforts, hosted and guided by CIRCUS.

MARIA Esteemed researchers, it brings us great joy to see that so many of you are honouring us with your presence! My name is Maria Pananaki, Project Coordinator at CIRCUS, and I will moderate today's conversation. I am accompanied by Claes-Fredrik Helgesson, otherwise known as CF, Director of CIRCUS and Ingrid Berg, Deputy Director, as we together host this event.

Each of you has taken part in a CIRCUS support form or event, and we hope to maintain this connection. Today's gathering aims to place your voices at the heart of our discussion – to share your experiences with fellow researchers and to explore how CIRCUS has contributed to new cross-disciplinary research initiatives. We are thus pleased to welcome a panel discussion featuring four researchers who have been involved in our research networks and project development groups. A warm welcome to Patrik Larsson, Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Theology; Catherine Holms, Senior Researcher at the Department of Civil and Industrial Engineering; David Smith, Doctoral Candidate at the Department of Women's and Children's Health; and Lena Mattson, Senior Researcher at the Department of Sociology. We also invite questions and contributions from the audience during the conversation.

PEPPY AND HAPPY!

MARIA To start off our discussion, CIRCUS seeks to create a platform that nurtures creativity and collaboration by balancing seriousness and playfulness. What are your thoughts on this approach?



PATRIK Ah, I remember CIRCUS in the Age of Covid...that was definitely a glimpse of light! Hard to forget your online Interdisciplinary Garden Party in 2020.

DAVID Right. I found the entire event, from the distribution of party kits to the various chat rooms, to be an innovative method of redefining social and professional academic engagement at a time when gathering in large groups was not feasible.

LENA I also appreciated the blend of enjoyment and seriousness, a combination that is not contradictory in the least.

CATHERINE Indeed, the details contributed significantly to the overall experience! It was quite remarkable to meet many unknown faces from our shared workplace at Uppsala University in such a manner.

DAVID I would also like to highlight the enthusiasm exhibited by CIRCUS in actively supporting and aiding our work. CIRCUS goes beyond mere financial support; the expertise and resources they offer should be widely acknowledged and shared.

PATRIK Certainly, it's crucial to underline your consistently positive and uplifting attitude in our interactions. Your enthusiasm is truly infectious!

CF I see a hand raised here in the front. Please, what is your question?

ELSA-AUDIENCE Hi, my name is Elsa and I am a researcher at the Department of Business Studies. I can recognise both the enthusiasm and the peppiness in CIRCUS's approach. One significant challenge that interdisciplinary researchers face, though, is to create and maintain meaningful collaborations. What has been the panellists' experience in that respect?

LENA I can certainly understand this dilemma. From what I've encountered, it's challenging to strike a balance between involving individual network members and ensuring that network activities and outcomes align well with their own work. Nevertheless, the guidance offered by CIRCUS has proven invaluable, acting as a platform for connecting with researchers in other disciplines within humanities and the social sciences who were previously beyond our network's reach.

CATHERINE Defining the parameters of our network also presents its own set of challenges, as we must navigate which activities and individuals are encompassed within its scope and which fall outside of it. However, our outreach efforts for collaboration were met with enthusiasm and garnered swift recognition, partly owing to our affiliation with CIRCUS. Building meaningful connections with researchers is vital for sustaining interdisciplinary endeavours.

PATRIK Sure, but you know, it is a bit of a struggle for a junior interdisciplinary researcher to build a network that actually means something. It is not just about our research; we must also navigate all these organisational challenges.

For example, creating effective cross-disciplinary environments is crucial to prevent younger researchers from feeling trapped in a career dead-end, where opportunities to enhance their CV are limited.

MARIA That is unfortunately true. The struggle to build meaningful networks and avoid career dead-ends resonates with the broader themes explored in discussions on interdisciplinary academia. Junior researchers are constantly balancing academic demands with the specific institutional context that heavily influences their career opportunities and obstacles (see Lyall 2019, 39).

INGRID I agree with Maria and I would also like to add that at CIRCUS, we are deeply engaged in the ongoing discourse about junior researchers' career advancement in cross-disciplinary research. We actively seek to engage with junior researchers and provide platforms to build connections, such as our annual Interdisciplinary Summer School. But that's a story for another time (see chapter 6).

SUCCESS IS MORE THAN FUNDING

MARIA Moving on to the next point of discussion, one of our guiding mottos in CIRCUS's different support forms is 'trust the process'. This notion emphasises that, in essence, the journey of crafting a favourable outcome holds as much significance as any envisioned destination. How has trusting the process influenced your research journey and ultimately led to meaningful outcomes?

PATRIK Indeed, financial resources enable the purchase of time, a precious commodity in academic life. While the practical help from CIRCUS has been exceptional, the moral support provided has been equally crucial.

CATHERINE I agree. It's important to dedicate an appropriate amount of time to the application process and to start it well ahead of time. In both regards, CIRCUS provides favourable conditions through its seed money support and the structure and timing of the seminar series.

DAVID For our team, CIRCUS has been a platform for sharing experiences beyond institutional constraints and introduced a working method that encourages researchers to articulate their ideas early and gradually refine them. This structured framework fostered a more task-oriented approach.

MARIA Ah, I spot a hand waving eagerly at the back! Please, go ahead!

DANIEL-AUDIENCE Hi, my name is Daniel, PhD student at the Department of Physics and Astronomy. Having only taken part in a single CIRCUS event, my familiarity with the various support forms is limited. Could you share more details about the help provided, aside from financial support?

MARIA Of course. Would anyone like to share their experience?

CATHERINE Certainly, I would like to emphasise that CIRCUS offered invaluable aid by providing proofreading and feedback on draft versions, even with limited notice.

LENA Likewise, we have experienced CIRCUS's remarkable responsiveness to our inquiries, offering feedback that prompted us to restructure and even revise the title of an application.

PATRIK Your flexible and unconventional approach to communication with us has also been crucial. It has enabled us to 'think outside the box'!

MARIA We have another question. Please!

STEFAN-AUDIENCE Yes, thank you. I am Stefan from the Department of Psychology. I guess mine is more of a comment rather than a question. I completely grasp the importance of both moral and practical support in our research journeys. However, let's not skirt around the truth: in the research world, the absence of funding is often synonymous with failure.

INGRID Absolutely. While the absence of external funding can indeed present significant challenges, it's essential to remember that setbacks and failures are not endpoints but rather opportunities for learning.

MARIA One example is that we often recommend creating a 'Collaborator's Prenup' within the research group (Lyll et al. 2011). The aim of this pre-nup is to establish clear expectations and foster open communication from the outset, throughout the duration, and even after the completion of a collaborative project. By starting with a well-defined plan, researchers have the opportunity to

regularly reassess and reflect on the project's progress. This not only helps in navigating the journey, but also encourages discussions on lessons learned. Regardless of the project's outcome, this experience is invaluable and something researchers can carry with them into future endeavours.

CF I see both Maria's and Ingrid's points and we do offer tools and support to navigate this challenge. However, it is also important to understand that encountering failure is an inevitable aspect of academic life. Universities ought to be good not only at facilitating success, but also at helping us to appreciate the effort. I think it is crucial for academic institutions to create an environment where we become good at acknowledging and learning from failure.

WHO DOESN'T LOVE A CIRCUS FIKA?

MARIA We cannot conclude today's conversation without highlighting what we believe is an essential element that fuels our intellectual discussions and collaborations: *fika*. Our aim with this social practice is to enhance our platform for cultivating relationships beyond research topics, and foster an environment where ideas flow freely. What are your thoughts on that?

DAVID CIRCUS has been offering venues and coordinating events, along with brewing coffee and arranging pastries for our gatherings. This should not be underestimated,

as *fika* has been a cornerstone of our network's approach to cultivating an inclusive and positive academic atmosphere.

LENA I also remember that CIRCUS events prioritise generous coffee breaks for freer discussions among participants. Many event schedules tend to be overly packed, neglecting the importance of allowing attendees time to digest content and connect with others.

PATRIK Holding seminars and workshops in venues outside participants' respective departments has also been a strategic move in cultivating relationships. Gathering on neutral territory not only encourages collaboration but also fosters a deeper sense of cohesion within the network.

CATHERINE For us, the Observatory has served as both a physical and social hub where diverse, and occasionally opposing, perspectives converge.

MARIA Yes, a question please!

SARA-AUDIENCE Hi, my name is Sara and I am a postdoc at the Department of Law. I wanted to delve deeper into the last comment regarding meeting diverse voices. How has that influenced your collaboration process?

CATHERINE In our experience, while collaboration eventually proved successful, it was a gradual process to grasp how our individual skills, both within our respective disciplines and across them, could enhance the project.

DAVID In our case, when we started we held varying interpretations of what defines a theory, a model, and similar concepts. Nonetheless, this was only a small communication challenge within the group.

PATRIK Engaging in interdisciplinary research presents challenges, particularly when navigating diverse research traditions and conceptual frameworks, often resulting in a divergence in language and understanding. Nevertheless, it should be of interest to all of us to strive to bridge these gaps when embarking on such collaborations.

CF If I may add, navigating the complexity of interdisciplinary dialogues often requires a holistic approach; on the one hand, critically evaluating the beliefs and assumptions inherent in a particular perspective and on the other hand, immersing oneself in the worldview of a particular discipline or viewpoint, even if it may seem foreign or contradictory to one's own beliefs (Strober 2011). By actively seeking out and valuing diverse perspectives, interdisciplinary teams can create a more nuanced understanding of complex problems, which can facilitate respectful dialogue across disciplines and promote intellectual growth.

MARIA And with that reflection, I think it's time to conclude what I believe has been an insightful conversation. I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our esteemed panelists and our engaged audience for sharing your thoughts and reflections! We invite you to explore our *research exhibition*, where you can discover the work of our research networks and project development groups over the years.

We hope this exhibition will inspire you and serve as a catalyst for further interdisciplinary dialogues and connections to flourish.

Imagine yourself exiting the theatre amidst a crowd of fellow researchers making your way to the research exhibition. There, the discussions centre around the refinement and realisation of both existing and novel research ideas.

This chapter illuminates the impact of CIRCUS in nurturing cross-cutting research endeavours and sustaining collaborative efforts. Drawing upon a collective of reflections shared by researchers involved with CIRCUS, it highlights the organisation's dedication to facilitating interdisciplinary work.

Outside the Humanities Theatre there is an exhibition with posters from all research networks and project development groups supported by CIRCUS over the years.

CIRCUS'S CROSS-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH NETWORKS

2019–2020

Bostaden som rättighet

Main applicant: Emma Holmqvist, Institute for Housing and Urban Research. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Law

Ecological Narratives: Bio/Cyber/Semiotic Perspectives

Main applicant: Katherine Hayles, Department of English. Faculties represented: Languages, Arts

Kulturarv och etik i fred och konflikt

Main applicant: Elisabeth Schellekens Dammann, Department of Philosophy. Faculties represented: Arts, Social Sciences

Nature as Culture: The (Re)production of Common Sense (NaC)

Main applicant: Ulrika Dahl, Centre for Gender Research. Faculties represented: Arts, Law, Social Sciences, Theology, Medicine

2020–2021

HERO – Den högre utbildningen som forskningsobjekt

Main applicant: Linda Wedlin, Department of Business Studies. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts, Educational Sciences

The Interdisciplinary Island and Seascape Research Cluster

Main applicant: Helene Martinsson-Wallin, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History. Faculties represented: Arts

Justice, Sustainability and Arctic Futures

Main applicant: Corine Wood-Donnelly, Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts, Theology

Migration as a Legal and Political Process

Main applicant: Rebecca Thorburn Stern, Centre for Multidisciplinary Research on Religion and Society (CRS). Faculties represented: Theology, Law, Arts, Social Sciences

Studies on Education, Migration and Segregation (EMS)

Main applicant: Håkan Forsberg, Department of Education. Faculties represented: Educational Sciences, Social Sciences

TextWorlds: Global Mapping of Texts from the Pre-Modern World

Main applicant: Rune Rattenborg, Department of Linguistics and Philology. Faculties represented: Languages, Arts

2021–2022

Aquifers in the Anthropocene

Main applicant: Susann Bæz Ullberg, Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology. Faculties represented: Arts, Law, Social Sciences

Historical Study of National Christianities

Main applicant: Urban Claesson, Department of Theology. Faculties represented: Theology, Educational Sciences, Arts

Ledarskap, effektivitet och rättsstatlighet i framtida kriser

Main applicant: Olof Wilske, Department of Law. Faculties represented: Law, Social Sciences

Anxiety – An Interdisciplinary Research Network

Main applicant: Malin Gingnell, Department of Psychology. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts, Theology, Languages, Medicine

Den digitala staden

Main applicant: John Östh, Department of Human Geography. Faculties represented: Social Sciences

FAL: Fieldwork in Anthropology and Linguistics

Main applicant: Harald Hammarstrom, Department of Linguistics and Philology. Faculties represented: Languages, Arts

2022–2023

Heritage Transformations

Main applicant: Cecilia Rodéhn, Centre for Gender Studies. Faculties represented: Arts, Languages, Social Sciences, Law, Theology

Inre kraft

Main applicant: Freddie Lymeus, Institute for Housing and Urban Research. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts, Theology

Image Content Through AI Pre-training

Main applicant: Jan von Bonsdorff, Department of Art History. Faculties represented: Arts, Languages, Theology

Rasism och diskriminering i den svenska skolan

Main applicant: Claes Tångh Wrangel, Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies on Racism (CEMFOR). Faculties represented: Theology, Educational Sciences, Social Sciences

Research Network on Digital Politics

Main applicant: Alexandra Segerberg, Department of Government. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Languages, Law, Science and Technology

Uppsala Human Rights Research Network

Main applicant: Anna-Sara Lind, Department of Law. Faculties represented: Law, Social Sciences, Theology

2023–2024

Organizing Local Food

Main applicant: Daniel Lövgren, Department of Informatics and Media. Faculties represented: Social Sciences

Tvångsvårdens former

Main applicant: Moa Kindström Dahlin, Department of Law. Faculties represented: Law, Social Sciences

Uppsala University Network on Indo-European Studies of Cultures, Languages and Traditions (UNI-CULT):

Main applicant: Terje Østigård, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History. Faculties represented: Arts, Languages, Theology

Uppsala Technical Humanities Network

Main applicant: Eva Lindqvist Sandgren, Department of Art History. Faculties represented: Arts

USER: Uppsala Smart Energy Research

Main applicant: Peter Juslin, Department of Psychology. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Science and Technology

**CIRCUS' CROSS-
DISCIPLINARY
PROJECT GROUPS**

2020–2021

Artificiell intelligens, moraliskt aktörskap och ansvarsutkrävande
Main applicant: Johan Eddebo, Department of Theology. Faculties represented: Theology

MAIN (Mainstreaming Fascism: Culture, Nostalgia and the Global Rise of Radical Nationalism)
Main applicant: Mattias Gardell, Department of Theology. Faculties represented: Theology

Sanatoriet som socialkulturell arena 1891–1945
Main applicant: Britt-Inger Johansson, Department of Art History. Faculties represented: Arts

The Image as the Living Counterpart: How Art and Visual Ephemera can Contribute to Beneficial AI Modelling
Main applicant: Jan von

Bonsdorff, Department of Art History. Faculties represented: Arts, Science and Technology

Innovating Funerals and Funeral Rites in Sweden
Main applicant: Johan Jansson, Department of Human Geography. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Theology

Retorik och avtalsrätt
Main applicant: Erik Bengtson, Department of Literature and Rhetoric. Faculties represented: Arts, Law

PLATYPUS: Participatory Play in Public Heritage Spaces
Main applicant: Lina Eklund, Department of Informatics and Media. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts

Moving and Mobilizing Meaning. Competitive influence through international communication in a multipolar digitalized global environment (DigInCom)
Main applicant: Göran Svensson, Department of Informatics and Media. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Languages

Digital Management of Reproductive Health
Main applicant: Helga Sadowski, Department of Informatics and Media. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts

2021–2022

Self-Referential Social Perception at the Macro Level
Main applicant: Mikael Bask, Department of Economics. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Science and Technology

Landsbygder: representationer av ruralt och lokalt i svensk litteratur 2000–2020
Main applicant: Anna Carin Billing, Department of Literature and Rhetoric. Faculties represented: Arts, Social Sciences

The Art of Migrating
Main applicant: Tina Mathisen, Department of Human Geography. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts

Ludum Platform: Video games and learning in children
Main applicant: Joshua

Juvrud, Department of Game Design. Faculties represented: Arts, Social Sciences

Att stärka inre kraft hos personer utsatta för våld i nära relationer
Main applicant: Freddie Lymeus, Institute for Housing and Urban Research. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts, Educational Sciences

Revealing the Roots of Minoan Language and Culture through Combined Approaches
Main applicant: Anna Foka, Department of ALM. Faculties represented: Arts, Languages, Medicine

Pandemic Racism – Life and Death in the Times of the Corona Virus
Main applicant: Irene Molina, Institute for Housing and Urban Research. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Theology, Medicine

The Fight against Global Antibiotic Resistance
Main applicant: Simone Callegari, Department of Informatics and Media. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Science and Technology

2022–2023

Frigör universiteten

Main applicant: Johanna Ringarp, Department of Education. Faculties represented: Educational Sciences, Arts

Företagsrekonstruktion: Mot en typologi för livkraftstestet

Main applicant: Jonatan Schytzer, Department of Law. Faculties represented: Law, Social Sciences

REASON: Researching Administrative Decisions: An Ethico-Legal Approach to Reason-Giving

Main applicant: Johanna Romare, Department of Theology. Faculties represented: Theology, Law

Consumer Behaviour and Antibiotic Resistance: A Sustainability Issue

Main applicant: Anna-Carin Nordvall, Department of Business studies. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Medicine

Sanning, fiktion och juridiskt ansvar. Den auktoritära impulsen som hermeneutiskt problem i skönlitteratur och svensk rättstext

Main applicant: Joel Samuelsson, Department of Law. Faculties represented: Law, Arts

Following the Money: Etablerandet av humanvetenskapernas forskningsfinansiella infrastruktur

Main applicant: Per Wisselgren, Department of History of Science and Ideas. Faculties represented: Arts, Educational Sciences

Rasism och diskriminering i den svenska förskolan och skolan

Main applicant: Annika Nilsson, Department of Law. Faculties represented: Law, Theology, Educational Sciences

Skolan som kyrka: Kyrkliga praktiker i svenska folkskolemiljöer 1850–1950

Main applicant: David Sjögren, Department of Education. Faculties represented: Educational Sciences, Theology, Arts

Tvångsvårdens former

Main applicant: Stefan Sjöström, Department of Sociology. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Law

2023–2024

POMMAC (Pär och Mathias med Anna-Carin)

Main applicant: Pär Ågerfalk, Department of Informatics and Media. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Science and Technology

SUSTAIN (Survive and Thrive Action Interventions)

Main applicant: Hannah Bradby, Department of Sociology. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Medicine

eHealth Data Analysis Group (eHDA)

Main applicant: Fan Wallentin, Department of Statistics. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts, Medicine

Larpocracy

Main applicant: Jon Back, Department of Informatics and Media. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Arts

Nature for whom?

Main Applicant: Tom Mels, Department of Human Geography. Faculties represented: Social Sciences, Science and Technology, Medicine

Gamla Uppsala? Archaeological Treasures beneath a Cathedral

Main applicant: Eva Lindqvist Sandgren, Department of Art History. Faculties represented: Arts

Arting, Curating, Wording, Worlding: Artistic Practices as Methods in Academia

Main applicant: Anna Orrghen, Department of Art History. Faculties represented: Arts, Social Sciences

Curated by Ingrid Berg

CIRCUS

is an exhibition



An organisation like CIRCUS is made up of its people and its activities – the researchers that create inspiring workshops and meetings, and the staff and board that organise events, run the operation and develop new ways of supporting interdisciplinary research. But an organisation also has a material manifestation – it creates artefacts that become representations of its vision and its context.

In 2023, CIRCUS gathered its material culture into an exhibition celebrating the first five years of CIRCUS. The exhibition opened on 30 May at the annual Interdisciplinary Garden Party in the Old Observatory. This chapter is a catalogue of artefacts that were on display.



ARTEFACT 1: THE SNOW GLOBE The snow globe – a common novelty Christmas decoration – symbolises CIRCUS and Uppsala University’s special connection to TORCH and the University of Oxford

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE SNOW GLOBE
A composite object of ceramics and glass, this undated and unstamped snow globe is a striking object. In the centre, it features the Radcliffe Camera at the University of Oxford. The building was erected in 1737–1749 and serves as a reading room for the Bodleian Library. Along the sides of the globe, underneath the glass dome, we see other examples of famous buildings: the Bridge of Sighs and Christ Church’s Tom Tower and College. Interestingly, the Radcliffe Camera features again along the sides of the globe – perhaps underlining the special importance of this building in the history of knowledge and *Bildung* at the university.

The globe’s intended purpose as Christmas decoration would suggest that a winter theme would run throughout the iconography, analogous to the traditional Santa-Claus-and-reindeer motif popularised in snow globes across the world. Here, instead, we see trees in full bloom. A figure wearing blue trousers and a white shirt practices the traditional art of ‘punting’ along the river. Inside the dome, however, snow falls on the Radcliffe Camera. This blending of seasons perhaps suggests the permanence of the university – a place of learning for all seasons.

CIRCUS AND TORCH – A BLOSSOMING FRIENDSHIP
The snow globe was purchased during a visit to Oxford by the staff at CIRCUS in 2020, just before the pandemic hit Europe. Since then, it has held a prime position at the office as a reminder of the international network of interdisciplinary centres catering to the needs of imaginative researchers worldwide.

In the mid-2010s, CIRCUS only existed as an embryo in the imagination of the Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences. Looking for inspiration on how to foster and encourage interdisciplinary research, they turned to the University of Oxford. Founded in 2013, the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH) aims to promote interdisciplinary research, as well as collaborations with external stakeholders through their Knowledge Exchange Programme. In 2020, CIRCUS staff visited TORCH. Then, two years later, staff from TORCH reciprocated the visit in Uppsala, and took part in the CIRCUS Summer School in 2022.

Today, we at CIRCUS are happy to call ourselves friends of TORCH. In 2023, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding between our two universities and we are starting to facilitate closer collaborations between our researchers.

FACTS	glass, adhesive, fake snow (...).
Snow Globe	Provenance: Purchased
Date of manufacture: 2020 CE (terminus ante quem)	at a gift shop in Oxford by Ms Mella Köjs and graciously
Materials: Painted ceramics,	donated to CIRCUS in 2020.



ARTEFACT 2: EMBROIDERY Cross-disciplinary research is very much like tossing a fruit salad – it takes a bit of extra work, but the result can be delicious!

FRUIT SALAD DAY

“Are you having a fruit salad day when you visit other faculties, or what’s going on?”

This question was posed by a friend and colleague of Ingrid Berg (who shall remain anonymous). Ingrid felt inspired and created a cross-stitch embroidery for CIRCUS. The motif features bananas, cherries, an orange and a watermelon (objectively the most delicious of fruits and also quite easy to embroider). Since 2021, the embroidery has decorated the seminar room Cassiopeia in the Old Observatory.

A fruit salad is composed of many different kinds of fruit – all of them bring something unique to the dish. The taste of the fruits has to harmonise but they still keep their distinctive flavours. We can easily draw an analogy to cross-disciplinary projects and networks. Here, people from different backgrounds and disciplines come together to investigate a research problem and they all bring something to the table.

In the best of salads, you can be an interdisciplinary researcher while still keeping the delicious flavour of your preferred discipline.

● THE CRUX OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

● For many researchers, attending a seminar or workshop at another department can be like venturing into unknown territory. For centuries, the university system has created silos and boundaries between disciplines and people. The upside is specialisation – a skill necessary to solve many specific research problems. The downside is isolation – an obstacle when facing ‘wicked problems’ that require interdisciplinary solutions.

The mission of CIRCUS is to strengthen researchers’ abilities to collaborate across departments, faculties and domains. This is done through open calls for researchers to form networks and project groups and to organise seminar series, workshops or conferences. Every step of the way, CIRCUS offers financial and administrative support as well as mentoring on best praxis and solutions to challenges that arise when collaborating.

We are here to make your collaboration as fruitful as possible (pun intended).

FACTS

Embroidery

Date of manufacture: 2021 CE

Materials: Aida fabric
(cotton), thread, glass, wood,
metal, paper.



ARTEFACT 3: THE BOX When the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, CIRCUS moved its Garden Party online – the box of goodies symbolises the importance of keeping in touch and of caring for each other in times of crisis.

BOX OF COMPASSION AND CARE

A This unassuming paper box was sent to participants before the CIRCUS Interdisciplinary Garden Party in May 2020. It contains everything a researcher might need for a successful party: a straw, umbrella and ice tea mixture to make your own cocktail; a bar of soap to wash your hands (important during a pandemic); flower seeds to plant in your own at-home garden; a balloon for decorating your home office; snacks for munching; Trivial Pursuit cards for keeping up your general knowledge; and playing cards for engaging with the online magician. It also contained information about CIRCUS and forthcoming events.

The goodies in the box were used in the four virtual rooms in the Zoom Garden. Besides its function as a container of props, the box was also a reminder of the importance of caring for each other in times of stress and anxiety. As such, it symbolises the social commitment of support centres to cater to the needs of researchers and to care for our shared academic family. Research is a collective endeavour – and we need to make sure that we create a healthy and supportive environment where creative ideas and people can thrive.

CIRCUS AND THE PANDEMIC

In the spring of 2020, Uppsala University moved its operations online to meet new regulations. This caused a tremendous amount of extra work; a heavy duty fell on teaching staff and lecturers to create online content and restructure classes. The pandemic created both professional and personal insecurity and stress: Will I become sick? How can I protect my elderly relatives? How can I work at home with my kids hanging around the house? While Sweden did not take extreme measures in comparison to other countries, we all still felt restricted and worried.

At CIRCUS, we tried our best to keep up with the times. Our main mission is to create new research collaborations at the University, a mission which requires meetings of various kinds. We learned new methods for creative hybrid and virtual meetings. We arranged Zoom *fika* breaks for staying connected and our networks received an extension of their support from CIRCUS.

In the aftermath of the tumultuous year that was 2020, we are proud to have continued to build CIRCUS together with researchers and staff at our great University.

FACTS

The Box

Date of manufacture: 2020 CE

Materials: Paper, glue.



Johan Ståhl, Professional Magician.

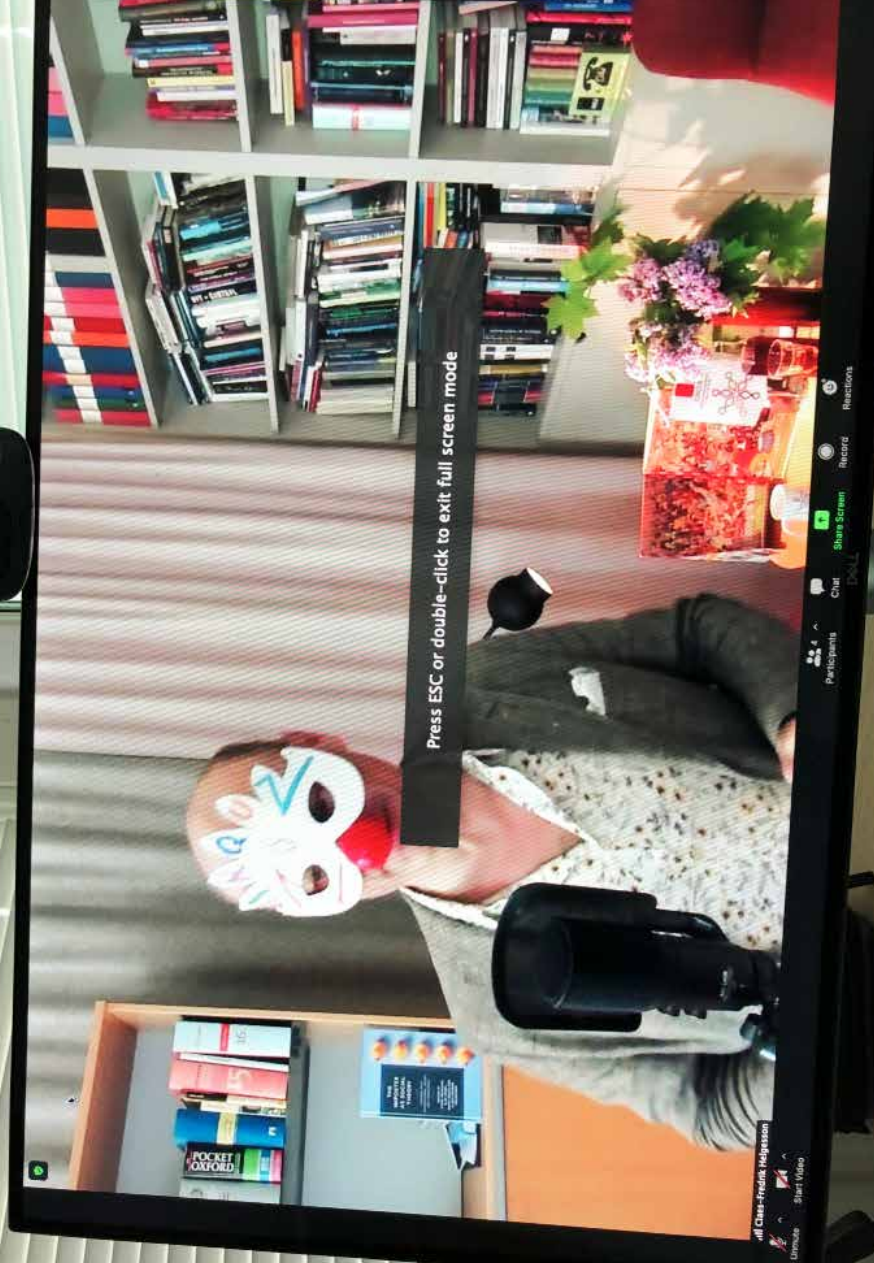
ARTEFACT 4: THE PROFESSOR CARDS In academia we meet a lot of interesting characters – the professor cards are a fun way to reflect on the identity of ourselves and others.

THE PROFESSOR CARDS

As the pandemic entered its second year, CIRCUS hosted its second online Interdisciplinary Garden Party. One of the themes of the party was academic identities. The *Professorial (stereo)type collector cards* were distributed in the gift boxes sent out to the participants. The box also included a mask that you could design yourself.

In the collector cards, we meet nine different characters based on common (stereo)types of professors that you encounter at departments across the University – ranging from the attention-seeking Professor Limelight to the bitter Professor of Eternal Grudges. The cards are one way of opening up a discussion on who we are or who we aspire (not) to be.

At CIRCUS, we believe in playful seriousness and that games are a great way of learning new things. We have, for instance, worked with the Department of Game Design to develop various role-playing exercises to use in interdisciplinary settings. By reflecting on our own identities and practices, we can begin to talk in earnest about the ‘politics of belonging’ in academia and the inclusionary and exclusionary processes that we all are a part of.



INTERDISCIPLINARY IDENTITY

A very common concern for researchers engaging in cross-disciplinary work is the experience of a sense of identity crisis. If I venture outside my field, then who am I? Will I get tenure if I publish work that could be considered outside my discipline? Departments can sometimes be fierce gatekeepers and decide who to let in and who to keep out based on narrow definitions of a true member of the discipline.

Catherine Lyall has written extensively about how disciplines shape our professional identities. Interdisciplinary early-career researchers in particular feel stressed about matters of self-identification. Importantly, Lyall highlights that interdisciplinarity in itself is a valuable skill. *The Synergist* is a researcher who can identify new promising collaborations and who understands the mechanisms of interdisciplinary work. The Synergist is, in short, an expert in research integration!

In the best of worlds, we should be able to have multiple belongings in our shared academic family. And the particular skillset of synergists should be valued as a great academic resource.

FACTS

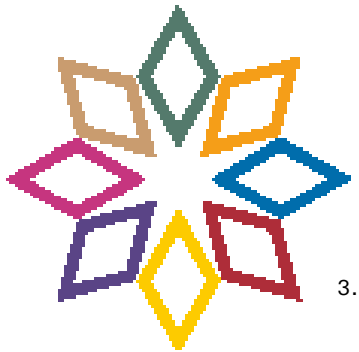
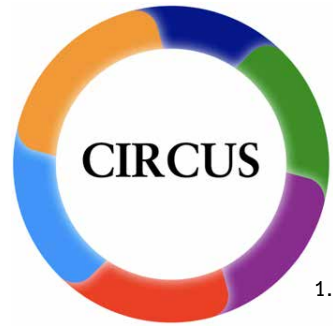
Professors Cards

Date of manufacture: 2021 CE

Materials: Paper, print.



ARTEFACT 5: THE SHAPE OF CIRCUS



THE RAPID DISCOVERY

The shape of CIRCUS was discovered in early 2019. Key figures in the quest for the CIRCUS shape were Tobbe Gozzi and the Director of CIRCUS. Their collaborative efforts to find the shape began in early January 2019. The actual discovery was declared at the end of the same month.

The discovery was hindered by several false finds. First, they found a multi-coloured circle of unclear provenance that claimed to be the actual shape of CIRCUS (1). They then found an agglomeration of circles (2) and an agglomeration of rhombi (3), both claiming to be the authentic representation of CIRCUS.

It was when they found a shape combining several circles and rhombi, that they knew that they had indeed discovered the true shape of CIRCUS (4).

The discovery resulted in a flurry of activity where the shape was put to use in a variety of expressions such as slide decks and roll-ups. In our curated collection we have a coffee cup, a deck of cards and a book-sized tote.

EVOKING MANY INTERPRETATIONS

Since its discovery in early 2019, the shape has been the subject of several conflicting interpretations. Some highlight how the circle alludes to the Latin word for ring and how the rhombus and strong colours are recurrent parts of the iconography of traditional circuses.

Others have suggested that the six coloured figures that make up the shape could be seen as the six faculties within the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences at Uppsala University.

There are additional readings suggesting that these figures are: neckties representing the masculine traits of academia; diverse people meeting in a meaningful scholarly conversation; or indeed daggers drawn within a secret congregation of knights.

The emerging established view is that the shape affords several both complementary and competing interpretations. Productive ambiguity is a key feature of the shape, as is its malleability. It is, just like CIRCUS as an organisation, open so as to expand rather than limit the number of fruitful possibilities.

FACTS

Coffee cup

Date of manufacture: 2019

Materials: Ceramic

Provenance: Purchased from a properly procured supplier.

Deck of cards

Date of manufacture: 2021

Materials: Coated paper.

Provenance: Made for CIRCUS third Interdisciplinary Garden Party (held online).

Book-sized tote

Date of manufacture: 2022

Materials: cotton

Provenance: Made for CIRCUS fourth Interdisciplinary Garden Party.



Maria Pananaki

CIRCUS

is a summer school

6

[A]t the crux of good interdisciplinary research lies not a shallow knowledge of myriad topics but a detailed understanding of how to make different forms of knowledge work together synergistically.

Lyall, Catherine (2019, p. 66)

WHY A SUMMER SCHOOL?
CIRCUS's Interdisciplinary Summer School emerged from conversations about how CIRCUS could enhance not just collective, but also individual competencies for effective collaboration in cross-disciplinary research. The central ideas revolved around the necessity of capacity building and a concentrated setting that extended beyond the existing support forms. These ideas culminated in the development of a three-day course, inaugurated in August 2022 at the Old Observatory. This was followed by a second summer school in August 2023, establishing it as an annual event at CIRCUS.

We have seen that we could contribute to substantial capacity-building in both the theory and practice of cross-cutting research in a way that the seminar series cannot achieve. A summer school would target both those who are already involved in CIRCUS support as well as others within Uppsala University. As a first step, a small-scale three-day summer school is planned for 2022 at the Observatory. (CIRCUS's plan for 2022)

This chapter unravels the making of the summer school, offering insights into the planning and implementation

processes along with reflections from teachers and participants involved.

EXPLORING INTEREST AND CRAFTING THE PROGRAMME

In the early stages of planning, we sought to gauge interest within Uppsala University through a survey. Sent out in February 2022 to over 400 individuals, the response was overwhelmingly positive. All 47 responses affirmed the appeal of a cross-disciplinary summer school. The survey provided a wealth of insights and suggestions, which we carefully organised into three broad categories:

- ◆ Theoretical perspectives on interdisciplinarity, delving into different concepts and approaches.
- ◆ Practical aspects of cross-disciplinary work, including organisational challenges.
- ◆ Specific research topics like sustainability and medical humanities, areas ripe for interdisciplinary exploration.

Moving forward, a workshop in April 2022 brought together ten enthusiastic researchers to refine our draft plans for the summer school. Splitting into groups, they discussed the proposed programme and shared their thoughts on potential topics as well as how to make the summer school inclusive. Their valuable input guided the development of our summer school programme.

As we subsequently shaped the framework for the summer school, our focus was on designing an enriching experience aligned with our core aims and learning objectives. These pillars guided us through the development of the course structure, the daily sessions and the evening activities.

The overarching aims of the summer school were to:

- ♦ Cultivate capacity in various facets of cross-cutting research.
- ♦ Provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on interdisciplinary research alongside practical, hands-on, experiences.
- ♦ Explore the potential, hurdles and opportunities inherent in research collaborations across disciplinary boundaries.

The specific objectives were crafted to assist participants in:

- ♦ Articulating key concepts central to discussions on multi- and interdisciplinarity and summarising pivotal literature on various forms of cross-cutting research.
- ♦ Addressing common challenges in cross-disciplinary research by applying relevant tools and practices.
- ♦ Balancing diverse roles and engagements within cross-cutting research collaborations.

The essence of our aims and objectives found form in sessions alternating between three main themes:

1. THEORY OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY: Sessions delve into various theories and concepts within interdisciplinary research, exploring epistemological and methodological foundations. These sessions elucidate the distinctions between inter- and multidisciplinary approaches, investigating the integration of knowledge and methods across disciplines.

2. WORKING IN ACADEMIA. This theme navigates two pivotal questions: How can we effectively collaborate in cross-cutting research projects? Who am I as an interdisciplinary researcher? Participants are equipped with tools to foster cohesive research collaborations and gain practical insights for a sustainable academic life. They engage in role-play sessions, facilitated by the Department of Game Design at Uppsala University, to hone communication and collaboration skills. Additionally, they participate in experiential workshops led by a professional academic career coach, exploring insights through physical movement and imagery, and reflecting on the challenges and rewards of an interdisciplinary academic path.

3. TOOLS, MAPS AND PRACTICES: International and local experts share experiences from cross-cutting research initiatives, introducing essential organisational structures. Attendees receive practical guid-

ance on navigating or initiating interdisciplinary research teams, learning about outreach strategies, stakeholder engagement and effective collaborative project creation. These sessions also provide insights into funding opportunities and useful tools for developing cross-cutting projects.

Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone.

“But which is the stone that supports the bridge?”

Kublai Khan asks.

“The bridge is not supported by one stone or another,”

Marco answers, “but by the line of the arch that they form.”

Kublai Kahn remains silent, reflecting. Then he adds:

“Why do you speak to me of the stones? It is only the arch that matters to me.”

Polo answers: “Without stones there is no arch.”

Calvino, Italo (1997, p. 74)

MAKING CONNECTIONS AND BUILDING TRADITIONS

The CIRCUS summer school serves as a dynamic platform catering to a diverse audience, including senior PhD students, junior researchers, seasoned tenured lecturers and professors at Uppsala University. Our paramount objective in participant selection is to cultivate inclusivity, drawing together a mix of individuals from

varied disciplines, genders, seniority levels, and diverse national and international research backgrounds. In both 2022 and 2023, the summer school welcomed 18 participants, representing different faculties within the University, contributing to a vibrant combination of knowledge and experience.

Beyond the process of participant recruitment, the engagement of qualified teachers was equally crucial. We were committed to assembling a distinguished faculty possessing a profound understanding of interdisciplinary research and capable of delivering both theoretical depth and practical insights. This quest for rich and diverse expertise led us to collaborate with professionals from Uppsala University, the University of Oxford (in 2022), Aalborg University and the University of Helsinki (in 2023), as well as a professional academic coach. The culmination of this effort was the formation of a 17-member faculty in both 2022 and 2023, each bringing a unique set of perspectives.

While the operational aspects of the summer school were taken care of by the CIRCUS staff, we were devoted to establishing enduring traditions. These traditions were introduced to participants on the first day, setting the tone for commitment and engagement throughout the summer school:

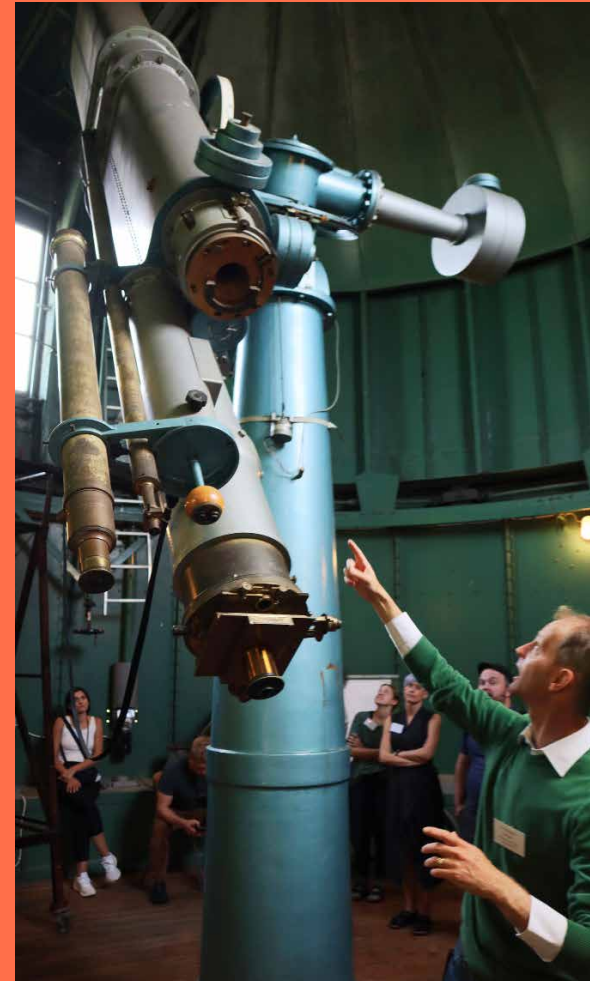
- ♦ Embrace a fluidity of languages for inclusive discussions.
- ♦ Foster a collaborative environment where everyone contributes to the enrichment of the present moment.

- ♦ Engage in collective efforts for mundane house-keeping tasks, reinforcing a sense of community with shared responsibilities.

The traditions not only aimed to enhance the overall experience of the summer school but also sought to cultivate a sense of ownership and an environment conducive to collaboration and lasting connections. An additional component intended to further cultivate this environment were the organised evening activities, which included a guided tour of the Observatory grounds and telescope, a documentary screening and discussion facilitated by a CIRCUS mentor, and a mingle and dinner at the Observatory. These activities were designed to provide opportunities for participants to engage beyond the academic setting, creating moments for shared experiences and deeper connections.

The CIRCUS Interdisciplinary Summer School began as an idea that we might be able to provide a setting for an immersive form of capacity building for interested researchers at Uppsala University. Now, after co-creating it for two years, it is becoming an evolving institution with a growing body of alumni who to a significant extent continue to engage in inter- and multidisciplinary endeavours. It is this momentum that has made the Interdisciplinary Summer School a part of what CIRCUS is.

p. 103 Summer school participants being shown the telescope at the Old Observatory by Eric Stempels, an astronomer at the Department of Physics and Astronomy, Uppsala University.



Claes-Fredrik Helgesson

CIRCUS

is made real by people and ideas

7

IT IS TIME FOR THE CODA

In this book we have aimed to exemplify what CIRCUS is about. We have covered some stories about the researcher experience, stories about the Old Observatory, about some artefacts and specific events, etc. These are all tiles of a larger mosaic of stories, stories of mundane progress, minor setbacks, and stories of lessons learned.

The broader picture we want to convey with this book is how all the stories of CIRCUS are made by people and ideas. There would really be no point to CIRCUS, had it not been for the many researchers that have found it meaningful to engage with CIRCUS in various ways. The plural is important here. A key feature of the very idea of CIRCUS is that it is open to welcoming groups of researchers pursuing very different ideas and projects and having very disparate outlooks and orientations. The seminar room might one day be full of researchers from various parts of the University sharing an interest in a tool for Bayesian analysis, and another day gather a multidisciplinary group of researchers exploring the sounds of poetry. Each such endeavour pursues its own pathway, but may in addition benefit from the possibilities of more unexpected juxtapositions.

What is much more difficult is to come to understand the way colleagues from different disciplines think: their assumptions; concepts; categories; methods of discerning, evaluating and reporting ‘truth’; and styles of arguing – their disciplinary cultures and habits of mind. (Strober 2011, 4)

In *Interdisciplinary conversations: Challenging habits of thought* (Strober 2011) the economist Myra Strober examined a set of interdisciplinary seminar series at universities in the United States and what had influenced how successful they were. In her analysis, she used the notion of ‘disciplinary habits of mind’ to describe how researchers in different disciplines have been trained to think. A central observation was that these normally implicit disciplinary habits of mind needed to become more explicit. This, in turn, required participants to become more aware of *their own* ingrained ways of seeing and understanding research problems. It further required the group to postpone what she called the ‘doubting game’, of which different disciplinary habits of mind regularly have their own elaborate version. For example, doubting the reliability of observations is central to scholarly work, but it could inhibit conversations when mobilised early in interdisciplinary encounters. Instead, she concluded that the reverse, the ‘believing game’, was a key component for making juxtapositions productive:

The process of synthesizing ideas from disparate disciplines is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. But it is precisely in that discomfort that the seeds of creativity lie, and if the group can continue to play the believing game – not insisting on certainty, closure, or judgments – participants may ultimately move to new truths and imaginative solutions. (Strober 2011, 165)

The broader lesson here is clear. There is a need to care for the ways researchers meet if we want them to productively gather in new constellations to pursue curious new avenues

or address so-called ‘wicked problems’. Just as questioning and doubt are essential in research for identifying the solid knowledge claims, believing is essential for imagining new ways to approach and define worthy research problems.

Again, the metaphor of the circus can come in handy, but this time as a metaphor for aspects of the world and how the artistic circus can actually provide advice on how to orient ourselves in the world. This brings us to the American poet Robert Lax, who examined the transience and cyclical nature of everyday life through the lens of the circus. To him, the image of the circus evoked ideas of the repetitive, yet changing. It brought forward the sense of community and the wonder and joy of the performers and their acts. In the poem he reflected on how he “often thought how much like a circus the world is, and how the more like a circus it becomes, the better.” (Lax 2000)

The circus is in motion, it requires
(calm) nerves, easy breathing, balance,
an ability to change from place to
place without inner disturbances.

Excerpt from *Circus Days and Nights* by Robert Lax (2000)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This entire book is in a way an extended set of acknowledgements. A central point of it is, after all, to highlight the importance of a multitude of people in making CIRCUS stories. These people are first and foremost all the researchers who have engaged with CIRCUS. Those who have come to seminars we have hosted, those who have attended our Interdisciplinary Summer School, those who have participated in the research networks and so on. Their essential importance to the whole idea of CIRCUS is emphasised throughout this book. One chapter is dedicated specifically to acknowledging the vision and initiative of the working group that created CIRCUS. Therefore, in these acknowledgements here, I focus on the less visible contributors to CIRCUS's everyday activities.

I would like to begin with those who by their, often invisible, day-to-day care and effort make it possible to make our metaphorical circus tent available, suitably prepared and open to welcome researchers. These are the dedicated staff at the secretariat: Ingrid Berg, Helena Grönqvist, Linda Isacson, Mella Köjs and Maria Pananaki. Your contributions and humour are indispensable for developing and caring for CIRCUS! Moreover, the secretariat has collaborated over the years with members of staff in other parts of Uppsala University for mundane, but crucial, functions like doing the accounting, providing HR services, and getting our internal IT system working. Over the years, CIRCUS has benefited from the efforts and care of, among others, Julia Brummer, Tobbe Gozzi, Linn Hellerstedt, Lena Holm, Richard Kelso, Johan Lundborg, Birgitta Magnusson, Kim Solin and Elin Tögenmark.

Your contributions are regularly invisible to the outside, but have nevertheless been very important! Thanks!

There are a number of people at units in other parts of Uppsala University with whom we have collaborated over the years, including Anders Westlin and his colleagues at the Research Support Unit, Anna Wallsten at the Innovation Partnership Office, Mathias Blob at Uppsala University Innovation, and Olle Jansson and Jenny Helin at Campus Gotland. Then there are our ‘centre siblings’, that is, other centres at Uppsala University who have multi-, inter- and/or transdisciplinary missions. From the outset, we have had rewarding contacts and gatherings for knowledge exchange with representatives from several of these, including: the Centre for Digital Humanities and Social Sciences (CDHU), the Centre for Disability Research (CFF), the Centre for Medical Humanities (CMH), the Centre for Multidisciplinary Research on Religion and Society (CRS), the Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies on Racism (CEMFOR), Higher Education and Research as Objects of Study (HERO), Uppsala Antibiotic Centre (UAC), and Uppsala University’s Centre for Women’s Mental Health (WOMHER). Thanks!

Another set of crucial contributions have been and are made by those involved in the formal governance structure of CIRCUS. Making vital decisions is naturally essential, but I would like to stress more how the development of CIRCUS has benefited from caring discussions and helpful suggestions from a large number of people in various functions involved in the governance of CIRCUS. First and foremost there is the dedicated CIRCUS board, which until the end of 2023 was chaired by Anna Lindström. Her suggestions and guidance were very helpful for CIRCUS and me person-

ally as director during the first five years. Thanks Anna! After serving two terms, Anna was succeeded by Annika Waern in January of this year, and we have got off to a good start in continuing the important chair–director collaboration. All the current and past members of the CIRCUS board have contributed over the years to illuminating and useful discussions that have shaped CIRCUS in more ways than I can list or even fully remember. These members are (in alphabetical order): Kajsa Ahlstrand, Carl Fredrik Bergström, Mats Benner, Erika Boije, Mikael Börjesson, Catarina Cederved, Anna Jonsson Cornell, Leyla Belle Drake, Johan Fritzell, Björn Hellman, Nils Hertting, Orsi Husz, Anna Lindström, Mattias Martinson, Christina Olin-Scheller, Carina Schlebusch, Folke Tersman, Annika Waern, Lynn Åkesson and Hampus Östh Gustafsson. Thanks!

In the governance domain, CIRCUS has similarly benefited from encouragement and productive discussions with other parts of the University management. This includes the deans and vice-rectors of the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences at Uppsala University, such as the previous and current vice-rectors, Torsten Svensson and Tora Holmberg. It further includes the discussions and encouragement from the former Vice-Chancellor Eva Åkesson and the current Vice-Chancellor Anders Hagfeldt. Thanks!

Another and final important group I would like to highlight are colleagues outside Uppsala who have also provided guidance and inspiration. These include the three members of the international review panel who evaluated CIRCUS in 2021–22. Christina Olin-Scheller, the review panel chair, was subsequently appointed to the board in 2024, and we have since stayed in touch in other ways with the other two

members of the panel, Catherine Lyall in Edinburgh and David Budtz Pedersen at Aalborg University. CIRCUS has also maintained contact with CRASSH in Cambridge and TORCH in Oxford since the inspirational visit in 2016 (see chapter 3) as well as forging new links, like those with colleagues working on similar missions at places such as the Interdisciplinary Academy (IDA) at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS), and Trinity College Dublin, which we visited in autumn 2023. This further includes the members of CIRCUS's International Advisory Board: Helge Jordheim, Alexandra Klass, Bernd Kortmann, Erin Leahey, Celia Lury, Victoria McGuinness, Uskali Mäki, Helen Small and Veronica Strang. Being woven into and part of a dispersed network of ventures and colleagues is and has been very important to the shaping of CIRCUS. Thanks!

It is hard to think of research without thinking about the communities within which it takes place. Initiatives like CIRCUS that aim to care for and bridge such communities are equally dependent on a lot of communal work.

This book would have remained an unrealised idea, had it not been for the early brainstorming with Alexandra Borg, Matilda Plöjel at Sailor Press, who designed the book and oversaw production, Thomas Hirter who typeset the text, and Linda Isacsson at CIRCUS, who coordinated us all to get our texts done. Thanks!

Claes-Fredrik Helgesson,
Director of CIRCUS
Uppsala, June 2024

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IMAGES:

p. 24 Royal Academy of Arts,
Stockholm.

p. 25 Unknown photographer.
Uppsala University Library.

p. 26 Uppsala University
Library.

p. 27 Photograph by Heinrich
Osti. Uppsala University
Library.

p. 28, 29, 82 Photographs
by Mella Köjs.

p. 54–55 Photograph by
Stephen Quigley.

p. 74, 78, 85, 89, 93, 103

Photographs by Linda Isacsson.

p. 86 Screen shot by
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A university centre like Centre for Integrated Research on Culture and Society (CIRCUS) has many stories. This book shares a few of them, including a story about the creation of CIRCUS, stories from researchers who have engaged with CIRCUS, and a tiny bit on the circus as a metaphor.

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