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Mode 2 and the tension between excellence and utility : the case of a policy-relevant research field in Sweden / Carin Hakansta ; Merle Jacob

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Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of changing science policy doctrines on the development of an academic field, working life research. Working life research is an interdisciplinary field of study in which researchers and stakeholders collaborated to produce relevant knowledge. The development of the field, we argue, was both facilitated and justified by the, at the time dominant, science policy orthodoxy in Sweden, sector research. Sector research science policy doctrine favoured stakeholder-driven research agendas in the fields relevant to the sector. This approach to agenda setting was highly contested by Swedish universities and left scientists vulnerable to the fallout from any conflicts arising among the stakeholder groupings that were part of the governance arrangement. Our case shows that working life research was in part a victim of the struggle between science and policy over who sets the agenda for science in Sweden. In this struggle, each side chose to use 'scientific quality' as a proxy for furthering its respective interests and visions for how science should be governed. The paper argues that this case is of interest to the continued elaboration of the Mode 2 thesis and the debate about 'relevant science'. We find that the close association with stakeholders and the concomitant dependence it created left working life research unable to defend itself against its critics and that this state of affairs was particularly problematic for social science research on working

08.7.2025

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