A SLOW FORM OF GOVERNANCE? COLLEGIAL ORGANIZATION AND TEMPORAL SYNCHRONIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SWEDISH UNIVERSITY REFORMS

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ABSTRACT

In the present discourse of university politics, collegiality has come to be viewed as a slow force – seemingly inefficient and conservative compared to popular management models. Concerns have thus been raised regarding the future prospects of such a form of governance in a society marked by haste and acceleration. One way to bring perspectives on this contentious issue is to perceive it in the light of the long history of the university. In this article, I derive insights about the shifting state of collegial governance through a survey of an intense period of reforms in Sweden c. 1850–1920 when higher education was allegedly engaged in a process of modernization and professionalization. Drawing on recent work in historical theory and science and technology studies (STS), I revisit contests and debates on collegiality in connection to a number of governmental commissions. Focusing on the co-existence – and collisions – of multiple temporalities reveals that overcoming potential problems associated with heterogeneous rhythms required an active work of synchronization by

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universities in order to make them appear timely, as higher education expanded along with the mounting ambitions of national politics, focused on centralization, efficiency, and rationalization. The analysis is structured around three focal issues for which collegial ideals and practices, including their temporal characteristics, were particularly questioned: (a) the composition of the university board, (b) the employment status of professors, and (c) hiring or promotion practices. Pointing at more structural challenges, this study highlights how collegiality requires a constant maintenance paired with an awareness of its longer and complex history.

Keywords: Collegial organization; multiple temporalities; synchronization; university reforms; Sweden; speed; efficiency

INTRODUCTION

A popular Swedish encyclopedia once stated that the "collegial system is considered to have the advantage of a more thorough consideration of cases, but also the disadvantage of their slower processing" (*Nordisk familjebok*, 1911, p. 543).[1] Similar notions echo in today's discourse about university reforms. Instrumental pressures to increase efficiency have long haunted the modern research universities, depicting them as "tired" institutions. Time thus has come to be treated as something burdensome rather than as a valuable resource, thereby transforming it into a central problem of university politics (Rider, 2016; Wedlin & Pallas, 2017b, p. 299). In line with such an approach, collegiality is commonly blamed for being cumbersome and slow. This has motivated organization theorists and others to probe whether this form of governance can survive in a society increasingly marked by haste and acceleration, a shift that has not left academia untouched (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016a, pp. 87, 103, 127; see also Bauman, 2012; Rosa, 2013).

In many cases, "slow collegiality" is contrasted with other forms of governance, such as more "modern" management models, particularly with the emergence of New Public Management in the late twentieth century. Marketization and the rise of the audit culture are seen as going hand-in-hand with a general temporal acceleration (e.g., Bjuremark, 2002, p. 22; Burneva, 2022, p. 25; Shore & Wright, 2004, 2015). Moreover, democratic practices also tend to speed up the rhythms of academic life as the university sector is forced to adapt to brief parliamentarian cycles (Ahlbäck Öberg et al., 2016, pp. 9–10). In current discourse about university reform, collegiality, on the other hand, is typically described as resistant to change, embodying a nostalgic longing for idealized pasts (Barnes, 2020, p. 151; Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016a, pp. 26–27, 34; Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010, pp. 30–31). But does this depiction really hold sway if the longer history of universities is considered?

While previous research has noted how collegial ideals were strained by new institutional reforms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

(Frängsmyr, 2017), few empirical studies have systematically explored the temporal critique of collegial organizations as a recurring theme in the history of universities. As noted in recent literature, it is imperative to historicize collegiality (Barnes, 2020). In line with this view, I demonstrate how a better knowledge of past negotiations of collegial ideals and practices may contribute to a revised understanding of the prospects of a collegial system today. To that end, I ask: Which conditions – including temporal ones – are required for this form of governance to function well and secure organizational legitimacy in the modern politics of knowledge (*cf*. Suchman, 1995)?

A CONTESTED CONCEPT AND THE NEED FOR SYNCHRONIZATION IN AN ERA OF MAJOR REFORM

It took until the late twentieth century for the multilayered and contested term "collegiality" [*kollegialitet*] to be ideologically condensed and become part of the Swedish vernacular, particularly taking off in the context of new reforms in the 1990s, as pointed out by Henrik Björck (2013, p. 10) in an important study of its conceptual history (see also Boberg, 2022, p. 29; Rider et al., 2014, p. 13; Sundberg, 2013; Wedlin & Pallas, 2017a, pp. 10–11). A century earlier, the term typically was employed more pluralistically. University boards and faculties, as well as other institutions, were referred to as colleges, as the general Swedish public administration had been based on a system of collegially governed bodies ever since the seventeenth century. So, rather than treating collegiality as an ideal type (shaped by the current use of the term), I adopt a more flexible approach in this article to avoid anachronisms. Charting how collegial notions were interpreted and mobilized in various ways, it is imperative to take the broader semantic landscape into account. Different versions or closely-related concepts, such as "collegial system," "colleges," "colleagues," "collegialism," etc., were regularly employed by professors and other scholars, indicating how they clearly perceived the university as a solid, yet multifaceted collegial organization.

While historically often regarded as an over-arching form of governance, collegiality today tends to materialize as "pockets" or "islands" within university organizations. Swedish state universities are generally based on a dualism, as management and collegial forms of governance blend or co-exist in shifting proportions (Sahlin, 2012, p. 199; Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016a, p. 11; Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2017; see also Lazega, 2020, p. 47). Most commentators, however, characterize collegiality as a waning phenomenon. In Sweden, recent debates have turned particularly intense as an abrupt process of de-collegialization has unfolded at a majority of institutions of higher education (Ahlbäck Öberg & Boberg, 2022, 2023). The most immediate driver of this process is the so-called "autonomy reform" of 2011, which deregulated collegial governance through faculty boards, and thus, in practice, promoted local centralization and line management. This development toward institutional autonomy,

which paradoxically endangers academic freedom on various levels, has also been observed in other Nordic countries (Nokkala & Bladh, 2014).

While the recent controversies have incited careful examinations of collegial conditions at Swedish universities, most studies have been relatively short-sighted, focusing primarily on the period after a major university reform in 1977. At that point, Sweden passed its first formal university law, which imposed a more centralized and standardized organization and strengthened ties between universities and societal recipients, for instance by incorporating additional public representatives into their local governance structures. The reform was seen as an epochal shift, marking a radical departure from traditional academic discourse. In line with that narrative, the previous organization of universities has been described as relatively static (e.g., Bjuremark, 2002, p. 33; Svensson, 1980, p. 39; Unemar Öst, 2009, p. 118). There are good reasons to nuance this picture, which falls into an archetypal dichotomic pattern, reminiscent of Mode 1 versus Mode 2, or Humboldt versus the mass university (Josephson et al., 2014, pp. 13–14). Even though the explicit use of the term collegiality is limited to recent decades, similar – and significant – debates on the university as a collegial organization do have a long history.

By examining a period of major reforms in Sweden that saw higher education undergoing a process of purported "modernization" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I show that the collegial organization was considered an obstacle to change on several occasions. It received criticism as several segments of Swedish public administration successively abandoned the seventeenth century collegial system, especially in the 1870s, by placing governmental agencies under the authority of single directors. University reforms in the late nineteenth century were generally fueled by liberal political currents that sought to impose this new and more managerial pattern of the national public administration on universities (Agevall & Olofsson, 2019, p. 79; Boberg, 2022, p. 22; Gribbe, 2022, pp. 10–11). In his doctoral dissertation, historian Göran Blomqvist (1992) outlines these organizational changes at the universities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the shifting state of academic freedom. Identifying a fundamental tension between ideals of autonomy and heteronomy, Blomqvist demonstrates how the conditions of universities became subject to change in a constant interplay with societal transformations. Looking at one aspect of these processes of change throughout the period in question, I contribute to this previous research on the organizational history of Swedish universities by addressing how the collegial governance at universities was reformed and debated with respect to temporal implications.

Issues of academic temporalities are still noticeably underexplored, despite a surge of anthropological, philosophical, and sociological inquiries into topics such as "academic timescapes" and "cultures of speed" in recent years (e.g., Kidd, 2021; Vostal, 2021), which are frequently linked to the "slow science" movement (e.g., Berg & Seeber, 2016; Salo & Heikkinen, 2018, p. 87; Stengers, 2018). Here, I approach the temporal features of collegiality through a special focus on the work of *temporal synchronization* conducted by a broad range of agents during

the period in question. Assuming the co-existence of multiple temporalities at given points in time, in line with the works of Reinhart Koselleck (2018), historian Helge Jordheim (2014, 2022) stressed that societies are marked by rhythms that constantly need to be synchronized with each other. There is no given "in-synchness" in history; social cohesion must be generated and maintained through active efforts. This insight obviously is salient at the organizational level and informs my analysis of contests of collegial ideals and practices, which, along with their diverse temporalities, were jeopardized by attempts to impose new temporal standards and make universities more homogenous and efficient.

As a dynamic arena, the university hosted a range of often colliding and seemingly incompatible times as academics had to take on a number of diverse roles and responsibilities (Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003; see also Clark, 2006). Synchronizing these times was critical to establishing the public legitimacy of the collegial organization. Universities, however, often exhibited a reactive pattern as they were forced to "keep up" with reforms implemented in other public sectors. With the general institutional expansion of the national university system (which in hindsight was rather small relative to the postwar period), the conditions of scholarship had been significantly transformed by the early twentieth century.[2] The steadily growing university system was reorganized in order to fit into a rapidly changing society. This adaptive process included the meticulous work of synchronization, perhaps particularly visible in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, as this period was characterized by numerous attempts worldwide to synchronize various times and establish coherent temporal standards (Ogle, 2015).

In empirical terms, this article illuminates discussions on the state of the collegial organization and its temporal entanglements in the context of a particularly intense period of university reforms (c. 1850–1920). Previously, the two Swedish state universities, that is, Uppsala (founded in 1477) and Lund (1666), had been regulated by statutes from the seventeenth century. Novel university statutes introduced in 1852, 1876, 1908, and 1916 were developed by governmental commissions and thus carried authoritative weight as they sought to balance dominant views, even though they did not fully represent public opinion. On the contrary, the commission reports provoked plenty of debates, and the proposals were not necessarily executed (Agevall & Olofsson, 2019, p. 91). This study, however, is not primarily concerned with the political processes as such, but rather with more fundamental discussions and how they evolved over time. The respective commission reports, together with some specific instances of fervent public debate, thus constitute the main sources for this analysis. Even if all commissions largely supported collegial ideals on a general level, they opened up discussions on which shape collegial governance should take in practice, and how it could be incorporated into wider narratives of modernization.

In the empirical sections that follow, I explore debates about three focal issues that constituted significant challenges to the collegial organization and its temporal qualities: (a) the composition of the consistory (or university board); (b) the employment status of professors; and (c) hiring or promotion practices.

Afterwards, I offer some concluding remarks on the implications of temporal conflicts and synchronization for academic governance and university politics more generally. Already in the first empirical section, I show how debates about collegial governance exposed tensions between narratives of "modern society" and "traditional" ideas of the university.

CONSISTORY COMPOSITION (AND THE CONSTRAINED IDEA OF THE UNIVERSITY)

The two state universities, Lund and Uppsala, clearly adhered to German academic traditions and drew much of their legitimacy from the education of civil servants who were absorbed by the Swedish apparatus of public administration. Notably, the universities were still small scale. Located in minor cities, they significantly influenced their immediate surroundings (Svensson, 1980, pp. 19–21). Yet, one of the main tasks of university commissions in the late nineteenth century was to integrate them more thoroughly into an increasingly centralized national organization.[3] Until that point, universities and the state had commonly been regarded as separate spheres with some mediating links, such as the Chancellorship, meaning that a chancellor represented the university against the government in Stockholm.[4] As the government invested more in higher education, the formal political dependence of universities increased. Opinions of government and parliament could not simply be ignored (Blomqvist, 1992, p. 106).

The university commission of 1846, formally chaired by crown prince Carl (chancellor of both universities), was a milestone in this regard, even if the activities of universities already had been debated and criticized in previous decades. The commission included one professor each from Lund and Uppsala, and two secretaries. Its main task was to synchronize activities at the universities according to a more uniform framework, aiming to replace their seventeenth century constitutions (*Underdåniga förslag*, 1852, p. 4). The new statutes, which were completed in 1852 by the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, have been described as a Swedish *Magna Charta*, as they codified long-standing practices of collegial governance. At the same time, however, they marked the start of an era of transformation in which a number of these collegial foundations would be called into question (Fehrman et al., 2004, p. 115; Frängsmyr, 2010, pp. 10, 73, 2017, pp. 36–37; Tersmeden, 2016, p. 84).

A main issue discussed by the 1846 commission was the so-called academic jurisdiction, traditionally motivated according to a principle of "peers judging peers" (*Underdåniga förslag*, 1852, p. 10). Since the seventeenth century, Swedish universities had been incorporated into the general public administration, but they were still allowed to function as autonomous corporations maintaining their own civil–criminal jurisdictions (Hedmo, 2017, p. 40). As noted by the commission, there were strong protests in Uppsala when this system became subject to debate. It was perceived as a collegial cornerstone, but according to the commission members, universities could no longer function as "a republic within the state" with exclusive privileges. They argued that it would be more efficient if

the academic staff spent their time fully on scholarly matters, and thus recommended the abolishment of the jurisdiction, as it was perceived as an antiquated phenomenon in a modern state (*Underdåniga förslag*, 1852, pp. 10, 31–32). Partly implemented with the 1852 statutes, this abolishment was eventually completed in 1908, in the wake of another (1899) commission (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, pp. 81–82).

The investigation of the academic jurisdiction warrants some closer scrutiny. By means of historicization, the 1846 commission sought to demonstrate that any composition of teachers as colleagues at a university was not universally given. Its report included a flashback to the founding of Uppsala University in 1477, stating that it had been constructed as a blended model based on the universities of Paris, where the teachers were in charge and the institution functioned as a unified entity, as well as Bologna (and Padua), where the students elected the governing body of the university and individual faculties functioned more independently. The commission thus argued that medieval academic jurisdictions had varied considerably in character, concluding that an autonomous jurisdiction should not be seen as inseparable from any general "idea of the university" (*Underdåniga förslag*, 1852, pp. 12, 17–31). This distancing from – and relativization of – a universal idea of the university (Karlsohn, 2016) is interesting as an argumentative strategy, as it portrayed the state of the collegial organization as historically shifting and dependent on diverse local models. In a similar fashion, organizational entities, such as faculties, were described as contingent products, rather than as abstract derivations from science as such. It was thus not obvious exactly which specific collegial constellation that was needed by a university for being functional (*Underdåniga förslag*, 1852, pp. 47–55). This deconstruction of traditional defenses of university autonomy created space for maneuvering and political intervention.

A large part of the upcoming reforms focused on the governance structure of universities, as their traditional "guild structure" was criticized as anomalous in a modern, professionalized society. In particular, a transition from broad "republican" assemblies to limited representative bodies seemed urgent as universities grew. As noted by Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016b, p. 3), the local board or "consistory" [*konsistorium*] structure was "reshaped through a number of reforms," ultimately taking the form of "corporate-like boards with an external chair and a large share of external members" in the twentieth century. The renegotiation of the consistory's function and composition begun already in the nineteenth century, however, as this type of body was frequently criticized for being lethargic and conservative, and this criticism surfaced in other countries as well (Gerbod, 2004, p. 120). But according to a principle of complete representation of full professors as indisputable members of the local board – in contrast to so-called "extraordinary" professors, docents, administrative staff, and students – Sweden stood out in international comparison.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Swedish consistory composition was heavily debated, not least as non-permanent academic teachers began to organize collectively in order to improve their working conditions and gain the right to participate in the university governance (Blomqvist, 1992, pp. 246–247,

1993, p. 216). A new commission, established in 1874 and chaired by archbishop and Uppsala pro-chancellor, Anton Niklas Sundberg, sought to further pursue the ambition of the 1846 commission to minimize differences between the two state universities. In line with a general trend toward scholarly specialization, the new commission expressed doubts about the common assumption that individual professors had sufficient knowledge regarding the development of basically all disciplines, at least within their own faculty. As their peer authority was questioned, a need for a more realistic division of work emerged, creating incentives for the construction of smaller, specialized assemblies (*Förslag till statuter*, 1875, pp. 13–14, 21). This, however, provoked intricate questions as to which issues should be delegated or continue to be treated as common collegial concerns. As summarized by sociologist of education, Lennart G. Svensson (1980, p. 49): "The idea of a unity of sciences [was] shattered into pieces due to purely organizational reasons."

As a first step toward a new division of work, the 1846 commission had proposed a practically oriented *Collegium Oeconomicum* as a supplement to the *Consistorium Academicum*. The 1874 commission continued along this line, and also suggested a division of the academic consistory in two parts, *major* and *minor* – an order maintained until the 1960s (*Underdåniga förslag*, 1852, p. 42; *Förslag till statuter*, 1875, p. 5; see also Frängsmyr, 2010, pp. 75–76; Gribbe, 2022, p. 14). This successive split, codified by the 1852 and 1876 statutes, marked a departure from the German, or Romantic, idea of the university as a genuinely organic system, characterized by a continuous interaction of its dynamic parts as one large although diverse unit (e.g., Readings, 1996). In terms of organization, the university was now increasingly embodied by separate representative or specialized units that did not require the physical presence of all professors upon every collective decision.

The major consistory was supposed to include all full professors and still carry the main responsibilities, but it would be free from dealing with most ongoing affairs. The minor consistory would consist of a limited group of elected representatives who would serve three-year terms. It was only with explicit hesitation, however, that the 1874 commission formulated this proposal. If the consistory was no longer entirely composed of equal peers, it was feared that the very "idea" of the university would be in danger, reminding us that this idea was the object of repeated negotiations. The most salient reason why the commission continued to champion this reorganization ("irrefutably needed") was that the meetings had begun to steal too much time from "higher" scholarly duties. In Uppsala, the single board system required the attendance of all full professors at more than 30 meetings per academic year, lasting approximately three hours each. This was described as a slow process and a "waste of time and resources" with "detrimental" effects on the quality of decision-making, for instance as consistory members did not have enough time to prepare for all of these meetings (*Förslag till statuter*, 1875, pp. 6–7; see also Blomqvist, 1993, p. 210). Genuine collegial practice began to require inordinate amounts of time from scholars that could no longer be justified as the university grew.

In an article in the periodical *Svensk tidskrift* [*Swedish Journal*], Lund history professor Claes Theodor Odhner criticized the statutes proposed by the

1874 commission, and demanded even more radical solutions. He agreed with the commission, however, that the consistory seemed fragmented and unable to act with proper authority. More generally, he emphasized that the distinctive pluralism of bodies within the academic structure of governance caused an "unnecessary retardation," thereby reinforcing the critique of collegial slowness ("Universitetsreformer," 1875, pp. 459, 496). A similar criticism was voiced over 20 years later. In 1898, Lund librarian and PhD Elof Tegnér initiated another debate in an article published in *Nordisk tidskrift* [*Nordic Journal*], arguing that it was necessary to modernize Swedish universities. This was in line with a common opinion that the novel statutes in 1876 had not implemented anything radically new. For instance, media accounts highlighted that "the *collegial governance* of faculties and consistories" had not been thoroughly reformed, thus forcing important issues to pass through the "purgatory of several colleges" ("Universitetsförhållanden," 1898). Tegnér's article was likewise interpreted as an attack on the foundations of the collegial organization that he found old-fashioned. The consistory at universities had no equivalents, Tegnér claimed, not even internationally. Swedish universities were likened to heavy machinery, as decisions about academic matters were not made "in haste," given the large number of parallel collegial bodies that were dealing with the same issues. To keep pace with more wealthy European nations, Tegnér advocated more efficiency and less reverence to traditions. He claimed that a more authoritative vice-chancellor role in line with the vertical structure (or "monarchic" model) of other governmental authorities would increase the speed of decision-making and reduce the societal isolation of universities (Tegnér, 1898, pp. 186–199; see also Frängsmyr, 2010, pp. 82–84).

Tegnér's ideas were radical. Professor of literary history, Henrik Schück (1898a, 1898b), protested against the depiction of the consistory as an overly time-consuming collegial body, claiming that Tegnér's negative view resulted from contingent, local conflicts in Lund (see also Hjärne, 1898b). Yet, Tegnér's most prolific critics shared some of his basic assumptions. History professor Harald Hjärne (1898a) granted that there were, indeed, too many competing collegial bodies at the universities, causing "all sorts of lingering formalities and an often completely unnecessary delay." The question was rather whether this should be seen as a necessary evil or not. As these discussions raged, a new commission, chaired by bishop Gottfrid Billing, was appointed in 1899. Although acknowledging the problems of temporal efficiency addressed by Tegnér, this commission did not accept his proposals, claiming that autonomous governance was foundational to the very idea of a university (Frängsmyr, 2010, p. 86). Nevertheless, the commission discussed further reforms, suggesting that the major consistory would be replaced by a university council, and that a smaller consistory (consisting of the vice-chancellor, pro-rector, and five elected faculty members) would deal with ongoing administrative issues (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, pp. 9–13, 73–76). This aspiration toward a representative system was framed as a natural step in line with the process started in 1852. The successive reform proposals were thus incorporated into a grand, liberal narrative of progress, even though conservative voices warned that changes should not be introduced too swiftly as they could endanger the (slow) organic development of universities (*Förslag och*

betänkanden, 1901, pp. 271–272). The principle of indirect representation, based on democratic elections, was met with repeated skepticism. This is not surprising, as these discussions played out before full democracy was introduced in Sweden. Several commentators pointed to the risk that various factions would form, indicating how frictions between collegiality and democracy have been central in the modern history of universities (Blomqvist, 1992, pp. 246–247; see also Ferlie et al., 2009, p. 11).

The new university statutes of 1908 ultimately struck a compromise by blending two categories of membership in the major consistory: some would be included based on years of service and some would be elected. These statutes were revised in 1916 in the wake of another commission of 1914; after that, no new university statutes were adopted in Sweden until 1956. The work of the 1914 commission thus marked the end of a period that saw several reforms of the consistory. Despite some loyal defenses, the universal idea of a university was partly deconstructed in order to enable such organizational change. Taken together, the reforms can be seen as part of an ongoing revision of time-honored collegial principles to synchronize Swedish universities with broader developments in society.

PROFESSORIAL STATUS (AND THE DILEMMA OF REPRESENTATION)

The expansion and societal adaption of universities turned the question of who should be counted as a colleague into a contentious one. As university structures became increasingly complex, conflicts of interest grew between various groups (Blomqvist, 1992, p. 332). A key point of contention was whether or not other teachers should be counted as true colleagues to full professors.

The 1908 blended model of consistory membership produced some practical differences in Lund and Uppsala. One reason as to why the ministry of ecclesiastical affairs had summoned a new commission already in 1914 was because such a heterogenous system was deemed unsustainable in the long run (*Betänkande med förslag*, 1914, pp. 3–4). In the ensuing discussions, a practice solely relying on the principle of democratic election was depicted as a potentially too drastic shift in the history of universities: the automatic consistory membership of professors, as "given by nature," continued to be defended as foundational to preserving the universities as collegial and autonomous institutions. There were, for instance, concerns that professors would care less about common university matters if they were not obligated to participate in its governance, and that administrative staff eventually would dominate the consistory at the expense of the combined scholarly expertise of professors from all disciplines.

However, trust in the universal competence of professors was no longer self-evident. The 1874 commission questioned the idea that all professors possessed identical competences, or "skills required for a man of governance" (*Förslag till statuter*, 1875, p. 10). Based on that premise, and also in order to cause less disruption to the scholarly work, the commission suggested extending the temporal terms of the rectoral office, which hitherto had ambulated based on a pattern of

one year (and prior 1840, only one semester), as well as transforming this role into an elected position, instead of letting professors take turns based on their age of service (Blomqvist, 1993, pp. 206, 210; Frängsmyr, 2010, p. 16; Gribbe, 2022, p. 14). As a consequence, philosopher Carl Yngve Sahlin remained in office as vice-chancellor of Uppsala University for no less than 13 years after the implementation of new statutes in 1876, thus marking an abrupt break with previous rhythms, and conferring significantly more authority to this position. To address the "necessity" of securing long-term stability, while still maintaining collegial governance, the 1899 commission suggested a system of overlapping mandate periods in the consistory (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, p. 86) even though such a system would further complicate the work of synchronization, with yet another set of temporal entities to master. It is thus plain to see why a more professionalized, long-term leadership was embraced in an attempt to enhance coherence and efficiency in the long run (Tersmeden, 2016, p. 84).

Doubts about the universal competence of professors also permeated discussions on the relationship between different teacher categories. A system differentiating between full professors and extraordinary professors (without chair) had been introduced after some parliamentary debates in the 1870s. In practice, the latter replaced the older category of academic adjuncts. Ever since the seventeenth century, these had functioned as a reservoir of staff constantly available to fill teaching positions as needed and to ensure the professorial rejuvenation. In practice, adjuncts had perpetually worked for universities under precarious conditions. After gaining more rights, this growing group of teachers began to demand even greater influence, and by the turn of the century, critique of the 1870s statutes amassed (Blomqvist, 1992, p. 264, 1993, p. 205; Frängsmyr, 2010, pp. 93–94).

The 1899 commission eventually sought to abolish the distinction between full and extraordinary professors entirely. Such a move would necessitate a "transformation of the collegial governance and administration" as the sheer number of professors attending meetings otherwise would become unmanageable, and too time-consuming (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, pp. 62, 71). If all extraordinary professors were automatically granted access to the major consistory, there would be 62 members in Uppsala and 49 in Lund – too many to fit around the table in the consistory room (Frängsmyr, 2017, p. 33). Since assemblies of this size would not be appropriate for the execution of administrative functions, the commission instead sought to make the minor consistory, or individual faculties, responsible for administrative matters. Lund professor of history, Sam Clason ("Utdrag af protokollet," 1907, pp. 11–12), commented on the reforms suggested by the subsequent 1906/07 commission:

> in our time, marked by strong demands of simple and quick reforms of public administration [it would seem] completely absurd to delegate administrative to colleges of circa 50 to 70 members. No matter which forms that would be selected to let these collegial members inform themselves about the issues in question … an unnecessary time delay and … often unnecessary costs would follow, and the entire process would potentially prevent decisions from being made within reasonable timeframes completely.

Similarly, the 1899 commission also concluded that beyond a certain limit, the quality of decisions would not improve with larger decision-making bodies:

"No one can deny that in their current composition, these colleges claim more university teachers than is required" (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, pp. 71–73).

In this way, changes to the collegial status of university employees depended significantly on practical circumstances, such as the ability to hold meetings in certain places, within certain timeframes. There was agreement regarding the need to impose an upper limit to the size of the professor collegium at the two universities to maintain efficiency. This may be compared with the Karolinska Institute, a specialized medical institution in Stockholm established in 1810, which was also discussed by the 1899 commission. Due to the smaller scale of this university with a single faculty, the model of a full assembly of teachers could still be maintained, and there was no similar need to distinguish between various types of professors (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, pp. 229, 252). Professor of medicine Frithiof Lennmalm noted that Karolinska's limited size protected the institution from potential conflicts between various collegial bodies (*Utredningar och förslag*, 1907, p. 17). However, the 1899 commission remarked that an organization also required a minimum size in order to truly function in a collegial fashion (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, p. 74). Taken together, these reflections indicate that collegial reforms typically were motivated according to quantitative considerations or practical administrative needs.

Debates on the collegial hierarchy turned particularly heated with the 1906/07 commission. In line with previous proposals, the existing system of various professor categories was deemed unsustainable in the long run (*Utredningar och förslag*, 1907, pp. 79–96). In many cases, extraordinary professorships had been created for economic reasons. As some new disciplines were founded, it would have been appropriate to install full professorships, but extraordinary professors offered a cheaper alternative. In practice, extraordinary professors thus often conducted the work expected by full professors, but under much worse conditions. This injustice provided a rationale for erasing the boundary between the two categories. As they were basically doing the same things, it seemed strange to exclude some of them from the main collegial bodies. At least, there was some consensus that all of them deserved to take part in the election of chancellor and vice-chancellor. The 1906/07 commission therefore proposed the construction of a broader plenary assembly for such purposes that automatically included all professors (*Utredningar och förslag*, 1907, pp. 79–95). This new collegial body was established as a complement to the representative bodies of the major and minor consistories with the new statutes in 1908. At the same time, extraordinary professors were finally equated with full professors from a governance perspective, as full professors were no longer automatically members of the consistory (Frängsmyr, 2010, pp. 87–88; Svensson, 1980, pp. 39–40).

Once again, these reforms were legitimized via their incorporation into grand historical narratives. The 1906/07 commission claimed that the existing system of extraordinary professors had not kept pace with rapid scholarly specialization (*Utredningar och förslag*, 1907, pp. 82–84). The collegial organization thus had to be synchronized with two parallel meta-narratives that structured the national politics of knowledge: (a) a story of a seemingly unstoppable specialization at the universities; and (b) a story of an increasingly (time-)efficient and professional

apparatus of public administration of modern Swedish society. Collegial practices had to be synchronized with the ideal patterns of change established by these narratives. One means was to maintain properly sized collegial bodies. With the experience of academic expansion, power seemingly had to be divided and concentrated within smaller collegial assemblies. As claimed by the 1906/07 commission, a more representative system would "result in substantial advantages with regard to a rapid, hands-on and continuous handling of issues" (*Utredningar och förslag*, 1907, p. 90). Concrete temporal gains thus motivated the reformation of universities at the aggregated level.

THE "PROMOTION MACHINERY" (AND THE TROPE OF "RETARDATION")

What perhaps brought temporal issues to the forefront of collegial discussions most markedly was the promotion and appointment of professors. According to Elof Tegnér (1898, p. 202), hiring procedures exasperated collegial negotiations. These negotiations clearly involved a synchronization of temporalities, as they were driven by a pressure to increase the speed of academic activities. They also addressed further questions regarding the limits of professorial expertise. For instance, concerns were expressed regarding the power balance between individual professors and faculties, and also whether external peers should be invited or not (Blomqvist, 1992, p. 248). In light of ongoing institutional expansion and scholarly specialization, it was no longer seen as convincing to argue that all professors should be able to assess candidates from all disciplines, not even within their own faculties. It was furthermore doubted whether they could remain unbiased in cases where internal candidates were weighed against external ones. A specialized peer review process had been introduced with the 1876 statutes, partly removing authority from the general collegium of teachers (Frängsmyr, 2017, p. 38). Was specialist knowledge supposed to trump the collegial ideal, based on a generalist ethos, of universally competent professors at a specific university? Until this point, full professors had been obliged to take on peer commissions, typically without compensation as they were perceived as honorary tasks. With an increasing burden of administrative duties, however, it was frequently argued that such activities should be duly compensated, particularly if the aim was to accelerate them (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, pp. 18, 94–95; SOU, 1922:17, pp. 196–197).

Moreover, the 1899 commission suggested that "age of service" should be taken into account in cases of several applicants, indicating that university politics had to include plans for the long-term supply of knowledge. The very existence of this commission was particularly motivated against a number of difficult and protracted promotion issues in the 1890s. On several occasions, peer reviews had resulted in completely opposite assessments, which threatened to undermine collegial self-evaluation. As an alternative option, a system based on direct calls with handpicked candidates was suggested to save time and reduce conflicts. Despite doubts as to whether such a procedure would fulfill the requirements

of legal certainty (Frängsmyr, 2010, p. 16), the commission was adamant that reform was necessary to accelerate appointment processes and develop a more centralized and uniform system, for instance, by creating a joint promotion committee with representatives from both Lund and Uppsala. This indicates how the safeguarding of collegial unity at a specific university had to be weighed against the value of broader collegial cooperation among scholars at the national level (and beyond).

According to the 1899 commission, the unwieldy temporal conditions at universities did not have any equivalents in other sectors of civil service. Within the existing system, appointment and promotion issues had to pass through several formal bodies (peer review, faculty, consistory, chancellor, monarch/government). Even if it was seen as reasonable for academia to operate according to special timelines in many situations, this hiring procedure was denounced as exceptionally complex and slow. There were fears that such employment mechanisms would be detrimental to university teaching, for instance leading to a frequent use of locum tenens (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, pp. 18, 101, 119–121).

The commission conducted a survey by comparing professor appointments in Sweden 1886–1899. At Uppsala University, 12 of 38 seemingly normal cases had taken more than two years to settle. Only four professors were appointed within a year. In Lund, 7 of 23 cases extended beyond two years. Particularly problematic, according to the commission, was the custom of giving candidates at least six months to improve their qualifications after the announcement of a vacancy before making hiring decisions. This phenomenon, referred to as "specimen time," was a remnant from an older era when scholars could apply for all positions within their own faculties, thereby switching disciplines in just half a year. However, qualification requirements had increased rapidly, and this practice was seen as obsolete. It was suggested that the specimen time should be reduced to three months, ideally reducing the timeline for recruitment and hiring without compromising the integrity of the peer review system (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, pp. 99–100, 125–130).

Further attempts to accelerate the speed of these practices would follow. The 1906/07 commission was for instance very specific in suggesting that applications should be submitted before 12 p.m. on the 45th day after a vacancy had been announced in the newspapers (*Utredningar och förslag*, 1907, p. 17). Likewise, the 1914 commission, while reluctant to introduce an upper time limit, wished to create economic incentives to speed up these processes (*Betänkande med förslag*, 1914, pp. 7–8). The ensuing 1918 commission proposed that submissions for professor positions should be received within 30 days, and the vacancy itself should be announced by the vice-chancellor within eight days. The peer review process would then be limited to a maximum of four months before a recommendation was submitted to the faculty dean (SOU, 1922, pp. 14–19). In this fashion, the introduction of new temporal standards or "normal times" was discussed in order to ensure efficiency.

In these debates, particularly in the 1910s and 1920s, "retardation" [*tidsutdräkt*] emerged as a key term. The slowness of "the academic promotion machinery" together with long-term vacancies were seen as threatening the interests of the

government. Since universities belonged to the public sector, they had to adjust to the practices of other governmental authorities, which were explicitly aiming to minimize vacancies (SOU, 1922, pp. 7, 137–138, 151–152). This underscores how different organizational logics clashed as the collegial academic ethos was weighed against public efficiency.

The 1918 commission interestingly conducted some transnational comparisons in order to highlight deficiencies of the Swedish appointment system. Just like the 1899 commission, it also looked into the past in order to evaluate the state of the current organization in temporal terms. In the seventeenth century, it turned out that appointments had been relatively rapid – 5.4 months, on average – but this was not entirely positive, since the swiftness had resulted from limited formalization and the government often bypassing university bodies. In the eighteenth century, the average was 7–10 months; and from 1800–1876 it increased to 13–16 months. After that, appointment times increased even more. From 1877–1919, the commission concluded that the average time had increased to 20 months in Uppsala and 19 months in Lund. Despite some measures taken with the statutes of 1908, the previous decade had only seen some marginal improvement, and the latest statutes of 1916 seemed to have had no effect (SOU, 1922, pp. 79, 93–95, 137–161).

The commission compared these appointment times with that of the Karolinska Institute, which was approximately two months shorter, on average, apparently due to the limited number of retarding collegial passage points at this smaller institution. More complex collegial systems like Lund and Uppsala, however, were defended as guarantors of quality. Even if the Swedish academic employment system had no equivalent regarding its "slowness and unwieldiness," the commission stated, it probably stood out in terms of objectivity and accuracy. So, in the end, the 1918 commission suggested that the existing system should be maintained at large, particularly to capitalize on accumulated collegial knowledge and experiences (SOU, 1922, pp. 162–167). But what is fascinating to note in connection to the ideas presented by the various commissions is how the temporal implications of academic collegial ideals and practices became a problem on the level of national politics.

The collegial organization collided with the ministry of ecclesiastical affair's desire to impose a unified and centralized university policy and reduce the costs of higher education, which could be achieved by shortening study cycles (Blomqvist, 1992, p. 378). The minister of ecclesiastical affairs in the early twentieth century, Hugo Hammarskjöld, wished to further activate professors and better synchronize the eight-month academic year with the full calendar year. This provoked outrage, as it was interpreted as an attack on professors (and students) for being "lazy" ("En ukas," 1909; Frängsmyr, 2010, pp. 89–90). In a similar fashion, there had already been quarrels about the professors' temporal commitments in the 1870s. In his aforementioned article, Claes Theodor Odhner (1875) highlighted the vast number of exams that professors had to supervise – in some cases more than 200 per year, requiring up to 12 hours a week. Odhner feared that this would exhaust the limited scholarly assets of a small nation like Sweden. Academic teaching thus had to be reformed with

respect to temporal efficiency. Benchmarking against German universities where students typically earned their degrees in a stipulated "normal" time of three years, he suggested reducing degree completion time at Swedish universities, especially given high indebtedness among the young ("Universitetsreformer", 1875, pp. 472, 481, 489). Numerous stipulations of temporal frames were necessary to keep the university functional as a complex organization, and issues related to saving time were frequently brought up as part of the ongoing work of temporal synchronization.

COLLEGIALITY TAKES TIME (AND SPACE)

The various commission reports contained notions of particular academic chronologies which collided with and were expected to give way to more "modern" requirements of efficiency (e.g., *Betänkande med förslag*, 1914, pp. 11–12; see also Rider, 2016, p. 3). In this concluding section, I will discuss some general implications of the synchronization performed to close such gaps between opposing organizational logics and temporal rhythms.

The discourse of university reforms included temporal synchronization work on the level of national politics as well as local universities. Just like today, nineteenth century scholars were multitaskers, combining research, teaching, and administration. They followed individual schedules, and professors tended to be rather involved in additional public commitments related to, for instance, politics and culture. A main challenge was ensuring that administrative or governance tasks did not consume all resources and distract staff from core scholarly duties. Keeping the small scale of these universities in mind, it obviously had consequences if a single professor was absent from his regular tasks for a long period. Due to institutional expansion and a more manifest professional ethos, it seemingly became more difficult to combine all the various roles in traditional ways.

Apparently, the collegial system was easily combined with short time horizons as long as universities were relatively small and comprehensible as organizations. Both Lund and Uppsala were small cities. Brief temporal cycles functioned seemingly well in such confined spaces.[5] In this regard, it is striking that the 1899 commission spent considerable time discussing whether teachers should be expected to live in these cities or not. University politics thus contained some very distinct spatial aspects, including the (biopolitical) power to regulate the physical presence of staff and students. The latter group had to report to the vice-chancellor within eight days after their arrival, and commonly had to adhere to strict attendance requirements. Not even the vice-chancellor was allowed to leave town for more than eight days during the semester without special permission, indicating the detailed nature of temporal regulations. Prior to the digital era and the advent of tools such as Zoom, it was important to be physically present, as collegial meetings could be summoned on short notice, sometimes only one day beforehand (*Förslag och betänkanden*, 1901, pp. 1, 8, 11, 48, 59–60; *Utredningar och förslag*, 1907, pp. 8, 25, 43).

On a certain scale, collegial governance could appear relatively flexible and efficient. Ongoing expansion as well as increasing political and administrative ambitions at the national level complicated the work of synchronization as collegial practices had to keep pace with a more diverse range of factors and rhythms established in other sectors of public administration (Svensson, 1980, p. 51). This indicates that the question of whether collegiality is slow or not, is highly context-dependent, just as universities are socially embedded. Moreover, questions of time and speed are – as we all know – relative. Their interpretations are fundamentally dependent on constant battles of narratives. Is a certain process framed as slow or not? Popularized concepts and metaphors, such as "retardation" and the likening of academia to heavy machinery, were often employed in highly strategic ways, thereby contributing to the depiction of collegial governance as an obstacle to change. In the eyes of many politicians and reformers, the modern state had no time for collegial "purgatories." This change in attitude reflected the successive transition from a state with a large number of collegial organizations co-existing in the public administration to a situation where the university stood out as a collegial bastion (Boberg, 2022, p. 22). As a hypothesis, I would suggest that a general pluralistic conception of collegiality was replaced by a more consecrated view of the universities as a unique organization with collegial governance structures (albeit reformed).

While universities have been commonly perceived as resistant to external pressures of efficiency and speed until recent decades (e.g., Murphy, 2015, pp. 137–138), my analysis shows that challenges to collegiality have a much longer history. They were part of a structural tendency to rationalize the expanding higher education system to keep up with socio-political changes. To some extent, the current challenge of managerialism can thus be interpreted as a recent framing and enhancement of an old problem. It is imperative to keep this long trajectory in mind and illuminate the key historical mechanisms at play. Together with the political aims of efficiency and rationalization, it was typically practical circumstances, such as the time spent on meetings every semester that made reforms seem urgent in nineteenth century Sweden, rather than appeals to some higher purpose or an idea of the university itself. On the contrary, beliefs in such an idea had to be renegotiated to conform with the practical necessities of efficiency and appropriate timeframes for decision-making.

This aspect of collegiality, as dependent on local, practical, and temporal conditions, should be incorporated into ongoing debates, which tend to stick to rather abstract notions, often taking collegiality as a given principle and an intrinsic good. Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016a, p. 21) rightly emphasized the need for constant maintenance in order to make collegiality viable in the long-term. Temporal synchronization should be an integral part of this active maintenance. After all, the empirical cases presented in this study were examples of attempts to create a functional and legitimate basis for the collegial organization of Swedish universities at the turn of the twentieth century while preserving scholarly integrity, particularly by earnestly tackling issues of temporality. Despite reforms, the collegial system managed to thrive, as power largely remained with professors. My study thus showcases examples of compliance but also resistance to larger

organizational trends. It was no doubt a difficult balancing act to retain autonomy while incorporating managerial ideals of the wider public administration in order to seem legitimate and "modern."

Because the organization of higher education and research differs between countries, it is imperative to be sensitive to specific and shifting political contexts, including reforms (Krücken et al., 2007). Even though the empirical cases presented in this article are limited to national debates (and some very local contexts), universities obviously participate in a much broader global project that has been operating for centuries. Just as it takes time to create and maintain a collegium, it has taken vast amounts of time to form the complex organizations we still refer to as universities (Bennett, 1998, p. 41; Frank & Meyer, 2020). As proclaimed by Stefan Collini (2012, p. 199): "we are merely custodians for the present generation of a complex intellectual heritage which we did not create – and which is not ours to destroy." At first glance, this statement might seem overly conservative, but the temporal dimensions required for generating a sound intellectual – and collegial – culture cannot be underestimated. Slow or not, universities should not abandon collegial organization structures too quickly.

NOTES

1. Translations of Swedish quotations into English are made by the author.
2. For the first time in 200 years, the number of students began to increase radically. For example, there were 1,500 students and approximately 70 teachers at Uppsala University in the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1910s, this number had increased to 2,415 students and 160 teachers (Frängsmyr, 2017, p. 37; Segerstedt, 1983, p. 11, 51). The period also saw the installment of new university colleges in Gothenburg and Stockholm.
3. Here, it should also be mentioned that the Swedish Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs (from 1968, Ministry of Education), which is responsible for matters of education and science, was established in 1840.
4. From 1859 onward, the Chancellorship of Lund and Uppsala was held by the same person, typically a member of the royal family. There were also local deputies, called Pro-Chancellors – positions held by bishops.
5. Interestingly in this respect, the mid-nineteenth century saw recurring discussions, divided along a conservative–liberal axis, on whether to move Uppsala University to the capital of Stockholm.

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