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Networks of Finno-Ugric studies

1. What is a network?

Among the papers presented at the symposium celebrating the 125th anniversary of the Finno-Ugrian Society, this contribution would seem to have only an indirect connection with the object of our research, the Finno-Ugric languages and connected phenomena. This is not Finno-Ugristics but *about* Finno-Ugristics; the thoughts I shall present continue the line of my "programmatic" reflections on the questions of internal communication, identity, and traditions vs the future goals of our discipline (Laakso 2000, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2008; Grünthal & Laakso 2001). To begin with, we must define the basic concepts: what is a network, and what is meant by Finno-Ugric studies?

Networks and networking are the subject of active research in different fields of the study of social and cultural phenomena, from etology to marketing, and there is an extensive literature on different aspects of networking. In considering the goals of this paper, we could start by defining a scholarly network as a system of processes of communication, that is, verbal and (basically) information-oriented interaction between people and institutions. This communication may be face-to-face or remote, and it may take place across considerable time spans, which, of course, weakens its mutual and dynamic character. In a low-volume discipline such as Finno-Ugric studies, intervals of 10, 20 or 50 years between important contributions to a discussion are not rare (for instance, more than 40 years elapsed from the often-cited Posti 1954 and comments on this by Koivulehto & Vennemann 1996 and Kallio 2000).

Networks are essential to a discipline. They serve both to maintain a research tradition, in different forms of peer-to-peer communication, and to reproduce the body of researchers, through training. Educating young scholars means socialising young people in the traditions of the discipline, making them initiated members of the community—and, simultaneously, members of various networks: peer groups, teacher-student groups or even "schools" of renowned teachers. Networks are interdependent of discipline identity: they condition and are conditioned by the boundaries of individual disciplines. This is an aspect

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often forgotten, if disciplines are merely defined by the object of research and/or by the methods used; the network perspective thus adds an important dynamic dimension to the definitions of disciplines.

Finally, networks are structured by recursion, as expressed by the collective suffix in the Finnish word *verkosto*, literally 'a group of nets'. They consist of smaller networks and combine to form larger ones. This means also that a network is essentially fuzzy; due to its capacity to combine and re-combine, its boundaries are seldom clear-cut. This brings us to the next point, defining Finno-Ugric studies, a notoriously fuzzy discipline straddling the borders between historical and applied linguistics, ethnography, folkloristics and even history, archaeology and literary studies.

2. Finno-Ugric studies: From undifferentiation to modern interdisciplinarity

Around the "hard core" of Finno-Ugric studies, historical linguistics investigating the relatedness and common origins of the Uralic languages, there is a border zone marked by such typical questions as "Is N.N., a translator of Finnish literature into Hungarian / a linguist dealing with Estonian syntax / an archaeologist investigating the prehistory of the Onega basin, etc., a *real Finno-Ugrist*?" Another typical question arising in connection with the definition of disciplines is defining the range of questions dealt with in research institutions, learned societies, publications or conferences; for instance, every fifth year, a discussion on restricting the choice of topics for the *Congressus Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum* seems to resurface, with questions concerning, in particular, the role of Finnish and Hungarian studies. However, Finno-Ugristics is not the only discipline suffering from identity problems—compare what has been stated concerning another field of research.

Cohen (1988) divides the history of geography in the United States into five stages. In the first stage, until the end of the First World War, the discipline was simple to define (physical geography) and undifferentiated, its theoretical and philosophical background was simple and unitary (physical causation) and the small body of researchers, coming from a handful of universities, was tightly grouped around one leading figure. The development that followed was characterised by differentiation and specialisation, conditioned by a multitude of new approaches, new techniques and new needs and also by strong growth in the number of professional geographers. After facing the challenge of interdisciplinarity, which threatens the identity of traditional disciplines, geography is now coming to a fifth stage, the stage of hierarchical integration:

> At this stage of the process, the system is mature, nodes can interconnect through a variety of subcenters and the system can absorb outside influences without becoming destabilized. (Cohen 1988)

Now let us compare these development stages with the history of Finno-Ugric studies—in Finland, for the sake of simplicity, although bearing in mind that Finno-Ugristics has always been a truly international discipline. Cohen's first stage of undifferentiation could perhaps correspond to the time of E. N. Setälä, the unquestioned leading figure of Finnish and Finno-Ugric language studies in Finland in the early 20th century, with its unified Positivist-Neogrammarian theoretical background and simply defined goals (describing the origins and development of the Finnish language). This was the approach that had made Finno-Ugric linguistics, and linguistics in general, emerge as a discipline with its own methods in the late 19th century—the approach that had made linguistics a science.

In US geography as described by Cohen, the first stage of undifferentiation was challenged by new interdisciplinary activities, that is, new networking. To quote Cohen again:

> But if new disciplines are difficult to create, informal clusters are not. Creative and restless scholars are constantly in search of fresh ways of looking at problems and of generating knowledge. The result is that the segmenting of disciplines and the breaking of traditional disciplinary bounds, a process that has always characterized the advance of scholarship, is now increasing at an unprecedented rate. As individuals, teams and small networks of scholars reach across disciplines to communicate with one another, the tendency is to formalize these links, to create new structures. (Cohen 1988)

The challenge of interdisciplinary contacts and new structures is very real in Finno-Ugric studies as well. However, there are also specific challenges which mean that Cohen's model is not directly applicable to the history of Finno-Ugristics. The institutions of Finno-Ugric studies live in an uneasy union of interdependency with the national philologies of the Finno-Ugric countries. As long as linguistics was mainly historically oriented and the main goals of the *Nationalwissenschaften* were related to national root-seeking in order to define and construct national identity, Finnish studies could be seen as part of Finno-Ugristics. This is true even in our days from a general, methodological point of view—and from the perspective of many foreign universities in which Finnish language and culture studies are institutional or belong to a subject called "Finno-Ugric studies". However, in Finland (and, *mutatis mutandis*, in Estonia and Hungary), the roles are reversed—Finnish studies have severed their Finno-Ugric roots and

Finno-Ugric studies have been reduced to the role of an exotic hinterland loosely belonging to but no more directly supported by the national philology.

In addition to the particular problems this national connection creates (cf. also Laakso 2008), there are two general challenges also mentioned by Cohen: differentiation, which threatens to segment disciplines, and interdisciplinarity, which creates competing connections and may finally question the meaningfulness of traditional disciplines. In Cohen's summary of the history of geography, differentiation was chronologically the first of these challenges, and it is certainly the most clearly noticeable in the history of Finno-Ugric studies, too—probably because it is a clear consequence of the massive growth in resources, numbers of researchers and students. However, differentiation and interdisciplinary networking are parallel and interconnected phenomena, and differentiation may actually be triggered by connections with neighbouring disciplines.

Finno-Ugric studies, originally an object-based umbrella term for anything connected to the origins and relatedness of the Finno-Ugric languages and their speakers, have been subject to intense differentiation during the last 100–150 years. As pointed out, for instance, by Mikko Korhonen (1986), the first professorship for Finnish founded in 1850 at the University of Helsinki originally covered the maximal area of Uralic studies (and was first occupied by the father of comparative Uralic studies in Finland, M. A. Castrén)—now, there are several posts, disciplines and institutes. Not only the institutes and chairs for the Finnish language, Finno-Ugric studies and Finnic languages but also comparative ethnography, cultural anthropology, comparative religion studies, folkloristics and Finnish literature can be regarded as a continuation of Castrén's legacy.

Besides this differentiation and specialisation, there are new challenges in interdisciplinary networking. Most markedly, they appear in the form of new institutions and organisations for "areal studies". Some of these have their basis in traditional Finno-Ugric institutions, such as the research unit for the Volga Region in Turku, closely connected with the strong tradition of research into Mari and Mordvin. In Finno-Ugric studies *extra muros*, that is, outside the "Finno-Ugric countries", instruction in Finno-Ugric languages seems to be more and more often placed into "areally based" units—Finnish (or Estonian) together with the languages of Northern or Northeastern Europe, the Nordic countries or the Baltic Sea region, Hungarian together with Slavic or East European. Sometimes, interdisciplinary tendencies and specialisation walk hand in hand, as in the case of the interdisciplinary Saami Studies which challenge the traditional "Lappology" (which is not only connected with traditional Finno-Ugric linguistics but also with a colonialist view of the Saami as "Others", see Lehtola 2005).

In view of these challenges, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that traditional Finno-Ugric studies are in danger of losing their identity and integrity and being torn into pieces. At this point, we should recall Cohen's definition of today's geography as a "mature system" in which "nodes can interconnect through a variety of subcenters". Do the Finno-Ugric studies of today form a mature system that "can absorb outside influences without becoming destabilized"? In order to answer this question, we will have to return to the question of networks: what are they, how do they function, and how can we distinguish a "good" or a functioning network from a less functional one?

3. Evaluating networks of scholarly communication

A dynamic view on research as communication and networking, instead of institutions and organizations, has the great advantage of making informal connections visible. In addition to institutes, organisations and formally recognised groups of collaborators, there are "invisible colleges" (Crane 1975) consisting of people who work on the same questions but in different institutions. Sometimes, the term "grapevine" is also used, denoting loosely organised informal groups of scholars with similar interests, in particular in connection with unofficial information disseminated within these groups (Forsman 2005: 16).

The role of unofficial and loose contacts becomes particularly important in view of modern network theories, as presented, with examples from a wide range of sciences, by Buchanan (2002). It seems that both nature and the social activities of human beings tend to create "small-world" network constructions, that is, networks in which any two points are connected by only a limited number of points (the famous phenomenon of any person being "just six handshakes away" from the President of the U.S.A.). Size alone does not matter, nor density of network interaction—networks of the "small-world" type seem to be more robust and less vulnerable.

"Small-world" networks are characterised by a combination of clustering (subgroups connected by stronger links) and a few random links between more distant parts of the network. Interestingly enough, it is these weaker connections that may even play a crucial role in the functionality of the network—for instance, when seeking a job asking a neighbour to contact an acquaintance of her sister's might be of more use than contacting all one's family members. In Finno-Ugric studies, we could state that occasional and loose contacts between researchers at different institutions or in different disciplines are essential for the dissemination of information and ideas.

The network structures of scholarly communication can be investigated using a variety of methods, from the sociologically oriented (for instance, interviews of individual researchers) to mathematical and quantitative methods and computerisable techniques such as "bibliometrics" or "info(r)metrics" (Forsman 2005)—for instance, studying mutual referencing and quoting between scholarly publications or the dissemination of new ideas and terminology. (Forsman [op. cit.] has investigated the spread of the term "social capital" and Barabási et al. [2008] have analysed the evolution of co-authorship networks in scientific publications in mathematics and neuroscience from 1991 to 1998.) In fact, scholarly networking in practice often combines these two aspects: the techniques of disseminating and searching information are intertwined with interpersonal processes (Shen 2006). In Finno-Ugric studies, to my knowledge, no such investigations have been undertaken so far, and references to the network aspects of our discipline are very scarce and implicit, also in classical handbooks such as Korhonen (1986) or Hovdhaugen et al. (2000).

To put it crudely, the history of Finno-Ugric studies is often shown as if consisting of isolated works of isolated founding fathers, with the very notable exception of the Finno-Ugrian Society and its role as the instigator of classical Finno-Ugristic fieldwork from the late 19th century until World War I and the publication of classic material ever since (the *res gestae* approach, cf. Hovdhaugen et al. 2000: 6). Alternatively, the history of Finno-Ugric studies has been dealt with in terms of ideas and paradigms of research (or, rather, "scientemes", according to the playful terminology proposed by Korhonen 1983), particularly in connection with the rise of the Neogrammarian paradigm and its dramatic ousting in Finland in the post-war decades (true, the latter process affected Finno-Ugric studies far less than Fennistics proper; for polemic arguments against exaggerating the post-WWII paradigm shift, see especially Itkonen 1999).

In one context, however, networking will receive more and more explicit attention in Finno-Ugric studies, too. For the goals of funding and administration, international networking has already become an important criterion, which has led to unexpected problems in national-but-international disciplines such as ours. Are the publications of the Finno-Ugrian Society, international by distribution and pertaining to a highly international discipline, "international" in the Finnish system which values "international" publications more highly than "domestic" ones—even if in this case, the Finnish publication series would represent the international cutting edge of Finno-Ugric studies?

Quantifiable criteria are also sought in less easily quantifiable areas of the humanities, and for the evaluation of publication activities this means importing an instrument from the nature sciences: the citation index and ranking lists based

on citation statistics. Already by now, the European Research Index for the Humanities (ERIH) project, supported by the European Science Foundation (ESF), has composed initial ranking lists of scholarly journals in 15 different areas, including linguistics. Although the ERIH Steering Committee explicitly advises against using the lists as the only instrument for ranking individual candidates and emphasises that the lists are not a bibliometric tool,[1] it may be difficult to determine the difference between individual evaluation and benchmarking of national research systems. (In particular, distinguishing between individuals and institutions is problematic in low-volume disciplines such as Finno-Ugric studies, in which single-professor departments abound and individual researchers can often be identified with certain questions, certain language varieties or their speakers.) There is, thus, a real danger that ranking lists of this kind will be used for evaluating the accomplishments of Finno-Ugric studies. At present, in the ERIH initial list for linguistics, journals of Finno-Ugric language studies are classified as category B at best. They are not considered leading journals worldwide, which means, in effect, that Finno-Ugric studies are not regarded as an independent discipline. Does this also mean that Finno-Ugric studies, if regarded as an isolated system, must necessarily be considered something inferior in comparison with truly international disciplines such as general linguistics or comparative Indo-European studies?

4. Networks of information and information-searching

Thus it would seem that evaluating the networks of Finno-Ugric studies is very difficult, for obvious reasons. In a low-volume discipline, characterised by individualist research traditions, a great variety of methods, approaches, traditions, terminologies and meta-languages, networking cannot be very dense. As mentioned above, the progress of discussion is characteristically very slow, with years or even decades between contributions to a certain theme—or the discussion may stagnate completely, as seems to have happened with one of the last papers by Mikko Korhonen (1988), whose "heretical" ideas about the history of Proto-Uralic vowels, strangely enough, failed almost entirely to provoke a debate.

What are the aspects of networking that should be taken into account, should a comprehensive evaluation of Finno-Ugric studies from the network point of view be undertaken? First of all, there is to my knowledge no system-

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[1]   http://www.esf.org/research-areas/humanities/research-infrastructures-including-erih/erih-initial-lists.html

atic bibliometric analysis of Finno-Ugristic publications. How many studies in Finno-Ugric languages appear outside the traditional Finno-Ugric fora (such as the publication series of the Finno-Ugrian Society and the Societas Uralo-Altaica), and what is "Finno-Ugric" in this case? (Once again, how do we draw a line between Fennistics or Hungarology and Finno-Ugric studies? Are *Virittäjä*, *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények* or *Keel ja Kirjandus* "Finno-Ugristic" journals?) Is it meaningful to analyse mutual quoting and referencing within Finno-Ugristic publications?

When evaluating networks of information and communication, the mother of all nets, the internet, cannot be passed by in silence. Due to the low volume of research, scanty resources and slow renewal of the information base in Finno-Ugric studies, most classic sources are still only available on paper, although the amount of relevant and reliable sources that are electronically accessible is constantly growing. This makes all analyses of networking based on the use of the internet fairly meaningless from the viewpoint of many core areas of Finno-Ugristics.

In addition to this, there are two general problems affecting the evaluation of electronic resources: First, the use of new media challenges the traditional division into "interpersonal communication" (for instance, informal discussion accompanying research in progress, typical of the first or conceptualisation phase in the process of scholarly communication) and "mediated scientific communication" or documentation of the results of research. Second, individual researchers do not act as systematically as information professionals expect them to—even if there are virtual libraries and information sources available, researchers do not use them or do not use them as frequently as possible. (Cf. Forsman 2005: 30–33.)

Forsman (op. cit. 34–35) quotes a study of students' information-searching behaviour (Heinström 2002) which established three different information-searching patterns (*Broad Scanners*, *Fast Surfers*, *Deep Divers*). She claims that the choice of strategy in information-searching is interconnected with both personality traits and the characteristics of the study area: soft disciplines with a wide range of sources, such as the social sciences, attract students who have an open, extroverted, competitive personality, and these people seem to favour a "broad scanning" strategy. To my knowledge, nobody has systematically researched information-searching procedures and strategies in Finno-Ugric studies, nor drawn any conclusions as to the typical personality traits of Finno-Ugrists. It seems probable that information-searching strategies in Finno-Ugristics are highly specified and varied, dependent of the relevant sub-fields and questions. I could also assume, on the basis on my own experience, that informal and personal connections play an important role and that a great part of the information-

searching is based on bibliographic connections between printed publications. However, as long as there are no systematic investigations concerning the use of databases, bibliographies and other information sources in our discipline,[2] this is no more than an assumption.

5. Networks of education and socialisation

The basic elements of networking in Finno-Ugristic scholarly communication and publication are easy to list: there are publication series and journals supported by Finno-Ugristic university institutes and learned societies (Finno-Ugrian Society, Societas Uralo-Altaica, etc.), and the very sporadic cases of papers on Finno-Ugric questions (pertaining to languages other than Finnish, Hungarian or Estonian) appearing "elsewhere", that is, in publication series, conference proceedings and journals of Fennistics, Hungarology or general linguistics. In addition to these regular fora, there are more or less occasional publications such as *Festschriften* (for Finno-Ugrists of my generation, which means contributing to at least one *Festschrift* every year and refusing quite a few further calls...), and, of course, symposia and symposium proceedings. This leads to the next point: interpersonal communication and social networks. Here, as in the area of scholarly publications and information-searching, there obviously have been no investigations of networking from a specifically Finno-Ugric point of view. The following remarks are, therefore, representative of my personal opinions and experiences alone, and I can only hope that they will provoke discussion and perhaps even stimulate further research.

As mentioned in the beginning, the networking of a scholar begins with academic education, which creates contacts not only within the home university but also with other institutions. For this reason, international student exchange and student conferences are extremely important, and the recent development of the IFUSCO student conferences into show-windows for Russian minority politics (Kuokkala's [2006] comment about the "mammoth disease" which expresses itself in an over-dimensional cultural programme could be understood in this way) that threatens to distance the IFUSCOs from the world of the average student, could be a dangerous one. An even more fundamental threat to under-graduate networking is posed by strict and school-like university curricula,

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[2]   The Finnish contributions to the URALICA project and its continuation, the URBIS database, are all accessible through the Finnish article database ARTO, and studies concerning the use and user opinions of the whole ARTO database do exist (http://www.kansalliskirjasto.fi/kirjastoala/koordinointi/ asiakaskysely2008.html; thanks to Maire Aho for this information!). However, it really seems that there has been no research on specifically Finno-Ugristic scientific communication.

which obviously allow for less and less optional studies in minor subjects and neighbour disciplines ("short degree tracks and a thorough education are mutually exclusive", Widmer 2004: 200). Considering the fact that a Finno-Ugristic education also typically implies acquiring a working command of two or more languages that are seldom taught in (Western) European schools, that is, learning these languages from scratch, it may even be increasingly difficult to find a place for an exchange semester at a foreign university in a curriculum already burdened by these heavy requirements.

Even at the beginning of her/his academic career, a young Finno-Ugrist should be given an opportunity to work at and create contacts with foreign universities and research institutions. In olden times, the career of many Finno-Ugrists who were native speakers of one of the three Finno-Ugric nation-state languages included working as a lecturer of their mother tongues. In the words of Riese (2008):

> The teachers of Hungarian and Finnish at the various departments of Uralic/ Finno-Ugrian Linguistics were earlier typically younger graduates of such departments in their home countries of Hungary and Finland. They spoke Hungarian or Finnish as their mother tongue, had a university degree (often in Finno-Ugrian Linguistics), but usually had no prior experience or training in the teaching of these languages to foreign students. It was also felt that such a teaching position was transitory at best, and should give the teacher the opportunity to work on his/her career as a linguist. A language teacher who, after a certain time, had not attained a higher scholarly degree and gone on to better things, e.g. a proper position in the university hierarchy, was considered a (scholarly) failure, all the more so if the teacher was a male, for whom the standards were of course "higher".

The professionalisation of teaching Finnish, Estonian or Hungarian as a foreign language in the last few decades, together with the shifting foci of language teaching at many foreign universities, has brought a change in this tradition (a welcome change, certainly, from the point of view of language teaching!). It remains to be seen whether this change in career development opportunities can be balanced by European and international investments in exchange scholarships for young researchers or by the new teacher's posts (lecturers or "language assistants" also coordinated or financed by Finnish, Estonian or Hungarian state organs) at some Finno-Ugric university departments in Russia.

6. Conclusion: The network perspective

In any case, for Finno-Ugristic institutions international networking is a vital issue. Teacher exchange, now financed by international programmes such as ERASMUS, could be an important instrument, and one could assume that small units such as Finno-Ugric departments would be particularly eager to use this opportunity to enhance and diversify their teaching programme; at least for our department in Vienna, the contribution of ERASMUS and CEEPUS exchange teachers has been essential. However, building contacts and creating cooperation beyond the level of a specified amount of teaching still depends on the initiatives of individual university teachers; systems of teacher exchange can only offer a framework, an opportunity to get to know each other and exchange ideas, but in the worst scenario they degenerate into travel bureaus for scholarly tourism.

Basically, this applies to congresses and symposia as well. They are still the best way to create and maintain interpersonal networking, including the aspects of bonding and solidarity, even in disciplines such as the computer sciences, in which traditional meetings of scholars could, in principle, easily be substituted by modern technological methods (Shen 2006: 243–244). A tradition for holding conferences is very lively in Finno-Ugric studies, as well. In addition to "local" symposia celebrating anniversaries of persons or institutions or continuing other local traditions, such as the biennial *Budapesti Uráli Műhely* symposia, the main international event in the world of Finno-Ugristics takes place every fifth year: the *Congressus Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum* (CIFU), which represents both the best traditions of our discipline and the most severe threats to its future.

The problems related to the CIFU tradition are evident to any Finno-Ugrist, and they have been discussed in various reports concerning previous congresses as well as within the international organising committee itself. In brief (cf. e.g. Laakso 2007): The CIFU institution originally had a covert secondary, non-scholarly function of maintaining national identities under the pressure of Soviet socialism and enabling Finno-Ugric cultural contacts across the Iron Curtain. Now relieved of this function, the CIFU should be able to intensify its activities in internal networking and activate contacts with relevant neighbouring disciplines. To attain the latter goal, the structures and standards compatible with scholarly events of a similar type should be introduced, that is: the CIFU should sharpen its scholarly profile.

The challenges of networking which the CIFU is facing now are symptomatic of two well-known and often deplored main problems affecting the whole field of Finno-Ugric studies. First, the Iron Curtain has been replaced by a lan-

guage barrier and methodological divide between the Russian-language tradition and Finno-Ugric studies *lato sensu* (in particular, the three "major" Finno-Ugric national philologies) in the West. Typical Fennists or Hungarologists do not read Russian, sometimes not even German.

Second, despite numerous pious wishes, there is too little "external" networking, that is, networking between Finno-Ugric studies, general linguistics and other related disciplines. Attempts to bridge this gap have been made, for instance, by the Uralic Typology Database project or the new electronic journal *e-Uralic*. However, the discussion on optimising the division of labour and resources between Finno-Ugric studies, national philologies, general linguistics and other related disciplines has hardly begun. The relationship with general linguistics is a particularly difficult question: is general linguistics a tool-kit serving linguists who work on specific languages and language families (and identify themselves with these specific disciplines and traditions) or is it an independent theoretical discipline with goals of its own, drawing on the material provided by ancillary disciplines? Since even general or theoretical linguists do not agree about the universal goals and perspectives of linguistics, there is probably no simple answer to the question of drawing the borders between language- or phylum-specific and general linguistic studies.

This, finally, is where the network aspect could and should be brought in. The point is that seeing disciplines as networks liberates us from the "life-span view". If a discipline is interpreted as a search for answers to a fixed set of questions, perhaps even in terms of a certain paradigm, it is bound to grow and then die, exhaust itself or fall apart, as in the following table:

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
CHARACTERISTICS OF KNOWLEDGE	Paradigm appears	Normal science	Solution of major problems Anomalies appear	Exhaustion Crisis
CHARACTERISTICS OF SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITIES	Little or no social organisa-tion	Groups of collaborators and an invisible college	Increasing specialisation Increasing controversy	Decline in membership Decline in membership

Table. Development of paradigms and scientific communities (from Crane 1975, quoted in Forsman 2005: 50).

Described in terms of individual paradigms, disciplines are subject to inevitable decay and death—despite friendly but condescending statements about today's Finno-Ugric studies such as in Hovdhaugen et al. (2000: 550): "Few signs of paradigmatic senility are visible." A network, in contrast, is dynamic and ever-renewing.

In evaluating a network or predicting its future, the crucial criterion of a stable and mature system is density and versatility of contacts, together with an optimal combination of "close" and "random distant" links (the "small worlds" structure). A network, which allows for a broad spectrum of subjects and flexible connections to neighbouring disciplines, seems to be a superior way to describe the tasks and challenges of a discipline such as Finno-Ugristics, a discipline characterised by a wide array of questions and approaches. This could also be the best way to evaluate the future accomplishments of Finno-Ugristic institutions: not in terms of "solution of problems" within a certain paradigm, as there is no one and only dominant paradigm within Finno-Ugric studies, and not just as ad hoc umbrellas for different kinds of philological studies involving languages which happen to be distantly related to each other.

Seen the other way round, the future of Finno-Ugric studies lies in networking. If the discipline is going to legitimate itself by describing itself as a network—which, as can be argued on the basis of what was stated above, could be the most viable strategy—both communication within Finno-Ugric studies and connections to neighbouring disciplines need our explicit attention. We need a dynamic view of knowledge, not only as something that precedes and triggers communication, but also as something that arises from communication itself.

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