

CSMN Afterlife

Background:

For the CSMN coregroup meeting 27.08.2014 , Olav Gjelsvik submitted the following memorandum:

“The Norwegian Centres of Excellence have made different choices at the end of their 10 year periods. There are two basic alternatives. Some have chosen to close down their operation completely. (The brain centre in Oslo, history centre in Bergen) Others have a continued existence, under the same name, but in a smaller format. Some of these have faculty or departmental support for a five year period (CASTL in Tromsø, Mathematics in Oslo)

From 2017 the university income of CSMN (NOK 2 mill) will be continued indefinitely, this is not bound up with a mini-centre, but will be a permanent contribution to the research and activities in the remit of the present centre.

CSMN faces a choice between these two models. It is, I believe, time to have an informed discussion about what is the better choice. Relevant issues concern the thoughts and plans of the people involved, how they see themselves working three years from now, what they want to pursue research-wise, and how this will fit into the two main alternatives. One main idea of CSMN, to optimize the research possibilities for all involved, should guide these choices, and the discussion about what is best should be free and open.

Olav

August 19th 2014.”

In the minutes from the meeting, written by Grethe Netland and to be finally approved at the next coregroup meeting, the following (among other things) is said about this issue:

“What follows below is not to be understood as a final statement from CSMN’s Core Group, just as summary of moments of the group’s first discussion on the matter: Based on the assumption that the Core Group’s opinion on the matter will count, it was decided to raise the issue towards IFIKK in short time, and to continue the discussion in the next Core Group meeting....

An argument that counts in favor of continuation, is CSMN’s strong name and good reputation. Besides, CSMN is, and will probably continue to be, an important platform for bringing in externally funded projects. An argument against a continuation is that people might want to go in other directions without being bound to the CSMN’s research profile. However, a prospective continuation must in no way

hinder anyone who has been connected to the centre to go their own way: all should feel free to work on CSMN topics, and to apply for money from outside the CSMN platform.

If we conceive of a CSMN that continues after 1 July 2017, there is a question of its purpose and organization. With regard to the first, there are two main models: Either, the purpose can be to work together on specific research topics, its purpose can be more instrumental, where the centre is a unit – with a strong name – from where one can apply for external funding, invite people and probably arrange events etc. within the general remit of “philosophical questions about language, morality and rationality”. The Core Group agreed that if there is going to be a continuation, the second model is the only realistic option. There is, however, not much sense in a centre without financial support, organizational structure and location.

After CSMN's period as a Centre of Excellence, UiO will contribute with NOK 2 mill annually for a follow up of what is built up during the 10 CoE-years. It is not up to CSMN to decide how this grant is going to be distributed. It is IFIKK, by its board, which is entitled to decide on the matter, but the Core Group's opinion will probably be carefully listened to. The same goes for thoughts about structure and location, which is questions that the Core Group will return to, but one idea is to ask for a base at sixth floor and ask IFIKK to take the chance to hire an administrator that can be dedicated to CSMN and connected externally funded projects. “

The present issue:

In case of a more formal afterlife, the best option seems at the moment to be the last, the ‘platform model’. There are several issues in this connection. There is a given task of spending the 2 million in the best possible way for the stated purpose.

There is one overall common aim (common between IFIKK and CSMN) to increase the chances of new external projects and external incomes. It goes without saying that this common aim is best served by cultivating any competence there is in achieving such funding.

The next issue is whether the best way is to develop this ‘platform model’. Then there is an issue about the connection between having a platform and cultivating the competence in getting grants, and there is the issue of whether something like an administrative position could be devoted to maintaining the platform. In the last case there might be questions about whether using from the 2 million for an administrative position is the best way of serving the earmarked purpose for this money.

CSMN presently sees a platform life as the most realist form of afterlife, and thus the idea to explore further. There is a sense in which one wants an afterlife (who doesn't?). But as with all things, we also have to think critically through this, and look at the pros et contras.

Pros

Here are some arguments for a platform: It will provide an increased chance of new external grants, and this will justify also spending money on running it and

maintaining it. The cultivation of competence in winning grants is best served by a platform, as its existence will encourage and reinforce the willingness to engage in the necessary work for maintaining and cultivating the competence.

Contras:

Here is an exploration of some of the possible problems: If the platform is going to be just a platform, it might seem that there is no clear connection to maintaining the competence, since that competence is not connected to the use of the platform, with support, quality control etc. Furthermore, there is in such a case somewhat unclear why an administrative position should be needed, and also why this should be a long term good way of bringing in external funding. If it is seen that this is just a platform by the funding agencies, its value might be quickly diminished. On the other hand, if one connects maintaining and cultivating a good competence in getting external grants with the platform, one is suggesting more than just a platform, and there will in that case be issues about whether this is best way of cultivating and making use of this competence within IFIKK (something which clearly should be done).

CSMN has yet to do the serious thinking and conclude one way or other. For our conclusion for what to propose about an afterlife, we will be happy for IFIKKs input as to whether

- a) an afterlife in the shape of this platform is a good or realistic way forward, and something IFIKK will support
- b) attaching something like an administrative position to a possible platform is advisable, especially under what conditions it might be advisable.