

Research programme

Centre for Research on Sustainable Societal Transformation (CRS)

(Centrum för forskning om hållbar samhällsförändring)

Research at CRS

Through multidisciplinary research¹, the Centre for Research on Sustainable Societal Transformation (CRS) investigates social and societal relations, as well as processes and changes enabling or constraining sustainable development. Our research considers current and historical trends, and perspectives for the future. CRS research relates primarily to UN Sustainability Goals (SDG) 11, “Sustainable Cities and Communities”, and 16, “Peace, justice and strong institutions”. The programme also draws on topics listed under other SDGs such as “Gender Equality” (no 5), “Reduced Inequalities” (10), “Responsible Consumption and Production” (12) and “Life on Land” (15). CRS specialises in research on societal and sustainable development at the intersection of top-down and bottom-up processes in various spatial and temporal settings. Uneven sustainable development and asymmetrical power relations are of special interest in CRS research, in line with the fifth strategic goal of the 2030 vision for Karlstad University: “We systematically promote sustainable social, economic and environmental development”, with special emphasis on addressing challenges of uneven development to communities and social collectives. CRS hosts a multitude of disciplines, mostly from social and human sciences such as history, human geography, political science, sociology and social work, but also from multidisciplinary fields such as gender, risk, environmental and tourism studies. CRS also brings together senior and junior scientists, including post-doctoral researchers. The research centre is affiliated with a Graduate school, thereby contributing to the sixth goal of the 2030 vision for Karlstad University: “Our doctoral programmes increase in scope and improve in quality”.

Researchers at CRS participate in various national and international research consortia and networks, and co-operate with external actors and stakeholders, thereby supporting the fourth strategic goal of the 2030 vision for Karlstad University: “We demonstrate a larger degree of internationalisation in our operations”.

For research to have an impact on society, stakeholder cooperation and research communication are key to CRS research. CRS thereby contributes to the third strategic goal of the 2030 vision for Karlstad University: “Our teaching and research are characterised by close cooperation with the community”.

The main, partly overlapping, societal challenges of the past, present and for the future which are addressed by CRS are dilemmas in relation to:

Innovation, transformation and sustainable development

This challenge includes concepts such as planning, development, innovation systems, transition to bioeconomy, risks and effects on the society and the environment, landscape management, including nature conservation and heritage management.

Power structures, knowledge and the role of civil society

This challenge includes concepts such as communities, power, organisation and resistance, urban and rural relations, regional development, mobility, culture, learning processes, governance and justice.

¹ Multidisciplinary = involving different disciplines separately in an activity. Interdisciplinary = combining different disciplines in a common activity. Transdisciplinary = stakeholders included in the activity.

CRS research also includes methodological development, especially the generation and application of methods and methodologies for multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research. Historical analyses and the development of long-term perspectives are special strengths of CRS.

Strategies and Activities

CRS is characterised by inclusiveness and versatility, uniting several streams of researchers to a substantial critical mass. The aim is to provide an environment where researchers can develop networks and raise academic quality and competitiveness. Researchers are also encouraged to pursue transdisciplinary research through stakeholder-cooperation and to communicate their research. CRS takes special interest in promoting early career researchers.

The activities conducted by CRS are directed towards these strategies. In order to raise academic quality and competitiveness, and encourage researchers to compete for external research funding and publish in highly ranked publication channels, we convene a monthly writing workshop, where draft papers and applications are discussed in a peer environment. These writing workshops are open also to researchers outside the centre. In order to further promote academic writing, CRS organises a yearly writing retreat, and provides a yearly call for two publication grants.

CRS organises monthly seminars where both internal and invited external researchers and other partners present, and receive commentary on their ongoing research. The seminars also function as a meeting place to promote cooperation.

Special attention is paid to promoting early career researchers. This is done firstly through the Graduate School, in which PhD students from different disciplines within the CRS sphere participate. The Graduate School offers PhD-courses, sometimes in cooperation with disciplines in the CRS sphere, and other activities for the PhD-students, including seminars/workshops, writing retreats and sessions on career possibilities after a PhD exam.

Secondly, CRS is working on building a support structure and mentoring for early career scholars with a PhD. Currently, mentoring and support for early career scholars are offered within the writing workshops, the writing retreat and through the publication grants.

Societal impact

Research at CRS shall contribute to societal responses to challenges and dilemmas. CRS research focusses not only on societal challenges of the past and the present, but also on those likely to occur in the future. It is our aim that our research has a positive impact on society and policy that it contributes to new ways of managing societal and sustainability challenges. Transdisciplinary research, collaboration and research communication are key to helping make a difference for the authorities, institutions, communities and other stakeholders involved with CRS researchers or which otherwise benefit from our research.

Of principal interest is the involvement of civil society in development and promotion of research-based methods for sustainable management of natural and cultural resources and in regional innovation systems.

For more information on ongoing research, visit the CRS homepage: <https://www.kau.se/crs> (Swedish) or <https://www.kau.se/en/centre-regional-studies> (English).