



Centre for Research on Sustainable Societal Transformation (CRS)

SELF-EVALUATION

Periodic Research Review

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NAME OF RESEARCH UNIT: Centre for Research on Sustainable Societal Transformation (CRS), Karlstad University

Self-evaluation

1. Summary

The Centre for Research on Sustainable Societal Transformation (CRS) is a research center at Karlstad University organized under the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The purpose of CRS is to be an arena for research and collaboration on sustainability and societal transformation issues related to, e.g. urban, rural, and regional development. This means addressing e.g. planning policy, regional policy, sustainable lifestyles, transportation, energy policy, cultural heritage and sustainability challenges related to the relationship between the urban and the rural.

CRS plays an important role as a *multidisciplinary* arena, gathering researchers from several disciplines. The weight put on perspectives from the social sciences however means that CRS particularly focus on decision-making, policy discourses and social relations that pertains to sustainability and societal transformation. CRS's areas of interest are high on the societal agenda and of growing importance, and that means that CRS is relevant for a growing number of researchers and practitioners that has an interest in sustainability and transformation issues. As a multidisciplinary arena, CRS facilitates *interdisciplinary* research. CRS activities, such as regular seminars, retreats and an annual symposium, gather both researchers and practitioners from urban and regional development and other related fields. Representatives primarily from the County Administrative Board of Värmland and the regional administration Region Värmland are also engaged in planning events and in the implementation phases of research.

CRS is also responsible for the Graduate School on Sustainable Societal Transformation. The graduate school organizes activities for PhD students from six disciplines at Karlstad University and provides PhD students with a larger, multidisciplinary research environment.

Using the vocabulary of a SWOT, among the *strengths* of CRS are the topics of the research and collaboration activities, the graduate school, the advisory board and the relations with our collaboration partners (currently these are primarily the Region Värmland and the County Administrative Board). Looking at *opportunities*, apart from the opportunities of an increase in funding, there is an opportunity to strengthen CRS even more as the primary arena at Karlstad University where academia and practice meet on sustainability issues. The main *weakness* is the financial situation with a small base funding and lack of external research funding, as well as the relatively small group of involved senior researchers. Another weakness might be that the focus on collaboration between academia and practice in combination with the broad focus area of the centre is difficult to communicate internally at KAU. By tradition, centres are supposed to almost solely focus on increasing external funding. This is an important goal for CRS as well, but at the same time it is obvious that researchers and practitioners with an interest in sustainability and societal transformation need a collaborative space. The primary *threat* is that CRS will be closed due to these weaknesses.

It is important to be aware of, when reading this self-evaluation, that CRS is not a department at the university, but an arena for knowledge exchange through research, research communication and interaction with practitioners. This means that the tasks mainly concern creating and organizing a research community – by, in brief, research, collaboration and communication.

2. Organization and leadership

CRS was established in 2015 under the name “Centre for Regional Studies”, and it was an initiative built on a long history of research and center-like establishments at the university focusing on regional development issues. One of the forerunners was CERUT (Center for Regional Development Research), formed in 2002, a multidisciplinary environment which focused on regional development,

and collaboration with external actors outside of academia was central. Another one was the so-called “strategic research environment” Regionala Samhällsbyggen” (roughly translated as “regional development” as well) that was established in 2010 by the university. CRS was then renamed from the Centre for Regional Studies to the Centre for Research on Sustainable Societal Transformation in 2019 to reflect a broadened and more sustainability-oriented research focus.

An important part of CRS is the CRS graduate school. It was initiated already before CRS was formally a center, building on the history of regional research mentioned above. PhD students that are part of the graduate school are funded via their disciplines, and the disciplines are responsible for their doctoral studies. Currently 22 PhD students are members of the graduate school, and they come from political science, human geography, social work, risk- and environmental studies, history and sociology. The graduate school has, like the center, taken on different forms over the years. When it started, a group of PhD students were recruited at the same time, forming a tight group working with regional development research. Currently, it is a group of PhD students at different stages of their PhD studies, and more loosely tied together topic-wise. However, one important function of the graduate school over time has been that it provides a larger research environment to PhD students from disciplines with a limited research environment, something which the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Kau has deemed necessary. The director of the graduate school is responsible for organizing the activities that are collectively decided upon by the PhD students and the director. The budget at this point is 500 000 SEK per year.

As regards funding, CRS has a yearly base funding of approximately 1,5 MSEK which goes to salaries, activities and overhead costs (and co-funding in projects where this is required). External funding has been *circa 500 TSEK on average per year* during the last three years, and there have been around two applications per year submitted during 2022-2024 for research funding to CRS. It is a necessity to increase external funding for CRS, but this has been challenging during the last three years. All research and other activities that take place under the umbrella of CRS are carried out by researchers employed in a department at KAU. These researchers can choose to place their externally funded research project at CRS, and thereby also contribute to the program and agenda of CRS. A big problem is that the university's organization with departments and centers in essence makes these two organizational units compete for research funding. Small centers, CRS among them, risk being overshadowed by departments, which are the primary unit of internal reporting, auditing and evaluation and where the applicants have their employment.

CRS is organized under the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Karlstad University and as a research center it does not have employees but a management team with part-time assignments for 4-5 people. It has a director (currently Moa Tunström, senior lecturer in human geography, with a 20% of full-time assignment), a director of the Graduate School (currently Annika Jonsson, associate professor in sociology, with a 20% of full-time assignment), an administrative coordinator (currently Sigrid Josefsson, with a 10% of full-time assignment) and additional members with smaller roles in the management team (currently Stefan Backius, senior lecturer in history, with a 5% of a full-time assignment). There is also a representative of the doctoral students (during 2025 the representative shifted from Tove Bodland, PhD student in risk and environmental studies to Nelli Halkosaari, PhD student in sociology, with a 5% of a full-time assignment).

Apart from having the specific roles of e.g. director or doctoral student representative the members of the management team also should represent several disciplines to ensure multidisciplinary and different types of networks both internally and externally. Currently there are four female and one male member of the CRS management team and five female and three male members of the advisory board (see below), but this has varied over the years. This means that gender equality is one factor to consider when recruiting new members to both the management team and the advisory board. Other factors are disciplinary identity and field of expertise. The same goes for the events the center organizes; various factors need to be considered.

The CRS management team meets regularly once a month from August to June, and it is the responsibility of the director to call meetings. The director and the administrative coordinator also meet between these team meetings if necessary. The management team is small and tight knit, and the working climate is open and constructive. The management team plans the activities of the center (meetings, seminars, events, writing retreats etc.) and is responsible for budgeting, yearly reporting, communication etc. It is also responsible for increasing the external funding of the center by initiating and encouraging research applications among researchers in the broader CRS community. Since CRS does not have employees, recruitment, promotion, and succession are not central tasks. It is the task of the sitting director to organize the process of recruiting a successor, as well as a director of the graduate school, but this also requires the involvement of both the management team and the advisory board.

The specific role of the director (who has a three-year mandate) is to lead and manage the activities of the center, i.e. development strategies, meetings, seminars, communication, budgeting etc., and be the contact person both inwards and outwards to external actors. The role of director of the graduate school (who currently has a mandate that runs until 2027) is to lead and manage the activities of the Graduate school, i.e. meetings, seminars, communication, budgeting etc., and be the contact person both inwards and outwards to external actors. The role of administrative coordinator is to assist the directors by e.g. taking meeting notes, update the website and activities calendar, call to meetings with the advisory board send out the monthly newsletter, manage the practical arrangements around meetings, writing retreats, seminars and events, collect activity reports from researchers for the yearly reporting. It can also involve doing similar tasks in research projects if necessary. The role of doctoral student representative is to represent the PhD students in CRS, and to be a link between the management team and the PhD students. The role of other members of the management team is to represent their discipline, contribute with suggestions for activities, and assist in specific activities related to research projects or other initiatives within the center. In addition to these assigned roles, all research centers at KAU have access to central support functions funded via overhead costs, such as the conference department and the communications department at the university.

In addition to the management team, CRS has an advisory board consisting of representatives from KAU, other universities, and external actors. This advisory board meets 3-4 times/year and provides valuable advice and insights for the development of CRS. Based on presentations of past and ongoing research and other activities from the management team and researchers involved in CRS, the advisory board provides valuable perspectives and suggestions on the development of CRS. The current members of the advisory board are:

- professor Karolina Isaksson (chair), The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute
- governor Georg Andrén, County Administrative Board of Värmland,
- professor emerita in human geography Gunnel Forsberg,
- Malin Vikner, strategist at Region Värmland (the regional administration),
- Lukas Smas, associate professor in human geography, Stockholm University,
- Susanne Søholt, senior researcher in political science at OsloMet,
- Satu Heikkinen, associate professor in sociology, Karlstad University
- Fredrik Krohn Andersson, associate professor in Art history and senior lecturer in Cultural Studies, Karlstad University.

The PhD student in the management team is also part of the advisory board in the same capacity.

In the background data, people with some kind of involvement in CRS are listed. Having a project located at CRS means being involved, but you can also be involved in activities in the center without currently having a project at CRS – e.g. by being a supervisor to a PhD student in the graduate school, by actively contributing to seminars or symposiums, or by regularly attending our writing retreat.

Over the years, CRS has organized activities supporting both PhD students and young researchers, both as part of the graduate school and the broader CRS “community” (see more in sections 4 and 5 below). These activities can be in the form of seminars, writing workshops and research retreats where space and guidance is provided to present and discuss research application drafts or paper drafts, and to encourage research collaboration across disciplines. CRS has consistently aimed to maintain a low threshold for participation, to serve as an inclusive arena for research and collaboration by including both senior researchers and PhD students. Inclusivity and flexibility are qualities of the center. The center provides multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary events as a complement to daily work activities at the departments. When inquiries are made for research partners or commissioned research, it is the responsibility of the director to make sure that the inquiry reaches the right people, regardless of their discipline or seniority.

3. Scientific results and academic impact

Researchers at KAU are in many cases involved in or belong to more than one research environment. Since it is not regulated what accomplishment should be reported where, like research results and publications, it can be difficult to clearly discern when something is part of or exists because of the center. This, in turn, can make it tricky to evaluate a center at KAU with quantitative measures. It is however clear that the expertise of CRS is relevant and wanted. One indication of this is the three commissioned projects CRS researchers have landed in the last two years, all directed specifically to CRS or CRS researchers (one from Fagersta municipality in 2024, one from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth in 2025 and recently from the Swedish National Heritage Board in 2025, starting in 2026). Another indication is that several CRS researchers have been active as e.g. reviewers, keynote speakers, experts for research councils, and on boards of national authorities.

Apart from the list of publications in the background data, scientific results and impact can also be seen in projects and publications from a few years back. And it is worth emphasizing that all the examples that are listed below clearly illustrate that the activities in CRS also have an impact beyond academia, which is well in line with the ambition of the center:

- The project “**De obesuttnas arkeologi och kulturarv**” (roughly translated as “The archaeology and cultural heritage of the landless”) was running 2017-2019 with Professor Eva Svensson from CRS involved. It was funded by the Swedish National Heritage Board, and the aim was to contribute with new knowledge on the history, the people and the material heritage of the landless from 1700-1900. This project resulted in a handbook that presents methods for establishing and legally protecting this kind of cultural heritage. This handbook is being used by both archaeologists the Swedish National Heritage Board and the County Administrative Boards, and by private archaeological firms.
- Several CRS researchers from across disciplines and faculties have been involved in two projects funded by Interreg, one forestry-themed (**Ingoskog - Innovation for a green transition in the forest**, 2017-2020) and one food-themed (**Biokuma - Biocultural Heritage and Alternative Food Production**, 2020-2022). Being Interreg projects, they involved both academic partners and actors from the public and private sector in both Sweden and Norway. Ingoskog developed and tested new participatory methods and tools to highlight forest resources, their values and different types of stakeholders, and contributed with knowledge on the challenges of sustainable forestry. This broadened the understanding of forestry as an industry and the values of the forest. Similarly, Biokuma increased the knowledge and understanding of the challenges in small-scale ecological food production and facilitated the preservation and development of the biocultural heritage in the cross-border region. Since Biokuma ended, small-scale regional food production and consumption is a growing research theme at Karlstad University, both in Risk and Environmental Studies, and in Human Geography.
- In 2020, a group of researchers in CRS published a paper in a journal on higher education. The full reference is: Mobjörk, M., Berglund, C., Granberg, M., Johansson, M. (2020). “**Sustainable**

development and cross-disciplinary research education. Challenges and opportunities for learning", *Högre Utbildning*, 10(1): 76-89. Drawing on pedagogical research, it examined how research education is organized in four research milieus and the experiences of PhD candidates pursuing their education in these learning contexts and it is an obvious outcome from developing and running the CRS graduate school, and an important contribution to a changing PhD education landscape in Swedish academia, with an increasing number of multidisciplinary graduate schools.

- CRS researchers have contributed to the understanding and lessons learned concerning regional innovation. A good example of academic impact regarding this is the paper by Ida Grundel & Margareta Dahlström from 2016: **"A Quadruple and Quintuple Helix Approach to Regional Innovation Systems in the Transformation to a Forestry-Based Bioeconomy"** in *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*. The research came out of the need to understand the fourth helix and its role in regional innovation, and the study was inspired by participatory transdisciplinarity, acknowledging the importance of a variety of actors in knowledge production from different spheres of society. The results propose that involvement of civil society in the innovation system could contribute to a larger societal transformation that aims to change consumer behavior, production patterns, technological developments, infrastructure, norms and values.
- Strongly related to the previous point is CRS researchers' involvement in the process around developing **the regional smart specialization strategy for the region Värmland**. Smart specialization is an EU policy concept concerning regional innovation, and several researchers affiliated with CRS was during the early 2020s involved in conferences, meetings and workshops related to the formation of this strategy – as experts and as representatives of CRS and the university. Also, in Värmland there is an established collaboration between the university and the region, now called the Academy of Smart Specialisation. Among many other things, this collaboration during two years co-funded a professorship in regional development for Margareta Dahlström, located at CRS.
- CRS researchers were part of a Regional Studies Association (RSA) network that during 2017-2018 organized a series of international workshops and resulted in a book published in 2020, **"Regional Economic Development and History"**. Already in 2017, CRS hosted the Nordic RSA conference, "Regions in Transition".

A multi, inter- and transdisciplinary research arena can make use of research in projects regardless of their administrative belonging. Among projects from recent years that have been administratively outside of CRS but that still has contributed to CRS, are for example:

- **"Water challenges in sustainable planning" (WATCH)** - a Formas funded graduate school at Karlstad and Örebro universities, funding seven PhD projects in six disciplines from the social and natural sciences and actively involving partners from outside of academia.
- The international Erasmus+ project **"Alliance of Regional Innovation Ecosystems on Smart & Sustainable Specialization Strategies" (ARIES4)** which also involved both academic and practice partners from Spain, Denmark and Bulgaria.
- The Formas project **"Changing places of work: A place-based approach for re-imagining work in fossil-free industrial towns of the future"** involving a multidisciplinary team of researchers from Lund, Sheffield Hallam and Karlstad universities. Related to this is also a smaller one year-long project funded by the Wettergren trust called **Omvandling, kultur och identitet i en värmländsk bruksort** (roughly translated to "Transformation, culture and identity in a small mill town in Värmland"). It involves historians from Karlstad university and it is a case study of the small industrial community of Storfors in eastern Värmland, exploring processes of deindustrialisation and their impact on local identity and community development.

These projects all have researchers affiliated with CRS involved in them, and all projects have actively contributed to CRS seminars and sessions at the CRS symposium (see section 5).

4. Academic culture

As an arena, CRS is multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary. CRS, and other similar centers at KAU, are important complements to the “disciplinary” landscape of the university. When it comes to academic culture, multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity means that seminars, symposiums, and other events organized by CRS are based in and open to a broad range of disciplines, perspectives, and professions. It also means prioritizing research projects with multi- and interdisciplinary teams, and projects that can be of interest to both research and practice. A guiding principle for CRS is to be an interest-based community with a low threshold for participation. This means that participation and types of participants in projects and events vary. Some activities attract primarily young researchers; other activities attract more practitioners from outside of academia. In the end, however, they all serve the purpose of encouraging and renewing research. Three types of activities should specifically be mentioned: the seminar series (“I samma landskap”, see more in section 5), the yearly CRS symposium (see more in section 5) and the yearly writing retreats. They are all occasions to present, discuss and develop research ideas, proposals and projects, and they all include both junior and senior researchers. The CRS retreat usually takes place at a conference venue and has had 10-15 participants in the last few years, spending a few days working individually and in groups on research projects, applications, etc.

Within the graduate school, CRS regularly organizes text seminars where PhD students read and comment on each other’s paper or chapter drafts. These seminars enable PhD students to get multi- and interdisciplinary feedback from their peers. The graduate school also regularly organizes seminars, workshops, and lectures on topics such as research ethics, academic writing, popular science writing, and post-doctoral career planning. Lastly, the graduate school goes on a yearly writing retreat. During this week PhD students work on their dissertations, but they also engage in joint activities each day. On this year’s writing retreat, they for instance discussed working life conditions for PhD students at KAU with representatives from the HR department and worked on the graduate school’s sustainability agenda at a workshop.

In addition, since CRS is an interest-based community, initiatives and suggestions from this community for seminar topics, forms, and speakers are encouraged. Via the monthly university internal newsletter, CRS forwards information on research calls and events that can potentially be of interest to the community and also encourages suggestions. In the case that a project lacks publication opportunities or wants to publish easy access, there is also the option to publish CRS reports. In the past, CRS also organized internal calls for small travel grants and seed money for writing applications. However, during the last years the center’s financial situation has not made this possible.

As regards academic networks of strategic importance, these are of course dependent on the types of networks that individual researchers bring to CRS via their own research, and they can be quite specific and topical – on regional innovation, water issues, cultural heritage etc. Looking at table 5.2 in the background data, among collaboration partners for CRS researchers are both other Swedish and international universities, and national and local authorities and organizations. In addition, we want to mention a few specific examples of other types of networks. First, there have been collaborations with Countryside & Community Research Institute at the University of Gloucestershire which has taken the form of research workshops and joint sessions at international conferences such as the Nordic Geographers Meeting. CRS has also been represented in the SDSN Northern Europe, part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). This network gathers universities and other knowledge institutions in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden working with the UN sustainable development goals. Finally, CRS researchers have been active in a network called SKÅNK, an arena for research, policy, industry and civil society on the cultural heritage of the forest.

5. Collaboration with the surrounding community

Being an arena for research and collaboration on sustainability and societal transformation, collaboration with external stakeholders is of central importance, and it is one of the strengths of the

center. Through research projects and events, CRS is in dialogue primarily with local, regional and national policy makers involved in planning, regional development, and sustainability. They invite CRS researchers, and CRS invites them – as speakers, members of research consortiums, interviewees, seminar participants, etc. CRS is committed to developing our collaborative “competencies” and being an arena for meetings and exchange of knowledge and experience between research and practice. It can generate new research topics, research questions, research objects and forms of research, and also contribute to making KAU visible regionally and nationally. As regards the external actors CRS’s impression is that collaboration contributes with deeper and more nuanced knowledge on their day-today issues, and also the opportunity to influence research.

CRS has well-established collaborations with Region Värmland and The County Administrative Board and they – and other external actors – turn to us for commissioned research, presentations at their events etc. The County Administrative Board and the Region Värmland are represented in the advisory board of CRS, contributing with valuable knowledge, insights, and networks. External stakeholders such as national authorities, regional administrations, municipalities, and NGOs represent our audience, research partners, and study objects. Both in projects and applications there have in recent years been collaborations with e.g. Fagersta and Storfors municipalities and the national authorities The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) and the Swedish National Heritage Board (Riksantikvarieämbetet). In addition, CRS has for many years been a partner of the association Reglab which has been “a forum for regional capacity-building” primarily oriented towards the regional administrations in Sweden.¹ These kinds of collaborations are difficult to quantify or evaluate financially, but they definitely broaden and deepen the understanding of challenges in planning, regional development and sustainability. It is also of growing importance in many research funding calls to have partners from outside of academia, and for external stakeholders to base policy in research. One example of how this kind collaboration can play out in a research project is in the above-mentioned projects “Changing Places of Work: A place-based approach for re-imagining work in fossil free industrial towns of the future” and “Omvandling, kultur och identitet i en värmländsk bruksort”. There, CRS researchers have worked strategically with research communication in the projects and been able to provide direct feedback to the local communities in Sweden where the research was carried out.

The more comprehensive collaboration between CRS and Region Värmland can be traced back to the so-called Academy for Smart Specialisation”. Since 2010, Karlstad University and Region Värmland have worked in a formal partnership on research and innovation activities linked to regional development. In 2015, this partnership led to the creation of the Academy for Smart Specialisation. The different actors within the Academy collaborate to achieve the shared goal of strengthening Värmland's private and public sectors, while also supporting research, innovation and education at Karlstad University. During 2021 and early 2022, work continued on further developing the regional strategy according to the smart specialisation model. Region Värmland led this process, with involvement from Värmland’s private and public sector organisations and from Karlstad University. In this process, several researchers affiliated with CRS (Lotta Braunerhielm, Margareta Dahlström, Linda Ryan Bengtsson and Moa Tunström) were actively involved in meetings and workshops representing the university.

The collaboration with The County Administrative Board and Region Värmland currently take two main concrete forms apart from the advisory board: **the CRS seminar series** and **the yearly CRS Symposium**. These events are programmed in collaboration and directed towards an audience from both academia and practice. The ambition is to address topics of relevance for Värmland from a research perspective and from experiences from practice. Both activities create an ongoing discussion and a dialogue that is of great value for CRS, and this appears to be the case also for the participating practitioners.

¹ It will however close down/reorganize during 2026 so now it is unclear how it will function in the future.

The seminar series “I samma landskap” (translated to “In the same landscape”, landscape both referring to an arena and a geographical context, landscapes being an archaic form of regions in Sweden) have had the following events during 2022-2025, with an audience of around 15-40 people from both academia and practice:

- June 13th, 2022: Vem kan man lita på? Ett samtal om samhällstillit och hållbar samhällsförändring (“Who can you trust? A panel on societal trust and sustainable societal transformation”, with a number of persons from the county administrative board, the university, local media, civil society organisations etc.)
- October 5th, 2022: Bilder av Värmland (“Images of Värmland”, with Lotta Braunerhielm, Karlstad University, presenting her research on the marketing of Värmland)
- 30 november 2022: Hur pratar vi om skogens värden? (“How can we talk about the values of the forest?”, an event with presentations by Margaretha Dahlström, Karlstad University, Anders Esselin, process manager for the regional forestry program for County of Västerbotten, Anders Olsson, Region Värmland)
- December 16th 2022: Sociala skillnader och socialt engagemang i Värmland (“Social difference and social engagement in Värmland”, an event with presentations by Anna-Karin Tollin, Region Värmland, P O Norell, Karlstad University, David Freundt, Tillitsbyrån and Andreas Pettersson, Occupy Bygdegården)
- May 22nd 2023: Förändrade livsvillkor på landsbygden (“Changed living conditions in the countryside”, an event with presentations by Marie Nordfeldt, Ulrika Åkerlund & Lotta Braunerhielm, all from Karlstad University)
- May 27th 2024: Att skapa energigemenskap i staden och på landsbygden (“Creating energy communities in the city and the countryside”, an event with a panel discussion with speakers from Region Värmland, Coompanion and the County Administrative Board)
- October 17th 2024: Vad är en hållbar region? (“What is a sustainable region?”, an event with presentations by Johanna Tangnäs, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Lisa Gärdt, Glava Energy Center, and Moa Tunström, Karlstad University)
- April 9th 2025: Utveckling, avveckling eller anpassning? Om små kommuners utmaningar och möjligheter (“Develop, wind down or adapt? On the challenges and opportunities of small municipalities”, a panel discussion led by Stefan Backius, Karlstad University, with Emil Jessen and Magnus Ahlstrand from the County Administrative Board Värmland, Maria Frisk, Region Värmland, and Hector Vallejos and Ewa-Leena Johansson, former local politicians from Munkfors and Ljusnarsberg municipalities)
- June 3rd 2025: Strategisk regional planering i teorin och praktiken (“Strategic regional planning in theory and practice”, an event with presentations by Mattias Landin & Rebecka Hallén Jorquera, Region Värmland, Moa Tunström, Karlstad University and Laila Gibson, the lake Vänern Cooperation)
- October 8th 2025: Att bygga för beredskap (“To build for preparedness”, an event with presentations by Kalle Alexandersson, Kristinehamn municipality, Tommy Sjöling, The County Administrative Board and Fredrik Krohn Andersson, Karlstad University”)

The CRS symposium, which is a mini conference, has so far been organized three times with around 50 participants each time, from both academia and practice. Each year the symposium has a broad theme which is deepened and operationalized by keynote speakers, and in panels and sessions. The symposium is free to attend and it has been appreciated by the participants, not least because the smaller format makes it easy to connect to other participants and keep important conversations going throughout the event. The mix of people has also been highlighted as something very positive by the

participants. From CRS's point of view, every symposium has meant that new knowledge and new perspectives have been gained, and that networks have expanded further.

The first year the theme was **Hållbarhetens temporalitet (The temporality of sustainability)** and the event took place November 23-24th 2023. The symposium was co-organized with Region Värmland and The County Administrative board in Värmland, with CRS deciding the overall theme, outlining the sessions, and doing the hands-on work. The keynotes, Professor Nina Cyrén Wormbs and Dr Richard Irvine, presented research on people's ability to disregard the future in everyday (consumer) life and the importance of a deep time perspective in sustainability respectively. Sessions dealt with, for instance, green re-industrialization and the Paris Agreement as a process.

In 2024 the heading was **Hållbarhet under förhandling (Sustainability under negotiation)** and the event took place December 5-6th. The overall theme of this symposium was how big questions about sustainability, risk and equality are shaped by and also shape local contexts. Sessions focused on, among other things, climate change adaptation and sustainable planning, and possibilities for different local actors to cooperate in relation to risk management. Keynote speaker was Susanne Wallman Lundåsen from Linköping University. PhD students from CRS graduate school hosted their own session entitled "Meet the sustainability researchers of tomorrow". This symposium was also co-organized with Region Värmland and The County Administrative board in Värmland, and it drew researchers as well as practitioners from a wide variety of organizations.

And finally, in 2025 the theme was **Vardagsliv och samhällsplanering i omställning (Everyday life and planning in transition)** and it took place November 27-28th. This symposium started off with a screening of the film described below combined with keynote presentations by Stefan Backius and Tomas Mitander (from political science at KAU). The theme of the presentations was justice dimensions in regional planning and transition in rural areas. In the sessions, the symposium addressed issues of regional equality, how to create an age-friendly society, the importance of locally produced food, and the ability and willingness to adapt to climate change in everyday life. Five PhD students from the graduate school made posters and presented their research to curious participants.

CRS has collaborated with the surrounding society in a **film project** (the title of the film has yet to be decided at the time of writing). The project was initiated in autumn 2024 and was a continuation of a session that Stefan Backius, member of the CRS management team, organized at the symposium 2023. The session came out of Backius' research and dealt with deindustrialization and green re-industrialization, and among the speakers were representatives from Region Värmland and The County Administrative board in Värmland, as well as researchers from different disciplines. The session was considered very relevant, and it was decided that something more should come of it. With the help of the university's communication support, interviews were filmed at five different locations. Three of the interviewees were picked straight from the original session and two were added later to broaden and deepen certain themes.

The film is educational as it provides a historical account of important societal transformations in Sweden from the 1860s to current day. It also addresses the changing life conditions for people who live in small towns and in the countryside. The film is meant to serve as a conversation starter for students and practitioners, as it sums up and comments on the current debate about the future of depopulated, postindustrial areas of Sweden (and indirectly areas in other countries that face similar challenges). The film touches on several important sustainability issues as it interrogates the urban norm and problematizes the lack of focus on "soft" values. It will shortly be distributed via CRS's networks, and the hope is that it, apart from generating discussion, will strengthen CRS's position as a collaborative arena.

In projects, CRS researchers often collaborate with a variety of actors both economically, in kind and in networks. For, example, Professor Eva Svensson is working in the nationwide project SweDigArch (Swedish National Infrastructure for Digital Archaeology) that involves both several universities and national authorities. In the Interreg project Biokuma (Biocultural heritage and alternative food

production), cultural heritage organisations and regional agricultural and forestry actors were involved, in addition to universities and governmental authorities. In individual projects CRS researchers have recently been collaborating with e.g. NGOs, farms, museums, church organisations, national authorities etc. This sometimes involves financial collaboration, but often it takes the form of in-kind contributions or co-arranging seminars, providing a space for events etc. This is of course very valuable for the specific project and for research communication but does not mean that CRS receives direct research funding.

Recently a CRS researcher was involved in a commissioned project from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) together with a researcher from Örebro University. The study was published in Swedish in the form of a CRS report and presented at a digital event organized by Tillväxtverket. That event has generated new opportunities for popular science research communication both in oral and written form, and work is ongoing to write an academic paper from the project. This is a good example of how commissioned research can result in both research, communication, and collaboration – and it is an example to find inspiration from, for CRS's further development. In a similar way, a commissioned project from the municipality of Fagersta led to a joint research application together with researchers from another center at the university. In that case, the application was administratively placed at the other center, something that illustrates the challenges for research centers - competing not only with the departments but with each other internally.

6. Interaction between research and education

Education is not the primary task of the research centers at KAU. However, CRS is a special case since it is responsible for a Graduate School. The CRS Graduate School organizes an introductory course for the PhD students called "Introduction course for doctoral studies in the Research school on sustainable societal transformation". It has been given whenever a new "batch" of PhD students have joined the graduate school. Since the disciplines recruit PhD students at different times of the year and with different intervals, it is not always easy to know when to offer the course. It was last given during spring 2023 with seven PhD students participating. Themes of the course include how the concept of sustainability has been theorized and put to use in different contexts, and what ontological and epistemological dimensions we need to consider when analyzing a sustainability framework. An important aspect of the course is its focus on multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives. Senior lecturers from the six disciplines that are part of the graduate school are always engaged in the course, and the literature also reflects the overall interest in combining and integrating different disciplines. The course is a link between CRS and education in both a direct and an indirect way. Directly, because the director of the graduate school is responsible for organizing the course, and indirectly because staff from CRS teach on the course. In 2023, Moa Tunström, representing human geography, for instance held a lecture on social sustainability. Annika Jonsson, director of the graduate school and also representing sociology, gave a lecture on cross-disciplinary collaboration and research. In this fashion CRS is, albeit irregularly, involved in education.

The graduate school has also been responsible for a PhD course called "The art of writing a thesis and feeling great along the way – writing processes and academic writing". This course has been open to all PhD students at KAU and was originally built on activities arranged exclusively for the graduate school. It became a separate course in 2022 and has been very appreciated by PhD students. In average, 8-9 PhD students have participated each spring term. The aim of the course is, among other things, to allow students to analyze their own approach to writing and develop an action plan to improve their writing.

CRS staff are, via their disciplines, involved in courses that are thematically linked to CRS. To give an example – Stefan Backius, senior lecturer in History and part of the CRS management team, has recently developed a course called "Deindustrialisation". The course shines a light on local experiences of global processes, i.e. what consequences deindustrialization has when it comes to working life in postindustrial environments, identity formation, and cultural renegotiations. This

course pertains to research conducted by Backius, but it is also a result of CRS symposium 2023, and the CRS seminar series. In the same vein, Annika Jonsson has developed a course on environmental problems for the Master Program in Critical Social Analysis, which is offered by Sociology at KAU. A third example is the Bachelor programs in Spatial and Social Planning and Tourism and Place Design, both topically intimately related to CRS focus areas. Several CRS researchers from Human Geography are involved in teaching (Lotta Braunerhielm, Lena Grip, Svante Karlsson, Moa Tunström and Ulrika Åkerlund) and make use of their research in lectures and other activities.

Finally, the film described earlier is meant to be used in education, and it is open access and distributed to suitable disciplines at KAU and other universities. Appropriate educational contexts are the programs mentioned in the previous paragraph. At the first screening of the film at the CRS Symposium in November 2025 it attracted interest both from participants involved in higher education and from national and regional authorities, and the ambition is to continue to spread the film to colleagues internally and externally.



The Center for Research on Sustainable Societal Transformation (CRS)

BACKGROUND DATA

Periodic Research Review

INTRODUCTION

Background data covers a three-year period (2022-2024) and contains information about staff, third-cycle education, financial resources and research outputs. Data is collected from the university administrative systems to provide an overview and illustrate preconditions for research at the evaluation unit.

1. STAFF

1.1

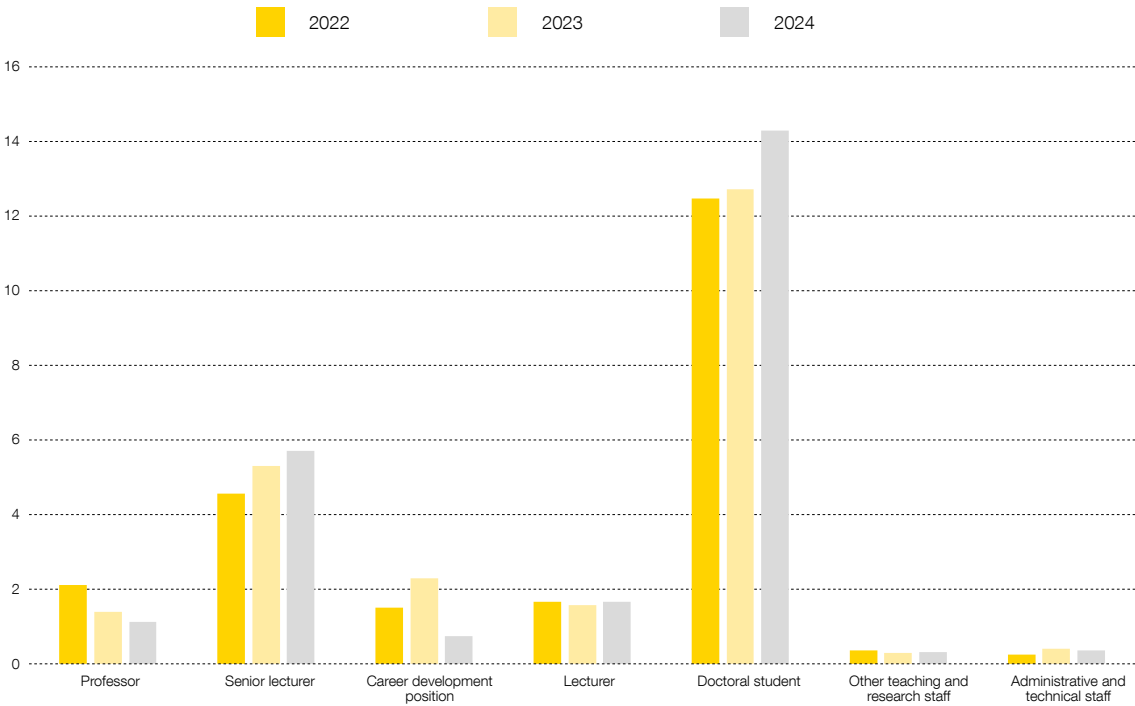


Figure 1.1 Workforce by staff category

The graph shows the workforce, full-time equivalents*, registered for research activity, and connected to the evaluation unit over a three-year period. Staff categories are professor, senior lecturer, career development position, lecturer, doctoral student and other teaching and research staff. See table 1.2 for individuals in each category.

Source: Primula

* Full-time equivalent (FTE) is a unit of measurement to illustrate the number of full-time hours spent on research for all employees at Karlstad University. Research includes recorded time covered by internal funding, external research funding, and commissioned research funding.

Table 1.2 Staff at the evaluation unit

Staff, based on position, engaged in research at the evaluation unit during 2024.

Position	Subject
Professor	
Dahlström, Margareta	Human Geography
Nordfeldt, Marie	Social Work
Svensson, Eva	Risk and Environmental Studies
Senior lecturer	
Agin, Sol	Media and Communication Studies
Backius, Stefan	History
Bhowmik, Avit Kumar	Risk and Environmental Studies

Senior lecturer

Braunerhielm, Lotta	Human Geography
Christenson, Nina	Biology
Enefalk, Hanna	History
Forsell, Anders	History
Gibson, Laila	Human Geography
Grip, Lena	Human Geography
Haas, Jan	Geomatics
Hoppstadius, Fredrik	Human Geography
Ibsen, Hilde	Risk and Environmental Studies
Jonsson, Annika	Sociology
Jul Sørensen, Majken	Sociology
Karlsson, Svante	Human Geography
Lampert, Peter	Biology
Landstedt, Evelina	Social Work
Ryan Bengtsson, Linda	Media and Communication Studies
Stegmann Mccallion, Malin	Political Science
Tunström, Moa	Human Geography
Åkerlund, Ulrika	Human Geography

Career development position

Mujezinovic, Davor	History
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Lecturer

Gustafsson, Kristin	Risk and Environmental Studies
Herstad, Maja	Gender Studies
Lindh, Magnus	Political Science
Melin, Åsa	History
Persson, Linda	Risk and Environmental Studies
Velander, Josefin	Sociology

Doctoral student

Andersson, Sandra	Social Work
Billebo, Sofia	Human Geography
Bodland, Tove	Risk and Environmental Studies
De Goër De Herve, Mathilde	Risk and Environmental Studies
Dijkers, Dide	Risk and Environmental Studies
Göransson, Per	Human Geography
Halkosaari, Nelli	Sociology
Hallerbäck, Sofia	Risk and Environmental Studies
Högsnes, Monika	Social Work
Lindhé, Ruth	Risk and Environmental Studies
Lindqvist, Lisa	Sociology
Loebs, Leigh Ann	Social Work
Mikalsen, Kristin	History
Mirbabaei, Shahab	Sociology
Nilsson, Kristoffer	Social Work
Nordsäter, Magdalena	Risk and Environmental Studies
Padden, Michaela	Political Science

Doctoral student

Rudnik, Alesia	Political Science
Tangnäs, Johanna	Political Science
Thielen, Alexander	Sociology
Turesson, Kenny	Risk and Environmental Studies
Van Eerbeek, Peter	Human Geography
Veeravalli, Sai Ganesh	Risk and Environmental Studies

Administrative staff

Josefsson, Sigrid

Source: Evaluation unit/Primula

Table 1.2.1 Researchers engaged in research at CRS, but not employed at Karlstad University.

- Hilde Rigmor Amundssen, Researcher at Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU)
- Ida Andersson, Senior lecturer, School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Örebro universitet
- Karl-Johan Lindholm, Professor, Dept. of Archaeology and Ancient History at Uppsala University
- Ida Grundel, Associate Professor, Docent, Department of Thematic Studies, Technology and Social Change (TEMAT), Linköping University
- Brita Hermelin, Professor of Human Geography at Linköping University
- Dan Keech, Senior Research Fellow, Countryside and Community Research Inst, University of Gloucestershire
- Hanna Martin, Senior lecturer, Department of Business Administration, University of Gothenburg
- Diana Carolina Morales Arcila, Postdoctoral Fellow - Centre for Technology, Innovation and Culture, University of Oslo

THIRD CYCLE STUDIES**Table 2.1 Doctoral students**

Doctoral students by discipline, year of admission, and degree of activity during 2024. Industry/collaborative/external doctoral students are marked with (I).

Name	Admission subject	Year of admission	Degree of activity 2024	Industry/external/collaboration (I)
Kristin Mikalsen	History	2019	20	
Per Göransson	Human Geography	2019	64	
Peter van Eerbeek	Human Geography	2020	65	
Sofia Billebo	Human Geography	2018	52	
Dide Dijkers	Risk and Environmental Studies	2023	74	
Kenny Turesson	Risk and Environmental Studies	2022	69	
Khabat Amin	Risk and Environmental Studies	2018	47	(I)
Magdalena Nordsäter	Risk and Environmental Studies	2018	61	
Mathilde de Goer de Herve	Risk and Environmental Studies	2019	57	
Sai Ganesh Veeravalli	Risk and Environmental Studies	2024	34	
Tove Bodland	Risk and Environmental Studies	2019	33	
Kristofer Nilsson	Social Work	2020	77	
Leigh Ann Loebs	Social Work	2021	35	

Name	Admission subject	Year of admission	Degree of activity 2024	Industry/external/collaboration (I)
Monika Högsnes	Social Work	2022	100	
Sandra Andersson	Social Work	2020	74	
Alexander Thielen	Sociology	2023	75	
Lisa Lindqvist	Sociology	2020	77	
Maja Herstad	Sociology	2020	68	
Nelli Katarina Halkosaari	Sociology	2024	81	
Seyed Shahab Mir Babaei	Sociology	2022	78	
Alesia Rudnik	Political Science	2020	70	
Jasmin Lind	Political Science	2022	33	(I)
Johanna Tangnäs	Political Science	2018	8	
Michaela Padden	Political Science	2011	43	

Source: Ladok

Table 2.2 Completed a degree of licentiate or doctor

Number of students that have completed a Degree of Licentiate and Doctor over the past three years.

Name	Subject	Degree (L/D)	2022	2023	2024
Åsa Melin	History	D	1		
Sol Agin	Media and Communication Studies	D	1		
Johanna Tangnäs	Political Science	D			1
Michaela Padden	Political Science	D			1
Mathilde de Goer de Herve	Risk and Environmental Studies	D			1
Josefin Velander	Sociology	D		1	
Total sum			2	1	3

Source: Ladok

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Table 3.1 Research funding

Research funds spent at the evaluation unit for the period of 2022 - 2024. Amounts in SEK 1 000.

	2022	2023	2024
Faculty funding ¹	1 983	1 792	1 656
External funding ²	1 521	659	494
Total	3 504	2 451	2 150
Percentage external funding	43%	27%	23%

Source: KULI/Raindance

¹ Faculty funding: Includes revenue from governmental funding and other internal incomes that include, for example, grants and/or compensation from other parts of the University.

² External funding: Includes revenue from fees, other reimbursements and funding. Funding which can include grants from councils, other public research funding agencies, municipalities, regions, and research foundations.

Table 3.2 External research funding

Distribution of external research funds spent during the period of 2022–2024. Amounts in SEK 1000.

Funding source	2022	2023	2024
EU and Foreign organisations	-251	-304	
Swedish Research Councils ¹	867	83	-117
Other Swedish government funders	657	630	416
Country councils and municipalities			195
Private foundations, industries, companies, etc.	248	250	
Total	1 521	659	494

Source: KULI/Raindance

¹ Research Councils include the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte), the Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development (Formas) and the Swedish Institute for Educational Research (Skolforskningsinstitutet).

Table 3.2.1 External research funding – ongoing projects

The table shows research projects during 2022–2024 that CRS are involved in. Amount in SEK 1000.

Funding source	Project	CRS member (s)	Project duration	Amount granted (KAU share)	Coordinator/Participant
EU Horizon 2020	Responsible research and innovation approach for transitioning the traditional (DigiTeRRI)	Margareta Dahlström, Malin Stegmann McCallion, Magnus Lindh	2020–2022	2 023	Participant
Interreg (EU)	Biocultural heritage and food production (BIOKUMA)	Eva Svensson (PL) Margareta Dahlström	2020–2022	1 082	Participant
Erasmus+	Alliance of regional innovation ecosystems based on smart sustainable specialisation strategies (ARIES4)	Avit Bhowmik, Moa Tunström	2022–2024	2 038	Participant
MIRAI (Japan Sweden collaboration platform)	Martech	Avit Bhowmik	2021–2023	199	Participant
Swedish Research Council	SweDigArch – The Swedish National Infrastructure for Digital Archaeology	Eva Svensson, Jan Haas	2022–2027	1 940	Participant
Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development	Beyond the city life. Post-migration experiences of the everyday life for families with young children moving out from a metropolitan area	Ulrika Åkerlund (PL) Fredrik Hoppstadius	2019–2022	2 978	Coordinator
Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development	WATCH – Water challenges in sustainable planning and the built environment (Research school)	Moa Tunström, Ida Andersson, Örebro University	2023–2027	5 800	Coordinator
Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development	Managing rural communities: The role of local civil societies.	Marie Nordfeldt	2020–2023	868	Participant
Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare	Changing places of work: a place-based approach	Stefan Backius, Åsa Melin, Davor Mujezinovic	2021–2024	3 033	Participant
Riksbankens Jubileumsfond	Rural-urban relations and sustainable transformation – a trans-disciplinary approach	Nina Christenson, Moa Tunström, Mathilde de Goër de Herve, Margareta Dahlström.	2022	87	Participant

Funding source	Project	CRS member (s)	Project duration	Amount granted (KAU share)	Coordinator/Participant
Assignment for Fagersta Municipality: Evaluation of the Municipality's Response to the African Swine Fever Outbreak, Crisis Management and Crisis Communication		Ulrika Åkerlund, Lena Grip, Sol Agin + student	2024	200	Coordinator
Assignment for the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth: Strategic Planning in a Regional Context		Moa Tunström	2024–2025	100	Coordinator

Source: Evaluation unit/Raindance

Table 3.3 External research funding statistics

Number of grant applications submitted to external funding bodies, number of granted applications, amount applied for, and amount granted refers to Karlstad University's share. Amounts in SEK 1000.

	2022	2023	2024
Number of grant applications	2	1	3
Number of granted applications	0	0	0
Amount applied	1 798	0	9 384
Amount granted	0	0	0

Source: KULI/Raindance

5. EXTERNAL COLLABORATION AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

5. External collaboration and academic engagement

Table 5.1 Engagement in the scientific community. The table shows the number of individual peer-review assignments within the evaluation unit during 2024.

Assignment	Total numbers, 2024
Plenary or keynote talk at international conferences	6
Assignment as expert evaluator in research councils and foundations	2
Assignment as expert evaluator for position of professor, associate professor (docent) and/or senior lecturer	2
Assignment as opponent for PhD thesis	
Assignment as member of examination board for PhD thesis	2
Assignment as editor or member of editorial board for journal	2
Assignment as reviewer for international journal	16
Assignment for national scientific councils	
Assignment for international scientific councils	2

Source: Evaluation unit

Table 5.2 Collaborative partners

Collaborative partners, reported by the name of organization, for the period 2022-2024. Research collaborations given here are limited to those with joint research grants and/or joint publications with the evaluation unit.

Table 5.2 Collaborative partners

Collaborative partners, reported by the name of organization, for the period 2022-2024. Research collaborations given here are limited to those with joint research grants and/or joint publications with the evaluation unit.

	Regional	National	International
Academic		Örebro University Lund University Linköping University University of Gothenburg Uppsala University Umeå University Stockholm University Linnaeus University Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) Marie Cederschiöld University	The Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa Sheffield Hallam University Concordia University Montreal University of Inland Norway University of Salamanca University of Genua (MC research school) University of Central Lancashire – Cyprus
Industry	Nordic Innovation Food Arena (Nifa)		
Public sector	County Administrative Board Region Värmland Fagersta Municipality	National Heritage Board Swedish History Museum County Administrative Board Uppsala Swedish Transport Administration The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise Kommuninvest Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency Swedish Gender Equality Agency	Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) Nofima – The Norwegian Institute of Food, Fisheries and Aquaculture Research
Other		Swedish Association for Scholarly Publication	

Source: Evaluation unit

6. SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION

The research activity at Karlstad University is expressed, among other things, in scientific publications. This report aims to map the publishing activity and its development over time for The Center for Research on Sustainable Societal Transformation, CRS. The report also shows the proportion of internationally co-authored publications where at least one of the authors is affiliated with a university outside Sweden as well as the proportion of publications that are open access, i.e. freely available online.

METHOD

To get a complete coverage of what is published within the unit, the following tables are based on registered publications in DiVA (Digital Scientific Archive), the local publication repository where researchers, teachers and students register their research publications and essays. It covers all subject areas and publication types.

Publication extraction for the years 2022-2024 has been based on the researchers individual KAU ID, which links them with their respective publications. The list of researchers that are included in the analyses was provided by the HR department at KAU and includes also researchers that are no longer part of the unit but were employed during 2022-2024.

The analysis includes all publications where at least one of the authors is affiliated with Karlstad University. The publication types included in the report consist of article in journal, article review, book review, book, chapter in book, conference paper, collection (editor), proceedings (editor), and report. The publication subcategories presentation, poster, abstracts and “other” have been omitted from the analysis because these entries are registered to a very varying extent by the researchers. Doctoral dissertations and licentiate theses are reported in detail in other parts of the evaluation and have therefore also been omitted here.

PUBLISHING OUTPUT

Counting the total number of publications is the simplest bibliometric measure for reporting publications over a period of time for a research-producing unit. The evaluation unit The Center for Research on Sustainable Societal Transformation, shows that the 62 people connected to the unit, have published 124 publications between 2022-2024 (for full publication list see appendix 1). Figure 6.1 shows publication volume changes between 2022 and 2024. Figure 6.3 shows the number of publications for each publication and content type during the investigated period.

Figure 6.1 The annual total number of publications during 2022-2024.

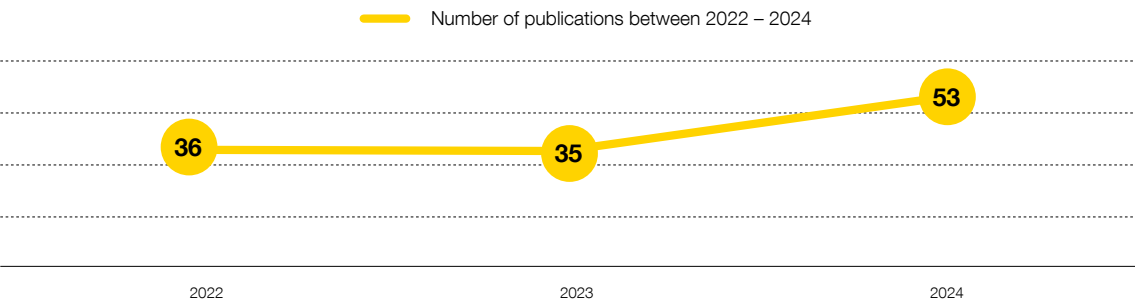


Figure 6.2 Number of peer-reviewed publications per year for the unit (bars). Percentage of peer-reviewed unit publications (line) out of the total annual number of publications.

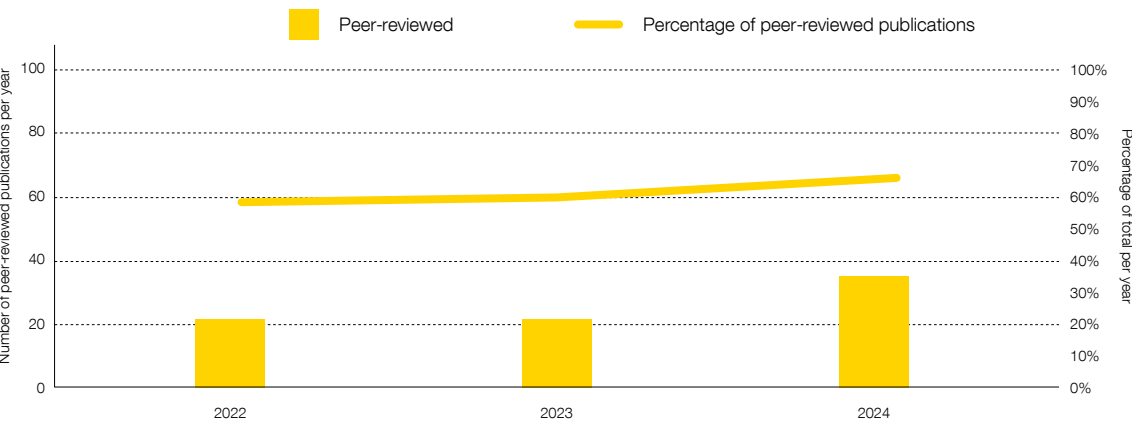


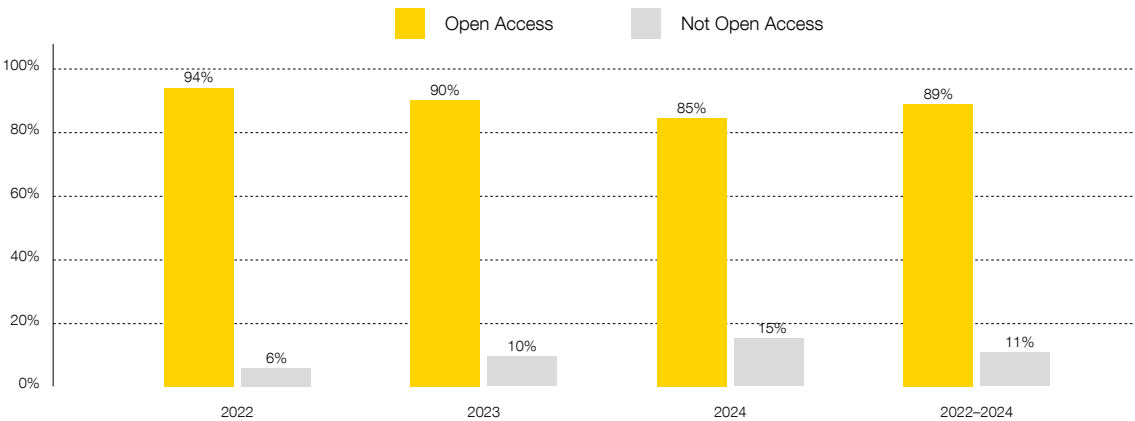
Table 6.3 The unit’s publications sorted by publication and content type for the years 2022-2024.

	Peer-reviewed	Scientific but not peer- reviewed	Other (popular scientific, debate)
Article in journal	60	6	7
Article, review/survey	4		
Article, book review	1	2	
Book	2		
Book chapter	9	14	1
Conference paper	1	1	
Report		10	5
Collection (Editor)			1

OPEN ACCESS

The Swedish government and many research funders demand that research that is financed with public funds needs to be published open access to make it more accessible for anyone who is interested. So far, this requirement has been applied predominantly to scientific publications in journals, which is why this report focuses on the proportions of open and closed access for scientific articles.

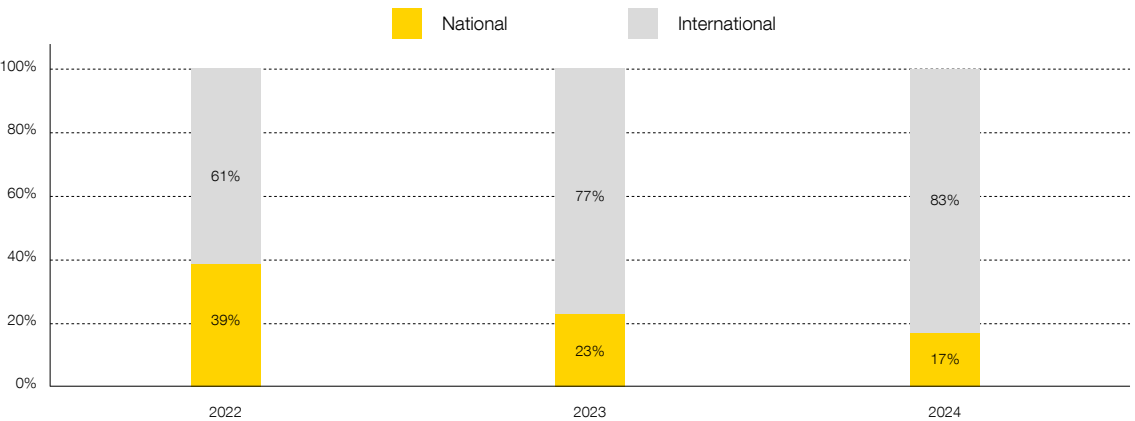
Figure 6.4 Comparison of the percentage of peer-reviewed articles that are open access and the percentage that are not.



National and International Co-Authorship

International cooperation in R&D is assumed to increase the quality of research and strengthen the country’s competitiveness and attractiveness. One way to measure international research collaboration is to measure the proportion of publications that are co-authored with researchers from other countries. As a double affiliation of Kau researchers to both Kau and an organization abroad also indicates an ongoing international collaboration, these publications have been counted as publications with an international profile as well.

Figure 6.5 Proportion of the unit’s publications with an international profile and publications where all authors were affiliated to Swedish organizations.



7. RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

If applicable, specify the most significant research infrastructure available.



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Article, book review	7
Book	7
Book chapter	7
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Report	9
Collection (Editor)	11

Article in journal

- Åkerlund, U., Grip, L., Braunerhielm, L., Ryan Bengtsson, L., & Hoppstadius, F. (2023). Kriskommunikation och fritidshus : Kan vi nå den osynliga befolkningen? *Plan*(3). <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kau:diva-104282>
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Evaluation report

[Date]

CRS

James Evans, Sofia Ritzén, Havard Haarstad

1. Summary (250 words)

- Summarize the main conclusions.

The CRS management team are dedicated and work hard to deliver lots of activity. Their commitment to building inclusive and interdisciplinary research cultures is commendable. The graduate school and regional engagement activities provide focal points for these activities that are well regarded and clearly highly valued by those involved.

We find that, mainly, CRS needs to formulate a clear set of scientific goals to direct their efforts across their activities. These should be related to the societal challenges that CRS approaches and co-produced with their academic members, regional partners and advisory board. The formulation of these scientific objectives, for example through the process of making a strategy for the centre, can be an engaging and mobilising process that draws more people into the centre, develops feelings of 'ownership' of the centres objectives and activities, and builds cohesion.

Organisationally, CRS could be more outward looking within the University. It appears that the centre consists of a small, dedicated team and a large network of 'weak ties'. A 'middle layer' of academics sat between the management team and the wider mailing list would help amplify and promote the work and agenda of CRS internally. Clearer scientific objectives, and the process of articulating these, can help build such a middle layer.

The regional engagement undertaken by CRS is deep and represents an untapped resource for research. But at the moment it appears somewhat too informal, which can be an obstacle to turning it into concrete results. It would ideally be formalised and badged as a specific initiative, with more emphasis placed on co-producing research proposals.

The graduate school is a unique selling point of CRS. It is well functioning and delivers core skills that seem to be unavailable elsewhere in the university. It seems to be highly valued and is particularly relevant to meeting the interdisciplinary challenges of working in the field of sustainability.

CRS could develop an internationalisation strategy and develop its profile in relevant networks of similar centres. CRS is well aligned with the new University strategy, especially in terms of its potential to develop stronger ties between education and research.

2. Scientific results (2 pages)

- Scientific production and academic impact taking personnel and financial resources into account.

There are signs of good activity in terms of projects and publications, but the scientific results are hard to evaluate quantitatively due to attribution issues between the Centre and departments. Their contribution would be much strengthened if they had a clearer set of scientific objectives that would guide the focus for research projects and publications. A recommendation would be to develop

clearer areas that they want to contribute to, for example by specifying the fields or key societal questions the centre wants to address.

This links to the opportunity to build a wider group of academics who could inform this. The Advisory board would be an excellent group to help develop these key societal /scientific questions.

These core questions would provide a basis to specify the multi/interdisciplinarity scope of the Centre in more detail, notably in terms of justifying which disciplines are being brought together and why. This would also provide direction for the graduate school.

Similarly in terms of transdisciplinarity, a set of scientific goals would help justify which stakeholders need to be involved and why, providing overall direction for regional engagement.

- National and international positioning of the evaluation unit.

Internationalisation activities are under-developed. The Centre needs to more effectively leverage existing international connections of members, and actively engage PGRs and ECRs with their international research networks.

The team need to put CRS in the shop window by developing new networks especially for Horizon funding. This would in turn create opportunities for grad students in terms of future academic careers and strengthen synergies between existing areas of activity.

We would recommend that they target key conferences / events / networks as part of their internationalisation approach (based on scientific objectives).

In terms of national positioning it is hard for us to say based on the material we saw, but would note that channelling excellent regional research into international research projects is a sound strategy successfully pursued by many similar groups in this field.

3. Organization and leadership (2 pages)

- The evaluation unit's organization and governance as regards of research.

Organisation and management were the largest topic of conversation, partly driven by the wider Karlstad review of centres.

The review meeting focused on teasing out the uniqueness of the centre and what it can provide to the University. Conversation moved from problem orientation to solution orientation, identifying what the Centre can do. Clearly there are a series of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary functions that CRS provides that departments by themselves cannot. It would benefit CRS if these are formulated more clearly by the core group.

Leadership needs to be more outward looking across and beyond the university, and could be more ambitious and entrepreneurial in seeking internal and external resource. There was anxiety about wider University processes and engaging senior academics. The Centre need to be encouraged to engage with these processes.

We discussed possible tweaks to the organisational structure. The core team are very committed but perhaps lacking senior experience to navigate university politics and bureaucracy. For example, advisory board could be used more proactively to make new connections inside and outside the

University. A 'middle layer' of academics sat between the management team and the wider mailing list would help amplify and promote the work and agenda of CRS internally. This could be framed as a management board with 4-6 senior academics on it.

- Strategic work and priority settings in support of quality and renewal of research.

CRS needs to formulate a clearer set of goals that can then direct action and justify resource allocation. This would help move from a research group mentality that focuses more on events and networks, to a research centre mentality that is more directed and intentional in terms of focusing on activities that generate specific outcomes.

Goals would also provide thread to connect activities of graduate school and regional engagement clearly into a single strategic effort.

The scientific contribution of CRS would be much strengthened if they had a clearer set of scientific objectives that would guide the focus for and subsequent evaluation of research projects and publications.

4. Academic culture (2 pages)

- Collegial work to support good research practices.

CRS should be commended for building an inclusive and supportive academic culture. CRS is focused on collegial activities like writing retreats, seminars and group activities. These activities are notable in supporting colleagues through the entire research process, from ideation to writing and publishing. The centre seems to serve an important function for the university by providing such an interdisciplinary arena for projects, researchers and students that do not fit neatly into departments.

Many of these activities successfully bring different disciplines together and are long-running, performing functions that departments cannot. CRS have been providing space for conversations between key disciplines for decades, as well as vehicles for collaboration through co-supervision and so forth. This indicates relatively deep interdisciplinarity, although it is mainly implicit.

The graduate school is an essential part of this, providing important function in terms of IDR and partnership building and training for grad students that is not available elsewhere. The voluntary engagement of grad students from diverse departments, and testimony we heard, evidences value.

We recommend that they focus on this unique selling point, and develop it and integrate it more fully into CRS. The graduate school can be closer integrated into the scientific activities of CRS. At the moment it appears to be somewhat separate. But there could be scope to include the graduate school closer into the regional engagement, for example, by offering real-world cases, co-production opportunities and later, maybe employment opportunities, to PhD candidates in the graduate school. Grad students should also be helping write bids, deliver research and so forth, helping both CRS and their future careers.

CRS needs to be able to speak about their work on academic culture in a productive and more forward leaning way. Clearer goals would help in this regard.

- Engagement in academic networks nationally and internationally.

In terms of international reputation, CRS needs to be more visible in the relevant research networks.

There is evidence of engagement with other key universities, but most effort seems to be regional. This may be strategically sensible. For this topic regional and international engagement is key. More high profile research outputs will raise the national visibility of CRS.

CRS should connect with similar centres to themselves to develop joint activities and promote learning and benchmarking.

5. Collaboration and societal impact of research (2 pages)

- Collaboration with the surrounding society and societal impact.

CRS has created a strong and enduring basis for regional engagement. Clearly trust and relationships have been built up. This is a huge investment of effort. The main benefit currently seems to be engaging grad students with partners. This needs to be developed further to justify the effort and resource expended.

The activity should be formalised as a platform for regional engagement. The emphasis should be on coproducing an agenda of societal challenges with them, and then developing joint projects, co-funded projects, consultancy, graduate placements, spin offs and so forth directed to address these challenges.

This effort could be framed as a soft research infrastructure to support co-production of research. There is huge potential here, as so much effort has been expended to build up goodwill.

Collaboration would be more focused based on the development of core scientific and societal goals, directing the further development of relationships with specific partners. It could also broaden out from the regional level (based on core scientific and societal goals).

CRS societal impact needs to be evidenced for example through end user / partner quotes.

- Work to support good working practices for collaboration with surrounding society.

CRS has done great work engaging graduate students with external partners through their regional engagement. There is clearly huge potential to lead on coproduction working practices. Regional actors are keen to actually come to the university. This could be further leveraged for networking, training contributions etc. Their willingness to come also indicates their appetite for involvement.

In order to show the results of this long-standing engagement, CRS could produce impact case studies to demonstrate their impact and promote best practice. CRS could also try to mobilise or reactivate staff who have previously been engaged with regional actors.

6. Relationship between education and research (1 page)

- Engagement in strengthen the links between education and research.

CRS conducts useful activity at the interface that should be presented as an important part of their profile. The Graduate School is a key link here in terms of teaching key interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary capabilities. CRS staff are engaged in teaching, and this could also be oriented towards strategic scientific goals.

Teaching can also drive research, by providing vehicles for staff to work together and develop new ideas. Many interdisciplinary research projects come out of co-teaching courses.

- Work to strengthen the links between education and research.

The educational element should be strengthened in the profile of CRS. The team could seek to orient teaching around CRS scientific goals and core competencies. Their grad students also go on to generate impact when they leave, which forms part of the impact of the Centre.

In this regard, the Centre is well aligned with the new University strategy and could present its work more clearly in these terms.

7. Recommendations for further development (1 page)

1. Formulate a clear set of scientific objectives strongly related to defined societal challenges. Direct resources across activities and articulate the contribution of the Centre in relation to these goals.
2. Enhance the profile and reach of CRS within the University, through a management board.
3. Formalise the regional engagement activities as a named initiative, and orient it explicitly towards co-producing research proposals.
4. Leverage the energy of the graduate school to support these activities by integrating it more deeply into all the activities of the Centre.
5. Develop an internationalisation strategy and connect with similar centres to develop joint activities and promote learning and benchmarking.