

2024 Review of the Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies at Lund University

Martin Cloonan, Director of the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Turku
Britta Padberg, Managing Director, The New Institute, Hamburg
Richard Taylor, Head of Physics, University of Oregon

Summary

The aim of our review was to assess the Pufendorf IAS's recent activities and to provide specific recommendations for developing its operational framework and extending its influence within Lund University. We applaud the Institute for developing and expanding its unique approach to incubating interdisciplinary ideas and establishing networks of diverse researchers. Our review highlights that the Institute is developing in to a powerful resource for Lund University. Our recommendations for building on this success fall into five categories which we will detail later in our report. We **recommend** that the Pufendorf IAS work in the following areas:

- 1. Enhancing Networks**
 - a) Establish and develop an Alumni Network**
 - b) Establish and develop Pufendorf Early Career Fellows**
- 2. Enhancing Visibility**
 - a) Within the University**
 - b) Via Public outreach**
- 3. Review the use of the Pufendorf IAS's premises**
- 4. Enhancing the research incubation process via changes to the application and selection processes and increasing support during the project**
- 5. Enhancing collaboration within the NordIAS (Network of Institutes for Advanced Studies)**

Introduction

The Pufendorf IAS was established in December 2008 to connect academic staff from different disciplines within Lund University's eight faculties. The Institute has undergone reviews in 2016 and 2019. Consisting of two directors of interdisciplinary institutes and a third member experienced in leading interdisciplinary research projects, the current review panel visited the Institute during the period 27th-29th May 2024 to conduct interviews of a broad range of the University community associated with the Institute. These included the Institute's Director,

Board members and staff, previous and current researchers, along with selected Deans, Pro-Vice Chancellors and the Vice Chancellor. The panel was also provided with previous reviews and a document analyzing recent research activities. We thank all of those who participated in our visit for their open exchange of views and suggestions.

During our visit, the Vice Chancellor described the Institute's role as "special" within Lund University's broad research environment. It is also unique when compared to other interdisciplinary institutes around the world, and in particular those belonging to NordIAS (the Nordic network of Advanced Studies Institutes, which we will discuss in more detail later in our report). The Institute's strategy for building an interdisciplinary capacity for the University is based on a bottom-up approach in which teams of researchers submit interdisciplinary research topics for two schemes - Advanced Study Groups and Themes. Crucially, both of these early-stage schemes require no research outcomes to be declared. Overwhelmingly, this initial freedom for exploration is seen by participants as essential for the Institute's continuing success as an incubator that fuels the University's interdisciplinary growth. In our view, it is vital that this approach is maintained.

This incubator not only generates potentially game-changing research directions but also transforms the faculty's capabilities to think in new ways and to work together in diverse teams. This continuous influx of interdisciplinary ideas and talent builds the University's capacity to respond to research initiatives – recent examples of which include the Thematic Collaborative Initiatives, Profile Areas, and Agenda 2030 Projects. Whereas these initiatives naturally target focussed goals over limited timeframes, the Pufendorf IAS's pipeline for these initiatives is permanent and plays out on a much more foundational level. In this way, the Pufendorf IAS's unique capacity supports rather than competes with other interdisciplinary endeavors. This collaboration between the Institute and Lund's evolving research directions is essential for continuous renewal of research at Lund University.

Recognizing this unique role is important for the continuation of the Pufendorf IAS's success. Given its limited resources, this role should not be diluted by requiring the Pufendorf to automatically serve as a more general 'service center' for all interdisciplinary tasks at the University. Instead, expanding the Institute's influence across the University will require a strengthened collaboration between the Pufendorf IAS leadership (the Director and Board) and the faculty and university leadership. In this regard, we emphasize the potential of the interdisciplinary resource being developed by the Pufendorf IAS for enhancing many university activities. Although the Institute's primary focus should remain on research, the skills and interests developed by the participants naturally influence their other university tasks. As examples, some of the teams assembled at the Institute could go on not only to drive major research programs but also to collaborate in interdisciplinary educational programs or outreach activities. As the University expands its capabilities, the Institute can feed those capabilities.

We will summarize some of the Institute's recent activities (primarily 2018-21) in the first section of our report. We will then present our recommendations for the Institute, most of which are fundamentally inter-related. Given the unique community of scholars assembled by the Institute, our first set of recommendations focus on expanding this network's influence on other members of the university environment. Our second set focuses on how to best record the Institute's achievements and then make these more visible to internal (university) and external (public) communities. Awareness in the university community is essential because it is the

beneficator of the incubator. Public awareness is also important because it lies at the heart of the Pufendorf IAS's mission statement ("to communicate the Institute's activities to the outside world" and "to show the world concrete examples of interdisciplinary and cross-border research collaboration"). The Pufendorf IAS has a wealth of research that could, with university support, be promoted to the world. Related to visibility, our third recommendation is a review of the use of the premises with the aim of maximizing this asset for the entire university. Fourth, as the Institute moves from its formation to refinement phase, it is increasingly well-positioned as a leading practitioner of interdisciplinary best-practices. We propose some key ideas that build on the Institute's own evolving methods. Together, these will reduce the risk associated with early-stage research, leading to higher quality productivity. Finally, the Institute is inherently collaborative. We recommend that it continues to build its recently established ties with the other Nordic Institutes for Advanced Studies. Based on this recommendation, the final section of our report provides a comparison of these institutes.

In summary, the Pufendorf IAS's productivity (quantified by the number of Advanced Study Groups and Themes) has grown since its formative phase. Our interviews and examination of the associated materials reveals many examples of transformative experiences of the participants. The number of these participants is growing annually and influencing many of the university's other activities. As an example, it is notable how many Pufendorf alumni featured in the university's other interdisciplinary programs (for example, the Thematic Collaborative Initiatives, Profile Areas, and Agenda 2030 Projects). We are impressed by the talent and enthusiasm of the Institute staff. It is clear they are operating at full capacity to support the Institute's current functions. Given the potential of the Institute to expand its role, we caution that any growth in activity will require increased resources. A detailed assessment of finances is beyond the scope of our current review. However, we **recommend** that the university assesses the advantages of introducing a dedicated manager to work with the Director. We also **recommend** that the Institute be allowed to carry-forward unspent resources for one year as standard practice. This will ensure the support of the highest quality and number of Groups and Themes.

Summary of Previous Activities

The Results Follow Up report from 2019 reviewed the work of 31 Theme Groups and 42 Advanced Studies Groups (ASGs) which took place between 2010 and 2019, covering the work of around 700 researchers. It concluded that "theme participation itself is an important experience and a contributing factor to success" (p. 15). Here we summarise the key points arising from the work of 17 Theme exit reports and 8 ASG reports from groups starting between 2018 and 2021. A summary of that work was also provided in the Pufendorf IAS's interim report (2024: 26-31). In both cases it was found that while a vital principle of the Pufendorf IAS is that applicants do not need to specify outcomes, the Themes groups (and sometimes ASGs) have nevertheless led to numerous publications, successful applications for external funding for research (including large grants), the development of new undergraduate and postgraduate provision (including the provision of PhD places), international recognition of Pufendorf alumni and the founding of new research networks/groups. All of this is of great credit to both the Pufendorf and the University.

This report does not replicate the largely statistical analysis which characterised the 2019 report. Instead, it highlights a number of key issues which the individual reports show and which Pufendorf IAS may wish to consider further. We note that the previous reports do not have a common format (ranging from 1 page to 30!) and **recommend** that a common format be used for future reporting, thus making the compilation of combined reports easier and allowing for comparative analysis. Issues which recurred across reports included the following:

Questions of where to present interim findings - within academic events such as symposia and conferences and/or to the general public

How to pursue follow up funding

Whether applications should involve participants from a minimum number of faculties

The nature of interdisciplinary work

The potential of the groups to produce interdisciplinary courses (E.g ASG Children Who Get Hurt and Theme The air that we breathe)

The potential of groups to have societal impact (E.g ASG Children Who Get Hurt and Improving Health Throughout Life, Theme Urban Creativity)

The potential to establish international networks, especially via visits by guests (E.g Themes Domestication and Urban Creativity)

Is the 8 month model the most appropriate? (Some of the timetables felt rather cramped)

Many reports stress the enjoyable/fun aspects of the work. The Pufendorf IAS could judiciously use some of these quotes when making calls for application

More guidance on what groups should actually *do* might be needed: 'It would be an asset to establish a clearer and more concrete list of what should be done in the project' (Theme Gigification of Work: 2)

We **recommend** that the Board and Director discuss these issues with a view to refining any processes which are deemed necessary.

Our following recommendations, based on the interviews we conducted as part of the evaluation, build on previous reports and expand on them with specific ideas.

Recommendations

1) Enhancing Networks

a) Establish and develop an Alumni Network

Why: The reports notes that approximately 1.000 researchers had passed through Pufendorf IAS between 2009 and 2021. These Alumni have the potential to form a vibrant interdisciplinary community within the university. They are an excellent resource for the university, which can be utilised in the formation of interdisciplinary focal points. Making this community visible strengthens the reputation of the Pufendorf Fellowships, encourages further interdisciplinary activities and also makes the institute even more visible within the university.

How: We recommend establishing a Pufendorf alumni network that is made visible on the website. To promote exchange and community, members could be regularly invited to events (e.g. dinner talks) at Pufendorf IAS. The current fellows, the university management and the deans should also be invited to these meetings.

b) Establish and develop Pufendorf Early Career Fellows

Why: Outstanding postdocs with a strong interest in interdisciplinary work should find a place for mutual exchange and peer support right from the start of their career at the Pufendorf IAS and support each other in their research and careers. They can also contribute to making activities at the Institute more diverse and equal. Furthermore, they become visible as an interdisciplinary pool of early career researchers for the university.

How: We recommend building a network of early career researchers at the institute. Membership is advertised throughout the university. The Board selects a small number of postdocs from different disciplines (5-7 each year) who will be affiliated with the institute for 3 years. During this time, the Pufendorf Early Career Fellows meet regularly at the Institute (e.g. once a month) to discuss their research from an interdisciplinary perspective and to support each other as peers. In addition to research topics, general questions (e.g. scientific methods, publishing, coaching, career planning, etc.) can also be addressed. An exchange with the alumni and current fellows at the Institute is an obvious choice. The Pufendorf Early Career Network aims to attract young researchers who want to think outside the box and exercise their interdisciplinary muscles, so to speak.

2. Enhancing Visibility

We note that the Seven Year Review called for the Pufendorf to raise its profile and we echo that Call. We believe that there are two aspects to this.

a) Within the university

Why: The interviews revealed that although the Pufendorf IAS as such is well known and popular within the university, many have no detailed knowledge of research projects and opportunities

at the Institute. The significance of the Pufendorf IAS for the development of new research areas and the establishment of collaborative research formats is also not sufficiently visible.

How: The Institute should demonstrate the development of the Themes and Study Groups in a systematic and exemplary manner. In order to obtain sufficient information on the long-term impact of the Themes and Study Groups, alumni should be asked 3-5 years later about the lasting effects of their work at the institute. Documented interviews with individual researchers and discussions within the alumni network can also provide information on the long-term impact. Qualitative examples should be emphasised and it should be made clear that the Pufendorf IAS is not only concerned with outcomes in the established sense, but also with the impact on people and their future potential.

b) Via Public outreach

Why: The Institute has excellent opportunities to reach a broader public with its timely and relevant topics. In addition, it could be attractive for some Themes and Study Groups to produce different types of products that have an impact on society (e.g. performances, artistic interventions, public lectures). Such events may take place following completion, but should reference Pufendorf IAS whenever possible.

How: The Institute should encourage the fellows to consider unusual ideas and support outstanding public activities. It should establish contacts with journalists and invite them to the Institute regularly. Existing cooperation with local cultural institutions could also be expanded.

3. Review the use of the Pufendorf IAS's premises

Why: We recognise the importance of the Pufendorf's premises (Classicum) as a mechanism for fostering interdisciplinary working. We are unclear, however, whether the building is being used to its full potential as a mechanism via which to raise the Institute's profile and further embed it in to the University.

How: We therefore recommend that a review of the use of Classicum is undertaken with a view to maximising its use as an asset for the entire university and attracting more external bookings. However, priority should be given to events with an interdisciplinary character in order to strengthen the special profile of the Institute and and make it an even more vibrant place within the university.

4. Enhancing the research incubation process via changes to the application and selection processes and increasing support during the project

Why: All measures should be taken to further improve the scientific quality of the Themes and Study Groups. To this end, it should be ensured that the call for proposals for the programs is clearly visible and that applicants are given the best possible support when submitting their proposals. The Pufendorf team has valuable long-term experience in conducting interdisciplinary projects and should also actively support the successful implementation of the groups.

How:

Application process

- a) Consideration could be given to holding launch events in conjunction with the annual calls for proposals for the Themes and Groups, which could actively communicate the function and freedom of the programs and reach a wider audience.
- b) Another measure could be development workshops held by former Theme coordinators to help faculty members prepare competitive proposals.

Selection process

- a) When making the selection, attention should be paid not only to the topics, but also to the composition of the group. To find out whether the team is well composed, it could be invited to a meeting with the Board. Experts who are familiar with the promotion of interdisciplinary research at an early stage should be consulted for the external review. The directors and deputy directors from NordIAS are particularly suitable for this.
- b) A Study Group can be an excellent basis for the successful formation and realisation of a Theme. Consideration should be given to how this process of further development can be supported in successful Study Groups.

Support of the programmes

- (a) One of the strengths of the Pufendorf format is the bottom-up generation of topics. There should continue to be a lot of flexibility here and this should be increased even further if necessary. For example, the flexibility of the program design should be considered. Some groups will prefer to meet in blocks rather than weekly meetings. To promote intergenerational exchange, early career researchers should also be considered for the groups. The role of the international guests should be clearer. They could, for example, act as mentors, that is as “critical friends” of Themes. Furthermore, a group member should feel responsible as a host for networking the international guests with the local community. The role of the coordinator should also be made explicit. Does he or she see himself or herself as a facilitator or as a leader and how does the group want to organize itself? Guidelines based on the experiences of the past years could be helpful here. Encourage the coordinators of different Themes to meet regularly during the duration of their project to exchange procedural recommendations.
- (b) It is also advisable to pay more attention to the preparation and follow-up of a topic in order to optimise the successful implementation. We recommend to start with a preparatory internal workshop before the Theme has its official kick off. Running another workshop with external guests could be considered after the program has finished. However, a workshop should not be mandatory and should only be run when a clear benefit can be expected. The group's work should not be determined by the preparation of a workshop.

- (c) More attention should be paid to team-building processes. Alumni could support this with their experiences and suggestions.

5. The NordIAS Network

As part of this Review, the Panel was invited to ‘place the Pufendorf IAS in a broader context and comparison with other “Institutes of Advanced Study” in the Nordic region’. Here we would note, once again, Pufendorf’s uniqueness within both the Swedish and Nordic contexts. While those other Nordic Institutes of Advanced Studies (IASs) which are university-based have clearly been designed to enhance their host institution’s research through recruiting of international fellows, the Pufendorf is unique in recruiting its members solely from within that host. While there is a danger that this could be seen as being somewhat parochial, such concerns are more than counterbalanced by the building of longer term research teams and projects than those which generally characterise other Nordic IASs. Previous research (Padberg 2020) has shown that IASs globally are characterised by a great deal of diversity and this is certainly also true in the Nordic case. Within this context, the Pufendorf’s uniqueness can be considered to be something of an asset. Furthermore any direct comparison with another Nordic IAS would be entirely inappropriate.

This does not mean, however, that the Pufendorf IAS should be blind to the Nordic context within which it operates. Despite their diversity, Nordic IASs face a number of common issues such as local funding mechanisms, the tension of being somewhat elitist institutions within societies characterised by an egalitarian ethos, the reviewing of applications, etc. In this context they have much to learn from each other and it is gratifying to find that the Pufendorf IAS has been an enthusiastic supporter of the NordIAS Network which is seeking to bring the Nordic IASs together for mutual benefit. We note that NordIAS is a young network which has thus far concentrated on the exchange of information. We understand that future developments might include such things as fellow and staff exchanges, joint events and joint funding applications. We commend the Pufendorf IAS for its support of this initiative and are delighted to see that one sign of this commitment to NordIAS is that this report will be launched at a NordIAS event in October 2024. We look forward to hearing more about Pufendorf’s work within NordIAS the future and warmly recommend that it continues to be a highly active member.

Reference:

[Padberg, B. 2020. “The Global Diversity of Institutes for Advanced Study”. *Sociologica* 14:1, pp.119-161, https://doi.org/10.6092.issn.1971-8853/9839](https://doi.org/10.6092.issn.1971-8853/9839)