

# **Pitfalls and possibilities with international partnerships: An interview with Gun-Britt Wärvik, the Swedish coordinator of an international partnership program**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is based on an interview with one of the principal leaders of an international partnership program between Ethiopia and Sweden, 2018–2022. The purpose of this interview was to deepen the understanding of these kinds of partnerships and to learn more about the possibilities and pitfalls of working in a joint program between national and cultural contexts. We interviewed Professor Gun-Britt Wärvik, the Swedish coordinator of the doctoral program between Addis Ababa University (AAU) and the University of Gothenburg (GU). The interview results suggest that doctoral supervisory challenges were present as students often used concepts produced in cultural contexts foreign to their assigned supervisors. Additionally, the administrative burden was particularly challenging for the Ethiopian counterpart that coordinated the program. Overall, the program created many positive work opportunities for students, provided possibilities for the staff of both universities to exercise supervision and examination of doctoral students, and enriched international experiences for all involved.*

*Keywords: concepts; context; cooperation; doctoral program; doctoral students; supervision*

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## **Point of departure**

In the late 1990s, I (Getahun) was a teacher assistant in a preparatory class for newly arrived immigrant children and children with function variation in Mondal's Municipality in Sweden. I remember that one day some of the children in this class

started talking about fish. When many of the children got involved in the discussion, Barbro, the special education teacher, suggested that we visit the local library to borrow books about fish. We went to the library, borrowed books about fish, and returned to the class. The discussion about different types of fish came up and many children thought it was cool to know about cod, a fish with a ‘beard’. They started drawing cod in their exercise books. Days later, we went to the local fish market and the children identified cod among other types of fish. We bought two medium-sized codfish and returned to the class. All of us helped in the preparation of the fish for cooking. First we scaled the fish, then removed the innards and when it was cooked each of us got to eat a small portion of it.

I learned a lot from this specific experience in that class. Carefully listening to your students, following their interests, and diving deep into them are productive learning/teaching conditions. That experience gave me the opportunity to reflect upon the difference between this exercise in that class and my early school years in Ethiopia, where the focus was placed more on textbook-based theories, rather than anchoring learning to the real world—outside the classroom. If that lesson about fish was in my elementary school in Ethiopia, it would not have gone beyond borrowing a book, reading about types of fish, and maybe drawing the fish. In that Swedish classroom, however, theoretical knowledge was complemented with practical action, and *learning by doing* was well exercised.

Years later, as a senior lecturer and researcher, I still keep that experience of teaching/learning in mind. It also reminds me of the principles in the Swedish education system, that education should be based on ‘scientific grounds and proven experiences’ (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2022). So, in my teaching and research, this has made me think about how ‘theory and practice are reflexively related’ (Mahon & Smith, 2020, p. 361), and inseparable. It is also equally important to take their interrelations seriously and to understand the importance of embedding knowledge gained from reading and other forms of learning into practice.

At the university, one of my areas of interest is praxis in higher education. Freire (1970) refers to praxis in terms of both critical action and reflection. I see it as the way in which we undertake our work in higher education locally as well as in partnership with colleagues from other parts of the world, our international partners. This includes reflection on our contributions as well as reflecting on our partnership. These reflections extend to different practical aspects of the cooperation as well as benefits to partners and lessons learned through the partnership. Higher education systems in other countries, in general, and the field of education, in particular, are interesting areas to investigate.

On this basis, my colleague, Petra Angervall who has participated in partnership projects with other countries, as both a teacher and a supervisor, started talking about what it means to cooperate with different universities in partnership programs. Some of the questions we raised were *why these partnerships are often given much attention, what are the reasons for the interest in these programs and who gains from these partnerships*. We decided to investigate one example of such international partnership programs: a partnership in doctoral education between Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia and the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. This partnership was based on a particular program in international and comparative education that will be described in more detail below.

As the text unfolds, we first describe the program, based on information from the program coordinator from Addis Ababa University, Dr. Alebachew Kemisso Haybano. Then we present an interview with the program coordinator from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, Professor Gun-Britt Wärvik. Later in the paper, we discuss some aspects of what the partners from Sweden have learnt from this collaboration, critical questions raised concerning the collaboration, issues of the institutional tradition of the two universities, and interests, impacts, and the outcomes of the partnership program.

### **Why are higher education partnerships important for Ethiopia?**

One of the biggest problems that the higher education sector in Ethiopia is currently facing is the lack of specialized academic staff with high qualifications and lengthy experience needed to work in the PhD programs. In our conversation with Dr. Kemisso Haybano, he explained that the universities are left scrambling to find resources to develop their 'human capacity' in order to educate, research and develop higher education institutions all over the nation. That is also why and how this PhD program in international and comparative education started. In this project the Addis Ababa University wanted to address the problem and secure future academic skills in teaching, supervision, research, and academic administration.

Dr. Kemisso Haybano also described how this project started as a part of a plan to launch a PhD programme in international and comparative education in 2011. Then the program had only one professor, Dr. Teshome Neka Tibebe, who got his PhD from Stockholm University's Institute of International Education and returned to Ethiopia where he started working at the Department of Curriculum Instruction. Hence, when the PhD program was approved, Dr. Neka Tibebe was the only teacher and leader with a PhD. However, he was able to invite some of his

colleagues through his personal networks. One of these colleagues was Dr. Agneta Lind from Sweden who set the initial standard for the program from the very beginning. At the same time, there were discussions to include and to move this informal cooperation between them into formal cooperation through the SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) mechanism, which came into reality when Addis Ababa University organised a large international conference in 2012.

According to Kemisso Haybano, Stockholm University Institute of International Education was invited by Addis Ababa University and a memorandum of understanding was signed between Addis Ababa University and Stockholm University Institute of International Education. That was what brought about this formal arrangement. It took some time to write the project agreements. Therefore, the first project was developed between Addis Ababa University and the Institute of International Education at Stockholm University.

While that project was starting, there was also another process in motion that aimed to establish a dedicated centre that was going to run the PhD program. Hence, in 2014, the Centre for Comparative Education and Policy Studies was established at AAU (Addis Ababa University) to host this PhD program and the project supported by SIDA came into this centre. That is how the agreement, and the project came together in this centre at Addis Ababa University in 2014. The formal cooperation with Stockholm University, Institute of International Education supported by SIDA started in 2014. The main activities Kemisso Haybano remembers as a student during that time were supporting student supervision and offering courses. Stockholm University staff were also coming to visit Addis Ababa University. The challenges of the program were having sufficient staff to run courses and supervise PhD students.

Until September 2017, Stockholm University was offering courses and supervision to students in cooperation with the centre. In 2017, Stockholm University terminated the agreement that was signed in 2012. AAU started assessing different Swedish universities for future cooperation and ultimately decided to start a partnership with the University of Gothenburg in 2018 (Addis Ababa University, 2018).

After the conversation with Kemisso Haybano, we decided to also interview the Swedish coordinator from the University of Gothenburg: Professor Gun-Britt Wärvik.

## **The Interview**

**Getahun:** Thank you for allowing me to interview you. I have some questions about the PhD Program you are coordinating with Addis Ababa University. Could you give me a background to what the project is about?

**Gun-Britt:** It's a research training partnership programme in international and comparative education and the research training partnership programme is SIDA's contribution to doctoral education in developing countries. This programme started in January 2018 and has been going on for four and a half years. And one of the tasks here has been to supervise 17 doctoral students from the Centre for Comparative Education and Policy Studies (CCEPS) at Addis Ababa University. All the doctoral students have one Swedish and one Ethiopian supervisor, so taken together, 6 Ethiopian and 11 Swedish supervisors have been involved. This is according to the SIDA model, a sandwich programme, and that means that the doctoral students have made three visits to Sweden and they have stayed up to three months during each stay. I think this centre says a lot about what this project is because the mission of CCEPS is to study educational systems and educational policy and reforms in an international and comparative perspective.

The centre also started its PhD program in international and comparative education. The idea was to study the global context, and two doctoral students from this project have compared different aspects in different countries. I think the global issue has been the main part of their doctoral studies.

**Getahun:** What do you think about the importance of locality in research education? Why are global issues in focus in this program? What kind of academic possibilities and difficulties are experienced in the program? What difficulties you experienced in your side and then the other side? If you like, we can start with the possibilities or positive things that happened and then move to the difficulties encountered.

**Gun-Britt:** It is about the North and the South, and the general idea often is that theoretical concepts are global or universal. This needs to be problematized. For instance, one of the doctoral students wrote about ethnicity and conflicts among teacher education students and she planned to use Banks's concept of multiculturalism (Banks, 1995) as well as concepts of race and social classes. She soon realized that these concepts are developed and used in other types of societies. Many western concepts and theoretical constructs are related to race and social classes. In Banks's work, for instance, the problematic relations between blacks and

whites in the United States are used to discuss the contradiction in society. Neither social class nor race is in focus in Ethiopia. She needed to reconceptualise and rewrite about the bases for conflicts in Ethiopia. In a country with 90 languages and different ethnic groups, language differences and ethnicity are core causes of conflicts. These have limited relevance in the United States or Sweden.

It is very difficult for us as westernized researchers to understand and detect some of the relevant issues, to then support the students, and to get the analytical tools. How to analyse and understand the societal and educational contexts the students are in.

I think I have learnt what is more important maybe is that I have to accept I am ignorant. I have to accept that, it is ok, I don't understand this, but I am not alone in this, there is as we said an Ethiopian supervisor who knows more about these matters.

Even the Ethiopian supervisors are trained in western countries, for instance, Sweden or Germany, and use western books that don't describe or connect well to Ethiopian society, so sometimes they don't know better. That means we are two parts that need to say 'ok, we don't understand'. We need to try to find some other way of approaching this. From the very beginning when we met them, when we started the supervision, and they started to describe their research problem, they knew what the reality was, they knew, we have to be very attentive and pay full attention to how they talk about their reality and formulated their problems that they wanted to study. If the Ethiopian and the Swedish supervisors work closely and be aware that we are ignorant, we need to be very sensitive to what the students are trying to formulate. I think that is important because we need to know that the important thing here is that the doctoral students need to produce knowledge relevant to the context in which they live, not the knowledge relevant to my Swedish eyes. Here I can feel that I am sometimes on thin ice because I am ignorant when it comes to Ethiopian society, but I have a good support from Ethiopian supervisors, and we can work as a couple to support the doctoral students. If it works well, it will be very good.

**Getahun:** Maybe there is no theorised material to use, maybe they lack literature on Ethiopia. Is it so?

**Gun-Britt:** No, no, no, there are! But it's very difficult to find Ethiopian research because, it is often very normative, according to my view, and most often it is not peer-reviewed. You can't trust the statistics because you don't know how they are produced. So, I think, this makes it difficult.

I'm thinking about one doctoral student who is writing about vocational education and his main concept is employability and curriculum. I said he couldn't write about employability because for me it's an economic concept that came from the European Union and it is rather an instrumental concept for education. For him it was about reduction of poverty, of course, about survival and death of people. It took a while until I understood what he thought.

Then, he only wrote about and repeated what international organisations like UNESCO and World Bank are writing about it. That was the truth for him, if we can only reach these goals then everything in the country will be better. It was like these organisations talk about a kind of promised land. The question is to see, in whose interests these nice promises are written? Maybe they are written in your interest, but maybe they are not written in a way to pay attention to the local context in Ethiopia and the specific needs of the workings of the Ethiopian educational system. It was needed to switch his critical eye, to see into something that he could use as a tool to understand his local reality and to see what was really going on here and not to evaluate to say this is good for the country that is bad for the country. To see how it really works, the kind of machinery on this policy making and ideas on how to undertake improvements.

**Getahun:** There is another issue, I am thinking about the problem of theorising. In Sweden, we have people who developed different theories. For example, while I was writing my dissertation, I used Ulf P. Lundgren's curriculum theory (Lundgren, 1983; Lundgren, 1990) in combination with Basil Bernstein (Bernstein, 1990; Bernstein, 2000) who wrote a lot in the same area. Are there people who developed these kinds of theories in the Ethiopian education system? The other question is, how did these dissertations contribute to theoretical fields and in theorising about the education system? Or are they only practice-oriented?

**Gun-Britt:** Not so practice focused. Some of them are, but as most of their work is based on policy studies, I think the actual outcome is a better understanding of Ethiopian educational circumstances and context. That is my impression.

They [the doctoral students] are not theoretically ignorant, they are well educated in comparative and international education, and the literature lists are rich. I don't think that doctoral students in Sweden have read all that kind of literature. Sometimes maybe they have to rely on Western theories.

**Getahun:** You see relying on Western theories as a problem. I also understand it is a problem. How could that problem be resolved?



**Gun-Britt:** It's hard work. It's hard work that has to be done by the Ethiopians. It takes time, but they have the time. I don't think someone can come to Ethiopia and help with this. It's because we don't have that kind of local knowledge.

**Getahun:** Are there other issues you consider as problems? Is there anything similar to what you mentioned earlier, in your experience. Problems in the education system? In the exchange between researchers, supervisors, and students?

**Gun-Britt:** I think that both Alebachew Kemisso and I have been working very hard with this program, so I can't really see how. He has taken a great responsibility and that is of course necessary because when I contact my supervisors in Sweden, I could send them an e-mail, saying 'Hej! We're doing this and this, is it OK?' But he cannot do this because they don't read emails every day, they might be out of Addis [the city] and then in some cases, they have no internet connections. So, he has to call them one by one. That takes time. To survive, Ethiopian researchers, have to also do 'consultancies', as they call it. They have commissioned research from international organisations. That means that they travel a lot. They're often out of Addis, perhaps for two weeks to collect data or do other academic work. So, they can't just work as researchers at the university, they have to do these extra things to survive.

It's expensive to live in Addis. I live 25 kilometers outside Gothenburg. I take a bus to work in the morning and back home in the evening, which takes me about 45 minutes one way. In Addis, there is usually heavy traffic. If you have your own car, you drive 10 kilometers per hour, and if you take the minibus taxi to go home, you have to wait maybe in a 200 meters long queue before you get to your place.

**Getahun:** Does this affect the education system?

**Gun-Britt:** It does, of course, since they [colleagues from AAU] have this kind of struggle and at the same time they also have to do additional work beside their ordinary work, it's hard.

**Getahun:** What other administrative difficulties do you see from both sides?

**Gun-Britt:** It has been very easy to work with Alebachew, but I can see I have had full support from the department controller in dealing with the economy of the



program. She has made all the economic calculations perfectly all throughout. Alebachew has not had that support. He has to do it by himself.

When it comes to administration, we have done the main part together, but there are some parts that I can't get involved in, and that is, of course, registration of doctoral students. It has to be done every semester, the registration of grades and so on. And I know that he struggles a lot with that. It's not enough to just use the computer system. He has to walk to offices, convince the person there, now we have to do this or that, and I think the system is not flexible. One of the doctoral students said to me 'we are so bureaucratic in Addis, you are not, you have no bureaucracy'. I said to him 'yes, we have so much bureaucracy here, but it works so smoothly'.

**Getahun:** Yes! There are no hindrances here, the Swedish bureaucracy existed for a long time and accumulated experiences of what works. Officials know what works. I'm telling to some friends about the 2018 elections in Sweden—for about four months, there was no government in place, but we didn't feel this absence. The day-to-day services were run as usual. The bureaucracy works.

**Gun-Britt:** Yes, yes.

**Getahun:** What did you learn from this cooperation project? What are the gains of the project for the doctoral students, for the supervisors and for GU [University of Gothenburg]?

**Gun-Britt:** Out of our 17 students, 13 have completed their studies. Three more will graduate in the near future. One has dropped out recently. It was due to family reasons, or personal reasons—he was affected by the pandemic, and his family and his friends were affected.

The students who graduated from the program got good jobs. They all have got good jobs as university teachers, in international agencies, and in national agencies such as the Ministry of Education. We have three people at the Ministry of Education. I think that's good.

The partnership program has left us with new international experiences for the whole department. It's very good to have that kind of experience. It's necessary because we live in a globalized world, we have many people from different countries in Sweden. Education and schooling, shape people.

When you lived as a child in a country and went to school in that country, that never leaves you, in a way that is your understanding of schooling, how it should be, how it is. Therefore, it's good to get a better understanding from another

country too. And I think that has affected me as well. I have seen something that I could never have been able to experience without this program. If you travel abroad as a tourist, you are a tourist. But here I have been engaged in departmental work at the centre, we have been sitting in the same office with Alebachew and working together. I have also participated in seminars with him in smaller groups in big halls, and I have been engaged in the department meetings, so I've been involved. I have had the opportunity to be a supervisor and also an examiner. It's also a good experience, because then you see that it is ok to do things in different ways, they have other traditions in Ethiopia, but it works well there, too. We have also started to work and publish together, have written together with Alebachew and several doctoral students, so that is new (Kemisso Haybano et al., 2021).

**Getahun:** Do the other supervisors also have similar experiences?

**Gun-Britt:** Yes, yes, I hope so. Yes, this is also how I think we should be able to continue when the project ends. Since the internet works so well for them [researchers based at Addis Ababa University], we can have joint seminars. We can meet in joint seminars.

Not all supervisors have the same experiences as me because I have been more involved in the program as I have been responsible for it. Some supervisors have been more engaged in supervising one or two doctoral students, that's it. Others have continued to co-publish (Angervall & Kassie, 2021) with their doctoral students after graduation. But I'm co-publishing with three people here.

**Getahun:** Are there situations you regret? Do you regret anything from this program?

**Gun-Britt:** I should have worked more on stressing the interaction between the Swedish and the Ethiopian supervisors. Because that was a difficult part, especially when it takes time and people not always have that time to spend on interaction. Sometimes maybe you have to realise it works well, but it could have been better to have more interaction between the supervisors.

**Getahun:** If you were to run the project today, is this one of the things you would like to do?

**Gun-Britt:** Yes, it is, and another one is that I should have also started to stress the importance of co-publishing between supervisors, and that should also have been included in the program.

**Getahun:** A colleague was wondering, if this program contributed in one way or another, to democratisation or the development of a democratic way of working?

**Gun-Britt:** It's a difficult question, is this about supporting the individual or is it about changing the system? For me, I don't see myself as a change agent when I worked in the program. I collaborated with colleagues and friends. I think I have contributed to changing the life situation of individuals, that is my thinking.

But when some of the doctoral students finished and were about to leave, they asked me 'How can we thank you?'. I then replied 'You can thank me by helping your students, your doctoral students in the future. When you supervise them, think about them, they need a support from a supervisor'. They said 'yes, I will do that', and I think that is something. Maybe that will contribute to democracy; otherwise, it's huge to contribute to democracy, that you can't. You really can't.

**Getahun:** But you do it on a micro level with individuals?

**Gun-Britt:** In micro, micro, micro level! But you can contribute to it a little in a very small way. You can contribute to another type of academic culture.

I don't see this as a project that I will leave when funding runs out, because now I have got colleagues in Ethiopia, researchers, research colleagues that I can interact with, and that's how it is. If you and I were engaged in a joint project—you are in Borås and I'm here [in Gothenburg]—even when the project had finished, we could continue to collaborate and do things, and I think this is how I want to continue this as well. And I'm sure I will.

### **When the project ends, what is remaining?**

Returning to my own experiences<sup>1</sup>, and especially my own university studies in the 1980s in Ethiopia, I remember that lectures can be used as a way of transmitting already existing knowledge to students. I remember that there was not much dialogue at the time between the usually-authoritative-lecturers and students. I can

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<sup>1</sup> Writing in the first person, from my own (Getahun's) perspective.

see today that this hindered reflection and creative ideas. Group work and group discussions were also rare, and the focus was rather on the individual performance. Examinations were summative and students were expected to give the “correct” answers. Students and lecturers were dominantly male. At the Department of Sociology, in my class, out of 30 students, there was only one female student; similarly, there was only one female among the lecturers in the department.

From what we gathered from the two coordinators included in this paper, the project discussed here adopted less authoritative forms of working and operated based on functioning interactions between students and their supervisors. Doctoral students were also encouraged to be critical of what they were reading and produce texts that were critical and context-bound. The presence of many competent women in the Swedish team provided a good example of the importance of gender equality in all levels of higher education. Hopefully these aspects of the project will, to some extent, positively influence the individuals and institutions involved from Ethiopia in an attempt to move away from the practices of the 1980s I described earlier.

What is also clear in Wärvik’s description is that this doctoral program had both successful and unsuccessful elements in practice as well as parts that could have been done in a better way. The whole performance of the project, including good will and cooperation from both sides, engaging in publishing together, and determination to continue working together even after the project is terminated could be considered among the positive and successful performances. On the other hand, at the very core area of the program minor differences in the form of dissertation writing, the administrative burden on the project coordination coming from the AAU side and the effect of AAU’s administrative decisions on criteria for student graduation were, to some extent, hindrances for the smooth running of the program.

The Ethiopian context and context from where the Swedish supervisors are coming from are different. From our reading, we see that the Swedish partners recognized their shortcomings in terms of understanding the local/national context. It is constructive that they allowed themselves to take advice from the co-supervisors from the other country and to learn from the doctoral students’ description of the situation and from their formulation of their research problems.

Issues of trying to import new concepts developed and used in other contexts to study the local reality were problematized. Wärvik illustrated this by using an example of a doctoral student who wanted to use Banks’s concept of multiculturalism (Banks, 1995) and other concepts, such as social classes and race that are developed and used in the West. This student, according to Wärvik, soon discovered that these concepts may be problematic to use as they are and attempted

to reconceptualize them to use them in Ethiopia's reality, where language difference and ethnicity are causes of conflicts, rather than social class and race-based divisions as in the West.

Wärvik also presented the case of a student who wanted to use, in the beginning, a concept from the World Bank, UNESCO, and other international organisations. They wanted to use the terms 'employability' and 'curriculum'. Wärvik thought employability was a concept used by the European Union, with the focus on economics that reflects an instrumental view of education. She later realised that the student was planning to use it in relation to poverty reduction in the country.

She adds that the big issue was that the student used the concepts on the basis of their face values: 'that was the truth for the student, if we can only reach these goals then everything in the country will be better. It was like these organisations had a kind of the promised land'. Here, Wärvik said the student was encouraged to have a critical eye on the concepts and goals stated by the document, to scrutinize if they were written in the interest of the country, if they were matching the local reality, and if they were implementable.

Other issues that were raised during the conversation with Wärvik was the administrative and contextual problem for the Ethiopian partners. Due to technical issues, her counterpart Kemisso Haybano had difficulty reaching all supervisors at times. Some were on work-related trips outside the capital city, for example. Kemisso Haybano was also responsible for many basic routines, as well as economic and administrative issues.

In addition to her counterpart, Wärvik also raised the difficult condition the supervisors and researchers at Addis Ababa University encounter. She explained that 'to be able to afford the expensive life in Addis, they [researchers at AAU] are forced to take on extra research work from other agencies that will provide them with more income'.

According to Wärvik all parties involved in the program, in one way or another, benefited from the program. The doctoral students were expected to get good employment opportunities after their PhDs, and staff at both universities got an opportunity to work together. The Gothenburg University staff also got special international experience in examining and supervising these doctoral students. Additionally, some supervisors and some students and supervisors published together. Wärvik expressed a wish for further and continuous collaboration:

I don't see this as a project that I will leave when time is out because now I have got colleagues in Ethiopia, researchers, and research colleagues that I can interact with, and that's how it is.

If she was planning the program today, she said she would have focused on better cooperation between supervisors and encouraged them to have better interaction and more collaboration through co-publishing. She emphasised the importance of continuing to work together in the future. We agree with Wärvik that the end of a project does not mean the end of all cooperation.

### **Final point: future challenges**

The project is a drop in the ocean for the rapidly growing higher education sector in Ethiopia. In the 1980s, there were not more than four universities and maybe 5 to 6 colleges in different fields. Today, there are more than 50 government funded public universities and private universities. This pattern is similar worldwide. However, while higher education institutions are rapidly expanding, there has been a lack of growth in infrastructure, material, and financial resources in Ethiopia, alongside shortages of trained workers, insufficient research in a variety of fields, overt gender inequalities, and problems concerning educational quality. The responsibility to solve all these problems rests on the Ethiopian government. Nonetheless, the Swedish and Ethiopian higher education partnerships such as this one might alleviate at least some small parts of these problems.

In working with this text, we got the opportunity to learn the 'pros and cons' of international partnerships. The partnership between Addis Ababa University and Gothenburg University was not only a work project between two higher education institutions but also a further understanding of the two countries' higher education systems and the working tradition of two leading higher education institutions of two countries through the narrative of two individual researchers. It was also an attempt to build an intercultural bridge between individuals bearing the roles of coordinators, supervisors, and doctoral students.

We are not claiming to know in detail what happens "behind the scenes", but from what we learned through this study we can classify this cooperative project as successful in many ways. Thirteen of the 17 doctoral students have graduated and are employed. When we started this study in the first half of 2022, three of the

remaining students were working hard to complete their dissertations. Some supervisors published together, and others did so with their doctoral students. The coordinators and supervisors are also determined to work together even after the end of the project. These achievements are what make us conclude the project is successful.

The knowledge and experiences gained through this study will hopefully be useful for future similar projects that deal with an international partnership between higher education institutions. However, we must study these kinds of partnerships in further detail, and especially their impact in the long run. It is also equally important to find out more about how cultural differences between the staff of the two higher education institutions shape the educational experiences students have. Future studies could include coordinators, supervisors, and doctoral students. Getting more actors and diverse voices involved in studies such as this one can enrich our knowledge about the program.

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## **Author biographies**

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*Petra Angervall* is a full professor in Educational Work at University of Borås, Sweden. Her research explores academic career, gender and international partnerships. She is the leader of the research group “Higher Education, politics and professionalism” as well as the Editor in Chief of “Journal of Praxis in Higher Education”.

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