



UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

RESEARCH STRATEGY, 2025-2028

The Saxo Institute

University of Copenhagen (UCPH)

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PREFACE

The research evaluation of the Saxo Institute completed in 2023 recommended the formulation of a more detailed research strategy that could assist the Institute in navigating a changing research landscape, in setting direction, and in specifying the Institute's position on conditions crucial to conducting humanities research.

This research strategy has its basis in dialogues, workshops and input from staff at the Saxo Institute. During the process of soliciting input for the strategy and discussing themes like academic freedom, research organisation and good academic citizenship, it became clearer to us that the deliberations themselves served a further, highly important purpose; namely describing our existing practices and raising awareness about what type of research community and institution, Saxo aspires to be.

This is part and parcel of a successful strategy; it is how it lives (on) and how it can enable researchers at Saxo to engage in new as well as familiar research activities with a heightened sense of purpose. Hence, this strategy is primarily written for Saxo's current and future staff. In this and several other ways, the strategy is tied to UCPH's 2030 strategy [Creating Benefit for More People](#). The alignment is especially visible in the ambition to create the best place for the best ideas and in the emphasis on academic freedom, well-being, and the importance of community.

As a research strategy, this document does not cover all activities at Saxo. Nor is it intended to substitute goals and procedures tied to these within the structures of academic management at UCPH. In this context, it is vital for us to stress the multiple, often symbiotic, relations between our two core activities: teaching and research. In short, educational activities inform our research – and vice versa. In the current curricula of Saxo's programmes, this is evident in mono-disciplinary courses, where the aim of mastering the research tradition and exploring new frontiers is inseparable from an ambition to train students in research practices through specific projects and exercises. The link is also evident in "research area" modules, where Saxo staff teach courses that spring from specific research interests to an often interdisciplinary classroom. In these ways, new generations of students encounter and qualify both established and cutting-edge research and research practices as part of their education.

Copenhagen, 1 March 2025

Saxo Management Team (Casper Sylvest, Head of Institute; Anne Folke Henningsen, Deputy Head of Department for Research; Anders Holm Rasmussen, Deputy Head of Department for Education; Christian Riis Stenby, Head of Institute Staff)

THE INSTITUTE

As one of the largest departments for the study of history and culture in Scandinavia, the Saxo Institute is home to four disciplines and six full BA and MA programmes: Greek & Latin, Classical and Prehistoric Archaeology, European Ethnology and History. In addition, the Institute hosts two international MA programmes (Applied Cultural Analysis and Advanced Migration Studies).

According to the recent research evaluation (2023), the quality of research produced by Saxo staff is either internationally excellent or world leading. From a backbone of disciplinary strength, the Institute hosts a range of activities and infrastructures for research that cross institutional and disciplinary boundaries. Currently, the Saxo Institute is the intellectual home to

- Four highly successful research centers: Centre for Advanced Migration Studies ([AMIS](#)), Copenhagen Centre for Health Research in the Humanities ([CoRe](#)), Centre for Sustainable Futures ([CSF](#)) and Centre for Textile Research ([CTR](#)).

- A string of major, externally funded and collaborative research projects, including: INNER_LEAGUE – A social-bureaucratic history of the League of Nations Secretariat, [Fashioning Sudan](#), [In the Same Sea](#), [Link Lives](#), Skin Health.
- [Five thematic research clusters](#) fostering interdisciplinary cooperation: “Culture, Politics and Religion”, “Difference”, “Global”, “Landscapes, senses and ecologies” and “Radicality”.
- Several research cooperation initiatives within and beyond UCPH (for example, the [UCPH School of Archaeology](#) and the [Centre for Modern European Studies](#)).
- A plethora of specialised, thematic initiatives within and beyond Saxo, including seminar-series and circles (for example the Institute’s Ancient Circle and the [Eighteenth-Century Research Forum](#)).

The Institute is made up of 110 full-time researchers from PhD fellows to Professors, an administrative staff of 5 full-time employees, and a student body of roughly 1400 BA and MA students.

VISION AND AMBITION

Forming part of a leading multi-faculty research university, the core ambition of the Saxo Institute is to foster the continued production of high-quality **research that matters** within a range of overlapping fields centrally placed in the humanities. Research can matter in many ways, for example when

- it makes an impact on an academic field, discipline or research tradition by generating new results, theoretical/methodological innovation, and scholarly debate
- it qualifies and enhances debates in the public sphere by setting new agendas or transforming existing ones
- it changes the life, practice or perspective of individuals, communities and institutions
- it is instrumental or influential in making or changing policy
- it responds to or re-directs a public demand for knowledge about history, culture and society
- it contributes to the higher purposes that we associate with learning in the broadest sense
- it cultivates scholarly traditions by re-activating them in new contexts
- it advances knowledge and deepens understanding of societal challenges by harnessing insights from several disciplines or fields of research

Integral to the ambition of producing research that matters is that Saxo consolidates and develops its position as an attractive, thriving and dynamic research institution.

It is our aspiration that **generosity, curiosity and critique** as well as respect for diversity in perspectives, theories and methods should continue to be core values of scholarly activity at Saxo. Similarly, we regard a diversity in objectives, activities and outputs as beneficial to scholarship. We encourage research staff at the Institute to further these ambitions and value efforts in this respect. These commitments, we believe, are decisive in creating and maintaining the wellbeing (*trivsel*) that can assist individuals and groups in producing research that matters.

In conducting and publishing research, members of Saxo's research community are expected to uphold the highest standards of research integrity as described in UCPH's [Code of Conduct for responsible research](#). Transparency is key in this context, and it is complemented by our commitment to open science (including the FAIR principles) and open access (OA) publishing, evidenced in the OA journals that Saxo staff are instrumental in running (including [AIGIS](#), [Classica et Mediaevalia](#), [Culture and History](#) and [Kulturstudier](#)). Attentive to the challenges of ensuring respect for the intellectual property rights of researchers, Saxo management encourages and must facilitate the widest possible access to and circulation of research produced by Institute staff.

GETTING THERE

Given the quality of research and the high level of scholarly activity at Saxo, pursuing our vision of research and research cooperation can naturally take its point of departure in existing research practices. To realise the ambition described above, Saxo's research strategy relies on three core measures:

I. Attractive research environments

At Saxo, we believe that a healthy working environment and transparent, supportive research management facilitate dynamic research cultures. The nexus of individual-communal relations in research is our core values: generosity, curiosity and critique. The concept of **community** captures the importance of contributions to the creation and functioning of research environments at Saxo, especially those that spring from collegial relations. The term emphasises a joint responsibility for the communal contexts in which research takes place. Taking responsibility means contributing positively in everyday practice to the culture we value and making sure that new members – guests, early-career researchers, seasoned scholars, or eager students – are welcomed and integrated into our research environments.

In nurturing attractive and productive research communities for Saxo's researchers, it is necessary to recognise that a significant proportion of research is individual in nature. In addition, many scholars pursue individual research projects or projects that involve limited collaboration at Saxo.

Indeed, the types of research activity that take place at Saxo demonstrate considerable variation

– also during individual careers. They range from extensive editorial service, activities that integrate research and teaching, and partaking in collective research projects to researching and writing a ground-breaking monograph. The possibility of gaining a range of experience and engaging in several types of research projects can play an important role in the individual researcher's pursuit of a fulfilling career.

This state of affairs makes it all the more important that there are opportunities to engage in collegial conversation and exchange, for example through talks and lectures at the Institute and weekly Brown Bag seminars, and that our research organization is attuned to a wide variety of demands and interests. Even if some research activities are highly individualistic, the pursuit of knowledge is, after all, a collective endeavour.

Research environments and the structures that support them must contribute to high-quality research. To this end, we expect

- that research activities sustain our core values and contribute to the inclusion of all staff
- that all research staff participates in Saxo collegial research activities
- that research leaders are exemplary in their conduct and attentive to the objectives of their specific function and the context in which it is exercised – ranging from the facilitation of new research cooperation in a cluster to the successful management of a large research project or center.

II. Research organisation

Most Saxo researchers are tied to one of the four disciplines with their attendant sub-disciplines that figure prominently at the Institute: Greek & Latin, Archaeology (classical and prehistoric), European ethnology and History. The disciplines form an established locus of scholarly debate and play a large role in the Institute's research-based educational programmes. Several initiatives and research communities emanate from these disciplines – from the recurring ethnological research seminars to the contemporary history circle and the open Friday seminars in archaeology.

Many researchers are also involved in one of the four research centers based at Saxo. They constitute dynamic and durable structures that foster a unique combination of research specialisation and cooperation with partners beyond the Institute. The stability of the center structure is instrumental in developing new projects, nurturing scholarly talent and attracting research funding.

Research clusters at Saxo are established through grassroots-based processes and play an important role in fostering vibrant cross-disciplinary research environments at the Institute. They are created and sustained by researchers with a common interest

in specific themes, approaches or research practices that foster new types of cooperation and play an essential role in integrating non-permanent research staff at Saxo. The cluster structure strengthens connections between individual projects, centers and collective projects.

Larger externally funded projects, typically with a duration of 4-7 years, enable specific types of research collaboration and practice: A tightly structured and multifaceted, collective endeavour revolving around a specific problem or research question with the aspiration of breaking new ground within a specific field. Within and ideally beyond the lifecycles of these team-efforts, such large projects of excellence bring new inspiration, ideas, guests and research activities to the Saxo community.

The research organisation at Saxo must be tailored to serve the needs of the research community and the ambition of producing high-quality research that matters – it is an organisation that cannot be static. Maintaining and developing it is the obligation of management in consultation with the department faculty board and the research committee.

III. Management duties

A final core measure revolves around a transparency about the responsibilities placed on Saxo management in relation to this strategy.

First and foremost, it must strive to safeguard the prerequisites of a dynamic institution invested in research that matters: academic freedom, dedicated research time, and access to relevant resources. As part of this objective, Saxo's management must insist on the continued relevance of qualitative assessment in determining research quality (in line with the [EU Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#)).

Second, management is committed to securing a balanced funding structure that makes the most of the opportunities offered by our two main sources of research funding: basic research funding (i.e. faculty research time funded by the university) and external research funding. Both types of funding allow Saxo researchers to explore original and perhaps obscure ideas and to complete substantial research endeavours that make a significant difference in academic and/or other communities. In this quest, decisions to house externally funded research projects must be based on a thorough assessment of the quality of a project and its implications for the Institute. The latter includes a

given project's match with research and educational activities, its compliance with data protection and information security policies, its compatibility with the policy that permanent staff are regularly and substantially engaged in Saxo's educational programmes, as well as its financial and strategic consequences. The overriding purpose is to ensure that externally funded projects benefit the Institute and that decisions with long-term implications for the development of the Institute are made at Saxo.

Finally, management is obliged to devise and implement a new policy towards academic staff on temporary employment with a view to increasing transparency and assisting these staff members with career development.

Shifts in structures of research funding and employment place new demands on Institute management in relation to temporarily employed academic staff who are vital to Saxo's continued success as a dynamic research institution. The core tasks of management in this respect include efficient onboarding of new researchers to ensure swift integration into relevant research environments, increased use of co-supervisors and/or mentors, frank communication about career opportunities at Saxo, and support for staff that are likely to pursue careers outside the Institute.

SHAPING SAXO'S FUTURE

Through the implementation of this research strategy, it is a distinct objective of the Institute to maintain and advance existing positions of strength. Currently, these range widely, from areas within disciplines to research centres and innovative collaborations in Saxo's research clusters.

Singling out centres of gravity in Saxo's research landscape is a difficult task. The following list of examples refers to areas where Saxo research is well-known and agenda-setting. It is indicative but not exhaustive.

- Materiality and materialisations, from flint and textiles to modern chemical composites
- Nature/culture: ecologies, places, and landscapes
- Everyday lives – prehistoric, historical and present
- Danish history and society
- Translations – textual and cultural
- Our global predicament, its origins and consequences
- Cultural history from ancient Greece to contemporary Denmark.
- Dimensions of the political, from security, migration and injustice to environment, health, and emotions.

In addition, the management team at Saxo believes that the Institute has further potential to expand and cultivate synergies within and across disciplines, organisational structures and existing strengths. These opportunities can be thought of as mounds in Saxo's research landscape. They constitute accessible, congregant spaces affording new perspectives and invitations for new knowledge production. Their common ground are themes that are not new to Saxo, but which could nevertheless benefit existing research activity through increased cooperation, cross-disciplinary engagement and common reflection. They include:

- Public policy
- Digitality
- Heritage

As emergent areas of scholarly innovation, these mounds have a potential for harnessing existing knowledge at Saxo to new academic and societal purposes. Whether they are viable as sites of cooperation cannot be pre-determined and neither can a specific outcome nor working manner. However, to explore and cultivate cooperation in these areas, management will organize a one-day seminar on each theme open to all staff and students at the Institute. The primary purpose of these seminars is to initiate conversations and appraise the promise of the identified common ground.

EVALUATION

No later than during 2028, Institute management will initiate an evaluation of the strategy with a view to adjustment or revision. The process is intended to be completed in advance of the next research evaluation. The evaluation of the strategy will take its starting point in dialogues with and among staff about the current text and its ability to capture the aspirations of both staff and management.

As with research evaluation in general, this evaluation will begin from a qualitative assessment. In addition, however, an assessment of the following indicators, involving a measure of quantification, may serve a valuable purpose in this process:

- Publication profile and patterns, including outputs other than conventional academic publishing
- Research application patterns, including volume, rate of success, and targeted grant schemes
- Extent of research management training among faculty
- Extent of cooperation beyond the academic world
- Internationalisation, including networks, cooperation, mobility and recruitment
- Integration of early-career researchers into Saxo structures, including onboarding procedures and use of co-supervision and mentoring
- Outputs and effects of Saxo's research organisation, including research clusters and research centers.



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