

**University of Cologne –  
Department of Scandinavian and Finnish Studies**  
Network partner of j o l n e s –  
**Joint Learning in Northern European Studies**



An interview with **Prof. Dr. Stephan Michael Schröder** (University of Cologne – Department of Scandinavian and Finnish Studies)

## **Transcription**

### **Prof. Dr. Stephan Michael Schröder**

Welcome, my name is Stephan Michael Schröder. I am the Professor of Scandinavian Studies at the Department for Scandinavian and Finnish Studies at the University of Cologne. I have been here since 2005 and I am very proud to be at this department . We are a very special department , because apart from Greifswald we are the only department in Germany that offers both Scandinavian and Finnish Studies. If you do a Bachelor's degree, you can take a joint Bachelor's degree in Scandinavian and Finnish Studies, where you can then choose your specialisation, and in the Master's degree you can actually do a Master's degree only in Scandinavian Studies or only in Finnish Studies. Another special feature in Cologne is that we offer a single Master's degree, again in cooperation with the University of Bonn. This means that you study your medieval studies in Bonn and do everything else with us in Cologne. And that is also in good demand among students.

At the department , we offer a wide variety of research foci. My own research focus is in the area of cultural history, especially cultural history around 1900, and I am currently working on a research project dealing with fan letters to Danish silent film stars. This is connected to the fact that I have been researching silent film history for many years. But that's not the only thing we do at the department ; in fact, the arc goes from the Middle Ages, from Old East Norse to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **WHAT POSITIVE ASPECTS DOES PARTICIPATION IN THE j o l n e s NETWORK HAVE FOR YOUR DEPARTMENT ?**

This network was originally created out of the desire to offer our Master's students a broad range of courses. The problem in the rare subjects is that you have limited local resources and that, with the help of such a network, you can of course offer your students a much broader register of courses. In addition, and perhaps this was not so clear to us at the time, such a network is also a great benefit for the teachers, because de facto you are then confronted in the courses with students who have completely different questions than your own, with students who have completely different prerequisites, who definitely bring new impetus into the teaching, and that is something from which I at least have also benefited greatly as a teacher. Of course, we didn't know at the time, as j o l n e s was just getting started, that we would have a Covid-19 crisis and that suddenly digital teaching would be as prominent as it has been for a good year now. And that has of course been a great advantage now, and we have

been able to help many other subjects here at the faculty with the knowledge that we have accumulated in digital teaching over the years.

### **WHAT DOES A NETWORK LIKE j o l n e s MEAN FOR A SMALL SUBJECT LIKE SCANDINAVISTIAN STUDIES?**

If you are a rare subject in a faculty, you usually have two options on how to network. One option is to network within the faculty. Of course, we also do that, we have joint teaching projects with other subjects, for example. That's what we should do, but of course it always leads to concentrating on overarching issues and that one's own, so to speak, specific Scandinavian or specific Finnish, recedes into the background. The other option is the one that j o l n e s stands for and that is the option of trying to build up a network with other institutes, departments or whatever they may be called in order to strengthen one's own subject identity, in this case the Scandinavian or Finnish one. And as I see it, we de facto need both directions, so we need both the networking with the neighbouring subjects in our faculty and the networking with the other Scandinavian and Finnish studies.

### **DOES THE NETWORK WORK SO WELL PRECISELY BECAUSE IT TAKES PLACE WITHIN A RARE SUBJECT?**

I don't think that such networks don't generally work in large subjects, but you have to realise that such a network is certainly also based on personal acquaintance. You have to know who you approach, you have to know who you can rely on, you might have to know each other from conferences, you might have to teach something together – and these are all things that I think are much easier to manage in rare subjects than in large subjects. In this respect, in principle it is certainly also possible in large subjects, but it is easier in rare subjects because we know each other better, because agreements can be made more informally and because students may have already moved back and forth between the different institutes. For example, in the current semester in j o l n e s I have a student whom I know from the Bachelor's programme in Cologne and who is now sitting in my course again as a Master's student in j o l n e s, although she is now studying at a “rival” department .

**Credits**

The interview was conducted on June 07 2021 via Zoom.

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