Introduction, statement of intent and platform of prof. Margit Sutrop, candidate for the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Arts

BIOSKETCH

Margit Sutrop is Professor if Practical Philosophy, Director of the Centre for Ethics, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Chairman of the council of the humaniora subject area. She was born 13.10.1963 in Tartu into a family of physicians. She graduated from Tartu’s Miina Härma High School (1981), and from Tartu University with a degree in journalism (1986). She holds an MA in philosophy (1991) from Tartu University, and a Ph.D in philosophy (1997) from the University of Konstanz in Germany. She has pursued postdoctoral studies at Oxford University, the University of Oslo, and the University of Konstanz, and she has taught philosophy in Tartu and Konstanz. She is a member of the Academia Europaea, ethics expert for the European Commission, member of the international curatorium of the University of Konstanz, and member of the advisory board of the University of Tübingen. In addition, she is a member of the governing council of the Lifelong Learning Strategy of the Education and Science Ministry; member of the Finance Ministry’s advisory board on the ethics of public servants; member of the Estonian Bioethics Council; member of the advisory board on Digital Health at the Social Ministry, the ethics committee of the Tartu University Clinic, and member of the academic advisory board of the Tartu University Library.

Margit Sutrop has published 100 academic articles, and the same number of opinion pieces in the media. She directs the institutional research theme “Disagreements: A Philosophical Analysis”; the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 research grant “Printeger”; and the national values development program of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Science. She has supervised three PhD dissertations and currently supervises six Ph.D students and two postdoctoral students. She has three children and three grandchildren. Her husband Urmas Sutrop is the Director of the Estonian Literary Museum.

WHY AM I A CANDIDATE FOR THE DEAN OF A FACULTY?

It is my strong intention to stand for educatedness as a value, both at Tartu University and throughout Estonia, and for the comprehension of the importance of the humanities and the arts. If elected, I will take a stand for the conviction that decision-making at Tartu University should consider the development of all four areas, and that students’ interests should be front and center. I will stand for the understanding of the specificity of the humanities, and that it would not be forgotten that Tartu University has an international mission to fulfill.

When I began my term as Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy three years ago, the Faculty’s budget was deeply in the red, and people did not believe that the large number of accumulated problems could be solved. By now we have solved the financial problems but in order to achieve sustainable development, we have activated structural, curriculum, and space allocation reform. We have created a College of World Languages and Cultures, activated MA schools, reorganized the Dean’s Office, and reconsidered our use of space.
I am very proud of the people in my Faculty for daring to undertake great changes. It is my moral duty to see all of these reforms through successfully, and to make sure that the successes are irreversible. I believe that together with the Faculty of Theology and the Tartu University Viljandi Culture Academy we will be even stronger.

**ELECTION PLATFORM**

**The formation of the Humanities and Arts Faculty**

On 1 January 2016, as a result of structural reforms, Tartu University will consist of four Faculties. The Humanities and Arts Faculty will include the Department of Theology, the History and Archaeology Institute, the Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics, the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics, the Institute of Cultural Studies and the Arts, the College of World Languages and Cultures, and the University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy. All in all, our Faculty includes 515 employees and 2850 students. The annual budget of the Faculty is ca 13.3 million Euros. The Faculty will be located in two cities, Tartu and Viljandi.

The Humanities and Arts Faculty also includes ten professorships in Estonian Studies and the Professorship of Liberal Arts. Metaphorically, we could say that our Faculty is the mother tree of the national university, the central pole which turns the mill of the study of national culture. Our task is to fulfill the mission of a national university: to study and teach Estonian language and culture, the material and intellectual heritage of Estonia, and to put this knowledge to work in serving the development of society. In order to be part of the larger, open world, it is also necessary to have knowledge of other languages and cultures, of philosophy, the history of religion, history, and arts. By researching and teaching these subjects we ensure cross-cultural communication and the coherence of society. The mission of our Faculty is thus to be the flagship of humanities in Estonia, in cooperation with other educational institutions, cultural and memory institutions, churches, and the embassies and cultural institutes of other nations which are located on Estonian soil.

The structural units of our Faculty vary in size, composition, as well as responsibilities. Some are more focused on teaching students; others teach across the whole university. Some have a number of research projects; others are called primarily to serve society. All of these differences must be taken into account. We must learn from one another’s strengths, while helping those who have problems. I am convinced that by joining together in one Faculty, cooperation among people in different structural units will intensify, and the clarion call of the humanities will be heard both within the University and in Estonian society. According to the University’s new Statute, there will be an elected member of our Faculty in the University’s Governing Council. The Faculty Dean will also become part of the Rectorate, participating more directly in the leadership of the University. All of this should guarantee better accounting for the Faculty’s interests and needs, and allow the Faculty to make a strong contribution to the development of the university as a whole.

If I am elected, I will do everything in my power to ensure that all four faculties of the university will have equal standing, and that the university will guarantee the sustainable development of all of them. In a university that is truly an universitas, it
cannot be as it was at Orwell’s Animal Farm, where all are equal, but some are more equal than others. However, equal treatment should not mean exactly the same support for everyone, since such an approach would not take into account differences in need nor the particularity of areas of study. As a nurturing mother, the alma mater must care for all of her children, while being more precise than it has been previously in recognizing where the specific strengths lie, and what one or another child might need in order to blossom. This principle should likewise apply within the Faculty.

Teaching

The number of humaniora students has dropped sharply in the last year and will apparently continue to do so in the next few years. Our Faculty finds itself in a difficult situation because of the injunction of the Ministry of Education and Science that BA curricula must have a minimum of 15 students, and MA curricula a minimum of 10. I believe that we must transcend the magic of numbers. Even in the Soviet years, students were enabled to specialize in small subject fields. The question is, how can we maintain this in free Estonia, where, unfortunately, more value is placed on financial profit than on being educated? Prior to the transition to the universities’ outcome agreement, the state provided support for small subject fields, in acceptance of the fact that there are subject areas where a small number of specialists must be trained. Thus the number of students in a curriculum is not the only criterion. The small number of students is compensated by their choice of minor fields in other faculties, or when courses taught in the faculty are taken as electives. It must also be kept in mind that several humanities specialties are currently also taught at Tallinn University. If there are not enough students for either university, and there is also a dearth of good university teachers, it is clearly reasonable to join our forces.

For many humanities specialties Tartu University holds sole responsibility. This means that if one of these curricula is shut down, it will not be taught anywhere in Estonia. When the Estonian Republic regained its independence, it was decided to reopen several specialties that had been closed during the Soviet era, for example theology and classical philology. In addition, separate curricula were established for Scandinavian Studies, Romance languages and literatures, painting, philosophy and semiotics. From the 1990s on, the (re)opening and building of these curricula has required a great deal of effort. Therefore, decisions concerning the future of these specialties cannot be made lightly, or merely in view of the immediate present. In places where a specialty has high research potential, the small number of students can be compensated by research projects. Of course, where there are neither students nor research projects, clearly something more radical must be done. It is crucial to maintain the plurality of humanities specialties, while at the same time increasing curricular flexibility, enabling students to combine different specialties. I am strongly in favour of interdisciplinary education, and I consider it reasonable that students choose both a major and a minor field, or a second major in another structural unit or even in a different Faculty. The more unique the education that a student can gain at Tartu University, the better will be their outlook on the job market.

However, most importantly we must think through WHAT we teach, and HOW we are teaching it. To resolve these issues, we must cooperate intensively with students. I
hope that if I am elected as Dean, our good cooperation with the students’ representatives will continue. 
For years I have directed the education process working group for the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 of the Ministry of Education and Research. We came to the conclusion that the greatest challenge for Estonian education is to move in the direction of teaching which supports the individual development of each student. In order for a teacher to teach in a lively and inclusive manner, to recognize the individual potential and interests of each student, being likewise enabled to apply assessment for learning, the future teacher must have experienced the same during his/her university studies. Not only in teacher education, but in all subjects, we must provide a future teacher not only with specialized knowledge, but also teaching skills and a grasp on what constitutes good practice.

Teaching general competencies
Studies conducted among university graduates show that our graduates are very satisfied with the specialized knowledge they acquired in university, but that they feel a lack in several general competencies; for example, graduates complain that they lack skills in cooperation, time management, and self-expression. Therefore we must strive to instill and develop these skills in our students to an even greater extent. We must definitely emphasize the development of new directions, for example, working up a digital humanities module, and bringing entrepreneurship and practical experience into our curricula.

Exchange Students Abroad
Having myself studied in three foreign universities, I consider study abroad to be extremely important. I believe that it makes sense to go abroad after at least three semesters of study in Estonia, when one already has a sense of academic direction. Thus, when attending a university abroad, one can focus one’s studies on those courses that are not taught in Estonia, or on what one wants to explore in greatest depth. All curricula should include a study abroad option, so that no problems are incurred in completing the curriculum on time, thus facilitating more students to choose the study abroad option.

Improving retention
One problem in the Humanities and Arts Faculty is the large number of students who interrupt their studies and drop out. Clearly, better advising would improve this situation, beginning with matriculation and continuing through to graduation. This year in the Philosophy Department we initiated a first-year students’ orientation day, “Find your way at University”, which received very positive feedback from students. This should be enlarged to include the whole Faculty, which means students in the Theology Department and the University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy. Also, training to improve the motivation of student tutors would help substantially. Clearly, better career advising, and the provision of related services would contribute to student retention. Those who have completed all but the final thesis should find it helpful that they can graduate based on a practical portfolio based on work experience.

Curriculum reform
We have initiated curriculum reform in the Philosophy department, and the process has gone the furthest on the MA level. Analyses and plans have also been drawn up
for the reform of the BA and Ph.D curricula. We must persevere in these reforms, and include the department of Theology and the University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy in theis process.

Last year the Faculty of Philosophy made the decision to close 6 MA programs and created two new MA programmes: European languages and cultures and foreign language teaching. This summer’s admission statistics showed that these were the right decisions. However, we still need to exert ourselves so that the MA schools come into full operation, and that the new courses would be filled with real substance. We also need to work hard on interdisciplinary MA seminars and practicums.

The transition to free higher education restricted the opportunities to teach in the “open university” format. However, it is clear that often people wish to pursue an MA degree while working on the side. Thus we must accommodate these students and create more flexible opportunities for them to pursue their studies.

**Ph.D Studies.**
Dissertation supervision must be improved with the aim of supporting students in completing their studies on time. However, the greatest worry in our area is that we are allocated so few Ph.D slots. Twenty state-financed slots a year means that in the best-case scenario, a program is only given one doctoral student per year; in some cases, one has to wait even three or four years for a single slot. This means that it becomes impossible to organize formal courses in the area of specialization, and one has to resort to individual independent study. However, interdisciplinary study can be organized through doctoral schools (the humaniora faculty has applied for two doctoral schools from ASTRA). I promise to fight for a more equal distribution of doctoral slots in the university, and that in evaluating progress on the doctoral level, what is considered is not only successful progress toward degree, but also the number of defended dissertations.

**Language of instruction.**
In a national university, it should be possible to study all subjects in Estonian. With respect to national cultural studies, it is our responsibility to maintain Estonian as the teaching language on all levels. Teaching in English is to be considered primarily on the MA and Ph.D levels. It is worth opening English-language curricula in those areas where we have strong research potential and the readiness to teach in a foreign language.

The Faculty of Philosophy has had a very good experience with its two English-language MA programs and one more such program is in the phase of development. The English-language MA program in semiotics is very popular; it has brought hundreds of interested students to Tartu, and these will become our ambassadors in the larger world. For many years there was a lack of Estonian students in philosophy, but the opening of the English-language MA program has increased the Estonian students’ interest in continuing their studies toward the MA. I believe that if we create an international learning environment for graduate students, then one consequence will be that it will have an impact on keeping Estonian students in the homeland. Studying in Tartu will become more interesting: students will acquire the experience of relating internationally and good skills in foreign languages while remaining at
home, which will entail retaining a feeling for one’s mother tongue, one’s culture and society. These students will pursue their studies in an environment that remains centred on their own language.

The faculty of humanities and arts must continue to stand for the ongoing development of Estonian scholarly and scientific terminology, so that the Estonian language would be usable as a scholarly language. If graduate studies increasingly become English-language centered, then it is all the more important that Estonian students acquire the terminology relevant to their specialty in Estonian; that they be able to articulate their work and research in good written and spoken Estonian. In my view, all Ph.D students should be required to write one popular science article per year, and to deliver at least one presentation in their mother tongue.

Research and Development

Recently the humaniorsa disciplines have been very successful in competing for Estonian research grants; they have been awarded the majority of IUT (Institutional Research Grants) and PUT (Personal Research Grants) per year, and they have directed the only humanities and social sciences-oriented Centre for Excellence in Estonia. Researchers in our Faculty are participating in the new Centre for Excellence competition in all four applications proposed by humanities scholars. People in our Faculty participate in the fulfillment of many state-funded programs and applied scholarship contracts. Over one third of the Faculty’s budget is made up of research funding.

The Faculty has demonstrated its ability for cooperation in the articulation of research foci, in the composition of ASTRA applications, choice of priority topics for the IUT competition, and in the distribution of basic institutional funding of the Estonian studies. I am sure that in the new, larger Faculty more opportunities will present themselves for the initiation of new interdisciplinary research projects. The research potential of different structural units varies, and for this reason I think it is important to direct those structural units that are less endowed with research grants to engage in greater cooperation with those units that have been more successful in acquiring research grants. Certainly it is necessary to further raise the Faculty’s potential through applications for foreign grants and postdoctoral grants.

Organizational Development

The greatest challenge facing the Humanities and Arts Faculty is the guarantee of financial sustainability. I believe it to be very important to raise the salaries in our Faculty and to improve the working environment. It is definitely possible to increase the budget, but it is likewise necessary to rethink the organizational aspect of our work and to reexamine the places where expenses are made. One area where it might be possible to economize is the cross-use of our study rooms. In a common Faculty, the structural units of the Philosophy department and the Theology Department can transition into cross-use of teaching rooms. This fall, in the Philosophy department we got rid of a whole building –the „Paabel“ building located opposite the University’s main building, and rebuilt the Lossi 3 building to meet the needs of the College of World Languages and Cultures.

At the Lossi Street facility, the College’s library will traverse three stories. The historians moved from the Lossi 3 building to the second floor of Jakobi 2, where
they are closer to their archaeology colleagues. In sum, the Faculty released 800 square metress of space, and this will certainly mean economizing on overhead expenses. What is at least as important, perhaps more important still, is that reallocation of space improves perspectives for cooperation and for the creation of family feeling.

If elected, I shall consider it my responsibility to see to it that people come to work in the morning with a joyful attitude; that good ideas will receive support; that all workers would have the feeling that there is value placed on their work and that their efforts receive recognition. Also, that all students feel that they are getting a good education at Tartu University, that their individual development is supported, that their concerns are attended to, and that they are considered to be equal partners.

I sincerely hope that the Humanities and Arts Faculty will grow to be one family, even though we are located in different buildings and even in different towns. I hope that our Faculty, as the mother tree of the national university, will put the mill of national cultural studies into powerful motion!

*Vivat crescet, floreat*, the Faculty of Humanities and Arts!

Margit Sutrop

Tartu, 21st September 2015