

# Do we need a separate discussion about impact for social science and the humanities?

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*Nordic workshop on impact of social science and humanities research*

*Oslo, House of Literature, 27 March 2017*

# Main themes

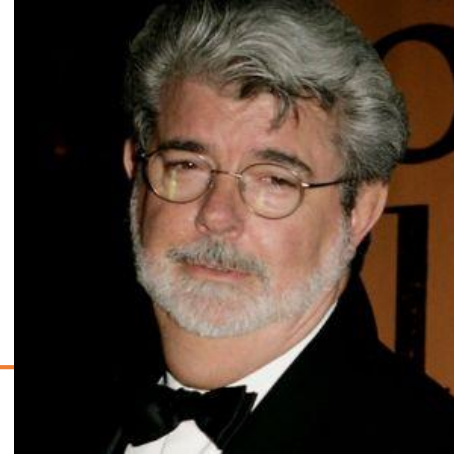
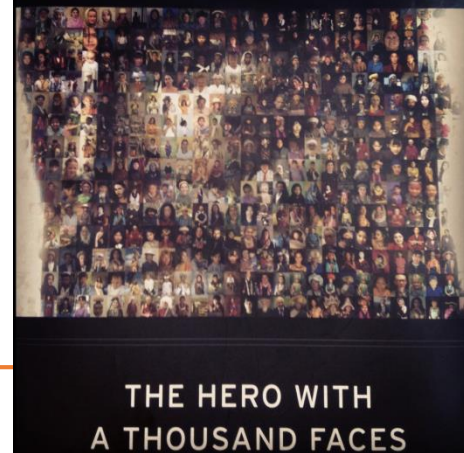
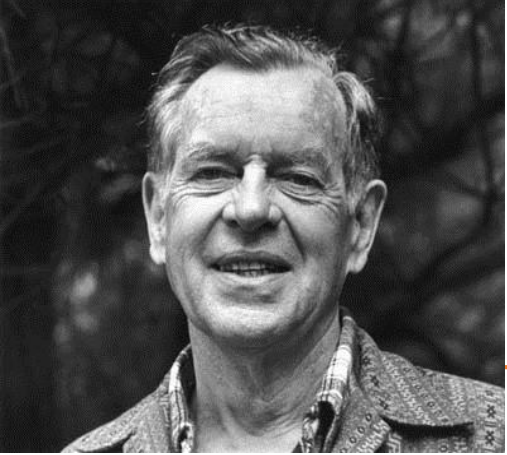
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- What do we know about impact from research?
- What is special about social science and humanities (SSH)?
- How do Norwegian researchers engage with actors outside of academia?
- Is impact different for SSH than for other disciplines?

# Impact – what do we know?

Impact takes time



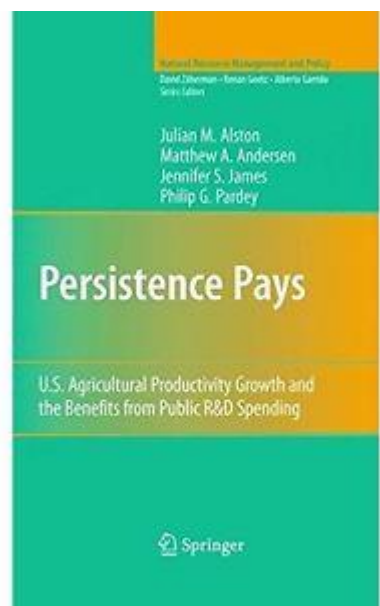


- George Lucas strongly inspired by Joseph Campbell's book "The hero with a thousand faces" (a study in comparative religion, 1949) when he created the Star Wars universe (first movie 1977)
  - The monomyth
  - The hero's journey
  - Metamorphosis
- "Campbell was my Yoda"





# Strong econometric evidence



- Studies of agriculture show that the average time from research to (main) impact can be 25-50 years
- Some research is clearly useful in a much shorter time frame, but this is not the general rule

# Preconditions for impact

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- Research often makes a difference not because of special actions of researchers, but because of the actions and characteristics of various *users* of research based knowledge
- *Productive interaction* between researchers and users also essential, i.e. the “academic engagement” that individuals carry out
- In many cases there might be little that the researchers – and the organisations that fund them – can do to increase, accelerate or influence the impact process

# GSM technology

- One of the most important research-based innovations coming from Norway (and elsewhere) the last 50 years
- Main actors: the state phone company's research institute and the technological institute SINTEF
- Strong interaction gave a digital system well suited Norwegian geography
- Weak impact in Norway, strong elsewhere (Nokia, Ericson and more)



Aftenposten A-magasinet Osloby Sport Meninger Magnus Meny

## Skapte revolusjon innen mobiltelefoni

GUNHILD M. HAUGNES

OPPDATERT: 30 OKT 2012 11:09 | PUBLISERT: 22 OKT 2012 12:02



Torleiv Maseng regnes for å være GSM-nettets far. Han ledet den lille forskergruppen som ved SINTEF på 80-tallet utviklet det som ble den europeiske standarden for radiodelen på det med tiden globale digitale mobilnettet GSM. Her er han fotografert hos Forsvarets Forskningsinstitutt i 2004, hvor han de siste årene har vært forskningssjef.

FOTO: Ørman, Rolf

De nordiske landene opparbeidet seg høy mobilkompetanse på feltet gjennom utviklingen av det analoge systemet NMT (nordisk



# Types of impact

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- Relevant impacts from research are not just economic but also related to health, environmental issues, policymaking and more
- Impacts can be instrumental and problem-solving but just as often conceptual, symbolic, political and more
- This is a central backdrop for modern impact measurement methods
- My earlier examples – Star Wars, agriculture, GSM – are all useful for understanding the heterogeneity of impact

Differences between fields

# Are SSH different?

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- Time: does it take more (or less) time for impact from social science and humanities research?
- Preconditions: are there different external conditions that need to be met for social science and humanities to make a difference?
- Types of impact: does social science and humanities research lead to distinct types of impact? Does this warrant special methods for measuring impact?
- Different from what? From STEM? From something else?









# Differences

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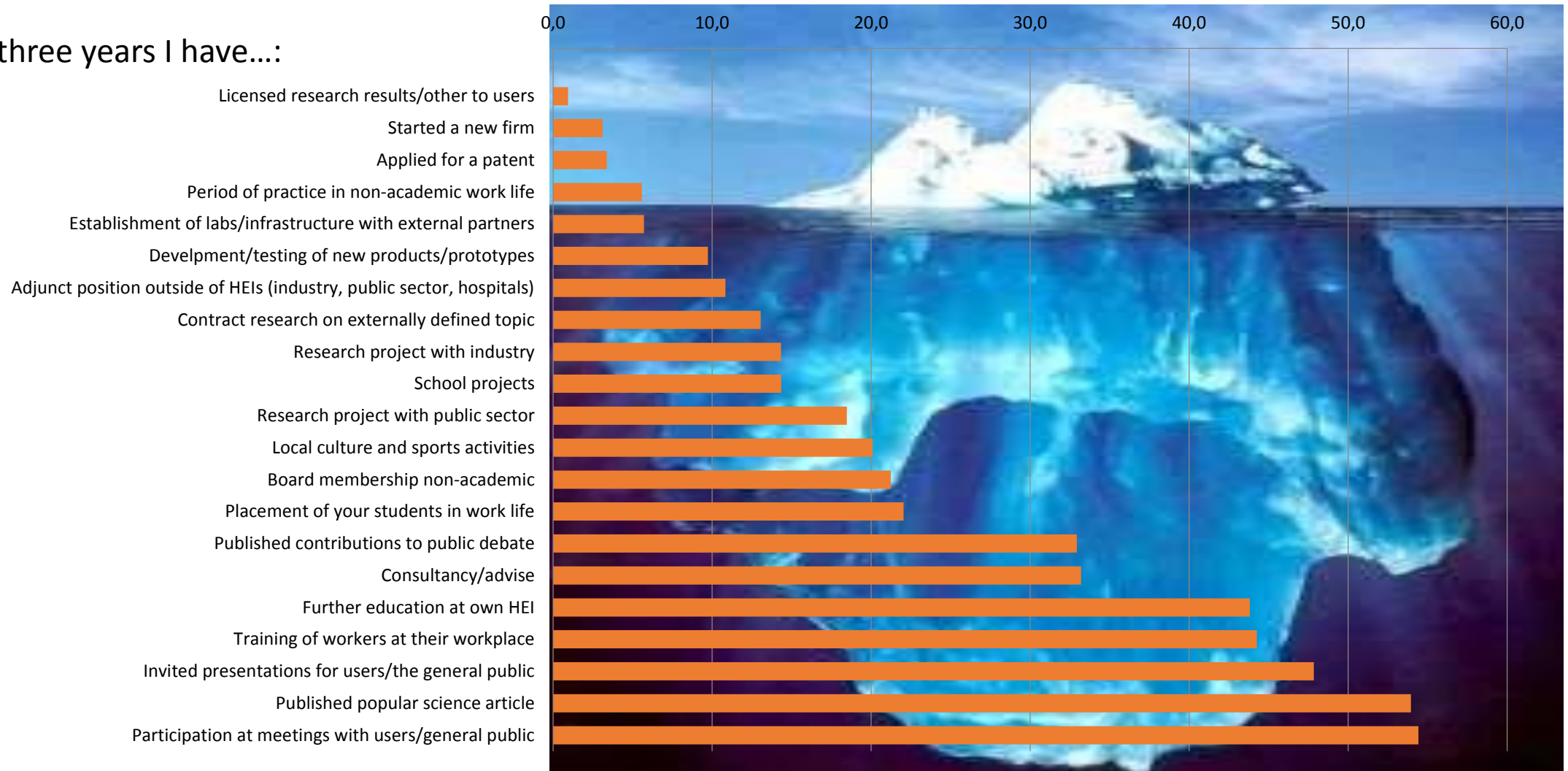
- Depend upon perspective and level of analysis
- We often exaggerate the similarities between social sciences and humanities – and their differences from other fields
- Compared to social science, humanities researchers define their activities to a much greater extent as “basic research”, they are more international and have less external funding
- At another level, there are major differences within these two fields but also transformations going on

# Academic engagement in Norway



# 4400 Norwegian researchers

In the last three years I have...:

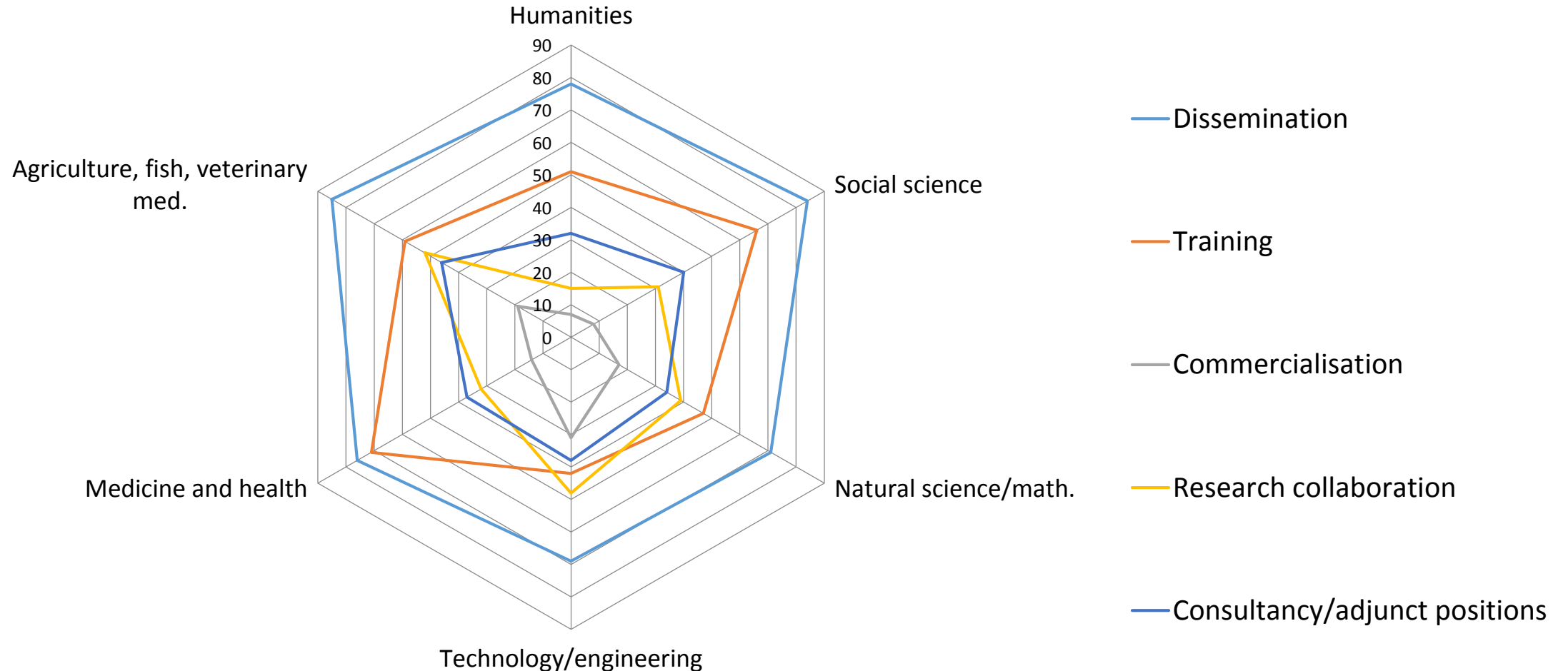


# Five main engagement types

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1. Dissemination to users/the general public
2. Training in/for non-academic organisations
3. Individual consultancy, professional practice and adjunct positions
4. Formal research collaboration
5. Commercialisation

# Differences between fields



# Two distinct stories

## Similarities

- Dissemination is the most common activity and commercialisation the least common in all fields
- Some researchers from all fields found in all activities
- The same factors influence the tendency to get involved in these activities regardless of field

## Differences

- Humanities overrepresented in dissemination, underrepresented in formal research collaboration and commercialisation
- Social science overrepresented in training and consultancy, underrepresented in commercialisation
- Fewer institutional differences than expected

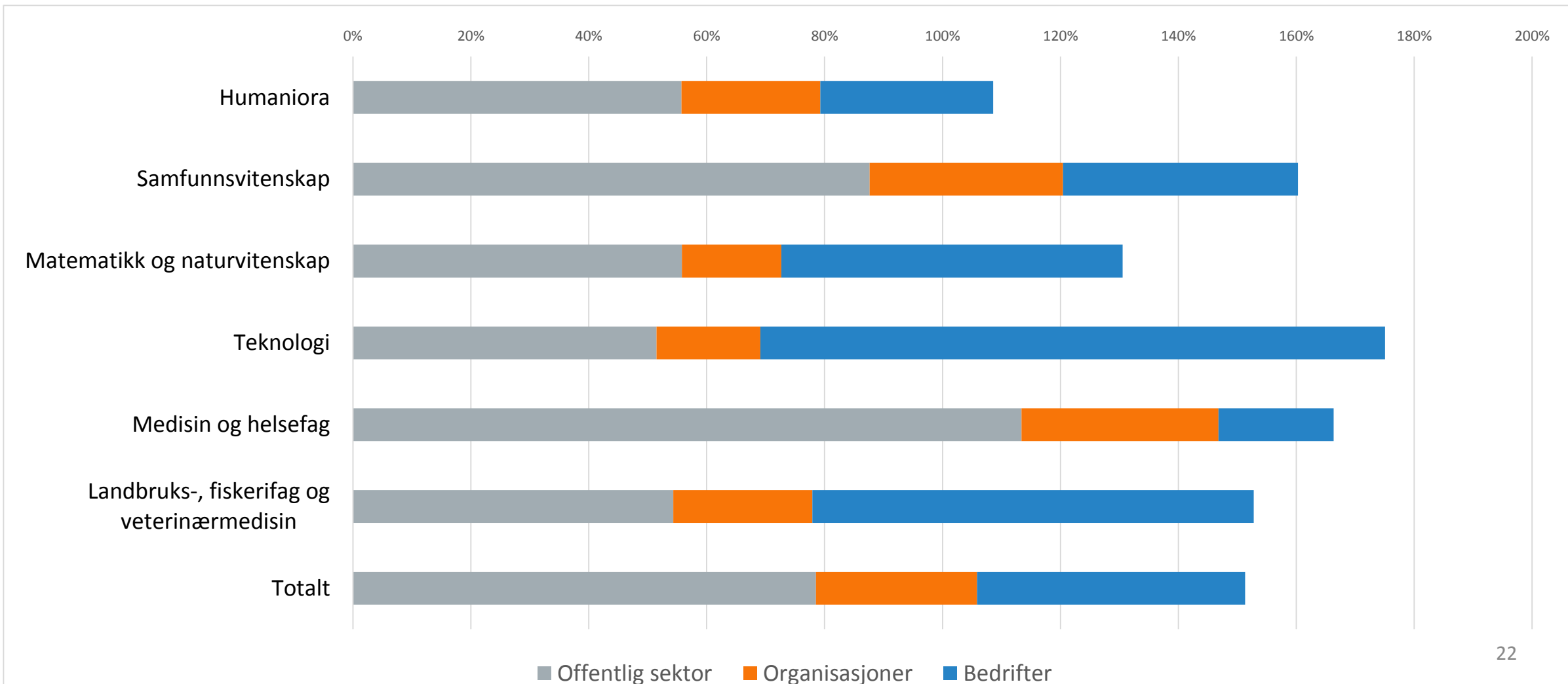


# Positive for engagement

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- Non-academic work experience lasting more than one year
  - Very common (48% in humanities, 59% in social science, 53% average)
- A research profile defined to a greater extent as “applied” or “problem-oriented”
  - Much more common in social science than humanities
- Seniority
  - Impact may be related to a certain level of expertise and experience
- External funding
  - Less common in humanities than other disciplines

# Wider collaboration partners



# Are SSH special fields?

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- So far: yes and no
- Time: few indications that impact has a different time dimension in SSH
- Preconditions: the non-academic partners are somewhat different, and humanities has fewer externally funded projects
- Types of impact: an indirect form of impact based on dissemination and training is central across fields
- Impact measurement: should not use patents and spin-offs to measure the use of social science and humanities – or of any other field

# Conclusions

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- We need a better discussion about impact and more knowledge about how the impact process unfolds
- Although social science and humanities research may be less “special” or “exclusive” than is often assumed, this also means that these fields are good starting points for fresh perspectives on and discussions of impact
- This is what we want to contribute to in the OSIRIS project

# Thank you

- For more information, contact [magnus.gulbrandsen@tik.uio.no](mailto:magnus.gulbrandsen@tik.uio.no) or see <http://www.sv.uio.no/tik/english/research/projects/osiris/>



The humanities in Norway: research, research organisation and external engagement

Magnus Gulbrandsen

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NIFU



Noder i kunnskapsnettverket

Forskning, kunnskapsoverføring og eksistent samarbeid  
blant vitenskapelige ansatte i UH-sektoren

Espen Hovik  
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Magnus Gulbrandsen

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