Frameworks for the understanding and evaluation of the societal impact of research in the humanities

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Frameworks for the understanding and evaluation of the societal impact of research: Examples

- Research Excellence Framework (UK, 2014)
- SIAMPI (Netherlands, 2009-2011)
- STAR METRICS (US National Science Foundation, 2010-2015)
- ERC Impact Framework (European Research Council)
The REF 2014 (UK) inspired the methodology in a Norwegian evaluation of the humanities in 2016-17: 169 impact cases

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- SIAMPI (Netherlands, 2009-2011)
- STAR METRICS (US National Science Foundation, 2010-2015)
- ERC Impact Framework (European Research Council)
Outline

- A typology of societal impact in the humanities
- Limitations of the impact case methodology
- Understanding and evaluating normal impact
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A classification of each of the 169 cases with regard to the *societal domain or sector* with which there was an interaction.
Cultural sector: The literary institution
Cultural sector: Performances
"Jeg har jobbet på 1. trinn i 14 år. Salto er det beste verket jeg har arbeidet med. Jeg opplever at elever leser og skriver mye tidligere."

Mai-Britt Moe, Munkerud skole
SLIK RETTES GRAMMATIKKEN


TEKST:

Gutten spiste den eplet.

MASKINEN SVARER:

 Kontroller ordformen «den». Hvis en artikkel eller et pronomen, her «den» står til et substantiv i intetkjenner, her eplet, bør også artikken eller pronomenet bøyes i intetkjenner. (Hvis har språkforskere glemt et komma etter «den»?)

TEKST:

Jeg liker meg fordi det er ikke kjedelig her.

MASKINEN SVARER:

 Kontroller passeringen av adverbet ikke. I leddsetninger bør slike setningsadverbial stå foran det finitte verbet, her er. Maskinen foreslår å bytte ut «er ikke» med «ikke er».

TEKST:

Jeg spiser å sover.

MASKINEN SVARER:

 Kontroller ordene å sover. Infinitivsmerke «å» brukes bare foran verb i infinitiv. Maskinen foreslår at du bruker «og».
Public space: Ethical considerations in societal dilemmas and in working life
Foreign relations: Understanding other languages and cultures
Tourism: Knowing cultural history
The memory of society
Typical areas of societal impact of the humanities

- The cultural sector
- The educational sector
- Media, software and the internet
- Public space
- Foreign relations
- Tourism
- The memory of society
A typology of societal impact in the humanities

Limitations of the impact case methodology

Understanding and evaluating normal impact
The impact evaluation methodology of the REF

Impact case template as Word file (6,975 submissions)
REF definition impact

An **effect on**, change or **benefit to** the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, **beyond** academia

Underpinning research must be “excellent” (2* quality or above)
The linear models of innovation and communication

Asking for narratives about:

- **The research that underpinned the impact:** “This section should outline the key research insights or findings that underpinned the impact, and provide details of what research was undertaken, when, and by whom,”

- **The resulting impact:** “A clear explanation of the process or means through which the research led to, underpinned or made a contribution to the impact (for example, how it was disseminated, how it came to influence users or beneficiaries, or how it came to be exploited, taken up or applied).”

**KEY FEATURES**
- One way communication
- Used for mass communication
- Senders send message and receivers only receive
- No feedback
- Concept of noise

**PROS**
- Good at audience persuasion and propaganda setting
- Intentional results

**CONS**
- Communication is not continuous as no concept of feedback
- No way to know if communication was effective
Challenges with the linear model for impact evaluation
Ilkka Turunen (2013), based on OECD (2008)

- **Causality:** the relationships between research and innovation inputs, activities, outputs, and impacts are often unclear or nonlinear.

- **Attribution:** it is difficult or even impossible to separate the impact of research and innovation from other inputs and activities.

- **Internationality:** the impacts of research and innovation are international by nature – activities and value chains are global, and both positive and negative spillovers exist.

- **Time scale:** the impacts are realized both in the short and long-term.

- Breakdown of impacts to a particular socio-economic target: **how to define** e.g. impact on public welfare or culture.

- **Data issues:** data on many issues related to science are unobservable or are not systematically collected; fundamental uncertainty around the concepts.
Focused on only one side of the interaction (because the method is used for institutional funding)

Why does impact matter?

- Accountability
  - spending public money means demonstrating the benefits of that investment to society

- Quality
  - research can be improved by engagement with a broad range of potential beneficiaries

- Maximising benefits
  - shortening the time to benefits, and increasing the impact we know our investments have

- Reputation
  - enhance UK attractiveness for research and innovation investment
A case of interaction and collaboration, about responding to needs
Syrian-Norwegian collaboration on documenting Palmyra (UNESCO world heritage) since 2008

Jørgen Christian Meyer, professor of archaeology, University of Bergen

Khaled Mohamad al-Asaad, director of Palmyra archaeological site
My own organization, NIFU, was recently evaluated, using the same methodology.

I wrote an impact case of interaction and collaboration, about responding to needs.
Presenting the results of the Norwegian research evaluation exercise: Normal contributions are not part of the story

Contributes to information technology, bioethics, peace processes

Contributes to emergency communication, genetic counselling, ethical regulations

Contributes to health care, engineering sciences, climatic research and energy
Extraordinary versus normal impact of the humanities
“Usually a short story focuses on one incident; has a single plot, a single setting, and a small number of characters; and covers a short period of time.”

“A short story conserves characters and scenes, typically by focusing on just one conflict, and drives towards a sudden, unexpected revelation.”
Normal impact

- Is found in responsible relations between academia and other institutions of civilization
- Is about daily activities and how well they are organized, not about individual incidents of visible impact
- A medical faculty is **part of the health care system**, not only of the university
Normal impact
Syrian-Norwegian collaboration on documenting Palmyra (UNESCO world heritage) since 2008

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Extraordinary impact
The sudden importance of the project after the outbreak of the civil war in 2011

Returned

Beheaded by ISIS
Extraordinary impact can also be a violation of normal impact

- Research misconduct also has societal impact
- Can be understood as an institutional responsibility in the perspective of normal impact
- Institutional level evaluation and learning is needed
- Normal impact is what needs to be secured

Hiring someone for a job is always a big decision. But the Karolinska Institute’s 2010 decision to appoint as a visiting professor Paolo Macchiarini (pictured above), once a world-renowned thoracic surgeon, turned out to be really big.

Following the deaths of two of Dr Macchiarini's patients at the Karolinska University Hospital and allegations of research misconduct, a TV documentary on his work shocked the Swedish public and led the Karolinska Institute's board to commission an external inquiry into the institution's handling of his case.

After the inquiry published its highly critical findings on 6 September – saying the institute had a “nonchalant attitude towards regulations” – Sweden’s higher education minister removed the

Source: Alamy
Normal impact can be evaluated at both sides of the relation

Cultural sector: The art institution
Conclusions

- A typology of societal impact in the humanities
- Limitations of the impact case methodology
- **Understanding and evaluating normal impact**
The **linear model** for understanding societal relevance forces upon us:
- A one-sided and individualized perspective on the relations
- A naïve interest in attributable evidence of impact

The **case study methodology**
- May still yield results that contradict the linear model and call for other frameworks for understanding
- The main problem with this methodology is instead that it leads to a focus on extraordinary cases of societal impact
Societal impact of research is **normal** and part of society.

Normal impact is about daily activities and **how well they are organized**, not about individual incidents of particularly interesting or impressive impact.

Normal interactions with society can be evaluated as such at the **organizational** level, taking **all inter-actors** into consideration.