

The Politics & Ethics of Assessing Research Impact:

Implications for
research
infrastructures

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Assessing Research Impact

Economic, social, environmental, cultural benefits (broadly defined)

- how to define?
- how to measure?
- political and ethical implications

Growing international interest

- e.g. UK REF GBP1.6 billion per year (EUR 1.9 billion) = 25% impact
- *ex post* or *ex ante* assessment linked to funding

Compact between science and society

- Hot topic
- Relevance gap
- Lack of evidence base
- Academic freedom vs. directing research
- Balance of impact vs. blue skies research (and funding infrastructure)
- Effects on science system?

Politics of defining research impact

Spectrum of definitions and measures

- narrow vs. widen
- simple vs. complex
- rewarded vs. invisible

Metrics and measurement are not value free

Bottom-up definitions are wider and more inclusive

Political appropriation of the ‘impact agenda’

Disciplining the academy

- power and control of knowledge **or** opening up participation in science?
- humanities and social sciences vulnerable **or** making previously unrewarded research visible?
- encouraging co-production of science with society **or** e.g. UK REF2014 where is (politically sensitive) participatory research?

European approaches

Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, UK

- range of approaches illustrate power of linking funds to competitive assessment of research impact
- linked to distribution of funds and/or institutional rankings & prestige
- bottom-up approaches produce more open and inclusive definitions of broader impacts, tend to include qualitative data, are more likely to involve peer review, and reveal a diverse range of impacts
- top-down approaches are data-driven, less complex, and have a narrower impact range, usually focusing on scientific impact or economic impact

Committing metricide?

The rise of 'impactology'

- the practice of assessing impacts, and the study of the practice of assessing impacts
- 'impactologists' – management, consultants, software, training
- pressures to save time and money
- metrics at the expense of more nuance and detail

An ethical impactology

San Fransisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) (2102)

The Metric Tide (Wilsdon *et al.*, 2015)

The Leiden Manifesto (Hicks, *et al.*, 2015)

Responsible use of metrics alongside impact narratives:

- transparent
- diverse
- reflexive
- humble

Impact and research infrastructures

Short-term vs. long-term measurement

‘Quality’ vs. impact (false dichotomy)

Broader public value vision of research infrastructures

- e.g. Donovan et al. (2014) funding of shared infrastructure stimulated impact across the research system
- data needed on shared facilities and resources
- short-term & long-term benefits for range of research users & beneficiaries
- common European measures?
- **beware of committing metricide**

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Thank you





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