

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Impact in the Nordic context:

Understanding the contemporary state-of-the-art in international comparative perspective

NORSSHVALUE Working Group seminar, 20th-21st August 2019, Faculty of Humanities, Háskóli Íslands, Reykjavik, Iceland.

There is an increasing interest in contemporary science policy in ensuring that public investments in research activities contribute to delivering improvements in society, sometimes referred to as the 'impact' agenda. Although this is often rationalised in terms of technology and life sciences research driving economic growth, there much potential for social sciences and humanities (SSH) research to create impact on their societies. The pressure from policy-makers on universities and researchers to create impact has been delivered through evaluations, the introduction of impact measures, and direct funding for impact creation. It is now widely acknowledged that these impact stimulation measures need to properly reflect the ways in which different scientific disciplines create impact, and the most popular approach, the UK's Research Excellence Framework uses peer review to ensure that evaluators have the necessary flexibility to adjudge whether researchers have reasonably created impact.

But at the same time we note that although policy-makers have been enthusiastic about the REF model, it has not travelled well internationally. The REF was derived from an early exercise in Australia that was ultimately abandoned to return a decade later in radically different format. At the same time, there have been serious attempts in Norway and Sweden to introduce the Impact elements of the REF into their national science systems. Norway used an impact case methodology as part of the national evaluations of Humanities and Social Sciences, whilst Swedish universities each submitted ten impact case studies that formed the basis of an experimental funding stream. These differences suggest that Nordic countries have very different needs in introducing these evaluations, and that with policy running ahead of evaluation theory, there is a need to better understand the context sensitivity of the creation of impact in SSH research.

Certainly the Nordic context is extremely different from the Australian and UK contexts in which these approaches have been developed. Impact in the REF is extremely causal and atomised, and appears to reflect the individualisation of the UK's social organisation. The Nordic context is totally different, with a stronger sense of collectivity, much lower power distances between actors, and a much stronger shared commitment to social welfare (including gender equality). These issues suggest that what Nordic societies (themselves extremely diverse) value from SSH research will differ considerably, and therefore any sensible attempt to measure that impact need better understand that Nordic context.

To address this challenge, in this symposium we seek to open an academic conversation regarding the relationships between SSH Research impact creation and the social contexts within which that evaluation takes place. We wish to explore the ways in which the concept of SSH impact is constituted reflective of societal needs, interests, dynamics, schisms and communities.

We seek to understand how the whole academic community relates to impact creation, and to make visible the ways in which much SSH research impact is hidden, erased and otherwise ignored in contemporary discourse. We therefore seek contributions that speak to one of more of the following questions, with either an explicitly Nordic or internationally comparative dimension:

- The social construction of existing forms of SSH research impact evaluation
- Foregrounding the politicisation of social development discourses and evaluation
- Evaluating SSH research impact reflecting different societal needs & capacities
- The potential for metrics to capture and depict impact creation
- Gender, social value and the creation of SSH research impact
- Reflections of SSH impact across non-Nordic national perspectives
- Appropriate policies for stimulating & supporting SSH research impact across national research systems.

This event will take place in Reykjavik on 20-21 August 2019 and due to extremely generous funding from the NOS-HS (The Joint Committee for Nordic research councils in the Humanities and Social Sciences) we are able to cover participants' (reasonable) travel and subsistence expenses. The symposium is the first of a triptych that seeks to ultimately provide an answer to the question of how can Nordic SSH research best contribute to societal development of the Nordic region. This will lead to a project volume and special issue that will appear in 2021. For more information, please contact Paul Benneworth or any of the other Working Group co-chairs.

- [Paul Benneworth](#), Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway
- Laura James, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark.
- Reetta Muhonen, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland.
- Eiríkur Smári Sigurðarson, University of Iceland, Iceland
- David Budtz Pedersen, Aalborg University, Copenhagen, Denmark