

Assessing the societal impact of scholarly books in social sciences and humanities

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Overview

- Evaluating societal impact of research a ‘hot’ policy topic
- Impact emerges in productive science systems around productive impacts
- Looking at the role of books in creating the impact within ‘productive SSH systems’
- Six examples from Spain highlighting complex relationship between “books” and impact



R-QUEST

Center for Research Quality and Policy Impact Studies

HOME	RESEARCH	PEOPLE & ORGANISATIONS	PUBLICATIONS	EVENTS	NEWS	CONTACT
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RESEARCH QUALITY AND POLICY IMPACT

Quality in research is a highly prioritized, but also a much debated issue in research policy. The Centre for Research Quality and Policy Impact Studies (R-QUEST) constitutes an 8-year commitment to explore the nature and mechanisms of research quality – funded by the RCN FORINNPOL initiative. The centre will address three closely related questions:

UiO: University of Oslo For employees Norwegian website

OSIRIS - Oslo Institute for Research on the Impact of Science

A part of TIK Centre for Technology, Innovation and Culture at Faculty of Social Sciences

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ACCOMPLISSH

ACcelerate CO-creation by setting up a Multi-actor Platform for Impact from Social Sciences and Humanities

Partners

Participant No*	Participant organisation name	Country
1	University of Groningen	NL
2	University of Glasgow	UK
3	University of Copenhagen	DK
4	Dalharna University	SE
5	Newcastle University	UK
6	University of Zagreb	HR
7	University of Tartu	EE
8	Sapienza University of Rome	IT
9	University of Göttingen	DE
10	University of Debrecen	HU
11	University of Ghent	BE
12	University of Barcelona	ES
13	Tallinn University	EE
14	University of Coimbra	PT

Academic background

- Increase interest within research policy to measure research societal impact (Derrick & Samuel, 2016)
 - ✓ More research evaluation systems now account for societal impact (UK, The Netherlands)
 - ✓ Quantitative approaches, but lately also qualitative approaches (e.g. UK's Research Excellence Framework) adopted in Norway & Sweden in different ways (Martin, 2011; Smith et al., 2011)
 - ✓ Tendency for practices to outstrip theory and reversion to things that can relatively easily be captured rather than what matters (Donovan, 2017)
 - ✓ Contemporary policy challenge – a more robust and rigorous approach to evaluating research societal impacts
- Increasing academic interest in understanding research societal impact beyond licencing deals, spin off companies or patents (Perkmann et al., 2013).
- When addressing research impact conceptualisations of ideas creating capacity and change in society
 - ✓ it is very hard to measure the flow of ideas
 - ✓ but rather easy to measure transactions associated with those flows (Benneworth, Hazelkorn, & Gulbrandsen, 2016).
- If we are talking about book evaluation then it makes sense to try and develop a framework for evaluating the societal impact of books alongside their scientific impact.

Productive interactions as an evaluation object

- High pressure from research funders to evaluate societal impact of research
- Pragmatic choice of evaluation objects
- Effective evaluation object already exists, comparative, countable
- 1980-90s emergence of AUTM measures
- 2000s search for more than 'counting widgets'
- Dutch ERIC project about evaluating research in its wider context → Siampi

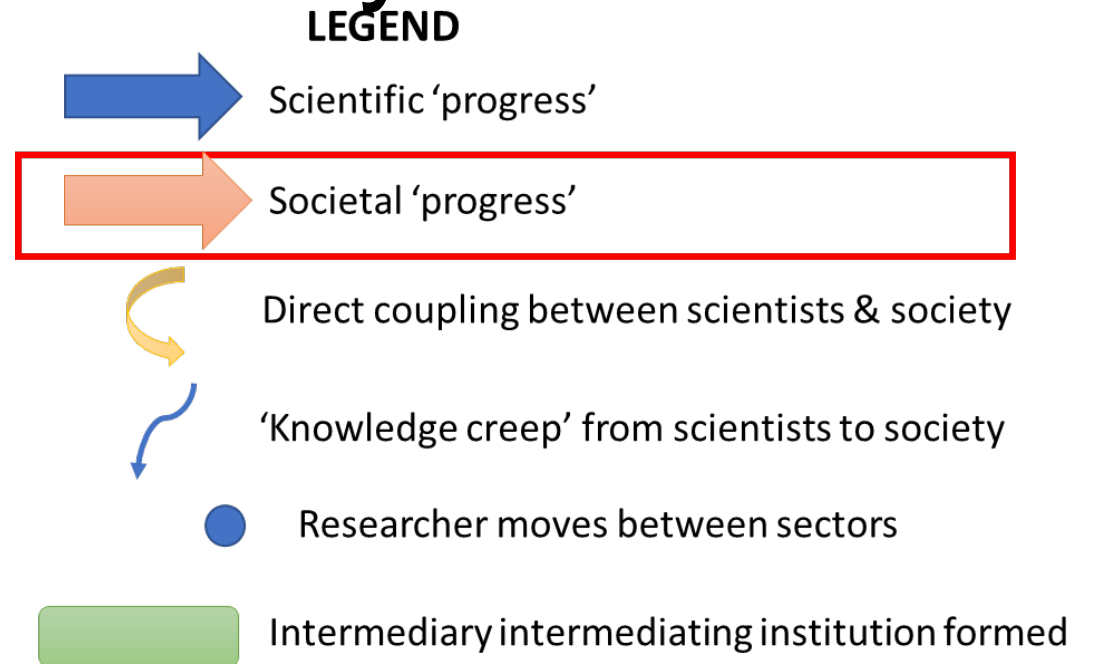
- Definition of productive interactions :
- "exchanges between researchers and stakeholders in the production of scientific knowledge"

Part of the impact of books comes through the role they play in productive interactions

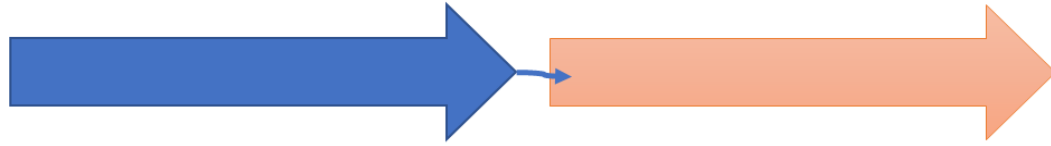
- Spaargaren & Van Drooge, p. 212.

From productive interactions to productive science system dynamics

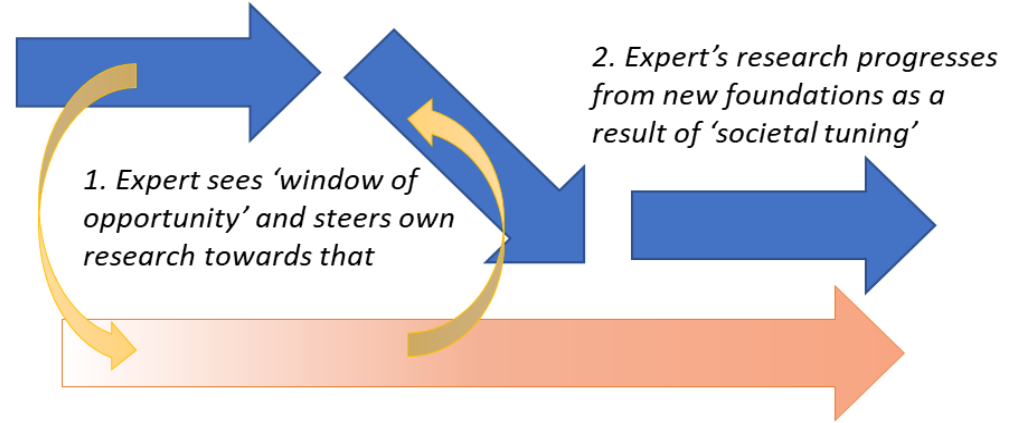
- Productive interactions as 'moment of interaction' between two systems ('spheres'):
 - ✓ Science system: producing rigorous, excellent research
 - ✓ Societal systems: producing artefacts with a wider value
- Productive interactions require orchestration two system logics
 - ✓ Science: universal-general
 - ✓ Society: local-private



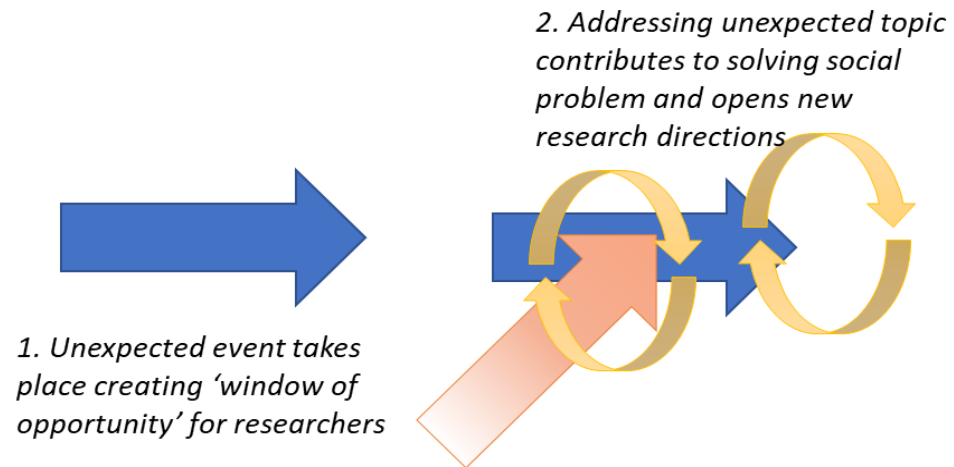
The Classical Pipeline Pathway



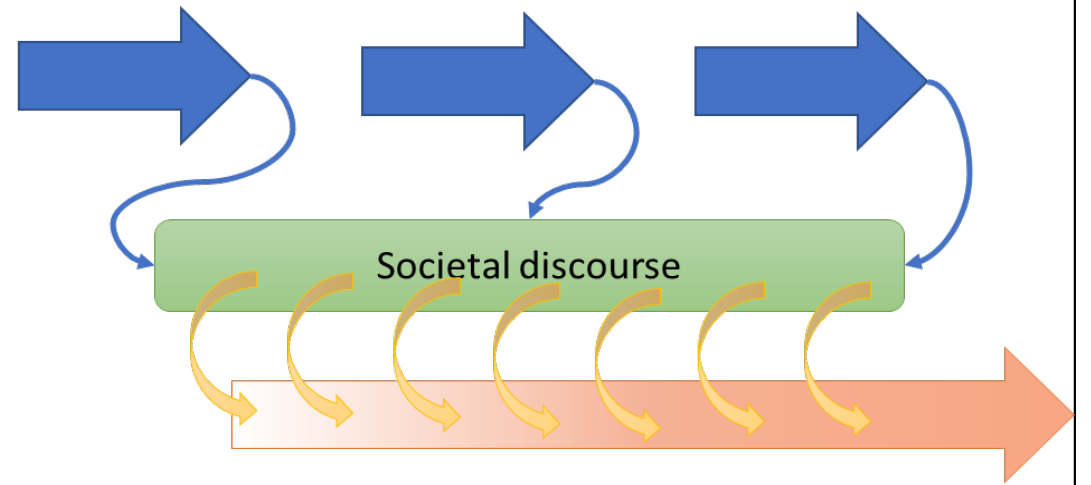
6. The 'Anticipating Anniversaries' Pathway



7. The 'Seize the Day' Pathways



11. The Knowledge 'Creeps' into society Pathway



Overview of potential ways by which knowledge creates societal contributions

Pathway	Process by which knowledge achieves societal contribution.
Classical pipeline	The research activity creates a 'piece of knowledge' which is transferred to a societal partner who immediately is able individually to realise value from that knowledge. Potentially measured through 'productive interactions'
Anticipating anniversaries	The research group builds up a knowledge base that might potentially be interesting and applicable to societal users based on researchers' anticipation of users' future interests. Potentially measured through 'activities of use'
Seize the day	The research group suddenly finds that their research has value in understanding an urgent, emergent phenomenon. There is a new research project that transforms existing knowledge into use value.
Knowledge Creep	The knowledge is continually popularised and comes to form part of an emerging discourse, and therefore influences the ways that ongoing societal debates unfold. Very difficult to measure and prey to 'extraordinary impact'

Research question

- ‘How can we create a first operationalisation of the impact of SSH research knowledge at least partly transferred through books as a first step to better evaluating that impact?’

Methodology

- Exploratory piece of research to explore the dynamics of these frameworks
 - Gathering empirical data and structuring it through conceptual framework
 - Drawing inferences based on structure and dynamics of restructured data.
- Use of case studies of
 - Productive research groups that have created scientific progress along with scientific contribution
 - There have been interactions and exchanges between scientific and societal sub-systems
 - Books have played some kind of role in the overall advance made in the system
 - Identifying 'what matters' about the books as the basis for potential evaluation.

Data set

- **Source:** SIAMPI Project 2009-2011 (addressing the Social Impact Assessment Methods for research and funding instruments through the study of Productive Interactions)
- **Data:** interviews with Social Science and humanities research groups and their counterpart (socioeconomic agent).
- Case studies where books have been published
- Analysing 6 case around 5 elements
 - (a) scientific advance,
 - (b) societal advance,
 - (c) direct contact,
 - (d) personal movement, &
 - (e) intermediary institution formation.

MUSICOLOGY

- The musicology research group are involved in research into 16th century Spanish music, and in particular the translation of old music scores into a modern notation that allows contemporary musicians to access and play that music.
- The books produced by this research group from that initial research project have been used by interpreters and conservatoires to ensure alternative, and arguably more authentic, forms of performance of this rediscovered music, thereby seeing the research influence the cultural patrimony of Spanish classical music.

ARCHAEOLOGY

- The archaeology group (the laboratory heritage research unit) is specialized in studying cultural heritage, its processes of meaning, valuation and revaluation, and the analysis of past and present transformations of heritage assets.
- The books that have emerged from this research activity have created new ways of working in the field of archaeology practice, ensuring that there are conservation and recording efforts

GEOLINGUISTICS

- The Geolinguistics groups specialises in understanding geographical variations in linguistic morphology and grammar in Spain, as part of a linguistics research theme.
- Members of this group wrote a commercially published volume "*Palabras Moribundas*" which documents 'word fossils' in the Spanish language, words which carry a meaning other than with which they usually would convey because of their historic evolution. This book sold in considerable numbers and also generated significant media interest.

ANCIENT LANGUAGE DIGITALIZATION

- The fourth research group studied focuses on the recovery and digitalization of ancient manuscript collections from Spanish held-documents in diverse languages including Arabic, Hebrew, Greek or Coptic
- The books emerging from this research group typically form a unique knowledge resource for the particular subject matter concerned, so for example "The holy library and the three great monotheistic religions of the Mediterranean" represent a unique heritage resource for understanding Islamic tradition and heritage in Spain from the Arabic (??) period.

MIGRATION

- The fifth example comes from the case of a research group specialising in demographic and population geography, specialising in migration studies, and located in Andalusia, southern Spain, a region undergoing substantive demographic ageing as well as significant migration.
- Books from his research group have been published by the BBVA Foundation to stimulate a debate in the rapidly-aging Spanish society about the importance of dealing with the effects of demographic ageing and the impacts of the increased demand for care (including within families) for societal development.

HERITAGE, MEMORY & IDENTITY

- The research group is a team of archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians involved in analyzing socio-cultural responses to painful societal events.
- Books published by this research group have served as a collective memory resource for Spain in both of these case studies, and although published as academic volumes serve as much a curation and display purpose for the specific details of the two cases as to create and disseminate wider scientific knowledge about collective grieving and memorializing a Franco-era prison.

Direct scholarly & societal contributions

- The books which have emerged from these engaged research groups have not primarily been scholarly volumes for whom the readership is an academic community.
 - The geoarchaeology group for example was concerned in its books to document the practicalities of its GIS system and its techniques for creating heritage risk maps
- The second role played by the book in the productive science systems was in the way that it was appropriated and absorbed by users for an act of socio-cultural creation.
 - Majority of the users here do not access the knowledge off-the-shelf through the book, but are already engaged in the specific knowledge community in various ways

The book in the life of the knowledge community

- In at least two cases, books represented working practices of a network of practice (geoarchaeology and musicology).
 - The book served as a community boundary object, by which potentially interested users could explore whether this community held useful knowledge.
- Constituting an audience or readership that spanned two communities authors were associated with around particular personal movement
 - geoarchaeologists doing applied consultancy and pure research, the
 - musicology scholars who were directing & researching music,
 - migration scholars creating new statistics & analysing migration impacts/ attitudes

Books and institutionalisation processes

- the role of the book in representing, constituting or articulating some kind of intermediary institution from which wider societal use was derived
- Geolinguistics case: *Palabras Moribundas* created what could be considered as a new class of meaning in society (*dying words*), and mobilised that in society through a fortnightly radio programme piece with many listeners.
- The geoarchaeology group were involved constituting “archaeological practice” (rapid *in media res* documentation of incidental archaeological finds) as a new kind of activity in Spain, and supporting these community members in their activities, assisting with understanding how to interpret legislation as well as technologies and techniques, in which the books played a role

Evaluating the Societal Impact of Books

- How can we create a first operationalisation of the impact of SSH research knowledge at least partly transferred through books as a first step to better evaluating that impact?
- Policy perspective on the social impact of books that needs to be captured by a research evaluation system is that they incorporate various configurations of these features
- Book as a nexus of a knowledge community, a turning point in a knowledge conversation
- Book as a protected space to prime knowledge that can then be deployed
- Book as a piece of cultural patrimony with a wider stewardship value
- Book may be antecedent to the eventual final act of value creation