

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA15137

STSM title: Cross-country comparisons of SSH publication patterns using national data

STSM start and end date: 12/09/2017 to 30/10/2017

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PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The purpose of this STSM at NIFU was two-fold: firstly, to analyse data collected during a European survey “Cross-country differences in social sciences and humanities publishing patterns”. This survey was used to acquire insights into the comprehensiveness and comparability of national bibliographic databases. The survey included questions on data collection and processing practices, on comprehensiveness of the content of national bibliographic databases as well as series of basic SSH indicators characterising the content of databases (e.g., share of book chapters per discipline). Secondly, the purpose of this STSM was to develop a methodology for bibliometric cross-country comparisons using national data from two or more countries. The starting point for this was a design of a follow-up study to a comparison conducted by Trycken Ossenblok, Tim Engels, and Gunnar Sivertsen where SSH publication patterns in Flanders and Norway (2005-2009) were explored. The planned follow-up study would explore longer period (2005-2015) and in addition to articles in journals would take into account also book publications.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

During the first two weeks of this STSM, I worked on the analysis of data collected using a survey “Cross-country differences in social sciences and humanities publishing patterns”. When interpreting collected data, I used also information in factsheets on databases collected during a survey “European databases and repositories for social sciences and humanities research output” (Sile et al. 2017).

In the third and the fourth week, I worked on an article manuscript. This text provides an overview of national bibliographic databases for social sciences and humanities (SSH) in Europe with a focus on the comprehensiveness of their content.

During the fourth and the fifth week the manuscript was revised on the basis of feedback acquired from collaborators of the study. In the sixth week the manuscript was sent to all participants of the second survey setting the 24th of November as the deadline for providing feedback.

In the third week, I began the work on methodology for bibliometric cross-country comparisons using national data from two or more countries. The analysis of data collected in the survey indicated that some aspects need more detailed inquiry into both the comprehensiveness of data as well as data collection and processing practices carried within national bibliographic databases. For this reason, I sought further information from the staff maintaining the Norwegian database Cristin as well as other people involved in data collection and processing (representative of The National Board of Scholarly Publishing, representatives of Higher Education sector).

The acquired insights pointed to insufficient conceptualisation of the notion 'comparability' (of national bibliographic databases). Therefore, during this STSM (especially during the fourth and the fifth week) I studied literature from the field of infrastructure studies (the work by Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, in particular) and in the philosophy of observation (Hans Radder). Using acquired insights, I drafted a proposal for an approach to pursue bibliometric cross-country comparisons of SSH using national data. The proposal needs further conceptual elaboration, however, it is developed to an extent that it can be presented for a discussion in a conference.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The two main results obtained during this STSM are: (1) an article manuscript providing an overview of national bibliographic databases in Europe with a focus on their comprehensiveness, and (2) a proposal of an approach to cross-country bibliometric comparisons of SSH using national data. The conceptual part of the proposal will be presented in the 22nd Nordic Workshop for Bibliometrics and Research Policy in the 9th of November, 2017 (Helsinki, Finland).

Here I summarise the key points of the results:

(1) Overview of national bibliographic databases in Europe with a focus on their comprehensiveness

This paper provides an overview of national bibliographic databases for social sciences and humanities (SSH) in Europe with a focus on the comprehensiveness of their content. The overview is based on two surveys. In Autumn 2016 we launched a survey to acquire an overview on national bibliographic databases for SSH in Europe. Surveying 41 countries (responses received from 39 countries) we identified 21 national bibliographic databases for SSH. Further, we acquired a more detailed description of the content and data collection and processing practices for 13 databases.

A key point of the text is that even though the content of national bibliographic databases is diverse, it is possible to delineate a subset that is similar across databases. At the same time, findings also highlight that differences in national bibliographic databases are often bound to differences among the science systems they refer to. These more subtle differences are much more difficult to capture. Hence, accurate interpretation of bibliometric analyses that incorporate data from various national bibliographic databases requires a detailed understanding of the specifics of SSH in the different national contexts.

(2) Approach to cross-country comparisons of SSH using national data

In this approach to cross-country comparisons, the key idea is that national bibliographic databases for social sciences and humanities are conceptualised as mediated representations of knowledge practices within SSH. In brief, using this approach, at the first stage of analysis, data in databases are treated as *data in databases*. Consequently, if one calculates, for example, the share of publications in national language, this indicator cannot be regarded as a property of SSH. At this stage, the indicator is only an indicator summarising the content of databases. In further steps, however, one tries to identify concrete examples of mediation. If possible, those examples can be used in a quantitative analysis of the extent to which, say the number of national journals, influence the number of publications in national language. The idea is that in this process of tracing the link between SSH as knowledge practice and data in national bibliographic databases, it is possible to acquire more sound basis for bibliometric indicators, and, more importantly, their limitations. These ideas I continue to develop further also after STSM and to apply to a comparison of SSH in Norway and Flanders (2005-2015).

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

The comparison of SSH in Norway and Flanders (2005-2015) will be carried out in collaboration with Gunnar Sivertsen (NIFU). Possibly, this collaboration will include representatives of other organisations (e.g., CERES – Current Research Information System in Norway) or of The National Board of Scholarly Publishing (NPU) in Norway with whom I have had a chance to meet during this STSM and).