The importance of impact and its implications for evaluation of SSH

Marc Vanholsbeeck, PhD
(@MVanholsbeeck)

Direction of Scientific Research, Ministry of Wallonia-Brussels Federation;
Université libre de Bruxelles & ENRESSH member

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1. Impact in context
2. Definitions of impact
3. Impact in European and national research policies and evaluation systems
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Impact in context

Internationalisation

Quasi-Marketisation

Managerialisation

Model of « World Class Research University »

Scientific impact: citations to articles in international top journals

Digitalisation

« Exoterisation »

Model of « Open University »

Impact beyond academia

(Vanholsbeeck, 2017)

Definitions of impact

Definitions of impact
Conceptual frames (1)

- Impact as dissemination
- Impact as direct economic effects (income from licenses, patents, spin-offs) (Benneworth, 2014)
- Impact as broader cultural, societal, health, environmental and political effects

- Impact as “extraordinary impact” vs. manifold and mundane types of impact (Sivertson, 2017)

Definitions of impact
Conceptual frames (2)

- Impact as the changes we can see (demonstrate, measure, capture) (Bayley, Phipps, Batac & Stevens, 2018)
- Impact as measure of impact
  - Bibliometrics for scientific impact
  - Economic metrics for economic impact
  - Altmetrics to measure societal impact? (Miedema et al., 2018)

Definitions of impact
Conceptual frames (3)

- Impact as 'pathways' to impact (Research Councils UK, 2014)
  - Linear (Caplan, 1977)
    - Knowledge Transfer / TRL
  - Non-linear
    - Co-creation of impact with societal stakeholders (Gronvad et al., 2017)
  - From direct instrumental impact to indirect conceptual impact (King's College London & Digital Science, 2015)

Definitions of impact
Conceptual frames (4)

- Impact as « productive interaction » (Spaapen & Van Drooge, 2011)
  - *"Exchanges between researchers and stakeholders in which knowledge is produced and valued that is both scientifically robust and socially relevant*;
  - *Mediated through various 'tracks' (a research publication, an exhibition, a design, people or financial support)*;
  - *Productive when if leading to efforts by stakeholders to somehow use or apply research results or practical information or experiences*."

Published

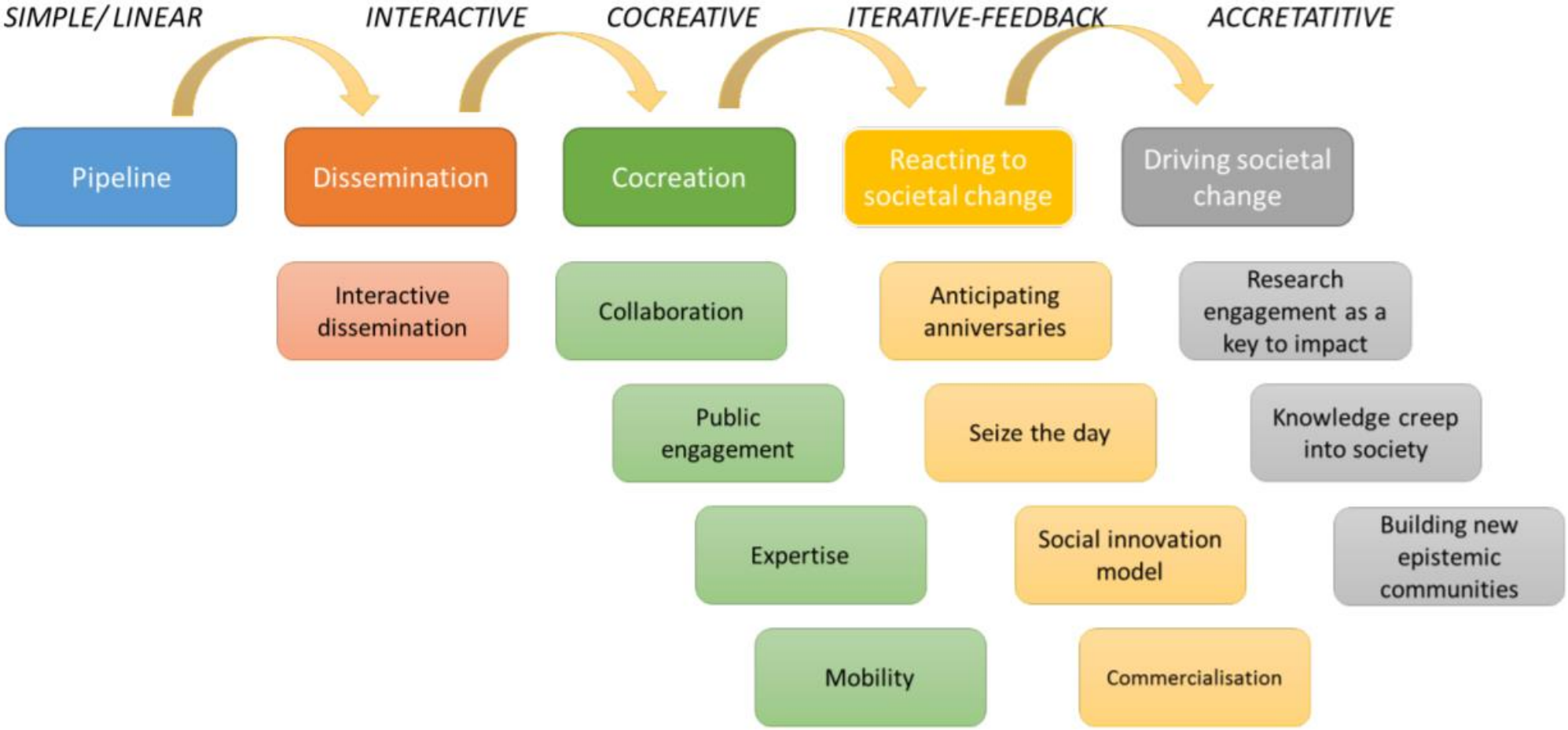
From productive interactions to impact pathways: Understanding the key dimensions in developing SSH research societal impact.

Muhonen, R., Benneworth, P., & Olmos-Penuela, J. (2019).

- Based on 60 cases studies in 16 countries
- SSH pathways to societal impact by paying attention not only to productive interactions but to their effects on the status of the societal and scientific partners and the broader effects taking place in terms of societal development and scientific advancement

- Typology of SSH pathways to societal impact

COMPLEXITY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS



Impact in European and national research policies and evaluation systems

Impact in EU research policies (1)

- Impact as (mostly) linear and economic but...

- "Mode 2 of knowledge production" (Gibbons et al., 1994)
- "Quadruple-Helix" model (Carayannis and Campbell, 2009)
- "Missions" of Horizon Europe (Kattel and Mazzucato, 2018)
- Open Access < Open Science Agenda including Citizen Science
- Responsible Research and Innovation

Impact in EU research policies (2)

- Evaluation of FP proposals:
  - Only Excellence for ERC (with the exception of Proof of Concept)
  - All others: Excellence (5), Impact (5), Quality and efficiency of the implementation (5)
    - Weight of 1.5 for impact in Innovation Actions and SME instrument
  - Horizon Impact Award – a prize dedicated to EU-funded projects whose results have created societal impact across Europe and beyond

Country Reports
National Evaluation Systems
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Contributors: Judit Bar-Ilan, Andrea Bonaccorsi, Karin Byland, Monica Delsignore, Gemma Derrick, Ioana Galleron, Haris Gekić, Jon Holm, Sven E. Hug, Arleen Ionescu, Marlène Iseli, Arnis Kokorevičs, Emanuel Kulczycki, Lai Ma, Michael Ochsner, Elena C. Papanastasiou, Ginevra Peruginelli, Janne Pölönen, Ana Ramos, Linda Sīle, Karel Šima, Mimi Urbanc, Marc Vanholsbeeck

Belgium / Wallonia-Brussels Federation

- FRESSH (Fonds pour la Recherche en Sciences humaines) (2012) funding of doctorates from the F.R.S.-FNRS which "aim[s] to carry out fundamental research projects with significant societal impact, using tools provided by human and social sciences."
  - Justification of the potential societal impact of the project in application file: players, groups or sectors likely to benefit from the results of the research in the shortmedium term.

International perspective (1)

- Not taken into account: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ireland, Israël, Romania
- In debates: France, Italia, Poland (Impact Assessment to be conducted in 2021)

International perspective (2)

- Social relevance criteria applied
  - to the institutional research assessment and funding of applied and basic research: Czech Republic;
  - to institutional research assessment: Latvia, Portugal, Switzerland;
  - to project funding: Slovenia.

- Non peer-reviewed types of pubications with societal impact taken into account in performance-based national funding of universities system (+ weighting of OA publications, 2021): Finland

International perspective (3)
UK, Research Excellence Framework

- REF 2014: peer review based assessment of 1911 submissions, 52061 academic staff, 191150 research outputs and **6975 impact case studies**
- Criteria
  - REF (2014): Outputs (scholarly publications, 65%); **(ex post) Impact (Societal Impact, 20%)**; and Environment (15%);
  - Upcoming REF2021: Output (scholarly publications, 60%); **(ex post) Impact (Societal Impact, 25%)**; and Environment (15%);

International perspective (4)
UK, Research Excellence Framework

- 'Impact' is *any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia*;
- 'Reach and significance' taken as a whole;
- SSH specificitites taken into account;
- Only Impacts that were given 3- or 4-stars eligible for funding (£2 billion to over 154 UK universities).

International perspective (5)
Inspired by UK REF

- Lithuania (National assessment of research units, 2018)
- Norway
    - Societal impact as a priority in long-term plan for research and higher education (2015-2024);
    - Societal impact assessed on the basis of submitted impact cases (REF 2014 template) and self-assessments from institutions;
    - Initial resistance (cases studies too limited);
    - Enhanced visibility of SSH impact.

Perceptions and attitudes towards impact

1. Senior researchers

Senior academics as key negotiators in the implementation of impact policies in the social sciences and humanities

Marc Vanholsbeeck, Theodosia Demetriou, Agne Girkontaite, Andreja Istenic Starcic, Ville Keiski, Emanuel Kulczycki, Elena Papanastasiou, Janne Polonen, Hulda Proppe and Maja Vehovec

Attitudes of researchers towards organisational changes (1)

- Individual scholars' power to « negotiate » the prescriptions (Linkova, 2014)
  - Scholars' definitions of impact (Derrick and Samuel, 2017)
  - Not many studies on the impact agenda (Besley and Nisbet, 2013; Dobbels et al., 2015; Besley et al. 2018)

Attitudes of researchers towards organisational changes (2)

- Acceptance, **symbolic compliance** (Kehm and Leiðytë, 2010; Teelken, 2011; Kalfa et al., 2018), « tinkering » (Vanholsbeeck, 2012), manipulation, « micro-politics of resistance » (Linková, 2014) or resistance to organisational changes (Chandler et al., 2002; Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd, 2003)
  - « Double allegiance » (Davies and Horst, 2016)

Methodology

- 16 interviews conducted in 2018 with senior academic sociologists in Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia
- Perceived roles in the implementation of research evaluation policies, including impact
- Impact as resulting from “productive interactions” (Spaapen and Van Drooge, 2011)

Perception of the impact agenda

- Impact not perceived as a (major) prescription
  - A few institutional initiatives but not at the same level than research and teaching

- Prescribed form of research output = article in « International Top Journal » (with high bibliometrical value)
  - Bibliometric indicators as a tool for more transparency (and less nepotism) but not an end in itself

Attitude towards impact (1)

- Impact deemed as important by most respondents
  - But risk of loosing substance in case of institutionalized impact

« I just have this feeling that people have adapted some standard phrases about impact. And, you know, about social impact, holding some conferences and connecting to some stakeholders, and things like that, involving someone from the labor market as consultant, background groups and bla bla bla. A few things are like this, yes. ”

(IS, female senior sociologist)

Attitude towards impact (2)

- Impact not only « instrumental »: critical social engagement as a sociologist’s duty
- Possible to combine international publications with impact driven activities and publications

“[The Open Access institutional repository of my university] gives an extremely important visibility to works that are not necessarily recognized as such. I realize that one of my syllabus has been downloaded so many times. [...] It gives visibility to less recognized types of research outputs. Conversely, my latest publications [...] are clearly peer reviewed and had an impact factor, but finally they seem to me to have infinitely less social relevance than things that I would have a hard time putting in a scholarly journal, because they are not ‘in the canons’.”

(BE, male senior sociologist)

Perceived obstacles (1)

- Quick penetration in the international research market (in English)

& International ranking of universities

vs.

- Societal engagement at the local level (in vernacular languages)

“So, if a university wants to be globalized (what we call internationalization) and compete with other universities in Europe, it has to be part of these university rankings. Therefore, in our university we encourage our staff to publish in English and even those who publish in Greek are encouraged to have an abstract in English so it can count in Scopus. Now, at a local level, it is of course important to publish in Greek (the local language) in order for the university to be part of society and social activities, but if we want to go beyond the small boundaries of Cyprus we have to publish in English.”

(CY, male senior sociologist)

Perceived obstacles (2)

- General lack of rewards and incentives: lack of (or lower) valorization of outreach (outputs)
- While outreach is time- and skill- intensive

- Open Access journals perceived as lower quality/reputation

- Lack of sound impact indicators
- Impact Factor not correlated to social impact

Perceptions and attitudes towards impact

2. Early Career Investigators

Diversity in impact conceptualization and engagement: accounting for social, epistemic and local contexts within the social sciences and humanities

Marc Vanholsbeeck, Karolina Lendák-Kabók and Alexis Dewaele

Methodology

- CARES project: 105 questionnaires in 29 European countries about ECIs' definitions and experience of impact and impact creation

- Impact to be considered as a "boundary object" (Star and Griesemer, 1989)
  - Common structure across "social worlds"
  - Community-specific conceptualizations

  - Hence better to avoid any "one size fits all" approach in the implementation of the "impact agenda"

Exploratory results (1)

- Commonalities
  - Positive views even if time consuming and in tension with research
  - Complex notion
  - Specific SSH pathways to impact creation
  - Accountability
  - High motivation but lack of support and incentives

Exploratory results (2)

- Difference in meanings linked to
  - Generation gaps: “entrepreneurial” ECIs vs. older researchers
  - Stage of the (early) career
  - Type of methodology
  - Motivation by research (and impact as a potential outcome) or impact (and research as a tool) first

- Next steps: is impact gendered?

Discussion

- Polymorphic universities needed
  - Diversified and open ecosystems of research production-dissemination-evaluation
  - Diversified career paths and profiles
- Impact and Open Science related skills (as part of the doctoral education)

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