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"From Global Indicators to Local Applications"

#STI2022GRX

Poster

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#STI22GRX

Societal Impact, the SDGs, and the Humanities: A case study from the University of Iceland¹

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Introduction

Like many other private and public enterprises, the University of Iceland has adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to measure its contribution to society. In this, it follows wide spread trends to use the SDGs as a measure of public good and to develop methods to measure the contribution of the institute towards the goals as a proxy for its societal engagement and impact (Sigurdarson, forthcoming). The university is a part of an alliance of 11 European universities in the AURORA network (<https://aurora-universities.eu>), which has as a main objective to work towards the SDGs. As stated in a general mission statement of AURORA: “... we aim to harness our academic prowess to influence societal change through research and educational activities – and ultimately to contribute to the achievement of the sustainable development goals.” Work is ongoing within the network to develop “Bibliometrics of Relevance” to measure the “Gross Academic Value” of the network and each partner university (<https://aurora-universities.eu/resources/sdg-analysis-bibliometrics-relevance>).

It is still unclear to what degree this “global” work will influence academic life in the local context of the University of Iceland, but it has the potential of upending some rooted practises and principles. In this presentation, ongoing research on the potential effects of “bibliometrics of relevance” on the evaluation and priority setting of research in an institutional context will be presented, with emphasis on the humanities.

The research

The research project is based on two strands:

1. Analysis of the developing “bibliometrics of relevance” within the AURORA network, particularly looking at the topic extraction for the SDGs, the publication databases, and the methods of evaluating the relevance and impact of publications (Vanderfeesten & Otten 2017; Sigurdarson 2021). This strand is based on readings of published materials and interviews with participants in developing the bibliometrics.
2. Analysis of types of societal impact research in the humanities does and can have. This strand is based on work within the COST network ENRESSH (Muhonen, Benneworth & Olmos-Peñuela 2020) on case studies of impactful research in the humanities and on ten in-depth interviews conducted at the University of Iceland with researchers in the humanities

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on their research and its actual or potential impact.

Indicative findings

The research, in its current state, indicates A: That the new “bibliometrics of relevance” risk repeating and enhancing problems with bibliometric approaches based on data that does not sufficiently cover and represent research in the humanities and related fields (e.g., Singh et al. 2021). B: That the models used to evaluate societal impact of research are too limited and do not capture important contributions by research in the humanities and related fields (Sigurdarson 2020). Jointly, these two issues point towards serious problems with current attempts to use the SDGs as a measure of the societal impact of research that can potentially have a negative impact on the transformative power of local institutions (Sørensen & Traweek 2022).

Conclusions

The research can be relevant for how evaluations of societal impact based on the SDGs are developed in a direction that is more inclusive of the humanities and more relevant for the development of universities with the goal of benefiting society.

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