

Michael Ochsner · Sven E. Hug
Hans-Dieter Daniel *Editors*

Research Assessment in the Humanities

Towards Criteria and Procedures

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Editors

Michael Ochsner
D-GESS
ETH Zürich
Zürich
Switzerland

Hans-Dieter Daniel
D-GESS
ETH Zürich
Zürich
Switzerland

and

FORS
University of Lausanne
Lausanne
Switzerland

and

Evaluation Office
University of Zürich
Zürich
Switzerland

Sven E. Hug
D-GESS
ETH Zürich
Zürich
Switzerland

and

Evaluation Office
University of Zürich
Zürich
Switzerland

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Foreword

The volume that lays in front of you covers an important topic, namely the search for academic quality in research in the domain of the humanities and, particularly, how to come to terms on how to operationalize that in research assessment contexts. Over the last 20 years, we have witnessed, particularly in Europe, a growing influence of quantitative techniques on the measurement of research performance, mainly in the natural, life, biomedical and engineering sciences. And although it was clearly acknowledged that these quantitative, bibliometric techniques have lesser relevance in the social sciences, humanities and law (SSH), the pressure on these domains to adapt to the research assessment practices of a quantitative nature, as applied in the natural, life, biomedical and engineering sciences, grew steadily. And while some of these techniques did work in those few specialties of the social sciences, in which journal publishing has become the field's standard, it clearly was not applicable in most other specialties of the social sciences, nearly all of the humanities and in law.

This increasing pressure on SSH scholars to show quantitatively how they perform in research assessment procedures led to much protesting reactions from the social sciences and humanities communities. So we witnessed a fierce debate on the applicability of bibliometric techniques around a research assessment procedure in the field of psychology in the Netherlands, centred around the role of books in the assessment of psychology research. In Belgium, the application of the journal impact factor as part of the funding allocation model applied in Flanders, has led to the creation of an academic bibliographic system that could better serve the interests of scholars in the social sciences and humanities in that same funding model. And finally, in 2012/2013, German SSH scholars made clear statements, when first economists, followed by sociologists, historians and educationalists protested against academic rankings. And as these protests have created a higher degree of awareness on the importance of having a better insight in the publication output types and scholarly communication practices of scholars in the SSH domains, and initiated a variety of research on that topic, a more important development has been

that an academic interest grew with respect to the variety of research and communication practices all across the humanities and social sciences landscape.

And that is exactly what this new volume is demonstrating: a focus on the different aspects of scholarly practice in the humanities, and the ways these are reflected in research assessment procedures. Important in that respect is that this development is taking place by and through scholars in the humanities themselves. By consulting and listening to the scholars that are subject to research assessment, one can learn how the assessment of that type of research should be organized, by streamlining assessment practices towards local research and communication practices. An important question addressed in the volume is on how academic quality is perceived by scholars in the humanities, and not only through qualitative procedures, but also by quantitative means. Where peer review has been the backbone of research assessment in the humanities in the past, and will remain to be in the future, the initiative on the development of various quantitative approaches has to be welcomed as additional methodologies, informing peer-review processes. And while I realize that these quantitative methodologies do stir up a lot of discussion, this discussion is productive in the sense that it is the scholarly community within the social sciences and humanities itself that is involved now, thereby taking things in their own hands, rather than being confronted with top-down installed bibliometric techniques that do not fit into the variety of the academic work in the social sciences and humanities.

The editors of this volume have done a great job by joining together a wide variety of internationally highly reputed scholars from various academic ranks and backgrounds in the social sciences and humanities, all very well qualified to describe the most recent developments in the research assessment practices they are involved in, either locally or internationally. Furthermore, the volume is a display of the variety of research practices in various domains of the humanities, reflecting the heterogeneity of the scholarly research and communication practices within the humanities.

To conclude this preface, I sincerely hope that this volume contributes to a further extension of the academic efforts from within the humanities to think and develop procedures and methodologies that suit research assessment practices in the humanities.

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Theod van Leeuwen