Real impact is about influence, meaning and value: Mapping contributions for a new impact agenda in the humanities.

LSE blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2015/07/27/mapping-the-public-influence-of-the-humanities/

The humanities are driven both by epistemological and normative interests in a range of topics resulting in a complex topography of the public value of the humanities. But for the most part, its diffuse knowledge and impact has been defined and restricted to inputs and outputs. **David Budtz Pedersen** *presents an overview of a research project aiming to reveal the pathways of humanities research deeply integrated in the functioning and affluence of modern liberal societies.*

The humanities constitute a vast and variegated research field. Scientific topics and research practices covered by the humanities have many different implications for society. They provide guidance, expertise, public-private collaborations, and they translate into a myriad of public debates, policies and institutional learning. However, the pathways of research in the humanities are often reduced to such immediate proxies as student employability or academic output (measured in papers and citations).

The Humanomics Research Center at University of Copenhagen is now launching a new research programme with the fundamental aim of widening the current scope and understanding of the pathways of humanistic knowledge. Instead of settling the issue within a narrow understanding of impact, the research programme explores the hypothesis that the humanities may find many pathways into society, some of which are deeply integrated in the functioning and affluence of modern liberal societies. In order to investigate the complex social networks of knowledge production and dissemination in the humanities, the programme will develop a new analytical framework for **Mapping the Public Influence of the Humanities**. Building on network analysis, qualitative interviews and conceptual models, the programme will test and assess the influence of humanities research against a wide range of societal values, sectors and institutions.

Image credit: **Graffiti scenery humanities** (Pixabay, CC0 – Public Domain)

In recent years, there has been a growing dissatisfaction – within both academia and society – with the simplistic notions of research impact. New approaches and research trajectories need to be developed in order to understand the pathways in which individual researchers and research communities affect different parts of society. This is especially pertinent in the humanities where there is a long tradition for intellectuals, scholars and publishers to educate and influence the public debate. The humanities are driven both by epistemological and normative interests in topics such as civil society, art, cultural heritage, diversity, linguistic erudition, interpretation, critical investigation, and public policy. While none of the existing metrics or evaluations provides insight into this variegated and complex topography of the public value of the humanities, they treat for the most part knowledge diffusion as a "black box" with only inputs and outputs. In so doing, they do not account for the societal and cognitive processes by which research products and learning processes are constructed and translated into public outcomes and values.

Mapping the Public Influence of Humanities approaches the public value of the humanities by using a multi-scalar and multi-dimensional heuristics. Public values comprise e.g. educational values (BA & MA production); societal values (expert advice, the role of public intellectuals, policy guidance); democratic values (deliberation, improved public policy); cultural values (engagement with museums and art institutions); research performance (publications, collaboration, networks), and economic values (employability and innovation). The assumption behind this notion of broader impact is that knowledge is created, transmitted, diffused and institutionalised, and by the end of that process becomes valuable to agents and institutions outside the academic community (see outcomes from the HERAValue Project).

In order to establish a comprehensive framework for Mapping the Public Influence of the Humanities it is paramount to integrate and combine a quantitative and qualitative analysis. This will make it is possible to map the different scales at which humanities research translates into influence: from individual users to societal structures and institutions. Fundamental to this investigation is the hypothesis that research becomes institutionalised – formally and informally – in societal routines, habits, but also in legal systems, institutions and cultural, artistic and epistemic practices. Thus, the project aims at satisfying the following research objectives:

1. To map which stakeholders participate in the construction and co-construction of different "trading zones" between society and the humanities.

2. To systematically uncover key stakeholder groups (editors, publishers, decision-makers etc.) which are engaged in the dissemination of humanities research.

3. To establish digital methodologies for mapping knowledge translation from universities to museums, civil society, private companies, public institutions etc.

4. To systematically review the career path and working skills of students in the humanities, including quantifiable outputs and economic impacts.

5. To disseminate the project's findings and contribute to designing better policies, instruments and indicators for the valorisation of humanities in society.

The research programme starts by investigating the role and degree to which humanities researchers provide external advice and input to public institutions such as government agencies, ministries, municipalities and parliamentary institutions. In a number of situations, humanities researchers act as external advisors and policy experts by serving on expert committees, working groups, commissions, task forces, and ad hoc panels. The present study proceeds by collecting data from governmental websites and archives building a unique database of (1) names and affiliations of active scientific experts in Denmark; (2) by documenting the educational background and research profile of the population; and (3) by downloading and collecting the full corpus of reports, whitepapers, communications, policy briefs, press releases and other written results of Danish advisory groups from 2005 to 2015. The construction of a unique database will form the basis of a semantic network analysis of the most influential concepts used in public policy making, and reveal the relation and combination of the educational backgrounds and research profiles of external experts working in public policymaking.

Mapping the Public Influence of Humanities thus provides a robust platform for understanding two things: Firstly, the project will study how individual research projects create outputs that are valuable – for example inform public debates that engage citizens. Secondly, the project studies how humanities researchers can adopt specific kinds of behavioural attitudes that will create outputs that are publicly valued – and valuable.

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