European Network for Research Evaluation
in the Social Sciences and Humanities

Third Mission der Hochschulen, Bern, 24. Mai 2019

Societal Impact in Research Evaluation

Conceptual Issues in the Assessment of Societal Impact and Paths to Thread

Michael Ochsner

COST ACTION CA15137 WG1

Societal Impact and Evaluation

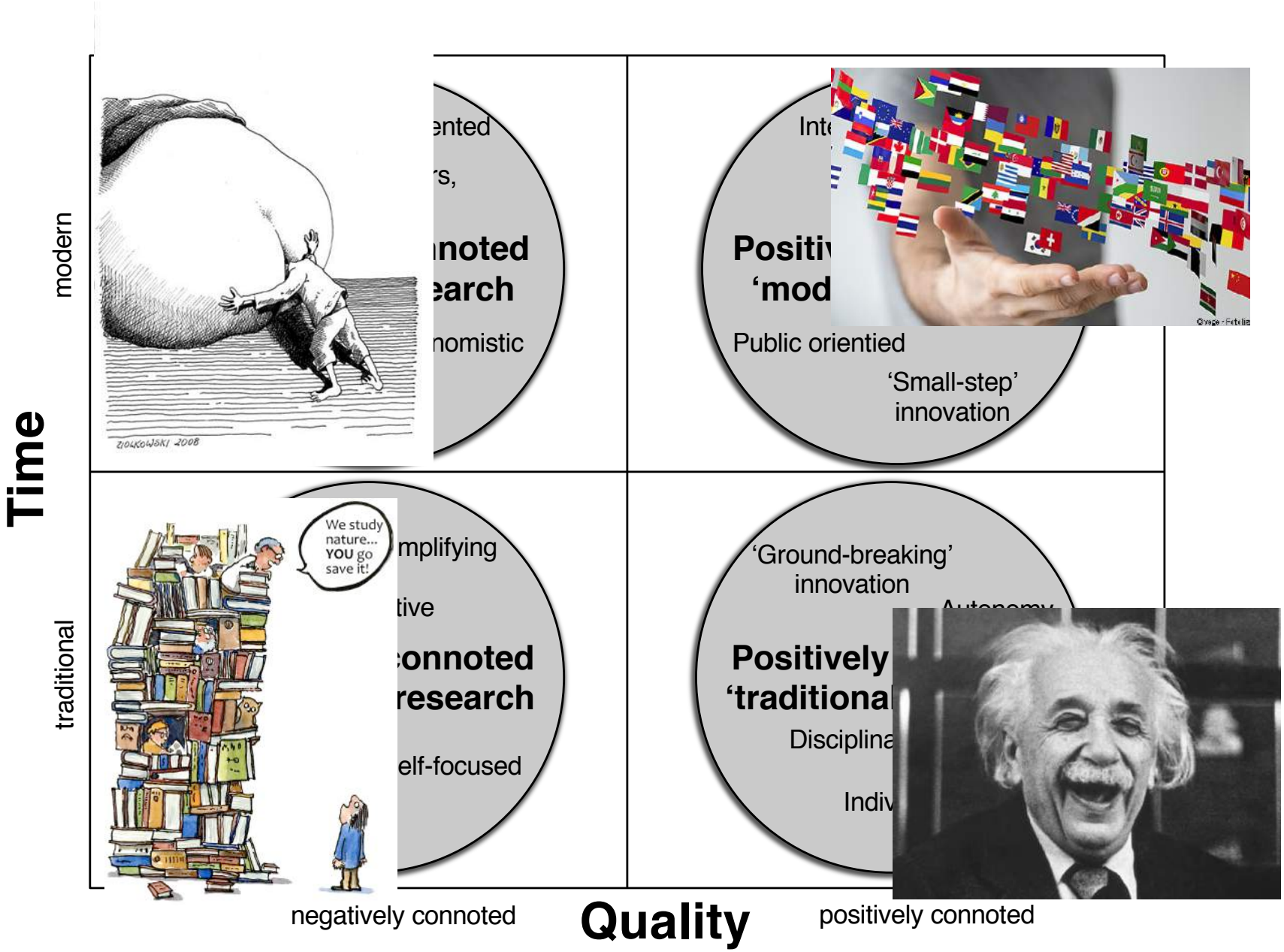
- **Background**
  - Until lately, research evaluation focused on academic impact
  - 1994: third mission as concept (Gibbons et al., 1994)
  - Information society: knowledge is more important
  - AUS: RQF abandons plans to introduce societal impact
  - UK: REF 2014, introduction of societal impact as criterion
- **Ways of assessing societal impact**
  - Narratives of societal impact (e.g., UK REF)
  - Evaluation in context: informed peer review (e.g., NL)
  - Productive interactions (ex-ante evaluations)
  - Pathways of societal impact (Muhonen, Benneworth & Olmos-Peñuela, 2019; EU: Austrian presidency)

Societal Impact and Evaluation

- **Role of societal impact in national research evaluation**
  - ENRESSH project: National evaluation systems
    - NO, NL and UK have impact assessments implemented
      - PT informally, peer evaluate scientific and social impact at the same time
    - Others follow suit and implemented impact assessments lately
      - CZ, ES, LT, (FR not for SSH and marginal; PL planned for 2021)
    - Some universities use it in institutional evaluation
      - FI
    - Most countries have funding schemes where impact is part of the desired outcome
  - What societal impact exactly means is not so clear (Derrick & Samuel, 2017)

Societal Impact and Evaluation

- **Diagnosis of state of the art (Bibliometrics)**
  - Existing procedures only focus on scientific publications
  - Specialisation increases
  - Scientific endeavour is team work
  - Knowledge society: society needs fast access
  - Scarce resources, expensive projects
- **Assumptions and Misconceptions**
  - Focus on measurable outcome, replacement of IF with SI
  - Open = Public will read
  - Focus on individual scholars or individual projects
  - Ironically, knowledge is more important, discourse discriminates it
  - STEM take the lead in something they do not understand



Ochsner, M., Hug, S. E., & Daniel, H.-D. (2013). Four types of research in the humanities: Setting the stage for research quality criteria in the humanities. Research Evaluation, 22(2), 79–92.

Quality Criteria and Measurement

19 Criteria specified by 70 aspects

orange: consensus in three disciplines; blue: two disciplines; ***bold and italic***: commonly used indicators

1. ***Scholarly exchange***
2. Innovation, originality
3. ***Productivity***
4. Rigour
5. Fostering cultural memory
6. ***Recognition***
7. Reflection, criticism
8. ***Continuity, continuation***
9. ***Impact on research community***
10. ***Relation to and impact on society***
11. Variety of research
12. Connection to other research
13. Openness ideas and persons
14. Self-management, independence
15. Scholarship, erudition
16. Passion, enthusiasm
17. Vision of future research
18. Connection between research and teaching, scholarship of teaching
19. ***Relevance***

Ochsner, M., Hug, S. E., & Daniel, H.-D. (2012). Indicators for Research Quality in the Humanities: Opportunities and Limitations. Bibliometrie - Praxis Und Forschung, 1(4).

Relation to or Impact on Society?

What is societal impact?

- **Learning from our research on humanities:**
- **Two criteria for "societal impact"**
  - **Impact on society**
  - **Relation to society**
- **For social sciences even more important as interactions are very direct (policy relevance)**

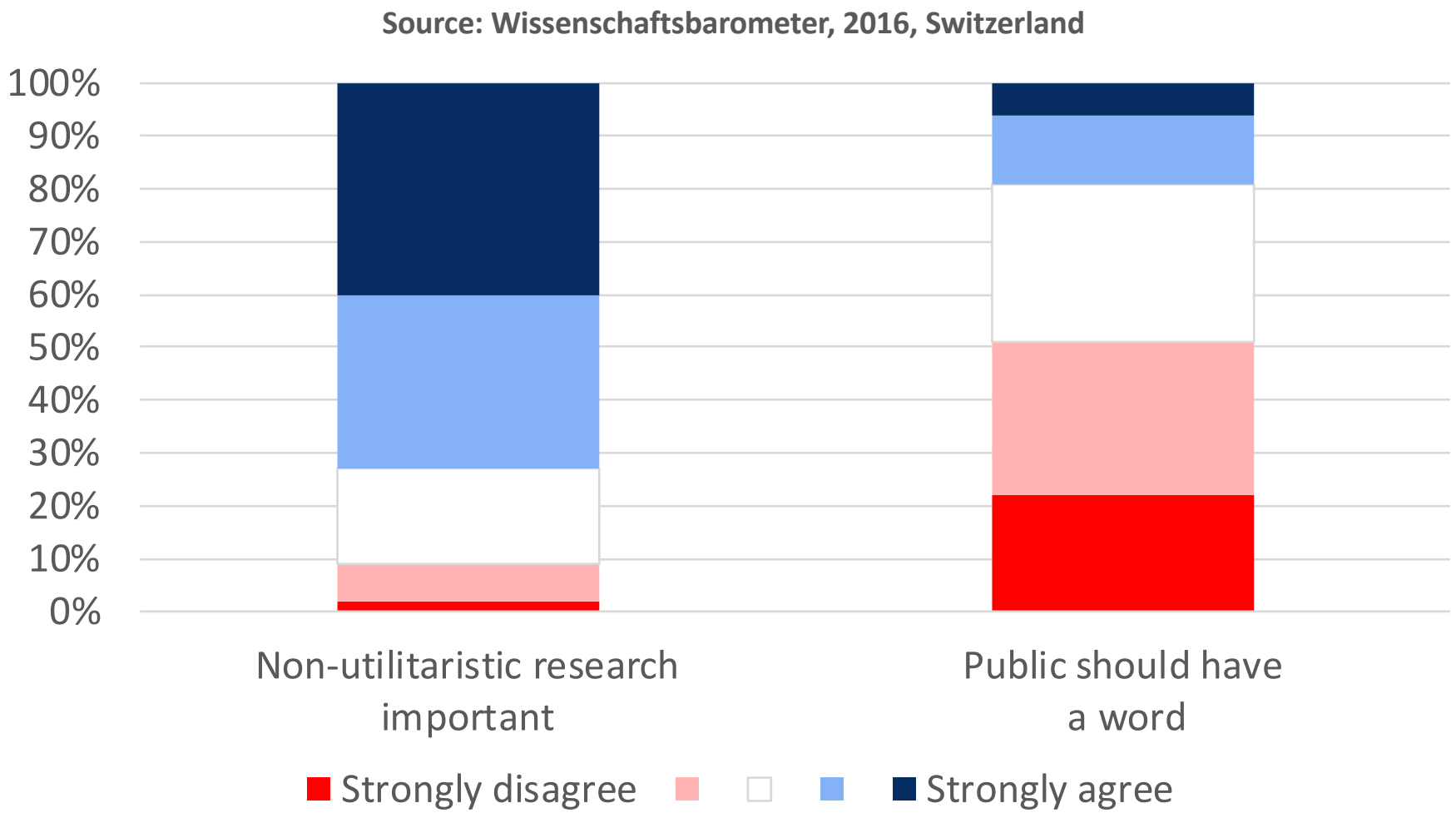
Relation to or Impact on Society?

- **Relation to society**
  - I deal with **topics** that from the **researchers' point of view** are relevant for society.
  - I make my findings **understandable to a non–academic audience** using comprehensible language.
  - My research has **an impact on the profession** related to my discipline.
  - I am **bold** to raise issues which I believe are vital for the society even though it might have **negative consequences on my career**.
- **Impact on society**
  - I respond to societal concerns and needs as **stated by society** itself (for example, I participate in current, socially important discussions, I respond to central questions of present–day policy and social discussions).
  - my research has an **effect on national, regional or local** culture/society.

Open = Public

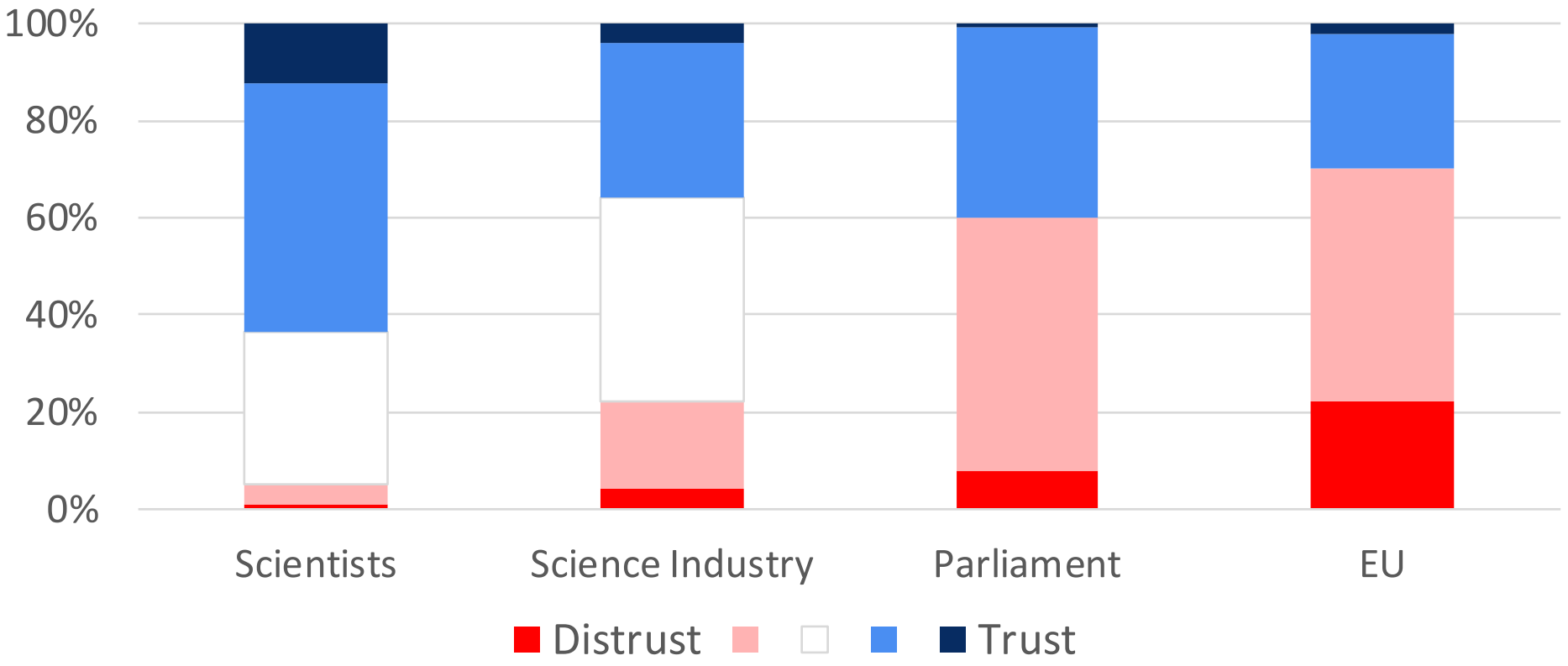
- **Assumption that the public wants to interact**
  - LERU workshop on Open Science:
    - “Do not use technical terms, nobody will understand”
    - Would you ask your plumber to not use his tools?
- **Accountability Assumption:**
  - Basic blue sky research is not wanted
  - Public wants to engage in science
  - Trust in researchers is low, rather have politicians and economy decide what are topics

Public Science?



Trust

Sources: Wissenschaftsbarometer, 2016; MOSAiCH, 2017
Attention: different scale and different survey. But nevertheless...



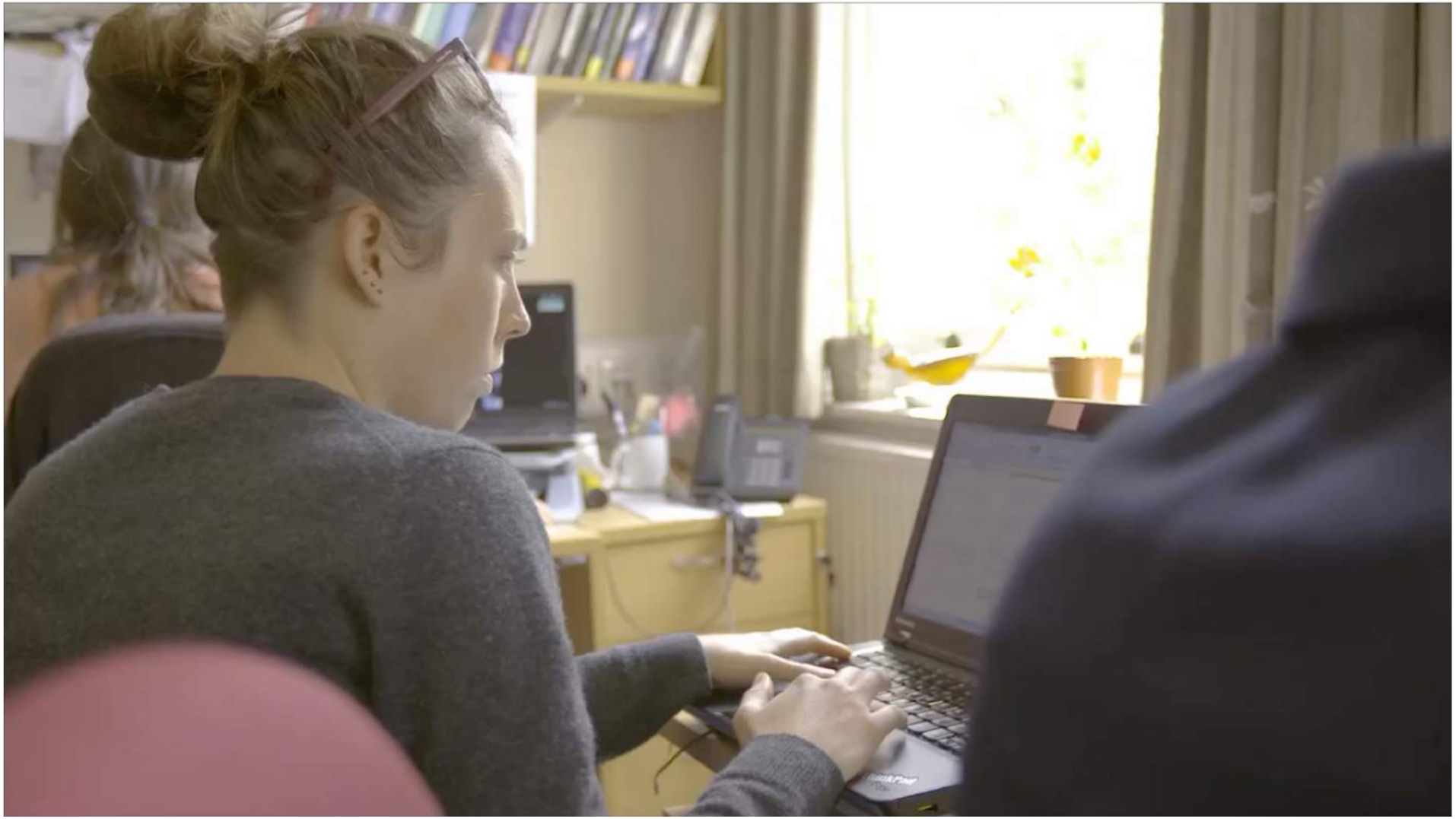
Individual Projects

- **Issues of the conceptual flaws of «societal impact»**
  - **Every single research has impact?**
  - **Scientific means: rigorous and established knowledge**
  - **Impact for whom? By whom? Attribution? Level?**
  - **Time? Positive/negative, opportunity costs**
  - **What is positive? Historical context (what is “good” today is not necessarily considered as “good” tomorrow)**
  - **What is the role of science/academia?**

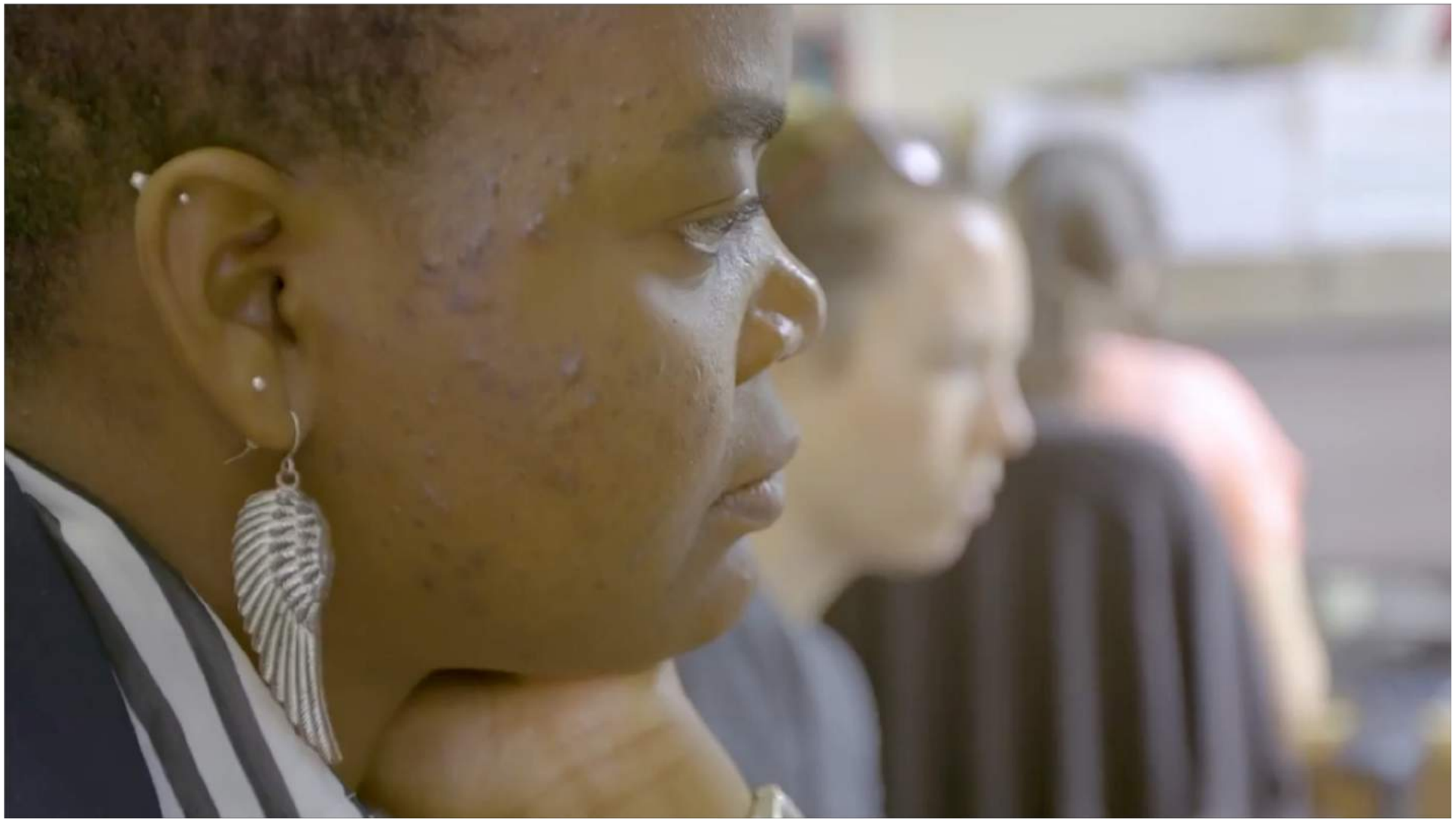
Winner

Screenshots from „Preventing HIV risk in Southern Africa“: https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/preventing-hiv-risk-in-southern-africa/

Research = White



Need/Impact = Black, Research = White



Agenda of Impact is Populist

- **The project is certainly excellent and impactful, not racist**
- **The video does what it needs to do**
- **The jury did what it was supposed to do**
- **The public did what it was supposed to do: applaud**

- **What did we learn about the project in the video? Nothing.**
- **What did we learn about the real reasons for the Problem? Nothing.**
- **Apartheid? Colonialism? The pope forbidding condoms? Nothing.**
- **It is a propaganda video for UK research, research that provides solutions. Politicians show how great they are: fake accountability**

Conclusions

- Research should ultimately be beneficial for the society
- Negative effects of project-level impact evaluation
  - Focus on selling, Oxfam-like videos
  - Single projects instead of established knowledge
  - It helps populism, not advancement of knowledge: there is no need to always let public decide or interact - they trust academia like no other
  - Simplistic (anti-critical)
- Research evaluation
  - Unclear how to evaluate (ex-post, ex-ante)
  - Same mistakes as for scientific impact: focus on quantity
  - Better: Focus on potential rather than outcome

Conclusions: Approaches

- **Careers: popularisation output as valued as scientific output, do not punish interdisciplinarity, reduce straight career paths, valorise diversity of experiences**
- **Projects: funding for interactions if project is big enough to produce stable results, do not ask small-scale projects to have impact (more research is needed)**
- **Disciplines: Learned societies as dissemination partners**
- **Universities: Holistic approaches**
- **General: create entities for knowledge transfer (it is a special competence to successfully interact)**

To Discuss

- Is the ivory tower useless?
- Who's role is it to create impact?
  - When is knowledge ready to be transferred?
- Learned societies as actors?
- On what level?
  - Career?
  - Project evaluation?
  - performance-based funding?

References

Derrick, G., & Samuel, G. (2017). The future of societal impact assessment using peer review: pre-evaluation training, consensus building and inter-reviewer reliability. *Palgrave Communications, 3*, palcomms201740. doi:10.1057/palcomms.2017.40

Ernst Staehli, M., Sapin, M., Pollien, A., Ochsner, M., Nisple, K., & Joye, D. (2018). *MOSAiCH 2017. Messung und Observation von Sozialen Aspekten in der Schweiz: Studie zu sozialen Netzwerken und zur Rolle des Staates* [Dataset]. Distributed by FORS, Lausanne, 2018. doi:10.23662/FORS-DS-925-1

Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P., & Trow, M. (1994). The new production of knowledge. The dynamics of science and research into contemporary societies. London: Sage.

Muhonen, R., Benneworth, P., & Olmos-Peñuela, J. (2019). From productive interactions to impact pathways: Understanding the key dimensions in developing SSH research societal impact. *Research Evaluation*. doi:10.1093/reseval/rvz003

Ochsner, M., Hug, S. E., & Daniel, H.-D. (2012). Indicators for Research Quality in the Humanities: Opportunities and Limitations. *Bibliometrie - Praxis Und Forschung, 1*(4).

Ochsner, M., Hug, S. E., & Daniel, H.-D. (2013). Four types of research in the humanities: Setting the stage for research quality criteria in the humanities. *Research Evaluation, 22*(2), 79–92.

Wissenschaftsbarometer (2016). WissensCHaftsbarometer Schweiz 2016. www.wissenschaftsbarometer.ch

Some SSH Impact Literature

Virtual Issue in Research Evaluation on Societal Impact in the arts & humanities by Donovan and Gulbrandson

Soon Special Issue in Research Evaluation on Societal Impact in the SSH by Benneworth et al.

Measuring the Impact of Arts and Humanities Research in Europe

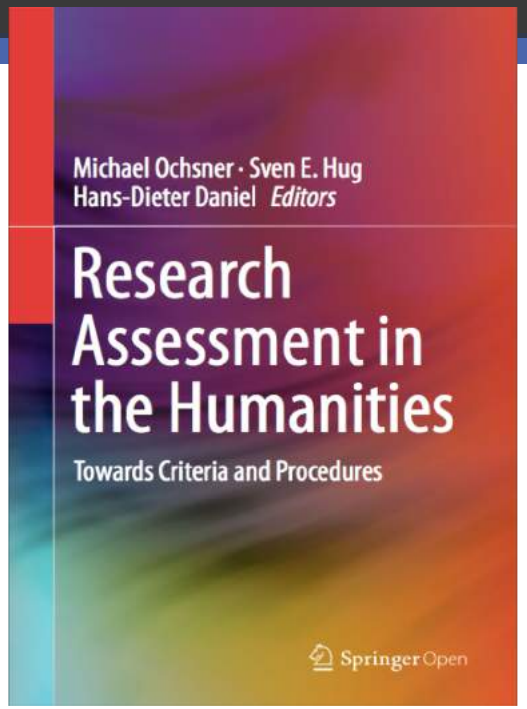
Read the latest virtual issue exploring the societal value of arts and humanities research.

Article collection on research assessment with many contributions on societal impact: https://www.nature.com/collections/kzffqpcdch

More SSH Evaluation Literature

Ochsner, M., Hug, S. E., & Daniel, H.-D. (Eds.). (2016). Research Assessment in the Humanities. Towards Criteria and Procedures. Cham: Springer Open. http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29016-4

With contributions by i.a.: Wiljan van den Akker, Alfred Hornung, Wilhelm Krull, Michèle Lamont, Gerhard Lauer, Christian Mair, Ingo Plag, Björn Hammarfelt, Ingrid Gogolin, Gunnar Sivertsen, Elea Giménez-Toledo, Thomas König, Remigius Bunia




palgrave communications
HUMANITIES | SOCIAL SCIENCES | BUSINESS

ARTICLE

Received 22 Aug 2016 | Accepted 27 Feb 2017 | Published 21 Mar 2017 DOI: 10.1057/palcomms.2017.20 OPEN

The future of research assessment in the humanities: bottom-up assessment procedures

Michael Ochsner[1,2], Sven Hug[1,3] and Ioana Galleron[4]

Ochsner, M., Hug, S. E., & Galleron, I. (2017). The future of research assessment in the humanities: bottom-up assessment procedures. Palgrave Communications, 3, 17020. http://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.20