



EUROPEAN

POLICY BRIEF



DECEMBER 2015

INTRODUCTION

Europe is in need of research that actively contributes tackling the challenges faced by society through the provision of knowledge and tools that are useful for policy makers and citizenry. In a context of intense debate about their future, the Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH) are required to demonstrate how they contribute to this endeavour. Consequently, the measurement and assessment of the impact of research has moved to the core of the scientific and political debate and it is foreseen as a key aspect in enhancing European Research and Development (R&D) excellence.

Evaluation of scientific impact has been widely applied and developed. However, social and political impacts have been only recently tackled and their measurement and assessment is in its initial stage in most countries, even though there are some cases with longer traditions in impact assessment. In this sense, it is of great importance for the future of the European Research Area (ERA) and for the individual European research systems to know which successful elements and processes exist as well as what difficulties have been faced in the SSH R&D impact assessment in the continent and abroad. This is crucial for ensuring the quality and social utility of the European SSH R&D.

In this context, the FP7 project IMPACT-EV (January 2014 – December 2017) is analysing: a) the scientific, political and social impact, as well as the impact on strengthening the ERA, of research projects in SSH; and b) research evaluation systems that take into account and promote those impacts. The next section presents the main findings achieved in the first two years of the project.

The IMPACT-EV analyses are based on the following definitions:

- **Scientific impact** refers to the publications, citation patterns, and dissemination among scientific networks, as well as further research development, derived from the project's results.
- **Political impact** means the transference of research outcomes and political recommendations into EU and national policies, and the use of those research outcomes by civil society or other entities in their political agendas.
- **Social impact** is different from dissemination and transference. It occurs when there is evidence of social improvements in relation to social goals (such as EU2020 goals) as a result of the research project.
- Finally, **impact on strengthening ERA** includes aspects such as mobility, training of young researchers, research careers improvement, interdisciplinarity, and international collaboration.

EU funded research on SSH does achieve relevant impacts. The analysis of SSH projects funded under the EC FP6 (last call) and FP7 allowed identifying plenty of particular examples of how the EC funded projects have achieved scientific, political and social impact. For instance, the average of JCR publications per researcher is 3.71 (including in the calculation young researchers with no publications). Besides, a significant achievement of political impact has been observed. There are projects whose findings have served as the basis to inform EU legislation and policy, as well as OECD, national, regional and local. There are also projects that have achieved a significant social impact, contributing to the established societal goals (i.e. Lisbon strategy, EU2020 targets, Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change). Furthermore, despite not having gathered the evidences of their particular impacts, a number of projects recognize the importance of the social impact.

Social and political impact evaluation in initial stages in most of the European countries. European national research evaluation systems have developed different systems according to their experience and approach in research assessment. Apart from the REF in the UK and some developments in The Netherlands, Ireland and Spain, the evaluation of social and political impacts of research is still in its initial stages in most of the European countries analysed. On the other hand, assessment of research projects is more widely spread in ex-ante stages. Ex-post evaluations are less frequent and usually cover programmes or are applied to specific scientific disciplines. In regards to the tools that funding agencies and other bodies involved use, the peer review system appears as the main technique (and similar modalities such as expert panels). Criteria and measures to support the peer review processes, as well as to increase its rigour and quality, are being developed worldwide. Some countries do include end users and other stake holders in these processes.

Awareness and difficulties in evaluating the social impact. Different difficulties exist when measuring social impact. First, many researchers share their concern of having appropriate measures and criteria to improve the assessment of social and political impact, including measurable indicators. This is aligned with the growing debate about the role of metrics and quantitative measures, which is also relevant in regards to social impact. However, since this is a novel issue at the international arena, there is not a unique model but different models currently in stake. Second, from a qualitative approach, the “bottom-up” model of collection of narratives along with other supporting evidence self-reported by researchers (applied for instance in the UK’s Research Excellence Framework) has been acknowledged as an innovative system for impact assessment; however, this approach is perceived in some cases as too difficult and expensive to be extended to all research. Third, the time needed for achieving actual effects on the society is longer than for other tangible outcomes, which poses a barrier for ex-post evaluation to fully capture social impact of research. Finally, when social impact is observed, the problem of attribution (the difficulty to demonstrate that the improvements observed are the consequence of research) appears in many cases as.

SIOR, the Social Impact Open Repository. One of the main outcomes of IMPACT-EV is the creation of SIOR (<http://www.ub.edu/sior/>). SIOR is an open access repository to display, share, store and measure the social impact of research results. It is a non-profit initiative that aims to enhance the visibility of scientific research with social impact. This tool aims to respond to the growing social demand made to scientists of achieving and showing impact, and it does so by facilitating a systematic gathering and registration of the social impact. Within SIOR, researchers and research institutions describe the social impact of their scientific work and provide the evidence of this impact and its source in order to make it available to other scientists, funding agencies, policy makers, civil society organizations and citizens in general.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- At present, most of the countries have only very incipient developments of social and political assessment systems. One of the main challenges for research funding and evaluation agencies is to further develop existing systems of SSH impact evaluation, and more specifically the social and political impacts achieved by the funded projects.
- Social impact needs to be understood beyond and different to dissemination and transference, and to include the improvements made in terms of contributions to the main goals that have been agreed in our societies (such as EU2020 or the Millennium Goals)
- Ex-ante evaluations of research projects and their teams could introduce the assessment of previous achievements in terms of pursuing social and political impact, similarly as it is done with former scientific impact (publications and others).

- The connections between repositories and research datasets should be facilitated in order to improve the assessment of research and its transparency. There are already interesting initiatives working on these connections, including new tools to assess social impact (for instance by making use of ORCID and SIOR)

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

IMPACT-EV aims to develop a permanent system of selection, monitoring, evaluation and comparison of the impact and outcomes of European SSH research. This system will be able to provide insights for the evaluation before (*ex-ante*), during (*in-itinere*) and after (*ex-post evaluation*) the implementation of the project, concerning assessment of the scientific impact, but mainly of the political and social impact of SSH research project outcomes.

For this purpose, IMPACT-EV has carried out an evaluation of 473 SSH research projects funded by the 6th and 7th Framework Programmes of the European Commission, providing insights about the extent of the impact of the European SSH R&D. An online questionnaire allowed collecting original data directly contacting researchers, and the information was complemented with the analysis of project documents as well as with interviews with EC scientific officers. Furthermore, an in depth analysis of the research systems and the particular mechanisms used for evaluating the impact of SSH in 12 different countries with different traditions and experience in impact assessment was carried out (Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the USA), being 9 of the case studies European countries. This analysis of the national research systems allowed identifying those mechanisms that better contribute to achieving the objectives set by the Europe 2020 strategy through the evaluation and assessment of the impact of SSH research. Finally, an analysis of the different impacts of the projects funded by national R&D calls in Europe was carried out, drawing from the particular results of the analysis of three case studies: Spain, Sweden and the UK.

These analyses were conducted based on the Communicative Methodology of research. Therefore, the process of evaluating the projects' impact not only allowed identifying the different impacts achieved, but also entailed a transformation within the scientific community. The IMPACT-EV data collection process has opened up the opportunity to collaborate with many researchers in order to analyse the social impact of their research, and for the researchers to consider and rethink their own work from the social impact perspective. In the data collection, we identified many researchers whose projects achieved or had the potential of achieving social impact but did not gather these types of information before. Their contact with the IMPACT-EV project made them realize the importance of doing so, and many of them committed to start doing it from now onwards. On the other hand, many researchers whose work had very limited social impact started reconsidering the way in which they approach and design their work. The enhanced ability for identifying the different impacts after becoming aware of their definition and importance was similarly observed in European and nationally funded projects. The increased awareness of the impact of research also allowed policy makers, research assessment agencies and other stakeholders considering and rethinking their own work from the social impact perspective.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME IMPACT-EV. Evaluating the impact and outcomes of EU SSH research |

COORDINATOR **UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA**
CREA. Community of Researchers on Excellence for All
Barcelona, Spain
Ramón Flecha, impact-ev@ub.edu

CONSORTIUM **HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**
Dep. of Science Policy and Scientometrics of the Library and Information Centre
Budapest, Hungary
András Schubert

ROYAL NETHERLANDS ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES (KNAW)
DANS. Data Archiving and Networking Services
Den Haag, The Netherlands
Andrea Scharnhorst

UNIVERSITÀ DELLA SVIZZERA ITALIANA.
Centre for Organisational Research (CORG)
Lugano, Switzerland
Benedetto Lepori

CONSIGLIO NAZIONALE DELLE RICERCHE.
Institute for Economic Research on Firms and Growth (CERIS)
Roma, Italy
Emanuela Reale

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
Trinity Long Room Hub
Dublin, Ireland
Paul Holm

POPULATION AND SOCIAL POLICY CONSULTANTS (PSPC)
Brussels, Belgium
Dragana Avramov

BRUNEL UNIVERSITY
Health Economics Research Group (HERG)
Uxbridge, UK
Claire Donovan

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
Cardiff, UK
Charles Larkin

FUNDING SCHEME FP7 Collaborative Project

DURATION January 2014 – December 2017

BUDGET EU Contribution: 2,271,709.00 €

WEBSITE www.impact-ev.eu

For more information Ramon Flecha. Main researcher
Marta Soler. Knowledge Management Committee
impact-ev@ub.edu

Further reading Flecha, R., Soler-Gallart, M. & Sordé. T. (2015). Social impact: Europe must fund social sciences. *Nature*, 528, 193. doi:10.1038/528193d
