Panel discussion

Opening session

"What is Impact of SSH? How can we make it tangible and comprehensible?"

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Athens

Discussion led by
Prof. Nikos Demertzis, President, National Centre for Social Research
Dr Eva Hoogland, Science Europe

Panel members:
Prof. Axel Börsch-Supan, MPI Social Law & Social Policy / Munich Center for the Economics of Ageing
Prof. Kurt Deketelaere, LERU
Prof. Ellen Hazelkorn, Higher Education Policy Research Unit, Dublin Institute of Technology
Prof. Irene Hardill, Director of the Northumbria Centre for Civil Society and Citizenship
Ms Angela Schindler-Daniels, NET4SOCIETY Coordinator
Prof. John Yfantopoulos, University of Athens, Expert in Health Economics, AG H2020

1) What IS the impact of SSH?

Background

The question: "What is the impact of the medical sciences" is rarely ever posed. It is taken as obvious that medical sciences are saving lives. Similarly, for many disciplines in the field of Science & Technology, the direct impact on our lives is clear. Think of the engineering sciences; nuclear physics; bio-technology; ICT; etc.

However, the impact of SSH research is less obvious.
In this session, we ask the question: "What does it mean for SSH research to have impact?"
Or, phrased differently, what are the key contributions that SSH research makes (to society, to the economy)? Are there special attributes that SSH can bring to society (the economy, etc.)?

Note that in this discussion, we are not interested in measurements or quantitative assessments. We will think qualitatively: What kind of impact does SSH research have? And what counts as evidence for this impact?

During the session

As a starting point for the discussion, we take the current Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK (www.ref.ac.uk/). This exercise highlights an interesting list of indicative areas of impact together with examples of evidence for this impact (see Annex).

During the session, panel member are asked for their comments. **Do you think that this is an appropriate way to think about impact for SSH? If not, what would you prefer to see differently – and how would you propose to go about this?**

2) How can we make SSH impact tangible and comprehensible?

Background

Next, the discussion will turn to the question how to make the impact of our SSH work visible.

For, the fact that the question about the impact of SSH is asked in the first place, points to the underlying diagnosis that 1) either SSH does not have much impact, or 2) SSH *does* have impact but it is hard to make this tangible.

If we agree that SSH research *does* have impact, the question is how to make this impact visible. This is an issue that concerns all SSH stakeholders: researchers as much as research institutes and universities, as well as research funding organisations.

In addition, it is an issue that impinges on all stages of the research process: from writing a grant proposal, to carrying out a research project, disseminating the results and submitting the final report.

During the session

Panellists are asked for their view. Do you have any experiences to share as to what worked well (or not) for you in making the impact of your own work visible? Also the view of the EC, and other research funders, would be valued. In particular, panellists are asked for suggestions where applicants should focus on when writing a proposal – as many of the participants are about to do.

Annex: Research Excellence Framework UK – Panel C (extract)

Section C3: Assessment criteria: impact

75.	In drawing up its assessment criteria and the advice to submitting institutions, the main panel strongly advises institutions that the guidance provided here, particularly regarding examples of impacts and evidence and/or indicators for those impacts, should not be read as exhaustive, prescriptive or limiting. It also recognises that the examples provided may fit under headings other than those to which they have been presented in the tables below. It wishes to encourage the submission of a wide range of types of impact outside academia, as evidence of the strength and diversity of the impact of research from Main Panel C disciplines, and anticipates that extremely strong impact case studies will be submitted which do not relate to any of the examples provided in the guidance. The examples are offered to assist institutions, not to constrain them.

77.	The main panel acknowledges that impact within its remit may take many forms and occur in a wide range of spheres. These may include (but are not restricted to): creativity, culture and society; the economy, commerce or organisations; the environment; health and welfare; practitioners and professional services; public policy, law and services. The categories used to define spheres of impact, for the purpose of this document, inevitably overlap and should not be taken as restrictive. Case studies may describe impacts which have affected more than one sphere.

78.	Impact of any type may be local, regional, national or international, in any part of the world. The beneficiaries of impact may include (but are not restricted to) community/ies, the environment, individuals and organisations.

80.	The main panel particularly acknowledges that there may be impacts arising from research within Main Panel C disciplines which take forms such as holding public or private bodies to account or subjecting proposed changes in society, public policy, business practices, and so on to public scrutiny. Such holding to account or public scrutiny may have had the effect of a proposed change not taking place; there may be circumstances in which this of itself is claimed as impact. There may also be examples of research findings having been communicated to, but not necessarily acted upon, by the intended audience, but which nevertheless make a contribution to critical public debate around policy, social or business issues. The main panel also recognises that research findings may generate critique or dissent, which itself leads to impact(s). For example, research may find that a government approach to a particular social or economic issue is not delivering its objectives, which leads to the approach being questioned or modified.

Indicative range of impacts & Examples

Impacts on creativity, culture and society: Impacts where the beneficiaries are individuals, groups of individuals, organisations or communities whose	• Enhancements to heritage preservation, conservation and presentation • Production of cultural artefacts, e.g., films, novels, TV programmes. • Public or political debate has been shaped or informed; this may include activity that has challenged established norms, modes of thought or practices. • Improved social welfare, equality, social inclusion; improved access to

knowledge, behaviours, practices, rights or duties have been influenced	justice and other opportunities (including employment and education).
	• Improvements to legal and other frameworks for securing intellectual property rights.
	• Enhancements to policy and practice for securing poverty alleviation.
	• Influential contributions to campaigns for social, economic political and/or legal change.
	• Enhanced cultural understanding of issues and phenomena; shaping or informing public attitudes and values.
Economic, commercial, organisational impacts: Impacts where the beneficiaries may include new or established businesses, or other types of organisation undertaking activities which create wealth	• Changed approach to management of resources has resulted in improved service delivery.
	• Development of new or improved materials, products or processes.
	• Improved support for the development of 'small scale' technologies.
	• Improved effectiveness of workplace practices.
	• Improvements in legal frameworks, regulatory environment or governance of business entities.
	• Better access to finance opportunities.
	• Contribution to improved social, cultural and environmental sustainability.
	• Enhanced corporate social responsibility policies.
	• More effective dispute resolution.
	• Understanding, developing and adopting alternative economic models (such as fair trade).
Impacts on the environment: Impacts where the key beneficiaries are the natural, historic and/or built environment, together with societies, individuals or groups of individuals who	• Specific changes in public awareness or behaviours relevant to the environment.
	• Improved management or conservation of natural resources or environmental risk.
	• Improved management of an environmental risk or hazard.
	• Operations or practice of a business or public service have been changed to achieve environmental objectives.
	• Improved design or implementation of environmental policy or

benefit as a result	regulation.
	• Changed conservation policy/practice or resource management practices.
	• Changes in environmental or architectural design standards or general practice.
	• Influence on professional practice or codes.
	• Changes in practices or policies affecting biodiversity.
Health and welfare impacts: Impacts where the beneficiaries are individuals and groups (human or animal) whose quality of life has been enhanced (or harm mitigated) or whose rights or interests have been protected or advocated	• Development or adoption of new indicators of health and well-being.
	• Development of policy and practice with regard to medical ethics, health services or social care provision.
	• Influence or shaping of relevant legislation.
	• Influencing policy or practice leading to improved take-up or use of services.
	• Improved provision or access to services.
	• Development of ethical standards.
	• Improved standards in training.
	• Improved health and welfare outcomes.
Impacts on practitioners and professional services: Impacts where the beneficiaries may include organisations or individuals involved in the development and/or delivery of professional services and ethics	• Changed practice for specific groups (which may include cessation of certain practices shown to be ineffective by research).
	• Influence on professional standards, guidelines or training.
	• Development of resources to enhance professional practice.
	• Use of research findings in the conduct of professional work or practice.
	• Influence on planning or management of services.
	• Use of research findings by professional bodies to define best practice, formulate policy, or to lobby government or other stakeholders.
	• Practitioner debate has been informed or stimulated by research findings.
	• Research has challenged conventional wisdom, stimulating debate

	among stakeholders.
Impacts on public policy, law and services: Impacts where the beneficiaries are usually government, public sector and charity organisations and societies, either as a whole or groups of individuals in society through the implementation or non-implementation of policies, systems or reforms	• Legislative change, development of legal principle or effect on legal practice. • Forms of regulation, dispute resolution or access to justice have been influenced. • Shaping or influence on policy made by government, quasi-government bodies, NGOs or private organisations. • Changes to the delivery or form of any service for the public. • Policy debate has been stimulated or informed by research evidence, which may have led to confirmation of policy, change in policy direction, implementation or withdrawal of policy. • Effect on the quality, accessibility, cost-effectiveness or efficiency of services. • Impact on democratic participation. • Influencing the work of NGOs or commercial organisations. • Improved public understanding of social issues. • Enabling a challenge to conventional wisdom.

Details: http://www.ref.ac.uk/