FROM THE EDITOR

CHALLENGING EVALUATION IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

The focus of this issue of *Deeds and Days* is on research policies for the social sciences and humanities (SSH), with particular attention devoted to the aspects of research evaluation. *Deeds and Days* is one of the few Lithuanian scholarly journals that have a wide thematic scope and thus may offer a rich and distinctively varied spectrum of inquiry into the matters of the social sciences and humanities. Evidently one of these matters is research policies for SSH. The humanities and the social sciences paired together under one label occupy a special position in the disciplinary continuum and require adequate tools and techniques within the research policies and evaluation landscape to reflect the distinctive features of their knowledge production, their patterns of scholarly interaction, their research modes, and the impact they generate.

The debate on understanding, measuring, and assessing SSH research has been prominent both at the national levels (see, for example, several recent monographs published in Lithuania entitled *Lietuvos humanitarinių mokslų Raudonoji knyga*[1] and *Tarp vertės ir poveikio: apie tikrą ir tariamą humanitarinių mokslų krizę ir jos įveikos būdus*[2]), and at the European level, for example, in thematic conferences organized by various countries during their EU Presidency. There is also an entire range of associations, societies, networks, and projects (see EASH,[3] Net4Society,[4] IMPACT-EV,[5] *inter alia*) devoted to the complex issues of valorizing SSH, defining and capturing the scholarly value and impact of their research. These initiatives are frequently emerging either from SSH researchers themselves or from various

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[1]   *Lietuvos humanitarinių mokslų Raudonoji knyga* [*The Red Book of the Humanities in Lithuania*]. Mantas Adomėnas, Vytautas Ališauskas, Rimvydas Petrauskas, Nerija Putinaitė ir Mantas Tamošaitis. Vilnius: Petro ofsetas, 2019.

[2]   Kirtiklis, Kęstas, ir Aldis Gedutis. *Tarp vertės ir poveikio: apie tikrą ir tariamą humanitarinių mokslų krizę ir jos įveikos būdus* [*Between Value and Impact: On the Real and the Imaginary Crisis in the Humanities and the Ways to Overcome It*]. Vilnius: Jonas ir Jokūbas, 2020.

[3]   The EurAlliance for the Social Sciences and Humanities.

[4]   See: https://www.net4society.eu/.

[5]   See: https://impact-ev.eu/about/.

national institutions representing them in European bodies responsible for research and innovation. Currently these initiatives have been gaining momentum with a variety of forms of expression, the most typical of which is scientific discourse.

The key themes and dimensions emerging in research literature are focused on revealing the connections between SSH and other science fields, on proving the capacity of SSH research to effectively address societal challenges, and on shedding light on the complex and diverse architecture of knowledge production and dissemination patterns specific to SSH disciplines. These dimensions are consistently contributing to the formation of a self-reflective meta discourse, indispensible and instrumental for understanding and appreciating the full value of SSH research, and, consequently, for facilitating its robust development. It is especially important now, when traditional research assessment schemes are being reconsidered to a varied extent for all scientific disciplines, placing major significance on demonstrating the impact of research at various levels.

One of the key concepts of the European Union research policy makers is *academic community*. Though no precise definition or delimitation of this concept seems to exist in the literature, it obviously possesses immense power. It is precisely the academic community which determines research conduct patterns in scientific disciplines; it establishes epistemic cultures and research integrity rules, it governs the predominant genres and their features, it sets particular publishing trends and scholarly communication patterns in general. Therefore, the role of the academic community in the research world should by no means be underestimated.

Academic communities usually exist within an institutionalized environment with a varied level of freedom, placed in hierarchical structures as long-term or short-term formations. The latter ones typically emerge from various initiatives created by like-minded colleagues driven by common objectives and passions. One such initiative developed from the resilience of humanities scholars towards the research evaluation policies of their disciplines. We are talking here about the EvalHum initiative, which was started in 2015 and which has consistently been running biannual conferences under the title of RESSH (Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and Humanities). Soon after its establishment, the EvalHum initiated a network which was awarded COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) funding and became COST Action ENRESSH, which grew consistently through its four years of existence (2016–2020) and united over 150 participants from 37 different countries. This COST Action produced a number of significant results manifested in a variety of workshops, policy briefs, conferences, and publications. It seems that within a relatively short time-span ENRESSH managed to contribute to a better understanding of SSH research value more than any other institution or project. The results of this Action are evident, especially in the form

of publications and established relations across European researchers, policy makers and stakeholders. However, ENRESSH publications are devoted to varied topics related to research evaluation and societal impact issues and, therefore, spread in numerous and diverse publishing venues. This special issue of *Deeds and Days* is thus meant to provide an overarching and more comprehensive view of ENRESSH and its activities in a nutshell.

This issue is slightly different than usual. It consists of two parts, the first one containing articles and overviews, and the second one offering insights and discussions. The Round Table discussion in the second part of the special issue constitutes an important contribution to the field of research evaluation, providing a vivid discussion of the initiators and group leaders of ENRESSH on various aspects of research evaluation including disciplinary and geopolitical issues. This section also presents monographs on Lithuanian SSH research policies written by Lithuanian authors and interpreted in the European research assessment context.

The articles and overviews section starts with a detailed analysis of the state of the art of research evaluation and SSH, presented by Stefan de Jong, Corina Balaban, Jon Holm and Jack Spaapen. It is a fitting introduction for less informed readers into the challenging research evaluation arena as it not only offers perspectives on qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria, SSH scholarly communication patterns, and peer review specificity, but also discusses research evaluation patterns developed and better suited for the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields (such as bibliometric indicators and international orientation) and their application to SSH. It is due to these measures, designed from the perspective of STEM fields, that the value of SSH research tends to be underestimated, and its significance in strengthening democracy and in promoting dialogue culture and the value of reflexivity is diminished. This article also presents aspirations of ENRESSH to transform research evaluation policies for SSH research, making them better reflective of epistemological characteristics and patterns of knowledge production in these fields. The authors conclude that for these suggestions to become reality a dialogue between researchers, policy makers, and stakeholders is imperative.

In the second article of this section Joshua Eykens, Raf Guns, Hanna-Mari Puuska, Janne Pölönen and Tim C. E. Engels focus on shared European research space in SSH manifested in the popularity of national, European, and international research journals in four countries selected for the study. The authors of the article discuss which research journals are chosen by scholars in different SSH disciplines as publishing venues, as well as the preferred languages of the publications.

The third article by Lai Ma unpacks the concept of societal and research impact, which is currently consistently promoted as a criterion for the evaluation of individual scholars, institutions, or entire disciplines. The author discusses the value of impact as an evaluation measure and the possibilities to manipulate it. She also attempts

to answer the question as to what constitutes evidence of impact in the context of the SSH as well as to define the epistemology of research evaluation in general. The author argues that too much emphasis on the wrong kinds of evidence may lead to erroneous assumptions not only about individuals, but also about entire disciplines.

In their contribution Agnė Girkontaitė, Paul Benneworth and Reetta Muhonen focus on the pressures felt by universities to demonstrate their value for society and on their evaluation based on societal impact (economic or other) measures. The authors of the article seek to reveal the dynamics of the engagement of SSH researchers with societal partners and stakeholders via a review of the existing extensive range of literature on the topic. The authors overview general research articles focused on societal impact and texts concerned with the experiences of individual scholars.

In the fifth article Jolanta Šinkūnienė and Marc Vanholsbeeck also view the issues of evaluation and academia through an individual lense: they investigate the career paths of young scholars and their experience with evaluations of various kinds. The research based on original semi-structured interviews with early career investigators from 14 European countries and diverse disciplinary SSH backgrounds results in recommendations for early career scholar support. Extracts from authentic interviews reveal challenges and opportunities that young scholars face as well as suggest ways for more effective mentoring.

The first section is completed with a conceptual and witty overview of the results achieved by ENRESSH written by Aldis Gedutis and Michael Ochsner. The common platform for all these results is diversity of all types in SSH; diversity of national evaluation systems, of evaluation measures, of methodologies and frameworks, of ways to produce knowledge, of languages of research publications, of their genres, and of stakeholders, especially those who participate in the evaluation of researchers. This multifaceted diversity is presented not as a challenge, but rather as a permanent condition of the SSH, thus raising a question about the rationale and feasibility of a common research evaluation framework when the diversity is so immense. The article serves as a provocative invitation to once again reconsider the research policy designs used for the evaluation of SSH research, which frequently tend to underestimate their value and significance. Whether it will succeed to generate change is not clear; however, it is worth the effort, especially involving a wider range of participants in this discussion.

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Rūta Petrauskaitė
Editor-in-chief of *Deeds and Days*
Emanuel Kulczycki
Co-editor of Volume 73
Jolanta Šinkūnienė
Co-editor of Volume 73

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