Developing a Documentation System for Evaluating the Societal Impact of Science

B. Wolf, M. Szerencsits, J. Heß
Department of Organic Farming and Cropping Systems
Organic agricultural sciences
University of Kassel

H. Gaus, C. Müller, R. Stockmann
Center for Evaluation
University of Saarbrücken

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Why assessing the societal impact of science?

- “grand challenges” (climate change, food safety, …)
  - examine problems, contribute to solutions
  - respond on side-effects and risks of innovation

- public funding of research implies social responsibility

- scientific impact does not include societal benefit
  - measures impact of science on itself
  - is not a proxy for „broader impact“ (e.g. Wooding et al. 2011)
Effects of current impact assessment

Research evaluation

- Scientific Impact
  - worse conditions for scientific publications and bibliometric indicators
  - essential achievements are not assessed/valued

- Societal Impact
  - within science
disciplinary organised
based on english journals
specific selection structures

Disadvantages for scientists, in applied, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research
Effects of balanced impact assessment

Research evaluation

Scientific Impact

Societal Impact

Objectives and design of follow-up projects

Scientific evidence & Societal benefit

Incentive effects
Challenges for societal impact evaluation

- Assess interactions causing impact or making impact probable
  - regard various attainments and value them qualitatively
  - attribution-gap:
    - apply it as contribution because of multicausal „systems of innovation“
    - use interactions to estimate contribution
  - time-gap: enable documentation of impacts on the long term

- Involve non-scientific actors in evaluation
  - Integrate different views

- Find synergies for documentation processes
Why developing a documentation system?

• data on societal impact not available
  – in sufficient quantities
  – suitable form

• provoke no additional documentation efforts
  – integration in funding procedures (application/reporting)
  – make project administration easier for funders/researchers
  – interoperability – provide data for other RIS-purposes

• provide data for the evaluation of
  – scientists
  – organisations
  – projects/programms
Synergies in research documentation

Research Documentation and Information

Documentation of scientific results

RIS for internal use, webpage, rankings

Documentation for funding decisions, project administration

Publications (Peer-Review)

Institutional documentation

Proposals

Reports

Thomson Reuters and other databases

Interactions with and impacts on practice and society

Structured documentation with RIS

Evaluation of Scientific Impact

Evaluation of societal impact
Focus of our project

- Which criteria and indicators exist?
  (Inter- and transdisciplinary research, social/societal/broader impact assessment; Development cooperation)
  - Which information is needed to apply existing criteria?
  - How can this information be structured and standardised?
    (refer to existing documentation tools/standards and develop structures)
  - Develop data model and prototype for testing
  - Testing of usability
    – Data input and use by scientists
    – Data use by research funding
    – Data use for evaluation
  - Adaptation of data model
Which information is needed?

**Context**
- Persons
- Organisations
- Sectors (e.g. agriculture, farmers)

**Projects**
- Outline data, problem, objectives, state of knowledge

**Work packages**

**Project-network, cooperations**

**Achievements, results, impacts**

- Results/ knowledge gain, discussion, conclusions, Assessment of relevance and usability

- Interactions with specific resonance

- Direct Impacts

- Subsequent impacts
  - Ecological, economic, social or cultural benefit

**Stages of documentation**
- Application
- Reporting
- Open end – project independent documentation
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- Activities (= events, meetings, workshops etc.)
- Exploitation rights
- Positions
- Negative impacts

**Interactions with specific resonance**

- Publications
- Conference contributions
- Promotion of young researchers
- Follow-up projects
- Products, tools, standards etc.
- Spin-offs
- Non-scientific application / utilisation
- Awards, resonance

**Direct impacts**

**Subsequent impacts**
Ecological, economic social or cultural benefit

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Which quality of information is needed?

Integration of feedback from practice and society!
Attribution of achievements

• Who has rendered the achievement or who was involved?
• Who has been reached, who has a benefit?
• In which project / work package has the achievement been rendered?
• Clustering of projects which contribute to impacts
  - innovation networks become more transparent
Knowledge gain + potential relevance for Practice

Increase in knowledge = abstract of the results

Potential of innovation for practical application

– Contribution to problem solving
– Relative advantage / connectivity to existing practices
– Complexity, trialability
– Observability of innovation in practice
– Acceptance of innovation
– Risks, which are connected with innovation
Interactions with „specific“ Resonance

- **Specific Resonance** = quantification of use
  - Publications → edition, citation
  - Brochures → demand, downloads
  - Spin-offs → number of employees, revenue

- **Who was involved?**
- **For which target group?**
- **What did the interaction contribute to the project?**
Resonance and application – direct impact

• Resonance
  – Feedback / Assessment through the chosen target group
    (e.g. through survey / feedback workshops / evaluation)
  – Awards

• Non-scientific applications
  – Kind of Impact
    • Change in perceptions (regarding problems or solutions)
    • Actions, practices, management, services
    • Products, techniques
    • Regulations / Policy (incl. Standardisation)
  – Maturity
  – Extent / scale
Subsequent Impacts

• Attribution to several projects but also to single work packages or achievements

• Categorisation according to the EC „Policy Impact Assessment Guidelines“
  – ecologic
  – economic
  – social
  – cultural

• Quantification
  – regional/national/international
  – Text box
Feedback by practice and society

• Reference persons
  – Could be recorded for all interactions and impacts
  – Feedback from reference persons

• Resonance of the target group
  – Documentation of (small) Evaluations, reflection workshops etc.

• Feedback function shall be extended
  – e.g. mini online questionnaire for project staff, important stakeholders in the sector or participants of an event
Data use - exchange with practice and society

Scientists & Organisations

Data input

Structured proposals & reports + independent

Projects & Programs

Evaluation

Use of data

Knowledge exchange

Transparency

Feedback

„User“ in practice and society

standardisation and interoperability is intended between institutional research information systems (CERIF, CASRAI, DINI, WR) and for research data (e.g. Research Data Alliance)
Thanks for your attention

Contact

Dr. Manfred Szerencsits szerencsits@uni-kassel.de
Dipl. Ing. Birge Wolf birge.wolf@uni-kassel.de

Further information

Wolf, Birge; Lindenthal, Thomas; Szerencsits, Manfred; Holbrook, J. Britt; Heß, Jürgen (2013): Evaluating Research beyond Scientific Impact - How to Include Criteria for Productive Interactions and Impact on Practice and Society. GAIA, Volume 22, Number 2, pp. 104-114(11)

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