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The theme of this conference, “evaluating research”, is one of the most urgent issues in the modern academia. There are various reasons for this urgency, but two come immediately to mind:

First, universities operate increasingly in an international environment, where students are supposed to move freely between countries, where researchers are encouraged to work in international teams, and where research funding is increasingly channeled through transnational funding agencies, which function according to international standards. This has called for new methods of evaluating applications and allocating research funding, based on less knowledge of the proposed projects or the quality of the researchers than is possible in national setting.

Second, there are increasing pressures on universities to “perform” – that is, their public funding is increasingly conditioned by certain measured and measurable targets, or benchmarks, and resources are distributed inside institutions according to similar criteria. These funding systems vary greatly from one country to another – but increasingly both teaching and research is compensated for in this manner. In the case of the University of Iceland, where I work, these evaluations are of major importance both for the salaries of the individual professors and the financing of the academic units.

Both of these factors call for new methods of evaluating research – and in most instances the response has been to look for methods where quality can be measured and quantified according to a set of universal rules. If the research output of an entire institution is to be assessed, for example, this has to be based on simple rules of calculation, both because no one has time to look for the *real* quality of publications, and because the output from different fields has to be compared on the same scales – thus an article in chemistry has to be appraised alongside a book in history, and weighed according to the same scheme.

For the natural sciences there seems to be increasing agreement to use one particular standard in these measurements, although this is far from universal, and this is the so-called Thomson ISI index. This index is an international commercially operated database, based in the United States, listing a large number of scientific journals (around 9000 in total), and a parallel counting of citations in these journals. In order to be listed, a journal needs to meet certain scientific criteria: it has to be peer-reviewed, it has to be published on time, it has to be "international" in scope, and finally the journal has to enjoy certain prestige in its academic field (however that is measured). Moreover, through complex accounting of citations, the "impact factor" of the various journals is quantified, and thus an article scores more points if is published in prestigious journals like *Science* or *Nature* than if they appear in a more specialized or regionally based publications.

For the humanities, this standard has never functioned well, although Thomson's Scientific maintains a specific Arts and Humanities index. The main reason for this lack of success is the fact that research in the humanities is, by its nature, more fractured than research in the natural sciences, and does not aspire to the same ideals of one unified world of science. Thus, the humanities deal with human cultures, in the broadest sense of that word, which tend to reflect local conditions and to operate according to particular scientific paradigms which differ from one place or time period to another. History is a good case in point. Although one can, of course, write the history of all humankind, it has tended to focus on certain areas, cultural communities, and chronological periods. Thus, we have Italian history, French history, and, indeed, Icelandic history. All of these bits and pieces are important, have their formative history and discursive traditions, at the same time as they have very dissimilar audiences and weight in the international scientific community. Publishing in English on English history tends, for example, to be regarded as "international" in character – because England, albeit being a place with particular history and culture, has a sphere of influence that is wider than – to take another example – the Icelandic one. Moreover, today the English language happens to be the academic *lingua franca*, and thus it has the potential of reaching far greater audience than what is written in a peripheral language as Icelandic, or even in a "large" language as Italian. For this reason, we will find some journals of English or French local history in the ISI database, but the leading journal of Icelandic national history will, most likely, never manage to be included.

In part, the fragmentation of the human sciences is the result of the same processes as the division of human cultures into separate communities. One major obstacle here is language, both as means of communication or dissemination of the scientific results, and as a channel to the subjects or objects we study. For someone researching Icelandic history, to take an example relevant to my own work, it is necessary to understand the language of the sources, which tends to be Icelandic, and that knowledge is generally limited to the very few who happen to be born on that island and the results arouse interest to few other than Icelanders.

Related to this is the fact that scientific research in the humanities tends to be of interest to people living outside of the ivory towers of the academia. Thus, researchers in the humanities are often in complex and intensive interactive relations with the community they study or live in. Unlike the bacteriologist, who does not talk to her or his bacteria, the historian communicates his findings to the cultural community she or he studies. For me, as a historian living in Iceland and working with Icelandic sources, it is of crucial importance to engage in critical discourse with modern Icelandic society, because the questions I ask have political relevance and are of interest to others than the narrow field of academic historians. This does not mean that *all* historical research needs to be interesting to the non-academic community, but only that excellence in historical research cannot be measured only on the premises that it is published in one, rather narrowly defined, category of academic journals.

Finally, researchers in the humanities tend to use different means to disseminate their results than researchers in the natural sciences. The most obvious example of this is the *book*; that is, the Thomson ISI indexes only list journals and certain conference paper series, but not monographs or collections of essays. The reason is both that journals are the standard publication platform for scientific results in the natural sciences, and the fact that it is impossible to follow all forms of publication in the world. But the publication traditions also differ in the use of references, as in the natural sciences, and to some extent also the social sciences, they are used not only to document the sources on which the research is based, but also lists all the literature pertinent in the field, even if it not used at all for that particular research. For this reason, the number of citation in the natural sciences is usually much higher than they are generally in the humanities,

where only a handful of leading authorities – the Foucaults, Braudels, Chomskys, to name just a few – collect a sizeable number of citations.

This *Sonderweg* of the humanities is, of course, well known in the academic community, and some efforts have been made to construct "correct" indices for the human sciences. The most ambitious one is, without doubt, the European Reference Index for the Humanities, which is an initiative of the Standing Committee for the Humanities of the European Science Foundation. This exercise is, in its nature, very laudable as, to quote a recent publication by ESF, it has the goal of facilitating "access to and assessment of the quality of Humanities research output, irrespective of disciplinary and linguistic boundaries." But, unfortunately, the initial results of this exercise are not promising, and I am very doubtful that it will ever be of much use.

To illustrate my doubts, I can take an example from the geographic area I am most familiar with, that is, history in the Nordic countries. The ESF index is certainly more inclusive in this field than the Thomson-ISI index, as it lists all the major national journals in the five Nordic countries. But for some reason they are not classified in the same manner; all but one are thus placed in the B category (which is defined as "standard, international level publication; good reputation among researchers of the field in different countries"), while the Norwegian historical journal is given an A ("high-ranking, international level publication; very strong reputation among researchers of the field, regularly cited all over the world"). It is absolutely unclear to me why the index differentiates in this manner between journals of essentially same nature. The Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian journals have, in fact, very similar distribution and they even have all the same name. Looking through the preliminary list of journals in history one might add that the journal *British Politics* is, for example, classified in the A group, and Dutch and Belgian national historical journals also. Thus, one might ask, if quality is really assessed "irrespective of disciplinary and linguistic boundaries", as is the declared objective of the project.

Minor mistakes of this sort can, of course, be corrected, because the index is still at a preliminary stage. But this is, I am afraid, indicative of a structural failure of the whole exercise. In theory it is based on "objective" criteria – the A-list is, for example, supposed to include between 10 and 25 percent of all journal listed – but in the end the selection will be subjective, based on the

decision of a panel and the people they trust, their biases and preferences. And how can this be otherwise? On what objective ground can we decide that one national history, or one field of research, is more important than another?

In a sense, the ESF-index is based on the idea that the "enemy" can be beaten with his own weapons – that is, it is based on absolutely the same premises as the ISI-index, except for the fact that it is more inclusive. The end result will be, I am afraid, that we only create more confusion by suggesting a particular index to evaluate European human sciences, without solving any of the problems at hand. We know that we can never formulate one, universal, objective standard to evaluate research in the humanities, but if we are forced to obey such standards, it is better to try to influence the way in which the commonly accepted one – the Thomson ISI index – operates than to invent a new one. So my suggestion would be simply to scrap this idea and use our efforts to do something more useful.

But why should we even care about bibliometric indices of this sort if they do not work? What difference do they make in our lives?

The answer is, of course, that these indices are used, whatever we think about them. My feeling is even that they are gaining acceptance as the university world is standardized and research internationalized. It is crucial for us, however, to draw people's attention to their flaws and shortcomings. In order to do so, we need to work on all levels; in our institutions, in societies as this one, and in international organizations.

To conclude, it is my firm conviction that the recent internationalization of European research is of immense importance for the humanities, because we need to challenge the traditional compartmentalization of our research communities. Large and important sections of historical research have developed in various national contexts, as I mentioned before, and history has served the construction of what is commonly called "national identities" and loyalties to nation states. Today, these compartments often feed xenophobia and distrust rather than facilitating critical study of society, and thus they need to be reformed. As an example of important European initiatives in history, I can mention the various CLIOH-projects (CLIOH, CLIOHnet,

CLIOHnet2 and CLIOHRES), coordinated by Professor Ann-Katherine Isaacs here in Pisa, which have brought together historians from all over Europe and beyond, researching and teaching various historical periods and thematic fields in history, with the stated objective of changing the ways in which European history is taught and researched. The aim is not however to create one, unified historical paradigm in Europe, because that would be the end of history, but rather to establish contacts between traditions and historical discourses which have developed separately – even if they often study the same processes, events, ideas, etc. By bringing European historians together in a working environment, such projects also create a platform to influence the rules of our game – and evaluation of research is, indeed, one of the issues European historian need to discuss.