

Humanities and Social Sciences at a Crossroads? The Bibliographic/Bibliometric Divide

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The Bibliographic/Bibliometric Divide

The Context

- during last decade lively on two interlinked issues:
- how to enhance the **visibility** of research outputs in the Humanities and Social Sciences
 - how to set up **evaluation systems** for the Humanities and Social Sciences – systems which would reflect the specific nature of their research outputs

- attempts to deal with these issues in Humanities and Social Sciences research on basis of databases, such as WoS, SCOPUS, etc. found lacking because of the specific nature of research in the Humanities and Social Sciences reflected in specific outputs
- specific nature of Humanities and Social Sciences research reflected in a number of characteristics
 - publication of articles, books, etc. in **national languages**
 - importance of **monographs**, chapters in monographs, etc.
 - necessity to include “**collections**” such as revised editions, collections of data

- in order to deal with diverse nature of Humanities research, the ESF, namely Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH) in 2001 launches ERIH – **European Reference Index for the Humanities**
- main aim of ERIH – to enhance the **global visibility** of high-quality research in the Humanities published in academic journals **in various European languages across all of Europe**

Initial Lists 2007/2008:

Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Art History, Classical Studies, Gender Studies, History and Philosophy of Science, Linguistics, Literature, Musicology, Oriental and African Studies, Pedagogical and Educational Research, Philosophy, Psychology, Religious Studies and Theology

ERIH used as a “**visibility**” mechanism

and

an “**evaluation**” tool

(different uses have been noted across Europe)

Reactions to ERIH

- after publication of ERIH Initial Lists criticisms directed to ERIH from different directions
- two main sources of criticisms:
 - those that are against any changes in Humanities research traditions and against “bibliometric” tools
 - those that want to take evaluation in the Humanities to a higher “bibliometric” level

Reactions to ERIH

- criticisms from research communities – national research communities, discipline research communities (e.g. German historians, Irish Gaelic Studies research community)
- criticism from funders – the need for adequate evaluation tools

Revised Lists were published in May 2011 and included the following disciplines:

Anthropology, History, Philosophy of Science, Linguistics, Musicology, Paedagogical and Educational Research, Philosophy, Psychology and Gender Studies.

Five lists are still under preparation and are expected by the end of 2011: Archaeology, Art and Architectural Design, Classical Studies, Literature and Religious Studies.

- In the period following the publication of the **Initial Lists** the following steps were taken by the ERIH Steering Committee:
 - recomposition of Expert Panels on the basis of the Panel membership rotation mechanism
 - the integration of online feedback from publishers, editors, European and national subject associations.
- According to the ESF Humanities Unit, 84 Panel Members from 25 countries discussed 3,541 feedbacks for over 5,500 journals.

Major changes in ERIH

Namely, the Initial Lists published in 2007/2008 categorized journals into **A, B, C** according to the following “definitions”:

Category A: high-ranking international journals with high visibility that are regularly cited all over the world and have a very strong reputation among researchers in different countries

Category B: standard international journals with significant visibility and influence in the various research domains in different countries

Category C: high-ranking national or regional journals with recognized scholarly significance

The ERIH Steering Committee considered feedback on the **A, B, C** Category names and with the intent of avoiding further misinterpretations and misunderstandings introduced new category names.

The definitions, whose main purpose is to clarify issues are:

- **National Journals – NAT:** European publications with a recognized scholarly significance among researchers in the respective research domains in a particular (mostly linguistically circumscribed) readership in Europe.
- **International Journals – INT1 and INT2:** both European and non-European publications with an internationally recognized scholarly significance among researchers in the respective research domains, and which are regularly cited worldwide.

Criticisms of Revised Lists:

- criteria for the selection of Expert Panel members,
 - the efficiency of National Contact Points,
 - the question as to whether peer-review was the best approach, etc.
-
- Of particular importance is the challenge of keeping a balance amongst possible theoretical approaches within disciplines, as well as **making sure that subdisciplines are either not underrepresented or possibly left out completely.** (Translation Studies)

Relationship between ERIH versus WoS and SCOPUS Impact of ERIH Initial Lists

- in 2008/2009 WoS includes 1500 so-called “regional journals”
- in 2008/2009 SCOPUS includes 2250 so-called “regional journals”
 - mostly “A” and “B” journals, few “C” or “national journals”

(“Options for a Comprehensive Database of Research Outputs in Social Sciences and Humanities” by Henk F. Moed et al. Center for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University, The Netherlands – mini report for SPRU, 2009)

“In the disciplines of the Humanities in the ERIH Lists, the categories “Religion and Theology” and “Linguistics” are much more “European” (and above all “continental”) than in the WoS and *Scopus* databases. The ERIH Lists present for these 2 disciplines more than 70 % of European journals, except for the United Kingdom. In Philosophy, in Literature, in Linguistics, the ERIH Lists correct markedly the geographical bias of the commercial databases.”

“JournalBase – A Comparative International Study of Scientific Journal databases in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH)”

Dassa, M., Kosmopoulos, C., Pumain, D.

Cybergeog, 2010

“Concrete” reactions to ERIH

In summer of 2008 a number of funding bodies
ESRC/AHRC (UK), ANR (Fr), DFG (De), NWO (Ne)
secure funds for

Towards a Bibliometric Database for the Social Sciences and Humanities: A European Scoping Project

(Ben Martin, Freeman Centre, SPRU University of Sussex, UK)

- report finalized in March 2010

One possible solution is to go forward with a **bibliometric** database as outlined in the SPRU Final Report

- the main aim of the SPRU Report is to facilitate the creation of a **bibliometric** database for the Humanities and Social Sciences
- What does the SPRU Report suggest?
 - A pilot study is proposed, starting with a small number of countries and a small number of disciplines
 - Although weakened in the Final Report short time frames envisaged (approximately 12 months)
 - Standard setting body composed of bibliometricians and researchers, but not all disciplines represented

Both the ERIH and the SPRU Report seen from the perspective of their declared aims also raise questions about priorities: what is more important?

- **visibility mechanisms** for Humanities and Social Sciences research outputs
- or **tools** that could be used **for evaluating research** quality and impact?

“The Future of ERIH”

On March 31, 2010 a meeting was held in Brussels on the Future of ERIH

- representatives of 26 Member Organizations
- Chairs of SCH and SCSS
- Marc Heppener, ESF’s Director of Science and Strategy Development

As conclusion of the meeting, it was decided to set up a small working group to provide a short report with recommendations on the **larger issues**:

Istvan Kenesei (Hungary), Pascal Perrin (Belgium), Nigel Vincent (UK), Gunnar Siversten (Norway – Chair), Sir Roderick Floud (Chair of SCSS), Milena Žic Fuchs (Chair of SCH), Marc Heppener (Director of Science and Strategy Development), Nina Kancewicz-Hoffman (Head of Humanities Unit of ESF), Balazs Kiss (Head of Social Sciences Unit of ESF)

“Towards comprehensive bibliographic coverage of the scholarly literatures in the Humanities and Social Sciences”

Report from a working group

Build a European *bibliographic* database

- build an all-encompassing database which would reflect the true diversity and richness of European SSH research
 - **visibility of European SSH research**
- go from national databases to a European-level database
 - synchronization of existing databases and setting standards for “new” ones
 - creation of a central coordination of national organizations for the establishment of standardized rules to ensure full comparability of nationally provided data
 - central coordination ↔ national databases

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Social Sciences & Humanities

The ECOOM team of the University of Antwerp is responsible for the construction of the [Flemish Academic Bibliographic Database for Social Sciences and Humanities \(VABB-SHW\)](#) and for the activities and research related to this task. Apart from that, the team supports the different work packages that are part of the Centre for R&D Monitoring (ECOOM) and takes care of the validation and interpretation of the data provided by the different services.

The operational goals of ECOOM-UA are:

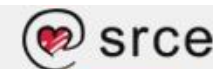
- Supporting the Flemish universities and university colleges ('associates') in preparation of the data submissions for the VABB-SHW. Each year, by April 1^{ste} the full bibliographic references of the years t-1 and t-2 need to be submitted.
- Developing, maintaining and optimizing the software needed for the processing of the data.
- Providing the Authoritative Panel ('Gezaghebbend panel') with an overview of the journal titles in which and the publishers with whom scholars of the social sciences and humanities who work for a Flemish higher education institution have published. Additional lists, e.g. of proceedings publications and book titles, are also provided.
- Applying the decisions of the Authoritative Panel regarding their selection of journals, publishers and/or proceedings on the data in view of the interuniversity budget allocation.
- Publishing the updated [VABB-SHW database](#) by the end of each year.
- Analyzing the characteristics of scientific communication in social sciences and humanities based on the data gathered in the VABB-SHW.
- Participating in the other work packages of the Centre for R&D Monitoring.

For more information, please contact Tim Engels (tim.engels@ua.ac.be).





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The report has been finalized and is being disseminated.

Main features of the “bibliographic approach”:

- recommended strongly – close collaboration between Humanities and Social Sciences
- build database which would make all scholarly literatures searchable and accessible across countries
- bibliographic references would thereby mirror as fully as possible the output of European research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and show diversity reflected in national languages, but also in national traditions within specific disciplines
- on the basis of such a database **move towards evaluation mechanisms**

Why a bibliographic approach?

- produce new synergy in research, connect scholars within disciplines and across disciplines throughout Europe
- give insights to researchers from different domains, open up avenues for collaboration between domains, and pave the way for multi- and transdisciplinarity, especially connected to the so-called Grand Challenges
- make visible European research at global level, especially necessary for addressing major issues within SSH disciplines themselves, but also issues pertaining to wider topics

THANK YOU!

