

# Tracking SSH within and outside of the scholarly literature: a discussion of the basis for output indicators

Gunnar Sivertsen,  
Norwegian Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU STEP), Wergelandsveien 7,  
NO-0167 Oslo, Norway.  
gunnar.sivertsen@nifustep.no

## Background

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Current initiatives on a European level to create more appropriate database coverage and indicators for the output of research in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) have resulted in a more detailed understanding of the types of outputs and impacts in these fields. The published output does not only appear as articles in international scholarly journals, but also in national journals, in books, and in non-scholarly literature for wider audiences. The publication and citation patterns are not as concentrated in international journals as can be seen in the natural sciences (Hicks 2004). Even with the recent rapid expansion of the two major multidisciplinary databases covering the international journal literature, *ISI Web of Knowledge* or *Scopus*, there is still need for supplementary sources of data to cover the other types of output and impact (Hicks and Wang 2009). One way forward could be to combine the existing commercial data sources with a "European-wide common documentation system of outputs" where the data are produced at the level of institutions (Dolan 2007). This is one of several possible paths that are investigated in the project "Towards a Bibliometric Database for the Social Sciences and Humanities", which is running in 2009 on the initiative of the research councils in England, France, Germany and Netherlands in collaboration with the European Science Foundation. The aim of the project is:

*"to explore the possibility of developing a bibliometric database for capturing the full range of research outputs in the Social Sciences and Humanities and for helping to assess their impact. This includes not just those articles published in international journals, but also articles in national journals, academic book chapters and books, books aimed at a more popular audience, reports in the "grey literature", and non-published outputs from fields such as performing arts." (From the introduction to the draft of the report).*

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the discussion of the possibilities and problems that we arrive at when looking at the full range of research outputs as they are mentioned in the description above. I will show that it is in fact possible to create complete data and indicators for the different types of *scholarly literature* from the SSH. On the other hand, I will indicate that there are larger problems with collecting data and creating indicators for *non-scholarly publications* and *non-published output*. (Citations as measures of scholarly and/or *societal impact* are not discussed in this paper).

## Methodologies

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This paper has two parts, one for the discussion of scholarly literature and another for the discussion of other types of output from the SSH. The methodologies are different in each part.

For the discussion of the scholarly literature, I will use complete data for 16,000 publications (fractionalized counts) from SSH in Norway's higher education sector in four years (2005-2008) to demonstrate variations on the level of disciplines in three dimensions:

- coverage by Web of Science (Thomson Reuters)

- use of foreign language (versus Norwegian)
- publication type (articles in journals or series, articles in books or proceedings, and books).

The method for defining and collecting the publication data is part of the so called “Norwegian model”, which is pointed at as one possible element in the solutions for better SSH coverage by two of the studies mentioned above (Dolan 2007, Hicks and Wang 2009). The model has two components, a National Research Documentation system covering all higher education institutions and collecting publication data according to a definition, and a bibliometric indicator that weights publications according to publication type and the level (prestige) of the publication channel (Sivertsen 2006, Schneider 2009). Only the first component is used in this study, meaning that all publications are given the same weight. Publications counts are fractionalized among authors of the same publication, meaning that contributions authors outside of Norway’s higher education sector are not counted. Three publication types are included:

- Article in ISSN-title (journal, series, yearbook)
- Article in ISBN-title (book)
- ISBN-title (book)

A four point definition excludes publications that are not scholarly, although in a scholarly publication channel (e.g. debates in Nature or textbooks on Oxford University Press). The definition says that a scientific or scholarly publication must:

1. present new insight
2. in a form that allows the research findings to be verified and/or used in new research activity
3. in a language and with a distribution that makes the publication accessible for a relevant audience
4. in a publication channel with peer review

Publication channels with authors coming mainly from only one institution are not included. A dynamic authority record ([www.dbh.nsd.uib.no/kanaler](http://www.dbh.nsd.uib.no/kanaler)) of so far 19,000 controlled scientific and scholarly publication channels ensures that references to non-scholarly publication are not entered. All data are validated at each institution, but transparent and observable across institutions in the same documentation system.

The methodologies in this paper for discussing non-scholarly literature and other types of output are not as advanced because complete and structured data are not available – which is the problem to be discussed. In three reports published a few years ago (UHR 2005, UHR 2006, UHR 2007), the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) tried to develop parallels to the model described above for non-scholarly literature, representing the so called “Third Mission” in all fields, and for non-published output in the arts. These supplementary models have so far failed to be implemented by the Government. I will give a short presentation of the contents of the reports and discuss why they failed to be implemented, and I will do so in relation to the results of a questionnaire study of “third mission”-activities at Norwegian universities (Kyvik 2005). I will also include a small study of how the register of members of The Norwegian Non-fiction Writers and Translators Association compares to the register of all tenured staff in SSH at Norwegian universities.

## Results

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The results for the scholarly publications show that although publication practices, as measured in the three dimensions of use of language, publication types and coverage in an international journal index, show large variations also within the social sciences and the humanities, it is possible to establish a complete coverage on the basis of an agreed definition.

The result of the discussion of data and indicators for non-scholarly publications and non-published output is a more concrete picture of the need to add field differences to the complexity of creating complete data and valid indicators for these types of output.

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