



Pushing the boundaries of the SEP

*experimenting with new modes of research
evaluation in the Dutch academic landscape*

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- *Anne Beaulieu, Ingeborg Meijer, & Paul Wouters*
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Outline of this lecture

- Organization of research assessment in the Netherlands
- Proposed solutions: QRiH
- Proposed solutions: Evaluative Inquiry
- Wrap up of this talk

*Organization of research
assessment in the
Netherlands*

The organization of Dutch research assessment

Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP – 2003, 2009, 2015)

- Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU)
- National Research Council (NWO)
- Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW)

The 2003 SEP revision re-installed the ‘power of decision’ back to the university boards

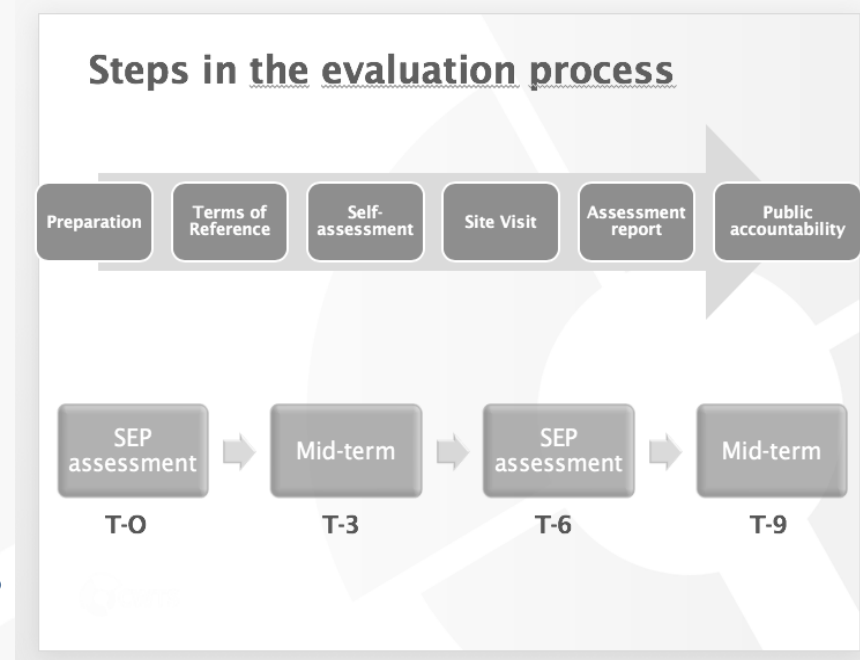
Some key characteristics:

- *Peer review is central, metrics are voluntarily*
- *The protocol is periodically revised*
- *Two levels of assessment (institute and research group, not individuals)*
- *Initially four main criteria: 1) Quality, 2) Productivity, 3) Relevance, and 4) Vitality & feasibility*



The Dutch context

- Evaluation results have no direct implications for funding (“weak evaluation system” according to Whitley (*Whitley, 2007*))
- Improvement use of evaluation results (as opposed to a distribute or controlling use (*Molas-Gallart, 2012*))
- National evaluation of all research units every 6 years
(peer review combining personal site visits, interviews, qualitative and quantitative assessment of output)
- Regular self-assessment half-way between national evaluation rounds



Reactions to the developments

Report *“Judging research on its’ merits”*

*(Advisory Committee from the humanities and the social sciences,
May 2005).*

*[... as humanists and social scientists were worried about the metrics
oriented flavor research assessment based on SEP potentially could get]*



Interventions supported by the KNAW

“Quality indicators for research in the Humanities”

(Committee on quality indicators for the humanities, November 2011).

“Towards a framework for the quality assessment of social science research”

(Committee on quality indicators for the social sciences, March 2013).

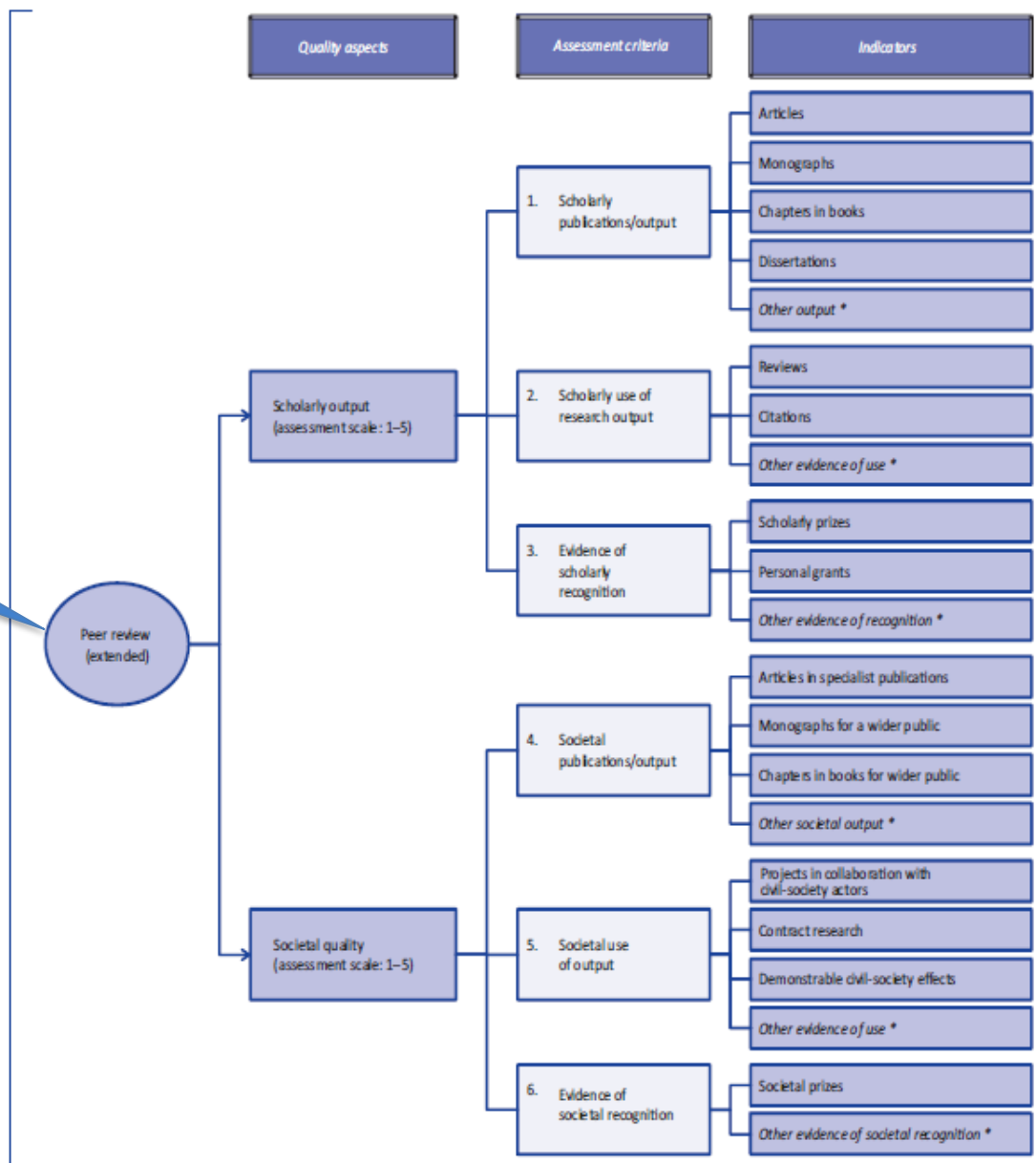
Key issues that were addressed in both reports:

- How to deal with heterogeneity? [without ‘standardizing’ it away]
- Take care of the variety of publication cultures
- How to embed “Societal relevance” aspects ?



Flow diagram taken from "Quality indicators for research in the Humanities"

Peer Review central



* discipline-specific/context-specific indicators

The infamous SEP Table D.1 ...

		Quality domains	
		Research quality	Relevance to society
Assessment dimensions	Demonstrable products	Research products for peers	Research products for societal target groups
	Demonstrable use of products	Use of research products by peers	Use of research products by societal target groups
	Demonstrable marks of recognition	Marks of recognition from peers	Marks of recognition by societal target groups

The infamous SEP Table D.1 ...

Narrative

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Well-known problems in societal impact assessment

- Issue of the data available for such type of impact analyses
 - Unlike academic impact analysis, no such datasets as WoS or Scopus are available
- Social impact analyses often have to deal with a variety of audiences
 - Unlike academic impact analysis, in which mostly only 1 type of audience is involved
- The very specific problem of how to link a particular societal impact to a particular research effort
 - ❖ Issues of the *attribution*
 - ❖ Issues of *temporality*

*Quality & Relevance in
the Humanities (QRiH)*



Quality and Relevance
in the Humanities

Home

SEP evaluation

Profiles

Tools

About QRiH

directly to the SEP indicators:

☰ Products for Peers



☰ Societal products



👤 Use by peers



👤 Societal use



💬 Recognition by peers



💬 Societal recognition



QRiH - Quality & Relevance in the Humanities

- By using lists of registered research outputs of two faculties of humanities, we were able to distinguish various output types.
- For journals and academic publishers, we mobilized the national research schools to assess the journals and publishers
 - *No grading of journals/publishers, just a list of important/less important*
 - *For both the academic as well as the societal realm*
- This led to the situation that in assessments, outputs on the list being labeled as important were '**authorized**', all others could be '**argumented**' to be of importance (*negotiation process*).

QRiH - Quality & Relevance in the Humanities

- The current SEP protocol mentions a narrative only for the societal realm, ...
 - *while in QRiH we position the narrative as the over-arching principle*
- The current SEP protocol prescribes the assessment of research, when looking at the table to be filled in, from a strictly column wise approach, ...
 - *while in QRiH we want to connect the two realms of output, usage and recognition also in a horizontal sense*
- Thereby, we strive to bridge the gap between academic outputs and products ^{vs.} societal products/outputs/activities

Using this table in a somewhat more productive way

Narrative

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*Evaluative Inquiry as a
new approach (EI)*

Developments in the UK and the Netherlands

We have already seen that, increasingly, research assessment also covers societal relevance as part of the outcomes.

This is welcomed, but ...

- **still perpetuates the idea of a divide between “*the academic*” and “*the social*”**
- **... is often related to the expectation that everybody has to do everything, societal relevance as extra, additional work**
- **... the split between academic and societal relevance is partly an artefact of reductive evaluation mechanisms.**

Three issues within the current SEP

- The academic excellence vs societal relevance divide
- The quantitative vs qualitative way of assessing academic quality
- The detached analyst ^{vs} engaged analytical collaborator

Situated Intervention

One step beyond studying 'productive interactions' (Spaapen & van Drooge)

Make use of the potential to design evaluation more loosely

Participation of communities under assessment

Direct involvement of social scientists in the practices they study



SITUATED INTERVENTION

SOCIOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTS IN HEALTH CARE

TEUN ZUIDERENT-JERAK

Situated Intervention

Evaluative Inquiry as a Situated Intervention is

more experimental, less formalized, more collaborative

... and leads to the production of

more situated, more grounded, and hopefully also more relevant processes and outcomes



SITUATED INTERVENTION

SOCIOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTS IN HEALTH CARE

TEUN ZUIDERENT-JERAK

The evaluative inquiry concept

We are currently striving to think & develop alternative ways to assess research.

This consists of:

- More context-sensitive evaluations, ...
- ... by way of an ecological approach, assuming diversity: not everybody has to do everything at the same time
- Evaluation as a means to stimulate self-reflection + emergent development (*“Evaluative Inquiry”, Fochler & De Rijcke, 2017*)

Evaluative inquiry approach

- Understands academic performance or impact as an effect of translations within and between networks of actors that make up academic research and its environments (Fochler & de Rijcke, 2017)
- This raises questions such as *
 - *What are the central issues or ambitions ;*
 - *how they are operationalized ;*
 - *what kind of output this yields ;*
 - *and where the output travels to ?*
- combination of methods, depending on what fits the specific evaluation purpose best

* Spaapen & van Drooge 2011 ; Joly et al. 2015; Molas-Gallart et al. 2015; Matt et al. 2017

The Evaluative Inquiry at CWTS

- Rethinking research excellence and academic quality.
- Research quality is not just an academic issue, but relevant to policy, professional networks and societal domains.
- Metric based analyses offer particular understanding of academic quality. A portfolio of different methodologies offers additional perspectives.
- Evaluations are often used as accountability tools. As such they don't prompt organizational learning. The evaluative inquiry approach aspires to both.

Evaluative inquiry, some key elements

- ✓ ***Various representations*** possible, none dominant
- ✓ ***Process***, not carved in stone
- ✓ ***Negotiation***, on the design and contents of assessment
- ✓ ***Pro-active*** rather than reactive
- ✓ ***Inclusion*** (rather than excluding)
- ✓ ***Contents*** rather than form
- ✓ ***Facing complexities and engagement*** head-on
- ✓ ***Learning*** rather than accountability

What can organisations do with it (I)

- Research organizations grapple with changing societal, economic and political contexts and expectations
- EI results in an overview of goals and missions and the ways these are embedded within the organization (goal > mobilization > output > reach)
- By using multiple methods

What can organisations do with it (II)

- We have seen that our work can serve as a starting point to develop or refine the narrative of the organization
- Based on the views and experiences of researchers and users (*“bottom up”*)
- ... which helps understanding the issues of value attribution and temporality when discussing societal relevance
- Articulating what is already going on
- And identifying new possibilities
 - *New audiences, existing ones*
 - *Ways of communication next to books and articles*
 - *A clearer structure of the organization, in terms of programs, centers and projects*

Phases

1. Exploratory phase

- Articulation of questions and issues

2. Data gathering

- Document analysis
- Quantitative methods (e.g. scientometrics, CRA, ABC, proximities – “Indicators in the Wild” (Rafols))
- Interviews

3. Workshop

4. Data analysis and reporting



Data collection and analysis

- Contextual Response Analysis (*Prins*); contextual scientometrics, e.g. bibliometric mapping (*Waltman & van Eck, 2016*); Area Based Connectedness (*Noyons, 2018*).
- Impact pathway analysis; Interviews with researchers and stakeholders about institutional organization, academic themes, output and impact.
- Workshops – data collection for SWOT analysis and/or testing of hypotheses.

Example of integration of mapping



University staff connected in a map, using citation analysis

Reporting

- Analysis of institutional organization as well as the relations between academic themes, output and impact.
- SWOT, leading to suggestions for self-assessment.
- Report is point of departure for conversation about ambitions and the organization of academic quality, internally and externally.
- Workshop can be an additional tool.

Some conclusions on the various developments regarding societal impact assessment

- The SEP protocol fits a wider group of scholarly domains, ...
 - Not only scholarly orientation plays a role, ...
 - ... but also the society at large is taken into consideration.
- Rather than being a technocratic tool, both approaches (QRiH & EI) want to bridge the gap between the inevitable bureaucratic necessity of evaluation, and the specific characteristics and strengths of academic disciplines.

Evaluative Inquiry: conclusion

- Revises linear notion of impact
- Reveals epistemic commitments and community values
 - Evaluative inquiry approaches evaluation as knowledge creation process
- Reflexive approach to evaluation
 - Relevance of scientific work as an unfolding process, involving a variety of academic and non-academic actors
- EI emphasizes the process and engagement dimensions
 - Rather than accounting and ranking !
- Values, networks of people, and resources as collectives

Inspired by Zuiderent-Jerak (2015):

this is a 'situated normative commitment, an attached instead of detached approach, "opening up and broadening out what can be addressed in evaluations, [not holding up a mirror],

"turning the **norms** and **values** and **subjectivities** not as things to leave out or leave unspoken

but turning them into an empirical topic in assessments.

Addressing the fallacy of 'One size fits all',

in favor of empirically specifying what issue(s) are at stake.'

Discussion

The evaluative inquiry is an approach to rethink academic value analytically and strategically.

What do you think?

The end

Thanks to:

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