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Impact – Dirty Word or Salvation of the Humanities?

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Zusammenfassung

Anwendungsorientierte Forschung, deren Themen von Förderorganisationen, politischen Akteuren oder Lobbygruppen vorgegeben wird, gewinnt immer mehr an Bedeutung. Im Kern geht es dabei um die Bewältigung drängender Fragen unserer Zeit, zum Beispiel in den Ausschreibungen zu gesellschaftlichen Herausforderungen innerhalb des Horizon2020-Programms der Europäischen Union. Dieser Fokus auf Relevanz und Wirkung wird jedoch oft als Bedrohung für die von intellektueller Neugierde getriebene Forschung gesehen und untergräbt oder delegitimiert diese sogar. Dieser Beitrag will zeigen, dass dies eine falsche Dichotomie ist, und untersucht spezifische Herausforderungen und Chancen der Impact-Debatte für die Geisteswissenschaften. Er erörtert einige wichtige problematische Merkmale des Impact-Konzepts für die Geisteswissenschaften und gibt Empfehlungen, wie diesen begegnet werden könnte. Er veranschaulicht diese Punkte anhand ausgewählter Beispiele aus den Impact-Fallstudien des britischen Research Excellence Framework 2014.

Schlagwörter: Geisteswissenschaften, Impact, gesellschaftliche Relevanz, Forschungsförderung

Abstract

Agenda driven research, with topics defined by funding agencies, political actors or lobby groups, is constantly gaining in importance. At its core is the commitment to tackling pressing issues of our time, for example in the societal challenges calls of the Horizon2020 programme of the European Union. This focus on relevance and impact, however, is often seen as a threat to curiosity driven research, undermining or even delegitimising it. This contribution will argue that this is a false dichotomy and will explore the specific challenges and opportunities of the impact debate for the Humanities. After outlining some major problematic features of the impact concept for the Humanities it makes recommendations how these might be addressed. It further illustrates its points with reference to selected examples of the UK's 2014 Research Excellence Framework impact case studies.

Keywords: humanities, impact, societal relevance, research funding

Neugier und Auftrag, *Curiosity and Commitment* – the topic of this conference and its title in honour of Helmut Eberhart are both inspired and inspiring and I want to thank the organisers for the privilege of being part of this reflection and this celebration. Universities are, and have been for centuries, defined by the tensions between curiosity and commitment. Intellectual curiosity, the passion for enquiry, the quest for truth regardless of the consequences, is a formidable intellectual power propelling scientific enquiry, human progress and self-determination. Academic freedom, 'the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the search for truth may lead' (IAU 1998), to quote the well-known *IAU* definition, safeguards this curiosity and is a defining principle of the modern university.[1]

Commitment to society, the determination to contribute to its continuous improvement and flourishing, is an equally strong *raison d'etre* of universities and is one that goes right to the core of our institutional responsibilities. Such commitment took many forms over the centuries: Since their foundation in the Middle Ages, for example, universities have enabled and organised the production, circulation and exchange of knowledge across borders and have been central nodes in the networks of knowledge and culture that have created and sustained a shared civilisation of common values and aspirations across Europe and beyond. Helmut Eberhart and I organised a conference on this very topic in Graz in 2007 as part of our common work as Chairs of the *Culture, Arts and Humanities Task Force* of the *Coimbra Group* between 2006 and 2011 (see Barkhoff and Eberhart 2009). Other forms of commitment in which Coimbra Group universities especially excelled include a prominent role in the life of their city and region and a central contribution to their economic, social and cultural life. Many also played a prominent and sometimes decisive role during the 19th and early 20th centuries in the formation of national identities and nation-states, in the creation of national movements, national histories and national cultures.

If I look at forms of commitment in more recent and contemporary times, society rightly expects that we contribute, through our teaching, research and public engagement, to the strengthening of open, democratic, tolerant and pluralistic societies. Such a commitment resonates in the mission statements and strategic plans of all our institutions and, more importantly, is deeply embedded in their daily practices.

However, today the expectations of politicians and other stakeholders towards universities are also increasingly more immediate, practical and measurable. To stay

1 This is the definition of academic freedom adopted by the International Association of Universities (IAU) at their UNESCO-sponsored meeting in Nice in 1950, reiterated here in a 1998 policy statement.

with the European dimension, which is the focus of the *Coimbra Group*'s work, the *European Commission* has, especially since the economic crisis in 2008, insisted that universities in the first instance have to contribute to the economic recovery in Europe, have to support job creation, economic growth and technological innovation and that especially European funding for research should principally and predominantly serve these goals. Governments across Europe have echoed this imperative in their national funding strategies and research priorities for higher education. This approach has, of course, informed the Commission's current Framework Programme *Horizon 2020*. In its Pillar 3 40 % of its overall funding is allocated for addressing grand societal challenges of our times such as climate change, energy, transport, food and agriculture, health and well-being, migration and integration, the future of democracy, extremism and terrorism or robotics and artificial intelligence. All these are formidable challenges, and it is indeed a noble obligation of researchers to contribute to tackling the great questions of our times which will determine the shape of our societies in the decades to come – and in some ways even the future of Humankind. For the Humanities at the start of *Horizon 2020* in 2012, the so-called 'embedding agenda' was championed by the then *Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science*, the Irishwoman Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. This novel and inclusive approach entailed the invitation and expectation that *SSH, Social Sciences and Humanities*, would increasingly become an integral part of all interdisciplinary approaches to all these challenges. It is obvious that none of the above-mentioned challenges can be effectively investigated and addressed without *SSH* perspectives being an integral element of the research set-up and research process. All these challenges have to be addressed not only at the level of technological and administrative solutions, but crucially at the level of attitudes, motivations and behaviour. Tackling each of them depends decisively on investigating underlying social, cultural and behavioural dimensions. In each of these challenges it is, after all, human behaviour that has created the problems and human behaviour in all its complexity is, alongside with technological innovations, also an important part of their solution. Across the Humanities community this embedding agenda had been welcomed and supported, but the reality in the funding calls of *Horizon 2020* has been radically different from these aspirations: Humanities and Social Sciences are almost invisible in the vast majority of funding calls, and this is despite detailed recommendations from the *SSH* community on how the embedding agenda could be delivered (Coimbra Group 2017a).[2] The *SSH* embedding agenda has not been delivered and is seen by many inside and outside the commission as a failure and its

2 See the recommendations in section III. 'Societal Challenges and the role of the Social Sciences and the Humanities' of the Coimbra Group's position paper on Horizon 2020 (Coimbra Group 2013), and the LERU advice paper *The Future of the Social Sciences and Humanities in Europe: Collected LERU papers*

future in the next Framework Programme FP9, *Horizon Europe*, which is currently being shaped, is uncertain and further marginalisation looks very likely.

In the *Culture, Arts and Humanities Task Force* and its successor, the *SSH Working Group* of the *Coimbra Group*, Helmut, our colleagues and I have been debating the reasons for this and how they are related to the so-called impact agenda. 'Impact' is, of course, alongside with 'innovation' and 'knowledge transfer', a current keyword of research policies in Europe and globally. It is the concept, according to which the societal relevance of research and the commitment of universities towards the public good is framed in today's debates. Policy and funding decisions are increasingly driven by the insistence on measurable societal impact. Impact is, for example, a key evaluation criterion for *Horizon 2020* proposals in Pillar 3, accounting for 30 % of the assessment. Following the recommendations of the influential Lamy Report on maximising the impact of EU Research and Innovation Programmes it is clear that the role of impact in FP9, *Horizon Europe*, is only to increase (Coimbra Group 2017b).[3]

In the United Kingdom, which in its research assessment policies has pursued the impact agenda more proactively and more systematically than any other European university system, the 2014 *Research Excellence Framework* exercise *REF*, which measures research performance in a discipline-specific peer-review process, allocated 20 % of its overall research funding to UK universities, overall £ 1.6 billion over five years, based on the evaluation of impact. For the 2020 *REF* that proportion is expected to rise to 25 %. The governments, funding agencies and university leaderships see impact as an important tool with enormous potential to leverage benefit to society from the investment into higher education teaching and research, and as an instrument to steer research policies and agendas in this direction.

The UK's *REF* offers a usefully broad definition of impact that shows its proximity to the concept of commitment as outlined earlier. It defines impact 'as an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health,

on the SSH research agenda (Van den Doel 2013). In its contribution to the mid-term evaluation of Horizon 2020 in January 2017 the Coimbra Group already expressed serious concern that the embedding agenda was lagging behind expectations and made suggestions on how to remedy this. One such recommendation (that has not been picked up since) was 'to make it an evaluation criterion for all SSH flagged topics to address SSH issues properly in the proposal and also demonstrate this in the structure of the consortia. Failure to do so should automatically be scored as major shortcomings.'

3 See Lamy 2017. In its reaction to the Lamy Report, the Coimbra Group stressed the special position of SSH *vis a vis* the impact agenda: 'the Coimbra Group would wish to emphasise that SSH perspectives need to be included more explicitly in the formulation of calls, and the concept of impact should be adjusted to be appropriate to the kind of contributions that SSH could and should make.'

the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'.[4] This is a definition that most of us in the Humanities, I think, would be prepared to embrace and work with; I certainly would. So why is impact such a feared, critiqued, maligned and sometimes even loathed concept, especially in the Humanities? In some quarters it has become almost a dirty word, one that a civilised, decent member of our community better not utter in public, certainly not in a positive or affirmative sense. I think we can agree across the Humanities communities that there is absolutely nothing wrong with the expectation that our research is useful and has a palpable effect on society and that, on the contrary, we can and should take pride in the contribution we make to our societies. My introduction also already indicated that societal benefit or impact has always been an expectation on us and is nothing new.

But it is precisely the current economic and political contexts and their effect on university and research politics that cause the problems. As this symposium is devoted precisely to the transformation of European universities caused by these contexts, it will suffice briefly to remind us of the three most relevant interrelated trends to explain the growing tension the impact agenda has created between curiosity and commitment. There is firstly (and principally) the move from curiosity-driven to project-driven research, with the research agenda set by stakeholders from outside academia such as governments, supra-national organisations like the *European Commission*, the private sector, lobbying organisations or philanthropic donors. There is secondly the move from discipline-based and individual research to interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and thirdly changes in the funding model for university systems away from long-term core funding to short-term project funding.

In this context, it is not difficult to see why the impact agenda with its increasing insistence on demonstrable societal benefit of publicly funded research, on accountability and a return for the investment of taxpayer's money, causes particular challenges for the Humanities and contributes to a sense of crisis experienced by so many. I will briefly discuss the six major problematic factors that I see in this respect – and there might be others –, before arguing that despite those, and in order to confront them the Humanities not only need to engage with the impact agenda but also have a lot to gain from such engagement. As always, these six factors are deeply interrelated.

Firstly, if one demands impact as a research result and makes it a criterion of evaluation and funding, then one needs evidence that proves and measures this impact

4 See this definition and its contexts at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/REFimpact/ (accessed 13 February 2018).

with a degree of precision and objectivity. While this might look like an obvious truism, it is one with far-reaching consequences, as impact takes many forms, some of which are more easily measured than others. If one wants to measure contributions to technological advancement or economic benefits, then the number of patents, spin-off companies, jobs created and the contribution to GDP are strong and relatively reliable and objective indicators. But how does one measure and objectify the more indirect and more long-term effects that most activities in the universities and especially the Humanities have? How does one measure, for example, a changed attitude in parts of the general public towards a nation's history that research on cultural memory has influenced over time? How does one then prove the link between the two and prove that such changes have strengthened democratic values or civic participation? How does one measure, for example, the contribution literatures of migration and their investigation and promotion by literary scholars make towards a more tolerant and inclusive society? How does one prove that a deeper appreciation of art by new audiences enriches people's lives and contributes to well-being? These are some of the questions that Humanities advocates, who try to make the concept of impact work for our disciplines, find themselves confronted with.

Secondly, the increasing emphasis on societal impact entails the danger of marginalising or even delegitimising curiosity-driven research, non-applied research and basic research. This is a problem for all disciplines but is arguably affecting especially those domains of knowledge such as the Humanities, which are more characterized by curiosity-driven and non-applied approaches. When looking at PhD and postdoctoral topics in our respective fields we can increasingly observe how research agendas are being influenced and steered by the impact agenda. If I look at my own discipline of German literary and cultural studies today most PhD projects cover areas for which the societal relevance is relatively easy to identify and to demonstrate: cultural memory and memory politics, literatures of migration and intercultural encounter, gender, ageing and generational relationships, medical humanities and environmental humanities. In general, contemporary authors and topics are favoured over more historic ones. These are of course all important and exciting topics very much worthy of investigation. But there is increasing evidence that topics that are harder to justify in terms of their societal relevance and impact, on obscure and neglected authors or topics or on more distant pasts, be these the Middle Ages or the Age of Enlightenment, are far less researched today than they were twenty years ago.

Thirdly, a narrow focus on impact discourages serendipity and thus considerably impoverishes the innovation potential of research. To let your mind roam freely

wherever it takes you, to give space to digression and change of focus, to pursue avenues of which you had no inkling that they existed or that they might become interesting and relevant for your work is one of the strongest assets of curiosity-driven research and is also at the heart of a productive and innovative research process. Of course, a focus on a given question and a particular problem to solve is not a strict opposite to the freedom of imagination and flexibility of approach, but if the research culture is continually shifting towards applicable results and measurable impacts, then the delicate balance between these two sides of the research process is in danger of going out of kilter. In their spirited defence of universities against an overly utilitarian and managerial approach *What are universities for?* Geoffrey Bolton and Colin Lucas make this important point:

> *Successful research, whether in the sciences, humanities or social sciences, depends upon a culture and individual attitudes that value curiosity, scepticism, serendipity, creativity and genius. They are values that are crucial to the university educational process at its most profound, and are most readily acquired in an environment of free-ranging speculation and research that is permeated by them (Bolton and Lucas 2008).*

In the same vein these authors also remind us that agenda setting by stakeholders from inside and outside academia inevitably misses potential solutions and decisive innovative developments and can get it very wrong. For example, President Roosevelt's 1937 Commission to advise on the most likely innovations of the next thirty years missed, among other things, nuclear energy, lasers, computers, Xerox, jet engines, radar, antibiotics and the genetic code (Bolton and Lucas 2008: 8).

Fourthly (and briefly), if funding decisions are increasingly based on impact, then it is in the logic of such funding instruments that areas which can prove and quantify their impact more easily and will attract a greater share of the funding. Of the thirty-four billion Euro in *Horizon 2020*'s Societal Challenges Pillar 3 just four billion Euro were designated for Social Science and Humanities, with only a small fraction of this money actually going to the Humanities.

As a fifth point we must ask how the research agendas are set and by whom. Especially the *Horizon 2020* programme, which has been one of the main drivers of the impact agenda, has been influenced not only by political agents, but also by various pressure groups from industry, who have their professional lobbyists employed in Brussels. At the inaugural meeting of the *Coimbra Group*'s *SSH Working* Group in January 2016 we debated with the late Philippe Keraudren, who was a tireless and committed advocate of the Humanities at the DG Research in Brussels, how we could best work for a greater prominence of Humanities topics in the Commission's

programmes. We discussed with him our concerns that the embedding agenda greatly lagged behind its original ambitions and that embedding recommendations by networks such as the *Coimbra Group* or *LERU*, the *League of European Research Universities*, were not being picked up. We observed that between the first and final drafts of work programmes often good calls with a broader perspective and a less applied focus were watered down, got their funding drastically reduced or completely disappeared. His message was as clear as it was sobering: with the lobbying power and constant presence of so many pressure groups trying to influence decision-makers in Brussels every day, the voices of and for the Humanities are simply drowned out. If the Humanities want a stronger presence in the Commission's funding call, we concluded, they need to get better at lobbying, they need to establish and resource stronger lobbying groups nationally and in Brussels, they need to build coalitions, hone and coordinate their key messages, become more consistent in what they ask for and speak more with one voice.

Finally researching for societal impact according to agendas set by politicians should be viewed with a degree of caution for another reason. Few would question the political importance and urgency of the societal challenges selected for the current framework programme, and the intended closer links with the *Sustainable Development Goals* in the next Framework Programme, FP9, will further increase the legitimacy of research agendas derived from those goals. However, if we look back in history, we can see that especially the Humanities can be in danger of serving partisan and deeply problematic agendas especially when their impact in the political field is called for. In European universities the impact of large parts of the Humanities, of historians, philologists and linguists was arguably at its highest when they served, at various junctures during the 19th and 20th centuries, nationalistic causes that provided scholarly – and often pseudo-scholarly – authority to processes of identity demarcations and hostile othering and thus exacerbated divisions and conflicts. Against such political instrumentalisation the distance which institutional autonomy and academic freedom provides is essential.

It might have become plausible from what I have said so far to see impact as a dirty word, or at least as a highly problematic concept. Where, the reader might wonder at this stage, considering the title of this paper, does impact as salvation come into it? The reality for all of us in academia, and especially for young researchers who are embarking on their careers, is that the call for societal impact will not go away and will only increase in importance. Whether we like it or not, we will have to engage with it, we will have to confront it and we are well advised to join in the debate in order to influence and shape it in a way that works better for the Humanities. Besides all the challenges outlined thus far there are also real opportunities in this

focus on greater societal impact, opportunities to increase the public visibility of Humanities research, to demonstrate to a wider audience why what we do matters and to achieve benefits for our societies.

In the first instance we need to argue and fight for ways of expressing and evaluating impact that are more appropriate for the Humanities and their more indirect and long-term influences. One aspect of this is to emphasise that the principal and most important way in which the Humanities have an impact on society is through the education of the next generation of leaders, equipped with skills crucial for vibrant democracies responsive to innovation and change, skills such as critical reasoning, independence of mind, creativity and problem-solving. Martha M. Nussbaum in *Not for profit. Why democracy needs the Humanities* has eloquently argued for the centrality of the Humanities for responsible and active citizenship (Nussbaum 2008), as has John Laver, the founding chairman of the *British Academy*'s *Humanities Research Board* in the 1990's, who described 'two distinctive attributes' of Arts and Humanities graduates: 'reflectiveness, leading to a thoughtful tolerance that is one of the hallmarks of a civilized culture, and a sense of being rooted in a cultural and historical context' (Laver 1997: 157). Let me add to this the intercultural competence that comes with the ability to read other cultures and negotiate their 'otherness' and the importance of language skills for this. The societal impact that derives from influencing the hearts and minds of our students must be included in the assessment and evaluation of societal impact.

We must, therefore, from the perspectives of the Humanities, monitor current practices, in the expression, measurement and evaluation of impact to learn from them, but also to critique them and make suggestions as to how they could be better adapted to our needs. Let me again take the UK's *REF* as an example. Included in the submissions from Higher Education Institutions for the 2014 *REF* were a total of 6679 impact case studies, in which the specific and demonstrable impact of individual research projects finds clear expression. Of these four-page documents, in which researchers outlined how they disseminated their research beyond their academic peers, engaged with a wider public and influenced domains beyond academia, 27 % were from the Arts & Humanities.[5] The ways in which this societal impact was achieved varied greatly and included exhibitions, screenings, readings or films, lectures, workshops and debates, websites, social media, videos, interviews, media appearances, political consultancy work and co-operations with cultural and creative institutions, heritage and community organisations, civil society groups,

5 For an overview and a first analysis of these Impact Case Studies see the research report King's College London and Digital Science (2015).

NGOs, charities or policymakers. All these case studies are available on a publicly accessible website, and they make interesting and sometimes inspiring reading.[6] They can even instil a cautious optimism that there are many imaginative 'impacts' to explore and that the impact of Humanities research can in fact be achieved and expressed. Two examples, chosen because of their proximity to Helmut Eberhart's discipline and research interests, may briefly illustrate this.

The first one comes from the field of Anthropology, which contributed thirty-two case studies overall to the 2014 corpus. The case study *Visual Mass Observation. Facilitating public engagement with a new collaborative ethnography* was based on participatory research by Michael Stewart from University College London who in his *MyStreet Project* encouraged and trained members of marginalised communities to produce films 'on their own environments – and reflect ethnographically on their everyday experience'. During this work he 'formed relationships with over three hundred filmmakers, inspiring them to use ethnographic investigations of everyday British life' (Stewart 2014). Through a website which presented 315 films in a living archive the project reached within two years over 11.000 visitors. Selected films were screened at the *Open City Docs Fest* at UCL to great acclaim and considerable national and international media coverage. Additionally, three hundred fifty participants from disadvantaged schools and communities were trained in ethnographic filmmaking in eighty-nine workshops across London, with very positive effects on their skills sets, self-esteem and empowerment. The impact case study also includes very favourable comments on the project by famous directors of British blockbusters like *Notting Hill* and *Billy Elliot*, who encountered the *MyStreet Project* as jury members.

My second example comes from the field of Religious Studies and has the title *Promoting Pilgrimage in Churches, Cultural Heritage and Tourism*. It reports on a multitude of engagements of Ian Bradley, specialist for pilgrimages in Scotland and Europe in the Middle Ages and Professor emeritus in the School of Divinity at St. Andrews. Here is the hundred-word summary of his impact:

> *Dr Ian Bradley's research on the history and practice of pilgrimage in Scotland has had an impact on public understanding of cultural heritage, on the tourist industry, and on the development of new practices by local authorities, churches and the military. Dr Bradley has been commissioned to devise and lead pilgrimages in Scotland and beyond, which have yielded quantifiable economic benefits of over £ 250,000. His research has contributed to the conservation of cultural heritage through a range of*

6 All case studies can be accessed at http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/%20 (accessed 16 February 2018).

> *consultancy work, with impacts including the establishment of the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum in 2012 and enhancements to the visitor experience at Iona Abbey. It is continuing to shape pilgrim route infrastructure development by national and local agencies, church groups and the army (Bradley 2014).*

I have to admit that I chose this case study also because it provides a link to my own university, Trinity College Dublin: The *Book of Kells*, the illuminated manuscript of the gospels, which is the pride of our library, The Long Room, and one of Ireland's major tourist attractions, was written on the Scottish island of Iona around eight-hundred.

What can we learn from these examples? Firstly, surely, that societal impact can be achieved and can be expressed. I am confident that most cultural anthropologists and European ethnologists present here today could produce similar case studies on work they have undertaken or could produce plans for similar activities arising from their current and future research. Secondly, it is already clear from these two examples that impact comes in many forms and facets, and that there are multiple ways of demonstrating it. This is encouraging overall, and while there is a focus on quantifiable evidence such as web-hits, audience numbers or generated income, evidence such as testimonies from involved and affected parties or media coverage is equally important and valid.

We certainly have to fight any notion that impact would ever be introduced as a mandatory element of research, which notably the *Research Excellence Framework* has not done, but it would certainly befit and enrich us as members of the Humanities research community to ask ourselves questions like those every grant application in the UK now has to produce in a so-called pathway to impact statement: Who might benefit from this research? How might they benefit? How do you ensure that potential beneficiaries of your research can engage with this research? While some might see this as a kind of coercion towards a narrowly utilitarian approach, I would rather take it as an encouragement and an open invitation to develop a culture of research design that always includes a dimension beyond academia, seeks appropriate partners for the co-creation and usage of our knowledge and connects to the greater questions of our time. The challenge here is not so much to steer our research topics and research questions artificially to suit an imposed impact agenda, but rather to include, regardless of what we work on, the systematic reflection and articulation of societal benefit into the way we think about, plan and structure our research, its outputs and their dissemination.

Public engagement and the so-called third mission of universities are more than an add-on to teaching and research. They are proud obligations of higher education

institutions and the contemporary expression of the kind of commitment that has been fundamental to universities and their core values throughout history. Any discussion about societal impact must be framed within this wider context. No one would deny that the impact agenda provides huge challenges for the Humanities, but it also offers considerable opportunities. We must rethink as disciplines and as institutions how we engage with a wider public and non-academic, non-specialist audiences. This is not easy and implies, among other things, seeking new partnerships in the private sector and in civil society, a readiness to listen to and understand the perspectives of these partners and to see the generation of new knowledge increasingly as a process of co-creation. These points were emphasised, for example, by two recent position papers from *LERU*, the *League of European Research Universities* on the topic, one from March 2017 and the other from April 2018 (Van den Acker and Spaapen 2017; Keustermans et al. 2018). It entails also a willingness and a conscious exercise to refrain from the jargon and the delight in hermetic language which one finds too often in academic discourse, and to cultivate a language that is not only understood by our peers, but instead is responsive to the way of thinking outside the academic world. All this challenges deeply engrained academic cultures and habits and requires a readiness to step outside our disciplinary cultures and comfort zones. It also means a readiness to embrace new formats of delivery and engagement and to create dedicated spaces in our institutions such as Humanities Research Institutes or Institutes of Advanced Studies which encourage and enable involvement in public debate and develop and sustain a culture of engagement with the big questions of our time. We must train and reward among our students and our young researchers discursive practices that combine disciplinary depth of analysis with clarity of expression and a focus on non-specialist audiences. The thesis-in-three competitions, which the *Coimbra Group* now organises across Europe every year, is just one example of this.

Crucially Humanities advocates must make their voices heard loud and clear in policy debates and insist in the engagement with university leaderships, funding agencies, governments and other policy makers that the focus on easily quantifiable output and direct economic benefit, which has dominated the impact debate for too long, is wrong and needs to be adjusted. We must develop and suggest more nuanced and more sophisticated ways to assess broad societal impact – in its many shapes and sizes – in sensitive and appropriate ways and with flexible and diverse sets of indicators, paying particular attention to the more indirect and long-term benefits that the Humanities bring to civil society and the public good. These points have been emphasised in several valuable recent contributions to the debate, for

example by the *Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences* in Canada (Federation 2017) or the *Trinity Long Room Hub Arts & Humanities Research Institute* in my own university (Burgess 2018).

We know that Humanities matter. We as humans are fundamentally meaning-seeking creatures and as such we need the reflection of our questions and aspirations in critical reasoning and open debate, and the refraction of our highest hopes and deepest fears in art and in culture. We need to tell our stories and we need to listen to the stories of others. We need this as much as we need food on the table and the air that we breathe. Try to imagine, for a moment, a world without music, visual art, drama, film or poetry, a world in which we could not make links with the past of our people and position ourselves in relation to tradition, or a world in which we could not connect with other cultures and unfamiliar people via the common reservoir of artistic, cultural or philosophical expressions of our shared humanity – it is a world that one cannot imagine as it would quite simply not be a world inhabited by humans. We have a lot to give, and we do give much to society. The challenge is to find convincing ways to articulate this. The imperative of impact might not be the salvation of the Humanities, but it is not its downfall either. It is an opportunity that we must embrace and shape with equal measures of vigilance and confidence.

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