Two steps forward, one step back: promises and risks for bibliometrics in the humanities

Iva Melinščak Zlodi
University of Zagreb
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Library
International context

• multitude of bibliometric indicators

• multitude of data sources – major ones are either commercial, and licensed (WoS, Scopus) or opaque (GS)

• bibliometrics as scientific research vs. evaluative bibliometrics

• rising demand for scientometric expertise: need for data + indicators + a meaningful interpretation
   → whose responsibility is it?

• *Leiden manifesto* (in making) – about responsibility for developing valid and useful metrics and research assessment methodologies → establishing standards
Situation in Croatia

5 years ago - no one asked about citation-related information in humanities.

Today:

- project applications (state or institutional)
- promotions/hiring (State regulations on promotions in science)
- journal subsidies
- institution assessment (for funds allocation)
- accreditation of university programs and studies
- awards

all are taking bibliometric data into account
Problems with metrics-based assessment in the humanities (in Croatia)

Several groups of problems (general and local)
• Related to communication and publishing practices in humanities
• Limitations of citation data sources and tools
• Problems related to small scientific communities and non-english language publications
• Choice of appropriate indicators and methods
• Responsibility for application
Generally identified problems with humanities (Nederhof, Hammerfelt...):

• mixed audience: international and national scholarly, public audience; local orientation
• different publication habits and channels (importance of monographs and edited books, preference of single-authored publications, language, etc.)
• lower values of collaboration, interdisciplinarity and internationality
• intellectual organization of research in the humanities
• disciplinary differences in referencing practices and citation patterns
• it takes longer time for a publication to get cited (lengthier citation windows should be used)
• heterogeneous nature of research in the humanities (archaeology, linguistics ≠ literary studies)
Problems in using existing data sources for citation analysis

- Low coverage of humanities journals
- Non-source items (cited reference search) → no authority structure (problems with common surnames)
- multi-authored works attributed to first author only in WoS
- GS citing items: url and content duplicates, non-scientific content (theses, lecture handouts, syllabi, presentation abstracts, project proposals), citations to books attributed to authors of introductions or translators
- in documents indexed by GS, where GS does not have access to full text, cited references are not recorded (for instance ERIC database, CROSBI national bibliography...)
- BKCI - on-going project with significant limitations: a bias towards English language publications (96% of its books) and publishers from UK or USA (75%), great concentration of publishers (Springer, Palgrave and Routledge alone account for 50% of the total databases)
- time-consuming human filtering
Metric-based assessment in Croatia

• Over-reliance on bibliometric data (perceived as objective, easily implemented and reliable, as opposed to peer review)

• Not enough experts (bibliometric researchers and professionals)

• Lack of information infrastructure

• Choice of indicators and methods – erroneous and not related to purposes and goals of evaluation process, with insufficient instructions
  
  “The key principle is that the unit of assessment, the research dimension to be assessed, and the purposes of the assessment jointly determine the type of indicators to be used.” (Moed & Halevi, 2014)

• Coverage in A&I databases as a popular indicator (getting in or being dropped out)

• Changes in evaluation criteria → changing publishing behavior (“it is wise to change an assessment method radically every 5 to 10 years” Moed & Halevi, 2014)
Current trends and developments

Altmetrics

- adoption of social media varies across fields (Rowlands et al. 2011)
- “Four promises” of altmetric research (Wouters & Costas 2012, Hammerfelt 2014):
  - the diversity of dissemination channels analysed
  - the speed of acquiring/retrieving data
  - the openness of method
  - the ability to measure impact beyond the ‘scholarly realm’ (social impact!)
- same old problems: importance of non-journal publications, reliance on print, limited coverage of non-english language publications

Downloads

- COUNTER
- aggregation?
Current trends and developments (cont.)

- Citation analysis – expanded to non-source materials and using lifetime citation data (Linmans)
- ERIH PLUS (European Reference Index for the Humanities) - Norwegian Social Science Data Services
- Ranking book publishers (quality or prestige?)
  - Surveys
  - Reviews
  - Sales
  - Citation data! - total citation count or mean citation per book (Zuccalla et al. 2014)
- \textit{Libcitations} (library holdings, not library loans) – WorldCat
  - strongly correlated with citation rates
“slow bibliometrics: thinking before counting”

Yves Gingras