

The Impact of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Discussing Germany and Japan

November 14th – 15th 2017, German Cultural Center, Tokyo

Objectives

Recently, the issue of *societal impact* has become the subject of intense debate and discussion in the world of academic research. Although a number of different terms are used – examples from the Japanese context include “output”, “innovation” or “societal needs” – the trend is clear. With rising frequency, and more and more in line with tangible incentive structures, academic researchers are asked to justify their use of public resources for research activities in relation to their utility for society. This demand is not restricted to those conducting the research. Departmental and university administrators, science policy advocates, ministries and governments, all are expected to demonstrate the *societal impact* of research funding allocations.

To thematise these discussions is not to discredit them. The expectation that the use of public funds be well justified is legitimate, and it is certainly not absurd to expect that such justifications be framed in the vocabulary of usefulness. Moreover, many of the challenges we face today have global proportions and their solution will depend on the contributions of basic, relevant – and useful – academic research.

Yet the discourse of impact calls for careful analysis and discussion, especially in relation to how to measure impact. The symposium raises three points for discussion. Firstly, the terms typically used in the discourse of societal impact are highly theory-sensitive. Apart from background assumptions regarding what constitutes a good society, their meanings depend on theories of how research findings filter into society and become causally effective. These implicit understandings deserve to be made explicit and discussed. Secondly, today’s advocates of societal impact have rarely attempted to refute the Humboldtian claim that academia is most useful as a whole when its day to day operations are not required to follow considerations of application. In light of the substantial prima-facie evidence in its favour, this claim, which was shared by the founders of many modern universities and continues to play an important role in how universities view themselves, should not be rejected without careful discussion and attention to empirical reality. Thirdly, the diffusion of demands for societal

impact has brought about real-world consequences which, themselves, call for normative appraisal. To highlight just one such consequence, the humanities and social sciences have come under significant pressure. Arguably, they face structural hurdles in demonstrating their societal impact in the kind of language typically used in debates over public resources.

There is a certain irony to the last dimension: the disciplines, which are most relevant to the analysis and discussion of the discourse of societal impact seem to have the hardest time adapting to it. Still, the humanities and social sciences are neither inactive nor uninterested, and this Japanese-German symposium will employ the unique potential of these disciplines to address the desiderates outlined above. Bringing Japanese and German academics into dialogue on this issue is especially important because while the discourse of impact is similar in both countries, it is embedded in very different intellectual and institutional settings and received by academic researchers in very different ways. By exchanging analyses and arguments and thus enriching public discourse about societal impact, the symposium aims to address neglected dimensions of the societal impact of the humanities and social sciences.

Participants

- Representatives of research funding organizations from Japan and Germany
- Research policy advocates from Japan and Germany
- Representatives of various relevant disciplines of the humanities and social sciences from Japan and Germany

Part I: Science Policy Workshop „The Impact of the Humanities and Social Sciences” (German Cultural Center)		
Tuesday Nov. 14 9:00	Word of Welcome	German Cultural Center
9:15	Keynote Speech „Truth – Impact – Power“ Peter Strohschneider (DFG President, Professor, LMU Munich)	
10:00	Round Table Discussion I “The Impact of <i>Impact</i>” In the last 15 years, scholars and scientists have become accustomed to talk of impact as a quality benchmark of research projects and research outputs. Remarkably, however, relatively little effort has been spent on disentangling its various meanings, let alone the consequences of applying metrics of impact on research. Chair: Julika Griem (DFG Vice President, Professor, Goethe University Frankfurt) Kazuo Seiyama (Professor emeritus, The University of Tokyo, Deputy Director, JSPS Research Center for Science Systems) Manabu Sato (Professor, Gakushuin University) Sayaka Oki (Professor, Nagoya University) Thomas Risse (Professor, Freie Universität Berlin, Member of DFG Senate)	
11:30	Lunch	German Cultural Center
13:00	Round Table Discussion II “The Impact of the Social Sciences and the Humanities” Arguably, the meaning of <i>social impact</i> in current discourse presents special burdens for the social sciences and the humanities. For practitioners in these disciplines it could be difficult to display the impact of their research in straightforwardly utilitarian and/or economic terms as may be demanded. Are there understandings of <i>social impact</i> which are not biased against the humanities and social sciences? What is the appropriate understanding of impact for these disciplines? Chair: Satoko Fujiwara (Professor, The University of Tokyo, Member of the Science Council of Japan)	German Cultural Center

	Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (Professor, Bielefeld University, Member of DFG Senate) Yutaka Tsujinaka (Professor, The University of Tsukuba) Yasushi Kato (Professor, Hitotsubashi University, President, Philosophical Association of Japan) Gesine Foljanty-Jost (Professor, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg)	
14:30	Final Statements, Greetings	
14:45	Coffee Break	German Cultural Center