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Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin
für Sozialforschung



"Scientific Quality and Social Relevance in the Social and Spatial Sciences: Visible? Measurable?"

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Performance indicators in science

Complexity reduction through quantitative indicators

Indicators show research performance, without explaining it

Differentiation of indicators...

...however, (implicit) hierarchy: publications and third-party funds

Establishment of comparability of incomparably (Heintz 2010, Godin 2006)

Not every research results can be displayed in indicators and figures

What is not measured does not count (anymore)



Publication Indicators - a problem?

Dominance of the referred journals

Impact factor: change of publication strategies

The specific characteristics of disciplines are not given sufficient consideration

Different research orientations find insufficient attention

Individualization of research

insufficient differentiation in review procedure



Scientific Quality and Social Relevance (in the Social and Spatial Sciences)

Perception and assessments of the researchers concerned.

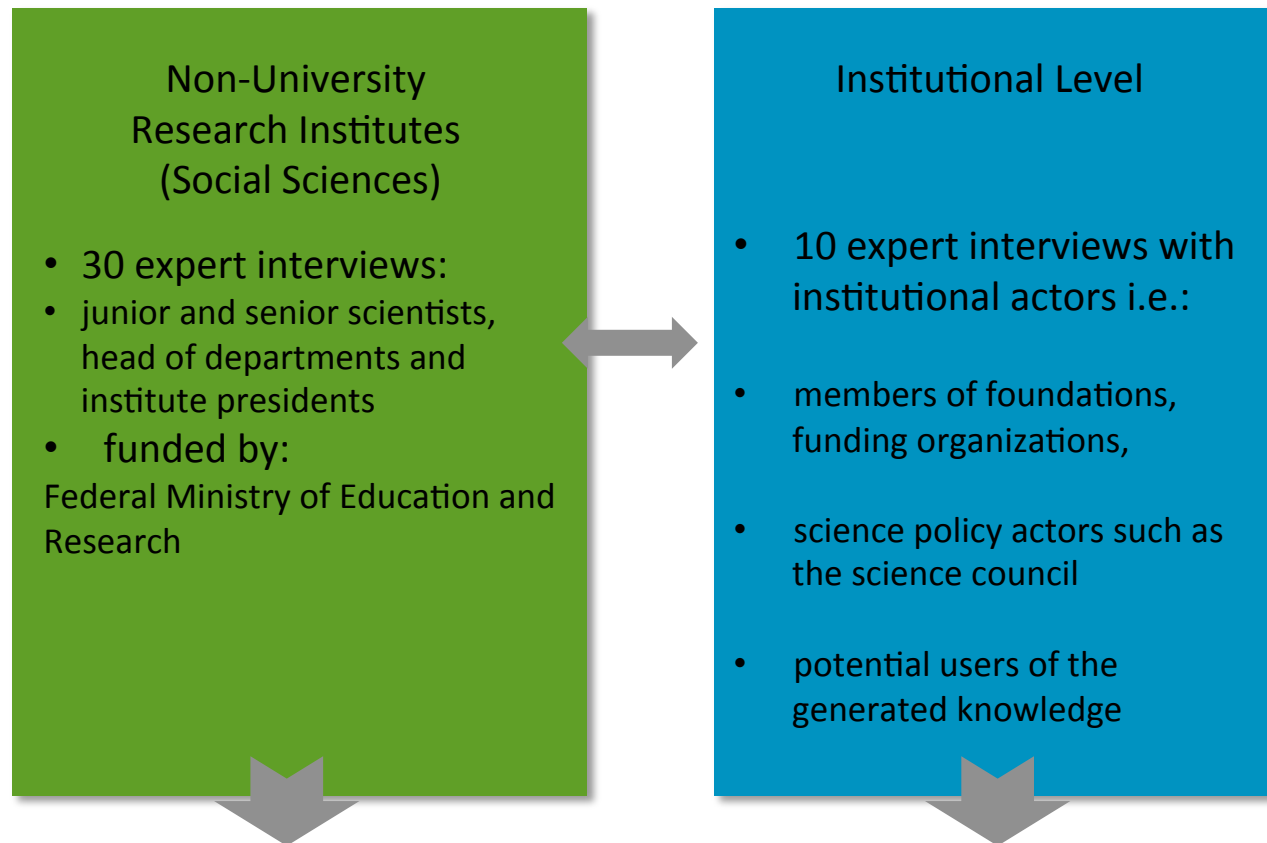
Researchers of the two disciplines were asked how they define their “performance” and on what criteria they would prefer to be measured.

Tension between scientific quality and social relevance in the spatial and social sciences.

Knowledge transfer (i.e. social relevance) cannot be reconciled with the current rating systems employed on both institutional and individual levels.

A special problem applies: While social science knowledge does flow into society, it is rarely visible as such (Beck/Bonß 1989).

„Unknown Terrain?“ Knowledge Transfer in the Spatial and Social Sciences



- transcription and analysis by using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000)
- case studies

Conceptualization of knowledge transfer

Knowledge transfer: mutually dependent and interactive process of exchange and sharing of research results with diverse scientific and external user groups
non-academic actors: 1. privat economy, 2. non-profit organisations, 3. public institutions, 4. the general public

„...in long-term collaborations it is easier to make a real change, it is possible to give them (the practitioners) something to think about...you are working together and develop new ideas. It is not only a process of knowledge transfer but rather new knowledge will be created together.“ (Interview Nr. 12, project „Unknown Terrain?“)

*„If I would describe the way we transfer knowledge, this could generally be described as a sort of wave, which in the beginning moved in our direction – when we received substantial knowledge from external communities and by absorbing and transforming this knowledge we were able to give something back in the end...“
(Interview Nr. 16, project „Unknown Terrain“)*



Benefit of knowledge transfer for researchers

"We are funded with public financing. In this regard I think it is our job to address a wider public. Every scientist should be able to address more people than their closest peers."

- ❓ knowledge transfer in the opposite direction from practice to theory: identification of complex processes, access to expertise of practitioners, new interpretations and ideas for new research projects
 - ❓ access to funding
 - ❓ valuation of research results
- intellectual and monetary benefits for researchers

"Yes, I think knowledge transfer is part of it. This is especially the case for scientists in institutes that are dedicated to science and are funded by taxes."

Challenges

"...I would say that knowledge transfer does not have any positive effects on your scientific career at all. In that respect it just seems to be a personal disadvantage to invest time for transfer activities."

- research institutes are conceptualized as “professional bureaucracies” (Mintzberg, 1979)
- scientists’ social and epistemic practices are based on scientific communities’ norms and standards
- loose coupling with practitioners: unsystematic interaction
- knowledge transfer is a criteria in appointment and evaluation processes, but research excellence (publications) is more relevant
 - knowledge transfer activities were not of high priority

balancing strategies

- *HR-strategy*: temporary labor division between junior and senior researchers
- *publication strategy*: negotiating tensions between intellectual property rights and publishing research results.
- *funding strategy*: transfer-oriented projects generate funds for pure research
- *organizational strategy*: finding the “right” balance between basic research and transfer

→ balancing strategies are only temporary and unstable solutions.



Social Sciences

Analysis levels and influencing factors





Research Projects

Cooperation with practioners

so far mainly selective exchange (workshops, conferences , publications)

→ Constant cooperations are helpful for the knowledge transfer:

❑ joint development of ideas

❑ Considering the needs and preferences of the practitioners

→ institutionalized forms of cooperation (eg . as the project advisory boards) reduce work of the researchers

Researchers



Time and resource conflicts

The low level of institutionalization of transfer in the (social) science can lead to time, resources and role conflicts at the individual level.

- low professionalization of knowledge transfer
- unclear boundaries, how much knowledge transfer is "legitimate"
- Tensions between research and application



Transfer as a personal career risk
Transfer as personal commitment



Research Institutes

Assessment of knowledge transfer services

- ❓ large heterogeneity of the transfer media, formats and target groups
- ❓ high costs of documentation, low comparability
- little systematic recording of transfers → low esteem

- limited influence of the organization



Science System



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"...I would say that knowledge transfer does not have any positive effects on your scientific career at all. In that respect it just seems to be a personal disadvantage to invest time for transfer activities."

- Knowledge transfer is a criteria in evaluations, but implicit hierarchy
- particularly rigid reputation system of the social sciences (especially sociology)
- one-sided orientation on academic career (publications a key criteria)
- currently there are no established career paths and professional identities at the interface between science and practice



"Directly my peers, I would say, no. They are more hardcore-scientists and say better don't spread yourself with other things. That is what you still can do when you are 60. At least when we are talking about the mid-aged peers."



Key Results of the Project



- Unclear understanding of transfer
- Transfer is operated in many ways , but often not recognized as such
- Transfer as a valuable activity for (Basic) Researchers
- Structural barriers on superordinate level
- ➔ Potential is not exploited
- ➔ Recommendation for activities





Knowledge Transfer Activities

Scientists carry out knowledge transfer within the setting of the non-university research institutes.

transfer-based research services

- collaborative research projects with practitioners

consulting services

- official positions on advisory boards and commissions; consulting projects, expert advice, reports

information services

- infrastructure services, setting up of databases

commercial activities

- spin-offs
- patents, licences

qualification services

- training, seminars for practitioners
- human resources development

networking services

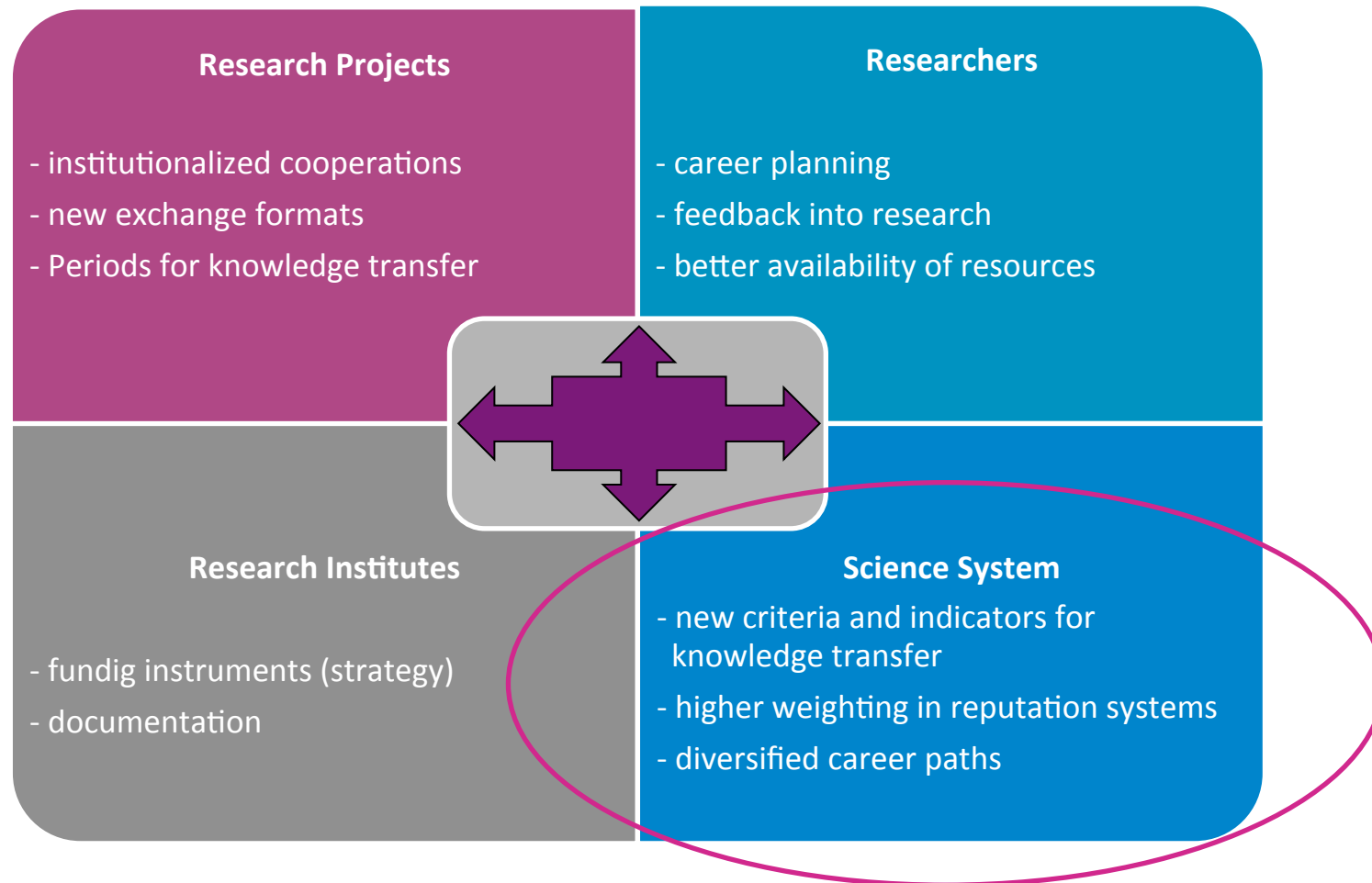
- Establishment and maintenance of networks
- exchange programs

services for the public

- newspaper articles, radio interviews
- events, exhibitions



Key recommendations for action





A first Resumée

Indicators for knowledge transfer in institutional evaluations of universities and research institutes?

What are valid indicators for knowledge transfer (i.e. societal relevance)?

Qualitative description of successful knowledge transfer in the society

A new hierarchy of indicators or a „democratization“ of indicators?

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Thank you very much for your attention!



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