

Abstract for the STS Conference Graz 2015

Theme: Responsible Research and Innovation Studies

SESSION 7:

Does Quality Count? On the Role of Metrics in Academic Accountability Politics

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Title:

Metrics as infrastructures for a marketization of research

On the epistemic and social consequences of the accumulation of evaluative worth in contemporary academia

The metric assemblages that pervade contemporary academic life are part and parcel of a new governance regime. The re-structuring of academic institutions and with it academic career structures along the logics of the new public management has been argued to be part of a wider neoliberal agenda which imprints the cultural form of the market as a template for the activities of ever more societal domains. If that is the case, then through the eyes of recent STS studies on markets and economization, metrics and their institutional uptake are a key infrastructure governing the conduct of researchers as actors on this market. In this, metrics do not only enact excellence, reputation and impact, but beyond that also become a symbolically generalized medium for expressing worth. If we ask what this development may mean for the social and epistemic development of science, as well as for its capacity to act responsibly, then we need to interrogate how this new register for creating and attributing worth relates to other ways of asserting worth in doing research.

My paper will sketch this perspective and illustrate it with examples drawn from fieldwork in the Austrian academic life sciences.