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## Science audited: Indicator-based systems for research evaluation and resource allocation

Åström, Fredrik

2018

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Åström, F. (2018). *Science audited: Indicator-based systems for research evaluation and resource allocation*. Paper presented at Scientific Communication and Gatekeeping in Academia in the 21st Century, Uppsala, Sweden.

*Total number of authors:*

1

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00



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# Science audited: Indicator-based systems for research evaluation and resource allocation

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FREDRIK ÅSTRÖM



# The Project

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- Evaluation and governance of the public sector (Riksbankens jubileumsfond, The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences)
- PIs: Fredrik Åström & Björn Hammarfelt
- Evaluation practices
  - Systems and indicators
  - Stakeholders
  - Infrastructures
- Effects on research
  - Adaption strategies: entering the evaluation discourse
    - » Publication behavior
    - » Selection of projects
    - » Using indicators



# Performance-based Research Funding Systems at Swedish Universities (Hammarfelt et.al. 2016)

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- Background: national PRFS since 2009
- Local use of PRFS at 26 Swedish HEIs
  - Great variations in terms of:
    - » Levels: individual, department, faculty
    - » Indicators: publication based, citation based
  - Poorly documented
  - Seldom evaluated
  - Loose connection to organizational goals

# (Metrics based) Evaluation in Peer Review

## (Hammarfelt & Rushforth 2017; Hammarfelt 2017)

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- External evaluations of candidates for academic positions in
  - Biomedicine
  - Economics
  - History
- Use of bibliometric indicators
  - Indicators as judgement devices
  - 'Citizen bibliometrics'
    - » Variation in-between fields
    - » Negotiating a variety of indicators, related to field practices and norms
- The valuation of publications in evaluating careers
  - Authorship
  - Publication prestige
  - Temporality of research
  - Reputation in the field
  - Boundary keeping



# Effects on Research Practices and Disciplinary Norms (Hammarfelt & Haddow in press)

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- Questionnaire on metrics use and publication practices among Australian and Swedish humanities scholars
  - Use of various indicators and rankings
    - » In AUS 62 % of scholars, in SWE 14 %
    - » In institutional policies, in CVs and applications, for general promotion of their work
  - Critical, but feeling pressure to adapt
  - Tension between disciplinary quality criteria and formalized indicators



# Effects on Research Practices and Disciplinary Norms, pt 2 (Nästesjö 2017)

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- Bibliometric study of, and interviews with, humanities scholars at Lund University
  - No radical shift in publication practices
  - Disciplinary differences, career stage & 'academic age'
  - Humanities scholars increasingly adapting to dominant trends in academia and research evaluation
  - Part of a re-negotiation of disciplinary norms and quality criteria

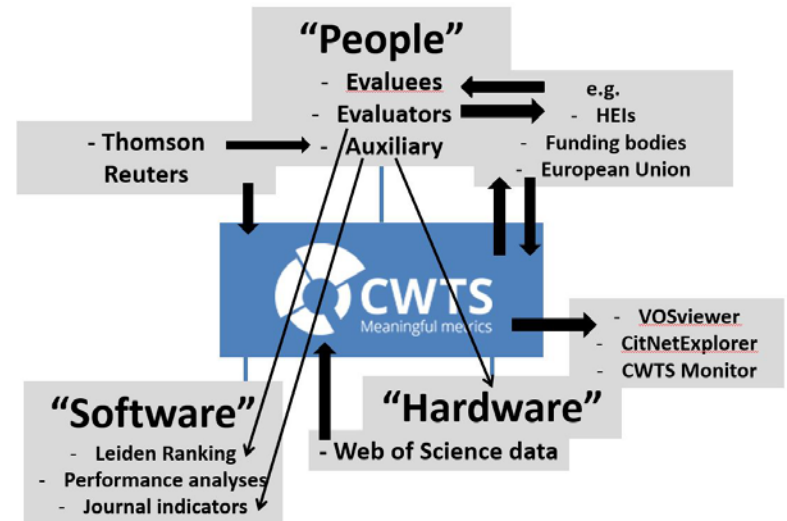
# Problematizing Research Evaluation Practices

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Infrastructures (Åström 2016)

“a number of possible distributions of tasks and properties between hardware, software and people” (Star & Bowker, 2006, p. 232).

- Interacting systems and structures
- The stakeholders
- Problematizing a distinction between evaluatees, evaluators and auxiliary stakeholders





# Problematizing Research Evaluation Practices, pt 2

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- The indicators
  - Organizational vs disciplinary evaluation
  - In relation to organizational practices and goals, e.g.
    - » The purpose of evaluation
    - » Documentation and 'quality control'
  - The competencies of the commissioning authority
  - A sense of what the indicators signify for the commissioning authority
  - Evaluation criteria vs incentive structures
- Scholarly Publishing: Communication vs Academic merit and reward

# Problematizing Research Evaluation Practices, pt 3

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- 'The metric culture'
  - Evaluation criteria and the shaping of disciplines: the interplay between research practices and the creation of evaluation practices
  - (Quantitative) Evaluation criteria coming:
    - » Out of external evaluation practices (e.g. national PRFS)?
    - » Out of changing practices in fields/disciplines, assuming the necessity of adaption
  - » The “Tension between disciplinary quality criteria and formalized indicators”  
vs  
“a re-negotiation of disciplinary norms and quality criteria”



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