

Sivertsen, G. (2018). An attempt to create an indicator for performance-based funding of artistic research in Norway. In Ysebaert, W., van Kerckhoven, B. (Eds.), *Evaluating art and design research. Reflections, evaluation practices and research presentations* (pp. 74-78). Brussel: VUB Press.

An attempt to create an indicator for performance-based funding of arts research in Norway

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This article gives a short account of an unsuccessful attempt in Norway in 2006 to create an indicator for performance-based funding of arts research. A committee representing rectors, deans and professors of the main Norwegian institutions for higher education in music, visual arts, performing arts, architecture, and design, tried seriously to create such an indicator, but concluded that it was not feasible. In the following, I will present the background for their attempt, the questions they raised, the answers they gave, and the consequences of their conclusions up to now.

Background: Performance-based funding of higher education institutions

In 2003, Norway introduced a performance based funding model for the Higher Education Sector (Hicks, 2012). The model is similar to the so-called BOF-key, which Flanders introduced at the same time for the Flemish universities in Belgium (Debackere & Glänzel, 2004). While Flanders made use of data from *ISI Web of Science* to measure research activity and impact for the funding model, Norway hesitated to do so because of the limitations of this specific data source with regard to the coverage of scholarly publications from the social sciences and humanities. Instead, a weighted publication indicator based on data representing peer-reviewed publications as listed in *institutional information systems* was introduced in 2005 (Sivertsen, 2010). Four years later, inspired by this solution in Norway, Flanders extended the data sources for the BOF-key by establishing the Flemish Academic Bibliographic Database for the Social Sciences and Humanities (VABB-SHW) as a supplement to data from ISI Web of Science (Engels et al., 2009).

Neither of these solutions take into account that artistic research is usually not presented in peer-reviewed publications (Lesage, 2009). This problem became urgent right from the start in Norway, since the performance-based funding model was implemented not only for the universities, but also for all types of smaller higher education institutions, including those specialized in the arts (e.g. the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo; The Academy of Arts and Design in Bergen). Recognizing the problem, the government decided not to use *research indicators* as part of the performance-based funding model for the specialised institutions in arts education. Consequently, only the *educational* activities were measured for the funding model. Nevertheless, this solution was unsatisfactory, not only for institutions specialized in the arts, but also for the other institutions. The specialized institutions wanted their artistic research activity, not only their educational activities, to be recognized in the funding model as well. The other institutions, on the other hand, included both institutions without arts in their educational programme as well as those with arts, but only as a small part of a more general programme. For the latter category, a funding model without indicators for arts research was a disadvantage, also from an internal perspective.

As a response to these concerns, the Norwegian government asked the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR, a sister organization of the Flemish Interuniversity Council, VLIR) to set up a committee of experts to investigate whether it was feasible to establish indicators for

artistic research that could be used in the performance-based funding model. The committee was appointed early in 2006 with Professor Harald Jørgensen at the Norwegian Academy of Music as chair and with six other members representing all major forms of art at different institutions. As an expert on indicators representing research, I participated in the project as a consultant for the committee.

The committee was asked by the government to “see if it is possible and practical to develop performance-based indicators for artistic research”. It was required that “the indicators must be operational, clearly focused, relevant, valid, verifiable and comparable, and that they must stimulate the development of artistic research in a wanted direction”. If possible and practical, the committee was also asked to specify indicators that could be used for performance-based funding of artistic research at the level of institutions.

The report from the committee was published early in 2007 (Jørgensen et al., 2007). I will present the main topics of discussion briefly before I end by summing up the consequences of the report so far.

What is artistic research?

The committee started by defining artistic research:

“Artistic research are processes that lead to an artistic product which is made public. In these processes, there may also be an explicit reflection on the development and presentation of the art product.”

The term “made public” was explained as “made publicly available to peers and others”, while “product” defined as “a work or performance”.

It was not easy to agree on “explicit reflection” as a requirement in the definition. Some members argued that explicit reflection is necessary if a work or performance is to be considered as research. Others would rather see the work or performance as sufficient in itself as evidence of the research process. The chosen definition was a compromise between the two points of view. I will return to this key problem at the end of this article.

What is a wanted direction for artistic research?

As mentioned above, it was a requirement in the mandate of the committee that possible indicators should “stimulate the development of artistic research in a wanted direction”. The committee responded to this requirement by stating that artistic research “must contribute with new developments and perspectives in the field from the perspective of the institutions and their educations in the arts”, and that the products of artistic research “must also be legitimate and arouse interest externally”. In the end, “the quality must be up to the national and international standards of professional artistic work”.

Are metadata for artistic research available?

This question refers to the institutional information systems that were used by higher education institutions in Norway in 2006. The committee’s answer was that “the present categories in the Current Research Information System are too narrow”, and that the system “must be further developed in this respect, albeit it is hard to see how it can contain good metadata for the purpose of performance-based funding”. After 2006, all systems have been unified on a national level in the *Current Research Information System in Norway (CRISTin, www.cristin.no)*. This system now registers about 1,500 artistic works or performances annually in the higher education sector, but without the details and documentation that would be needed for performance-based funding.

Can products from artistic research be verified?

This question reflects the requirement in the mandate that the indicators should be verifiable. Yes, the committee answered, but with one important exception: “Performances and performance art are difficult to document and verify later on.”

Can the quality of products from artistic research be documented in peer-reviewed channels?

This question was relevant because the committee was seeking a parallel to the Norwegian publication indicator, where peer-review is a requirement in the definition of scholarly publications (just as in Flanders). As mentioned above, the committee discussed possible indicators that would advance artistic research not only from the point of view of the individual artist, but also “from the perspective of the institutions and their educations in the arts”. Moreover, “the quality must be up to the national and international standards of professional artistic work”. Hence, the question about peer-reviewed channels was relevant.

The committee observed that “most works and performances are not peer reviewed before or after they are made public”. Nevertheless, “channels and arenas for explicit and publicly available quality assessment of works and performances do indeed exist, but they cover the various forms of arts and their expressions so narrowly that they cannot be the basis for indicators in the context of performance-based funding”.

An alternative solution would be a positive answer to the next question:

Can the quality of products from artistic research at the institutions be peer reviewed by expert panels?

This is a possibility, the committee said, however, “the costs and time consumed by making the institutions document and present their artistic research and have it evaluated regularly by expert panels would not be legitimate in view of the limited usefulness and effects of such a procedure”.

Can artistic research be measured in a comparable way across all forms and expressions of art?

This would be a necessary requirement if information about artistic research should be counted and weighted into a performance indicator. The final judgment of the committee was that “Even if the answer to all the other questions above were positive, comparable measurement would still not be feasible.”

Alternative solutions

Consequently, the conclusion was that performance-based indicators for artistic research products are not feasible. Instead, the committee suggested two other types of indicators that could be used for performance-based funding of institutions with artistic research:

- Number of candidates that finished the Fellowship Programme for Artistic Research
- The institution’s share of external funding from competitive national grants for artistic research (yet to be established, recommended)

Later consequences of the failing attempt

The Norwegian government decided not to introduce performance indicators for institutional funding of artistic research. Instead, what is now called the *Norwegian Artistic Research Programme* was expanded as a direct source of funding (similar to research councils and foundations) of artistic research at higher education institutions. The programme both has a *Fellowship Programme*

(mentioned in the recommendations above), which is directed at students as a parallel to doctoral fellowships, and a new *Project Programme*, which is directed at the teachers and professors at the institutions. The programme has a Steering Committee that is appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research. It has an overall national responsibility for stimulating artistic research in Norway.

Even if the attempt to create performance indicators for artistic research failed in 2006, the committee's report was not without impact. The influence can be seen the new regulations of the programme as of 2010 of the *Norwegian Artistic Research Programme*. Here is a citation showing the influence of the committee's definition of artistic research and their discussion of "explicit reflection":

"One important challenge within these educational environments is to develop critical reflection and to formulate it in ways which can be understood beyond internal professional circles, and thereby stimulate debate."

Here is another citation demonstrating that the "institutional perspective" became influential:

"Individuals and environments produce artistic research. However, institutions add an institutional perspective by considering artistic research more than the sum of a series of individual works or performances. Educational programmes need to be based on artistic research in a way which is similar to research based education at other institutions of higher education."

Conclusion

Finally, looking back at further developments in this field since 2006, it is amazing to observe the development of new online peer-reviewed publication channels for artistic research (Amez, 2012). These new channels did not exist at the time when the Jørgensen committee took on its difficult task in Norway, but they do indeed respond quite positively to several of the questions that the committee had to answer negatively. One of them is *Journal for Artistic Research*; another is *Art & Research – A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*. A third example appeared recently in Scandinavia: *InFormation - Nordic Journal of Art and Research*. Probably, the questions discussed in this article have not found their final answer.

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