Research impacts and disciplinary diversity

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Structure

- Impacts in different groups of disciplines – commonalities and differences
  - Evidence from interview research
  - Evidence from REF case studies

  1. Conceptions of impact
  2. Generating impacts
  3. Narrating and evidencing impacts

- Frameworks for deciding indicators
  1. Vulnerabilities
  2. Dimensions
  3. 'Toolboxes'

Note: You are welcome to cite/ use the information on these slides, but please refer to the sources provided on each slide.

Impacts in different groups of disciplines

Conceptions of impact

Impact in REF 2014: all subjects (6975 CSs)

- Types of impact varied **with disciplines** (e.g. Panel A clinical guidance 19%, Panel D media 26%), but pathways diverse in all (3709 pathways)
  - **Largest** - public policy and parliamentary debate impacts
  - **Small** % of commercial activity (5% CS spin outs, 9% patents, 10% licenses)
  - **PER** c6% CSs - Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh / Panel D
- **Stakeholders**:
  - Panel A – patients, NHS, clinicians;
  - Panel B: companies, manufacturers, engineers;
  - Panel C: children, communities, governments, workers, banks, unions;
  - Panel D: students, schools, teachers, museums, curators, writers, journalists

  (King's College, 2015)

Impact narratives: medical and health sciences

- **Key distinction**: basic/ translational research
- **Anchor**: improved patient care and health outcomes
- knowledge transfer and collaboration with industry
- public engagement with science and research

"I sit as a trustee of probably up to 12 charities, most of which have something to do with medical research. I think that sort of contribution is at least as important as contributions made to government activities. [However] I think it would be intolerable to have to keep a detailed account of all such activities and how would they be ranked relative to each other." and *"would indeed be inhibiting of such activity"*

"impact assessment needs to consider carefully the various stages of translational research so as to award credit correctly to those who have devised and brought to clinical evaluation new interventions, rather than giving disproportionate credit to those who undertake late stage evaluation of technologies invented by others."

Medical schools

- **Outcome-based** indicators and **translational research**
- **Social accountability** strategies (Awases et al, 2010; Woolard and Boelen 2012)

> "the obligation to direct their education, research and service activities towards addressing the priority health concerns of the community, region, and/or nation they have the mandate to serve. The priority health concerns are to be identified jointly by governments, health care organisations, health professionals and the public"   (WHO 1995)

Impact narratives: sciences

- **Key distinction**: applied/ non-applied
- **Anchor**: contributions to a) solving problems; b) the general stock of disciplinary and generic knowledge
- Commercial and technological advancement
- Communicating passion
- Transferring methods and techniques

In [this field of] *research there is NO immediate commercial impact. But we don't have the luxury of astronomy or astronomers, where they can make ANY picture of the galaxy look quite fascinating. There's always the public interest, right? So this is how we fall between the two extremes: the attraction of science for science's sake, and commercialisation.* (earth science interview).

Social sciences

- **Key distinction**: types and modes of research

- **Anchor**: societal relevance

- Inter- and multi-disciplinarity

- Policy influence, service uptake, educational engagement, methodological transfer, public influence, visibility

- User engagement and co-construction.

Forget the new buzz-word about impact – *if you were talking to me a decade, or even two decades ago, I would have said the most important thing for my research is, does it have an impact on policy, which in turn has an impact on people, or on the well-being of people. That's what my research is about.* (social sciences interview)

Professional schools

- Nexus teaching-research
- Innovation, professional education and entrepreneurship (vs consultancy and commercialisation)
- Infrastructure for KE and network-building
- 'Porous boundaries' (Pettigrew, 2001)

Repositioning in HEIs?

Impact narratives: arts and humanities

- **Key distinction**: disciplinary traditions

- **Anchor**: cultural value and public engagement

- Outreach, educational value, recreational and commercial value, Collective processes

- Creative practice

It's not really the impact of one individual; it's the impact of the whole field, and hundreds and hundreds of people, from all different parts of the world, working on this problem. (humanities interview)

Cultural value debates

- Instrumental vs intrinsic value

- Intelligent accountability vs politics of metrics

- Measurable vs. 'ineffable'

- Monetisation vs aestheticisation

- 'High' vs 'low' culture, elite vs mass

- Positive vs 'negative' impacts

- Analogue vs digital

- contested concepts -
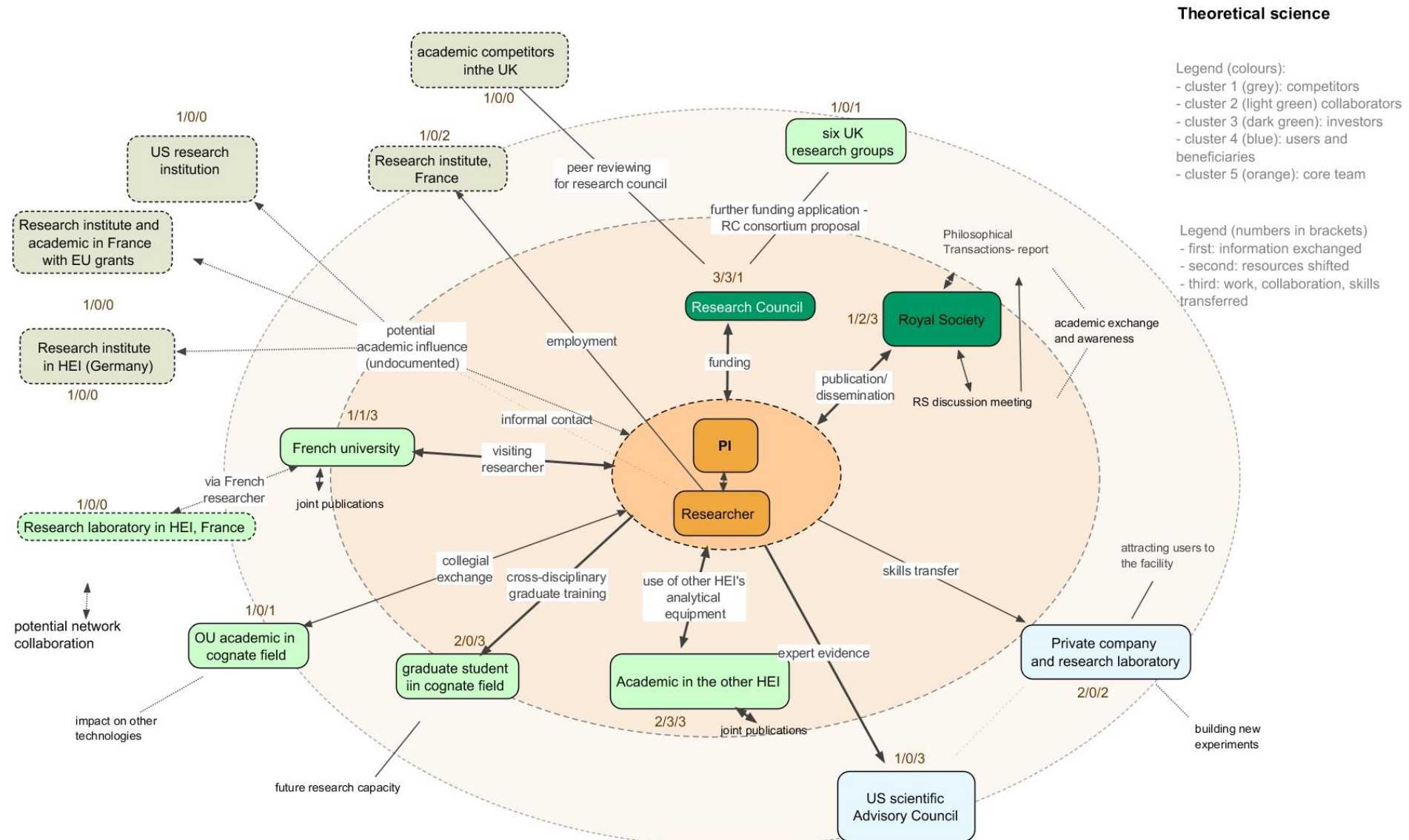
Impacts in different groups of disciplines

Generating impact

The relational spaces for impact in different disciplines
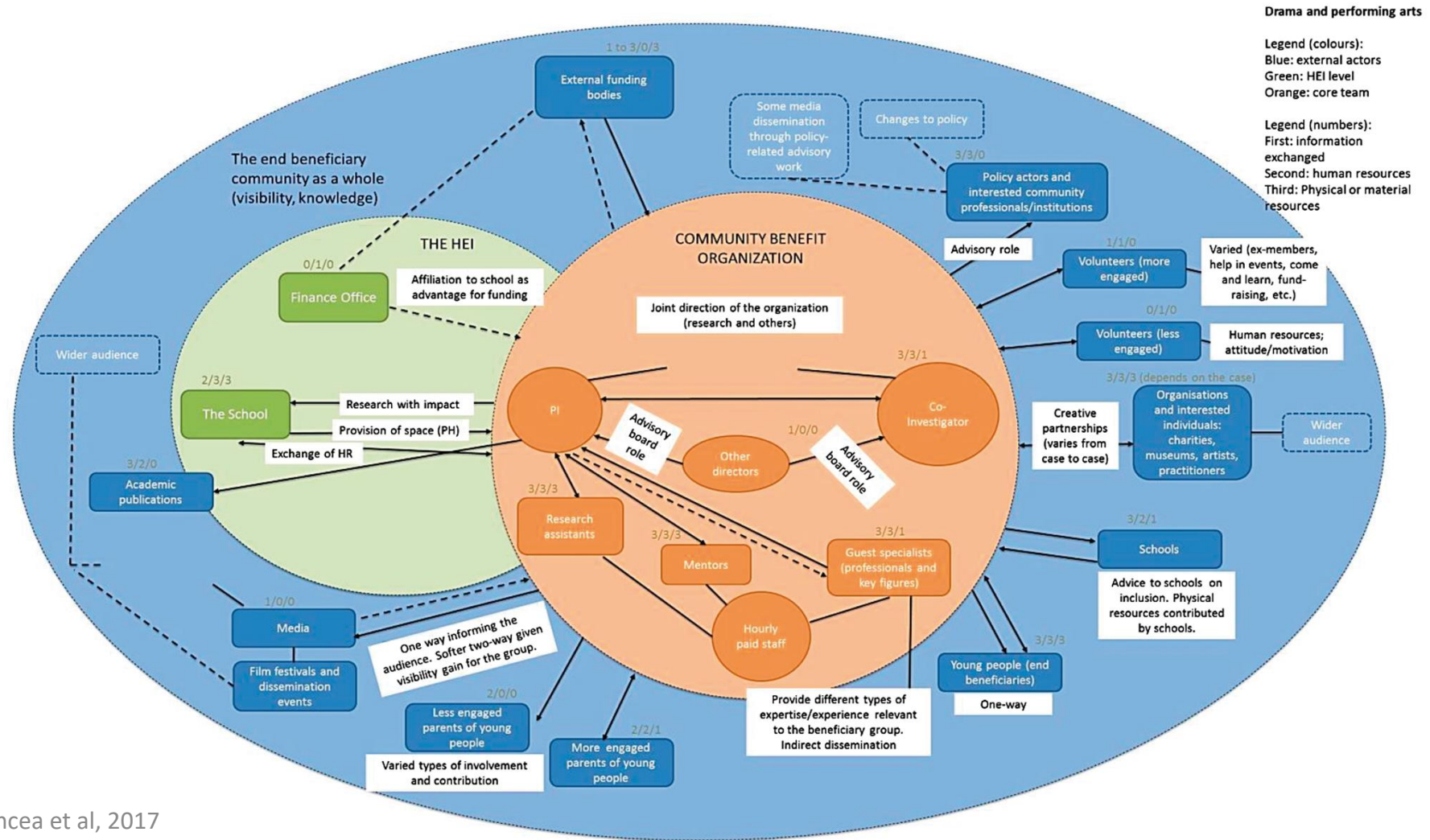
Qualitative network analysis

- Nodes

- Relationships: direct/ indirect

- Flows:
  - -direction: univocal; reciprocal; undetermined
  - -content: information, human resources, physical resources
  - -intensity: weak; moderate; strong; negative

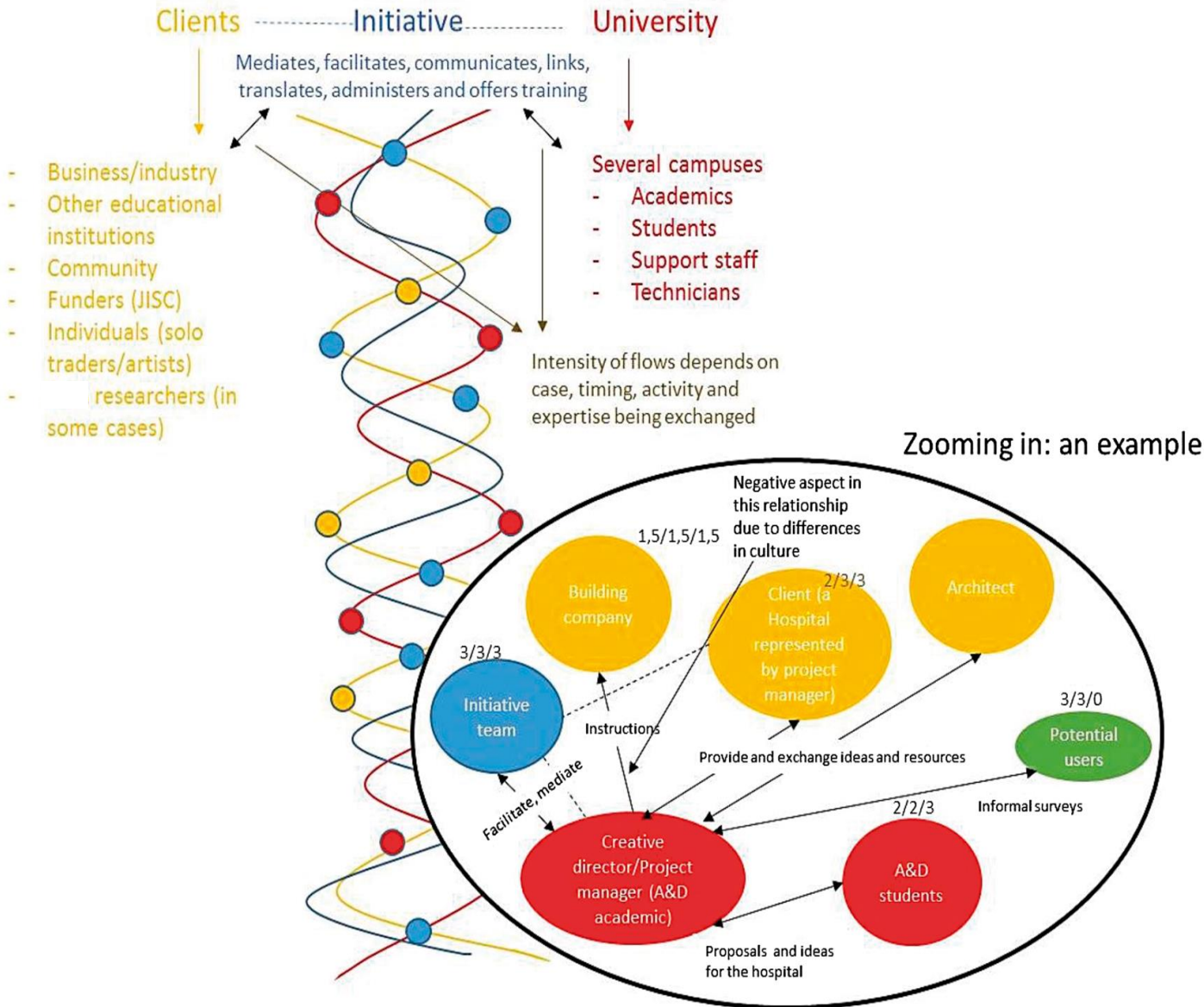# Externally funded research project (earth science)

(c) Alis Oancea, 2011

User-commissioned research project (geography)

Community- led project (performing arts)

(c) Oancea et al, 2017

Enterprise unit

Impacts in different groups of disciplines

Narrating and evidencing impact

Type of corroboration source (in n=250+ CSs)
Testimonials
Print and broadcast media
Digital and social media
International organisations and supranational agencies documentation
Independent academic and professional publication
Professional bodies and societies documents
Other UK national public bodies incl. RCUK
Industry documents and publications
UK national and local government documents
Third sector documents
Art and culture organisations publications
Foreign governments and bodies
Educational and training material
Parliamentary documents
Documents relating to spinouts
CS researcher-produced sources
Research websites
Award information
Web and altmetrics
Clinical trials
Court case reports
Other

Narrative construction of CS

- **Script types**
  - The money stories: Business success
  - The urgency stories: Demand or need driven
  - The practical stories: Problem- solution
  - The common good stories: Public and cultural interest
  - The weight of knowledge stories: Accumulation of compelling evidence
  - The technological leap stories: Innovation (cutting edge)

Oancea and Djerasimovic, 2015

Narrative construction of CS

a) Climactic
b) Headline
c) Portfolio
d) Chronological

(Oancea and Djerasimovic, 2015)

- "We measured [impact] according to the criteria by counting the reviews, itemising all the different stakeholders, showing how it had informed lots of television programmes and showing that it had actually influenced [...] policy"

- "But we have to just be careful that we don't then become prisoners of those metrics."

<div align="right">(principal investigator)</div>

A different vocabulary?

- **Bridging cultural divides**
- **Creative and connected learning**
- **Transformative experience leading to changes in behaviour**
- **Working in conditions of risk, doubt and uncertainty**
- **Culturally enhanced understanding and practical wisdom**
- **Experimentation and innovation**
- **Reframing value**
- **Impetus for disciplinary maturation**

UNDERSTANDING

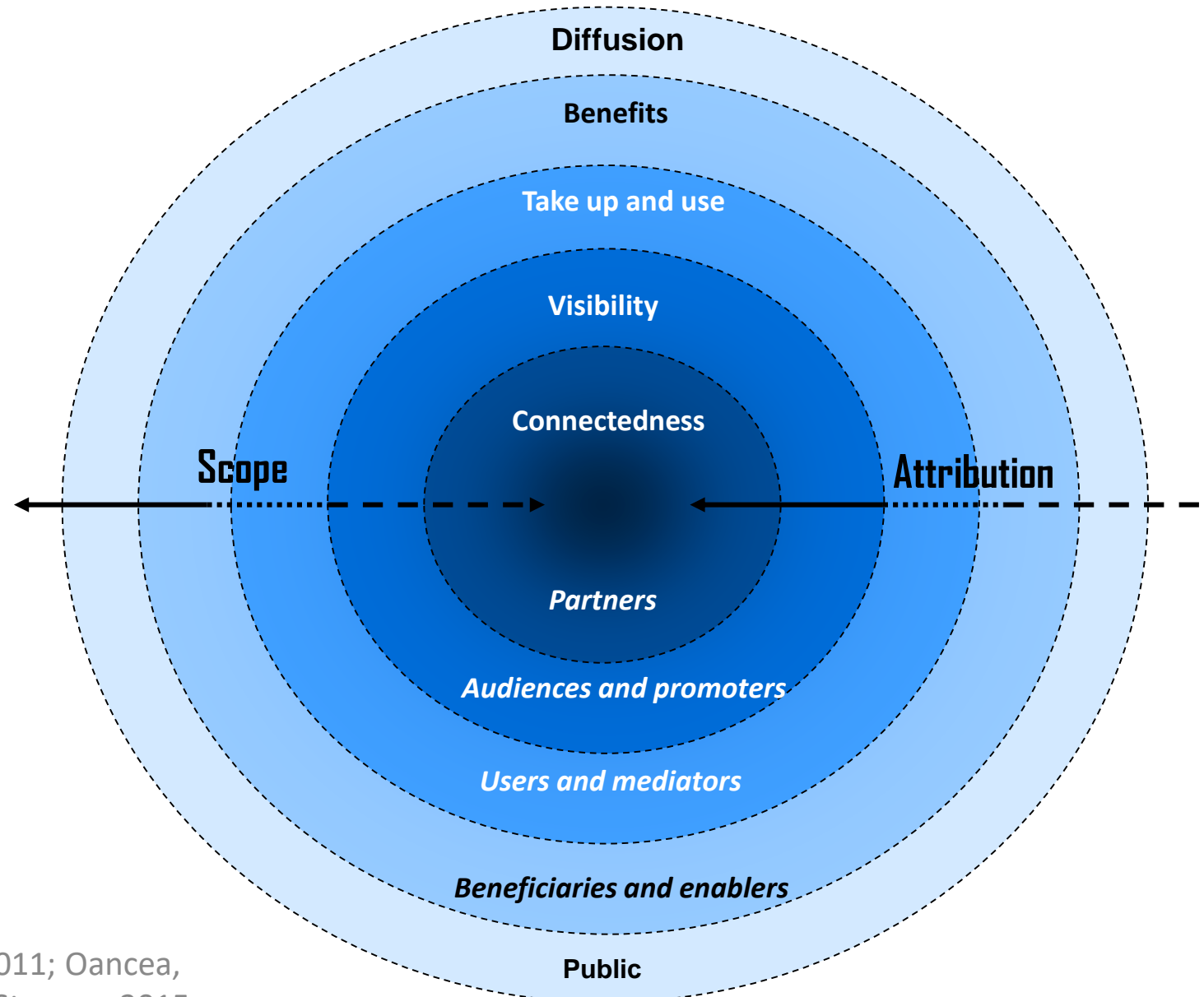**Personal and interactional enrichment and transformation**: personal growth and well-being - being and becoming human; self knowledge and expression; depth of thinking and "widening of intellectual horizons"; release, coping, healing and exhilaration; enjoyment and pleasure; making sense of human action and experience in different material, social and cultural environments

Engagement and criticality: aesthetic experiences, expression and appreciation; (cultural access), engagement, and participation; (cultural) rights, social change, voice and resistance; productive engagement with cultural industries; making marginalised or silenced identities visible and vocal; motivating dialogue and understanding of difference

Connectedness and rootedness: (social and cultural) interpretation, understanding and empathy; social cohesion, sense of connection, belonging and security; sustaining the links with the past and with place; appreciation of cultural identities; recovering past or marginalised material and historical value

(c) Oancea, Florez and Atkinson, 2018

A textured concept of (pathways to) impact

(c) Alis Oancea, 2011; Oancea, Djerasimovic and Stamou, 2015

Frameworks for impact

Indicators and governance

Meanings	Stable & measurable attributes	⟷	Negotiated public judgement
Methods	Design and test metrics	⟷	Critical deliberation
Role	Technical	⟷	Developmental

(c) Alis Oancea 2014, 2019

Risks and caveats of impact metrics

- *Instrumentalism*: means-ends separation - commodification of value

- *Simplification*: downplaying conceptual complexity and practical serendipity

- *Homogeneisation*: glossing over diversity (disciplines, modes of inquiry)

- *Opacity*: obscuring power relations

- *Short-termism*: unable to capture "sea-change" nature of e.g. cultural shifts

- *Too exclusive*: narrowing of scope for the sake of definitional boundaries

- *Too inclusive*: broad to the point of being "virtually meaningless"

- *Residual*: what's left after accounting for more defined forms of value

- '*Macrotising*': artificial aggregation of surface/ non-standardised metrics

- *Undevelopment* : weak conceptual network ("contribution", "impact")

- *Obsolescence*: through association with particular performance regimes

- *Validity and reliability issues*: proxy indicators

Vulnerabilities in organisations

- overly tight division of labour;

- expansion of parallel functions;

- division academic/professional;

- micro-management;

- misrecognition of impact and impactful work;

- lop-sided 'partnerships' and resource grabbing;

- attitudinal problems - institutionalised condescension, conceit, attention seeking, boastfulness...?

Framework for decisions in institutions

Think about:

- Goal of monitoring/evaluation

- Mission of research

- Level of assessment

- Disciplinary structures, epistemic cultures and research approaches

- Stakeholders, audiences and beneficiaries

- Research environment

Adapted from framework for open science engagement - Wouters, Rafols, Oancea et al (2019)

Toolboxes

Develop:

- Capabilities

- Infrastructures

- Exemplars (investments, practices)

- Responsible reward and incentive systems

Adapted from Wouters, Rafols, Oancea et al (2019)

These slides draw on work published as:

Oancea, A. (2019) Research governance and the future of research assessment. *Palgrave Communications*, 5 (27). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0213-6

Wouters, P., Ràfols, I., Oancea, A., Kamerlin, L., Holbrook, J. and Jacob, M. (2019) *Indicator Frameworks for Fostering Open Knowledge Practices in Science and Scholarship.* Expert report, European Commission.

Oancea, A, Florez-Petour, T, Atkinson, J (2018) "The ecologies and economy of cultural value from research", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1128418

Oancea, A, Petour, TF, Atkinson, J (2017) "Qualitative network analysis tools for the configurative articulation of cultural value and impact from research", *Research Evaluation*. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/reseval/rvx014

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