

Capacities and Societal Impact: The Case of Humanities

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UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

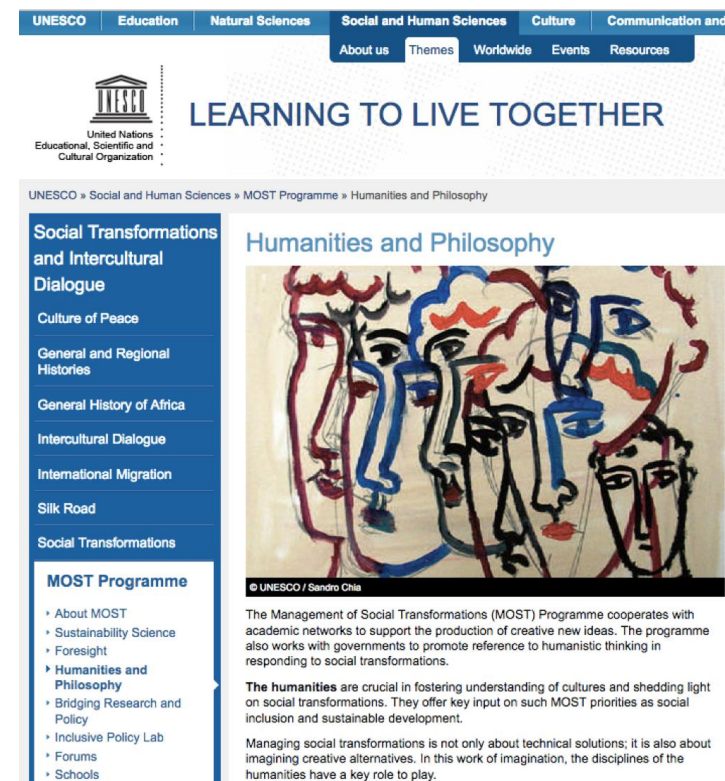
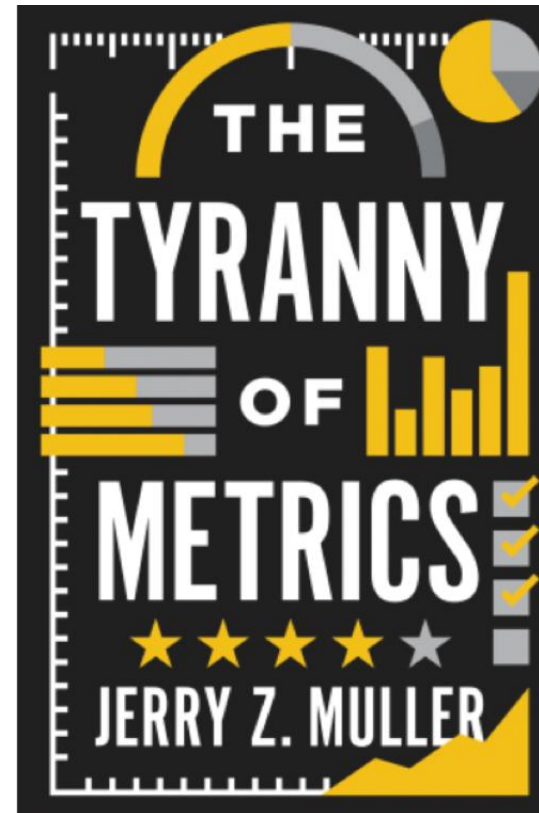


Presentation

1. Societal Impact: The Challenge
2. Tools for Understanding
3. Cases studies: University of Iceland
4. Representative Cases
5. Results and Further Questions

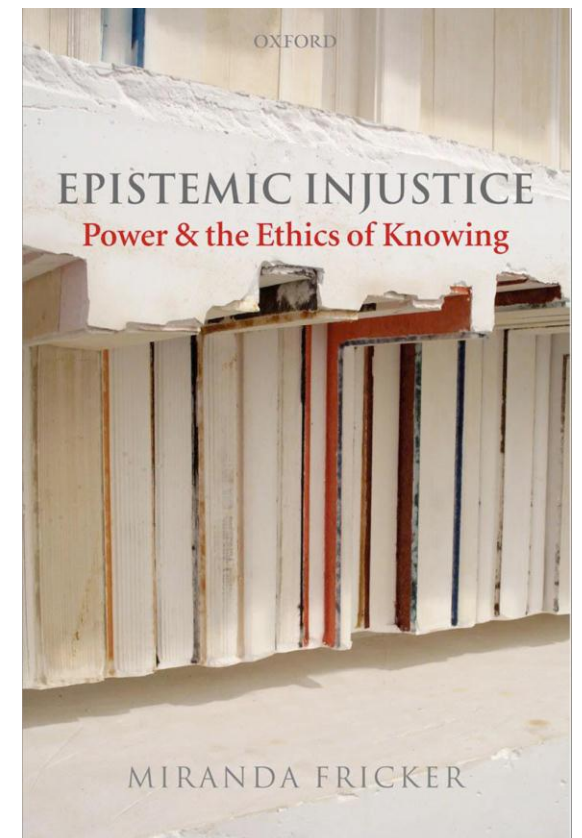
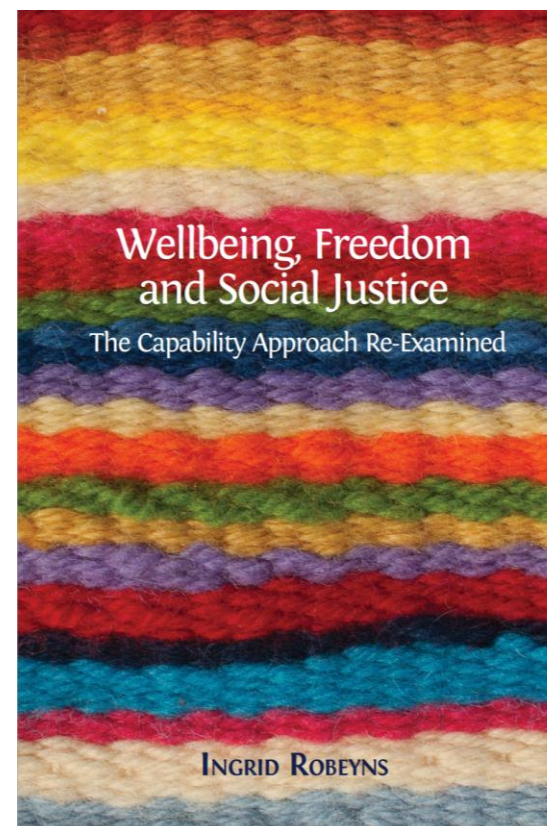
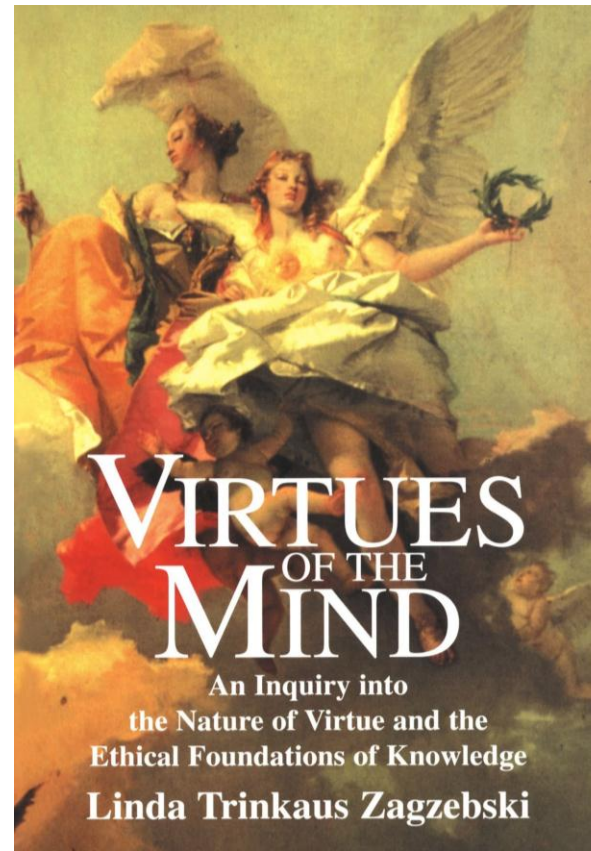
Societal Impact: The Challenge

- Understanding the transformative nature of Humanities *independently* from how it is measured.
- Claiming a place for the Humanities *within* the “production boundary” of science.
- Being unafraid to look at major challenges facing humanity from within the Humanities and seeing the *actual* contribution they make.



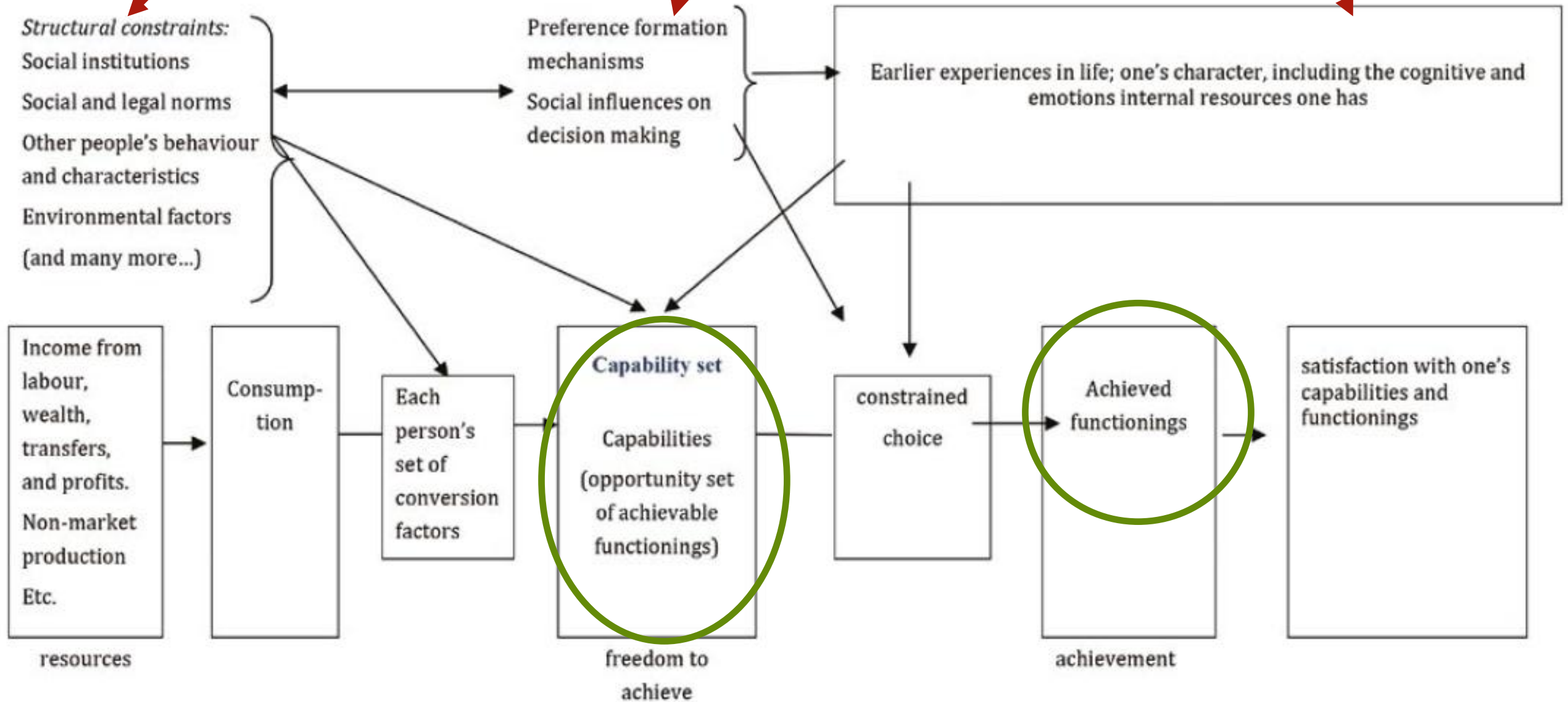
Tools for Understanding

- Translating impact in terms of societal change and positive impact in terms of increased capacities.
- Virtue Epistemology:
 - Development of stable character traits to increase and secure knowledge.
 - Focus on epistemic justice, i.e. *hermeneutical* and *testimonial* justice.
- The Capability Approach:
 - Real freedoms - both as *capabilities* and *functionings*; or, the *freedom to achieve* and *achievement*.



Potential and actual impact of research

Figure 2.1 A stylised visualisation of the core concepts of capability theories



Source: Based on Robeyns (2005b), updated and expanded.

Research Questions and Approach

- How does research in the Humanities change society?
- How do researchers in the Humanities understand “societal impact”?
- Ten interviews within the School of Humanities, University of Iceland (May-June 2018).
- One hour, semi-structured, open questions.
 - On the research, motivation, collaboration, impact.

Some Results

- Main impact is through teaching by changing perceptions and introducing questions.
- The concept of impact - particularly societal impact - was relatively unfamiliar. The question rarely asked.
- The local aspect of the Humanities (or "social embeddedness") apparent in discussions about motives and initiative for the research.



Value of a Language



Icelandic linguistics

Research question: What impact does English online and in smart devices have on the Icelandic language?

Impact points: Icelandic society, political and cultural institutions, technological industry/programming

Impacting, i.e. increased capability: the view towards a language as a valuable part of creating and communicating our worldviews and ideas

Transformation, i.e. realized functioning: the research provides an informative ground to discuss the state and value of the Icelandic language

Creating a Society



Archaeology

Research question: How was society in Iceland established?

Impact points: local, rural communities and Icelandic society in general

Impacting, i.e. increased capability: the view towards the societies ability to change and their sense of responsibility towards the characteristics of their own culture

Transformation, i.e. realized functioning: the research provides the notion of the possibility of change

The “Monster” in Medieval Culture



Medieval literature

Research question: How does the idea of a “monster” impact our view towards disabled people?

Impact points: distinguished group within society, disabled people and their families, social and legal norms, political institutions

Impacting, i.e. increased capability: the view towards norms and abnormality in relation to health and quality of life

Transformation, i.e. realized functioning: the research provides an informative ground for a dialogue about norms and prejudices towards disabled people

Motivation

“It is not promising for Icelandic if attitudes towards Icelandic are negative among the young but positive towards English.”

Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir, PI

Objectives

“... all societies must be conscious of themselves and this consciousness is reflected in peoples’ ideas about their past.

When you ask someone, how would you describe us, Icelanders, she immediately refers to history. It is a large part of it [what it means to be an Icelander], and I would say that our role, as scientists working in this field, is to maintain these ideas and prevent them from becoming outdated or irrelevant.”

Orri Vésteinsson, PI

Interdisciplinary

“I see this in disability studies, which I am indirectly involved with through a research project, that we have great impact on each other. Just this mentality – as a matter of fact I have approached disability like the supernatural.”

Ármann Jakobsson, PI

Conclusions and Further Research

- Empowerment through research is a common theme. Can be reflected in capabilities and functioning's.
- Both testimonial and hermeneutical justice apparent.
- *Direct impact* on specific groups or *indirect impact* through better conceptual resources or new questions.
- Extra measures for impact rarely taken; part of “normal” research.
- Is (e-)valuation on this basis possible?

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 - University of Iceland funded research project: *A Virtue Model of Impact*.
 - And:
 - The COST network ENRESSH (CA15137)
 - Participants:
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