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Scholarly Communication Research Group

The Evaluation Game: Why the Context of Implementation of Research Evaluation Systems Matters

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Aim of my talk

My goal is to demonstrate how the use of metrics in academia **contributes to publication pressure** and drives scholars to publish their results in a way that allows them to maintain their jobs and positions.





Why a new concept?

In exploring the **response of CEE scholars to metrics**, I identified a significant gap in the current theoretical models: they lacked an account of **how the region's historical and cultural heritage shaped a collective approach to metrics**.

**Two driving forces of
academia**

Emily

Published several articles
between 2013 and 2015

During this time she moved
from the University of
Strasbourg to
the University of Cambridge



- ▶ Emily existed only as a false identity of a Czech professor to give publications a more attractive “look” through prestigious affiliations.
- ▶ She was quite "successful," having co-authored several publications in journals.
- ▶ Emily’s creator published and co-edited 17 monographs and more than 60 journal articles in just three years.
- ▶ The creator of Emily published some papers with superiors who were also subjected to the same publication pressure.



19 minutes before midnight
October 21, 2014.

Senior members of a medical
faculty of Imperial College
London received
an email



”

If anyone is interested how Professors are treated at Imperial College: Here is my story.

Prof. Stefan Grimm



- ▶ The e-mail was set to be sent a month earlier. This was how Stefan Grimm planned to inform his colleagues of the reasons for his decision.
- ▶ Professor Grimm was found dead on September 25, 2014 after being told he was "struggling to fulfill the metrics."
- ▶ Before his death, Grimm was told that his grants had ended and he had not obtained new ones.
- ▶ He learned that he had to generate £200,000 a year. However, this requirement was not part of his contract.



**Two driving forces which enable
the emergence of (metrics-based) research evaluation systems**



Metricization



Economization

Metricization

Reducing every aspect of
academic activity to metrics
and reducing all scholarly activity
to publication output

76

74

72

7M

68

66

64

62

60

58

56

54

52



Economization

Focus on using funds for science to boost the economy, while ensuring accountability of the science sector comparable to other market sectors



**Metrics-based research
evaluation
is not a new solution!**

National research evaluation (and management) system

- In the 1720s, Peter the Great started work on the Russian Empire's document management system which was supposed to support the development of the economy and culture.
- This system became the prototype for other systems regulating the activities of contemporary offices in terms of organization and methods.



National research evaluation (and monitoring) system

- In 1823-1833, the Russian Ministry of National Education sent all institutions the forms on which employees had to report their activities.
- The practices of compelling university professors to **produce a publication every year**, first enforced in the 1830s, continued through most of late imperial and Soviet history.
- In 1833, the ministry created its own scientific journal, in which each employee of a university „could” publish at least one scientific article.
- Authors had to describe *societal impact* (called „usefulness”) of their research at the start of their articles.
- Each university (and later, departments) began to publish its own journals to provide a publication channel where their employees could publish and meet the ministry’s expectations.

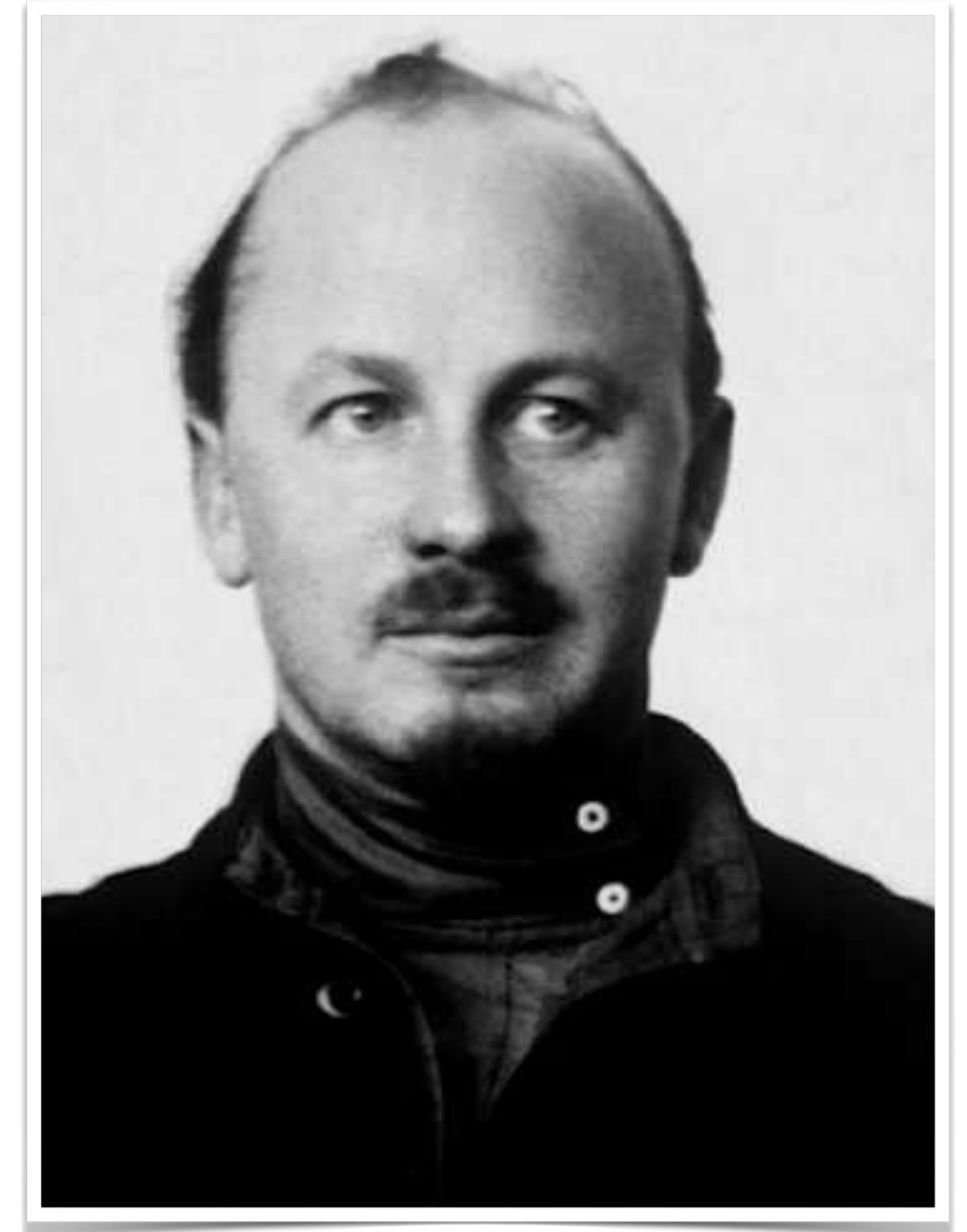


The uniform of the faculty of St. Petersburg University (1834)

Scientific Organization of Scientific Labor (NONT)

The origins of the Bolshevik's idea of science planning

- Founders of NONT believed that the productivity of research could be increased by **improving scientists' work methods and the material conditions of their labor.**
- Bolsheviks discussed indicators for determining scientists' effectiveness. In 1931, Bukharin during the *First All-Union Conference on the Planning of Scientific-Research Work* explained that the **publication lengths** is not a good criterion and why we need a system of complex indicators.
- (Central) planning of science at the national scale was directly connected with a national *ex-ante* research evaluation system: whether research is in-line with the **idea of the Soviet Man** and/or contribute to the **Soviet economy.**



Nikolai Bukharin

Research evaluation

- ▶ This history is still vivid in various practices in higher education and science sectors in Central & Eastern Europe.
- ▶ Evaluating research by counting publications has a 200-year history.
- ▶ Researchers have always found a way to play the evaluation game.
- ▶ When playing the game, researchers must balance ***institutional loyalty*** with ***disciplinary loyalty***.



How do researchers, institutions, and other stakeholders respond to metrics?

Following the metrics

Adjusting practices

Neglecting metrics

Gaming the metrics

Playing the evaluation
game

Difference between
gaming (evaluation regime)
and **playing the evaluation game**





Gaming

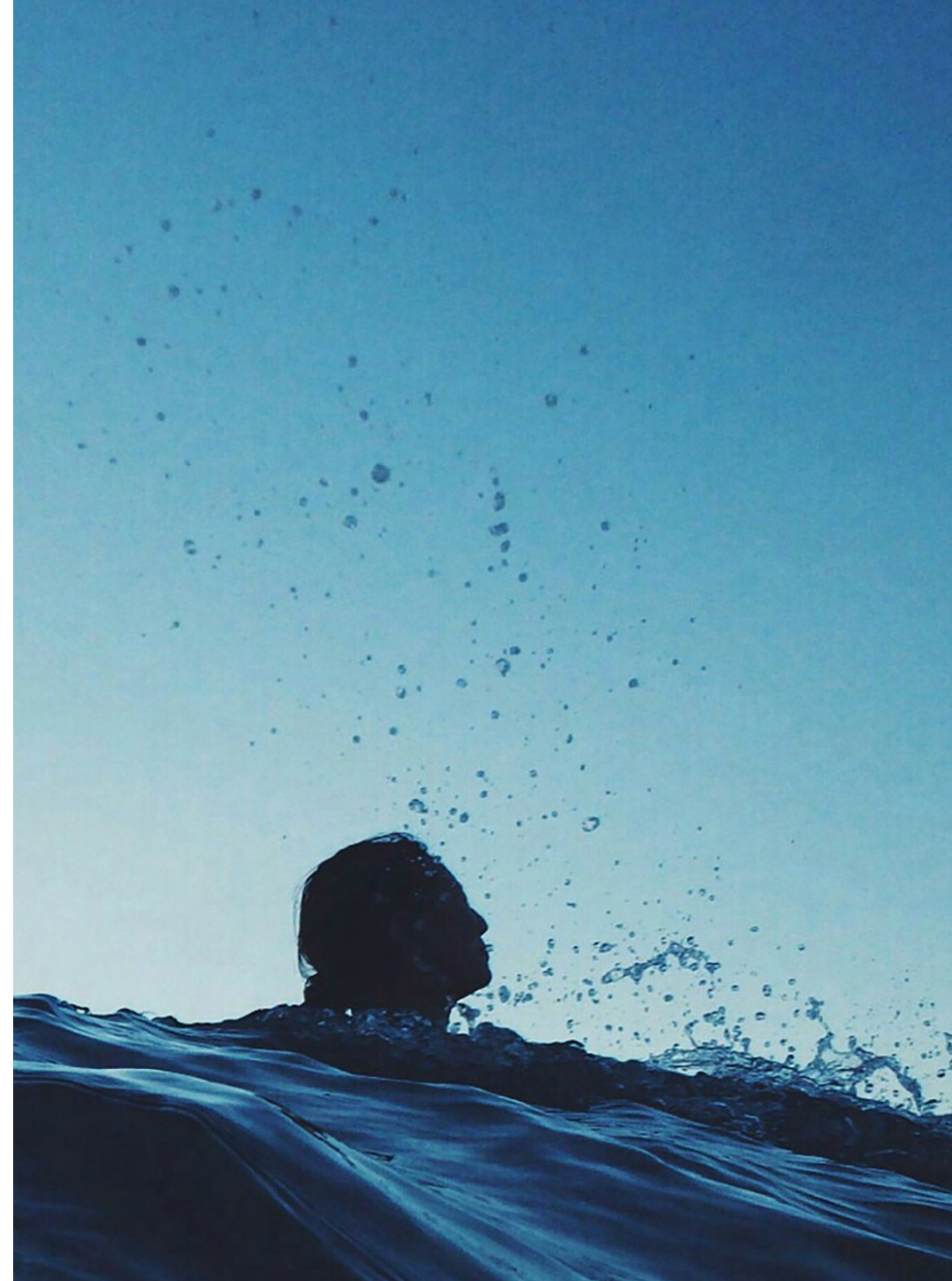
- ▶ It is a strategy to maximize profits which is fully in line with the rules but it is often combined with finding loopholes in the legal system (e.g., through unforeseen but permitted interpretations of the rules).
- ▶ Thus, gaming, although perfectly legal, can be seen as unethical in that it violates scientific ethos (= *disciplinary loyalty*).

Playing the evaluation game



Playing the evaluation game

- ▶ Like gaming, it is fully compliant with legal principles, but is not as easy to evaluate in moral terms as is gaming.
- ▶ The goal is most often to maintain the status quo (e.g., keep their jobs) by following the rules at the **'lowest possible cost'**, not to maximize profits.
- ▶ Following the rules at the 'lowest possible cost' is crucial in the distinction between 'playing' and 'gaming'.
- ▶ Assessment of the ethical aspects, however, must take into account additional structural dimensions: how the institution—whose rules are met through playing the game—provides resources for the work needed to meet its requirements.



The case of predatory publishing: why publishing in so-called predatory journals might be perceived as a rational practice?

Context of Implementation of Research Evaluation Systems

Quality spectrum of scholarly journals



What is a predatory journal / publisher?

The easiest way to say something about the world is through dichotomies.
In this way, we produce an easy to use tools to valorize everything.



**Mislocated
centers of
scholarly
communication**

Why have we introduced a new term?

We introduced the term **mislocated centre of scholarly communication** to describe the role some publication channels play in the (semi-)periphery. It is geopolitically sensitive and does not blame scholars or imply publishers' bad intentions.

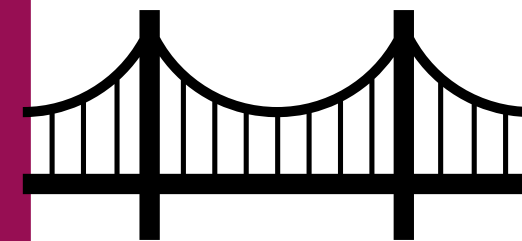
Many journals are established and maintained to publish papers that count in research evaluation regimes.

They are counted because they are perceived to be linked to central countries and institutions.



If a journal meets two criteria, it is considered a mislocated center

it is **illegitimate** or
invisible from the
perspective of
the center of knowledge
production

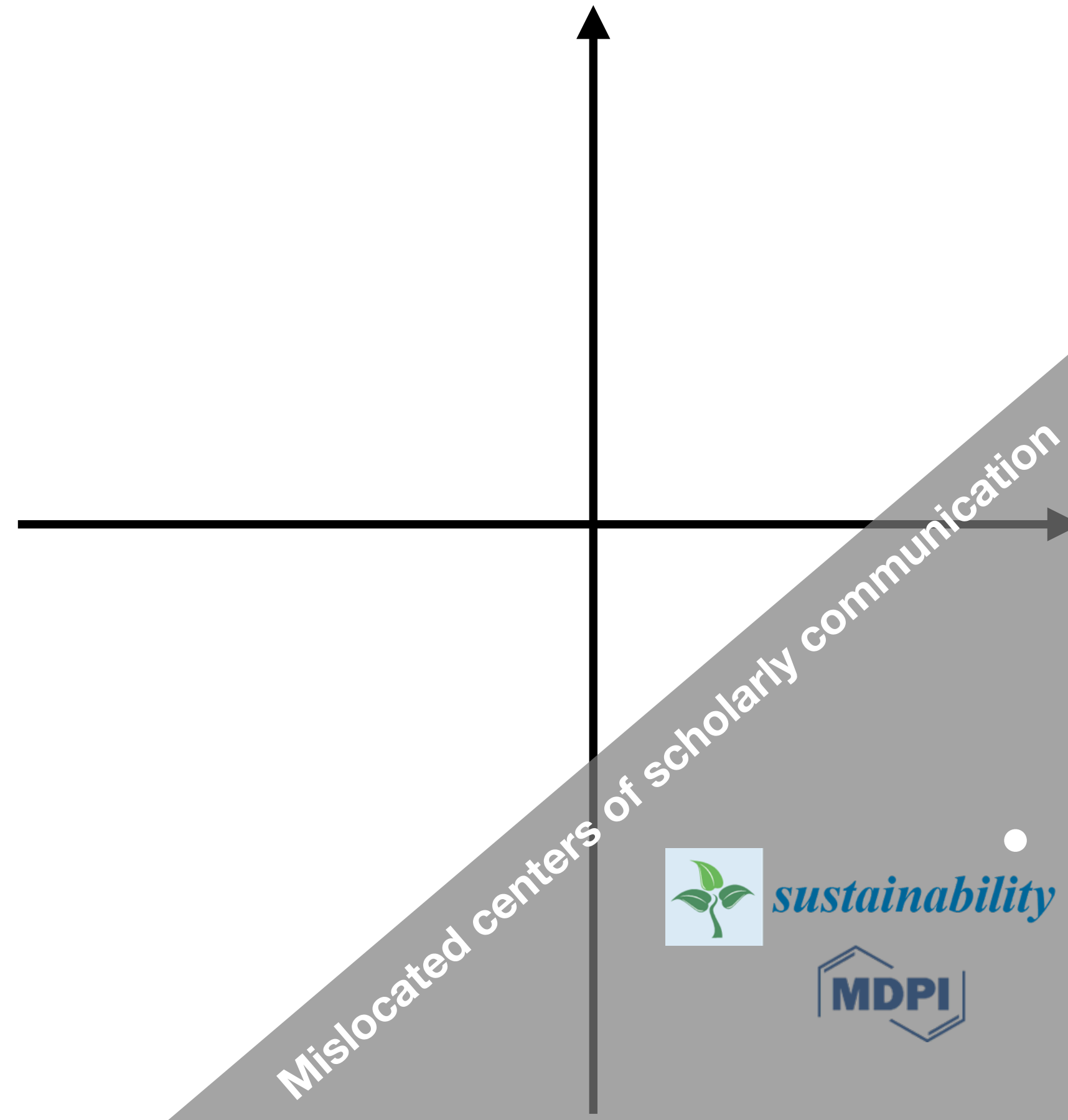


It is **legitimized** in the
(semi)periphery
due to its perceived
connection to the center.

Geopolitical landscape of scholarly communication

High visibility & legitimacy in the center

Perceived connection with the center gives no legitimization in the peripheries



Highly legitimized in the peripheries because of being perceived as connected with the center

No visibility & no legitimacy in the center

A collection of various metal wrenches scattered on a dark, textured background. The wrenches are of different sizes and orientations, some showing signs of use and wear. The central text is white and bold, standing out against the dark background.

**Mislocated centers
as a tool in the
evaluation game**

**What can we do with the
proliferation of metrics?**

Response 1

Improving Metrics and How They Are Used

- ▶ Rational, balanced, and evolutionary response to the challenge of transforming science under the influence of metrics.
- ▶ Any effort by academia to improve its situation by collaborating with the commercial companies that control scholarly communication will end in failure for academia.
- ▶ I believe that while calling for improving metrics, exposing their limitations, and demonstrating responsible ways to use them is necessary and useful in the short term, it is entirely inadequate in the long term.
- ▶ While we should improve these metrics, we must also prepare ourselves for the long road ahead that addresses another front.



Response 2

Stop Using Metrics

- ▶ If all metrics eventually become the goal rather than the measure, then the use of metrics in academia should cease.
- ▶ There has never been a time in academia in which universities or research institutes were uncontrolled.
- ▶ Thus just as there has never been an ivory tower for researchers to work in that has no contact with the public, there has never been a state of “no metrics” in academia.
- ▶ I believe that one cannot realistically move beyond metrics because they are not a defining feature of academia, but of capitalism itself.



Toward a Third Response

Seven Recommendations for Academia Not Driven by Individualistic Metrics

1

We should support an academic environment that brings out the best in scientists and managers, not the worst. **Let's appreciate actions that serve the community.** Activities that benefit the common good should be defined within a long-term perspective (of at least a decade).

2

There should be a dramatic increase in stable funding for science through **block grants.**

3

Academic institutions should guarantee **stable employment conditions and good salaries**, including for early career researchers.



4

Researchers should be fully involved in **defining evaluation criteria** and producing metrics if the evaluation is to be based wholly or partly on them.

5

Let us de-individualize evaluation, that is, let us evaluate researchers as members of research groups, members of departments, or heads of laboratories. In modern science, no one works alone.

6

Key **scholarly communication infrastructures** must be managed by academia itself.

7

If metrics are to be part of research evaluation, all data used to calculate them must be **completely transparent** and accessible to all.



Thank you

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