The pitfalls of signature. Questioning affiliation in French research and higher education institutions

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The pitfalls of signature - Questioning affiliation in French higher education institutions

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Background and context:
- Accountability regime (Wouters, 1999)
- Challenge for individuals and institutions to be easily identified
- 10 years of new funding schemes and structures in France (the “millefeuilles” pastry phenomenon)

Method:
A participatory/reflexive approach

High-level managers

Researchers

Scholarly communication specialists

Publishers

Huge cleansing

Inside the institution with an home-made tool OPALIA

Outside the institution in bibliographic databases

- Development of a new tool Opalia
- Hundreds of references exported from Scopus, WoS and the French Open Archive repository HAL
- Manual sorting by information specialists
- Generation of charts and tables for analyses

Collaboration with data providers:
- Scopus: Implementation of a new way to display information
- WoS: providing a list of the institution name variants in order to improve the database algorithm

Case study: A prestigious school of engineering set up for 20 years in a large university campus
Injunctions, paradoxes, unexpected facts, incongruities...

Actors are pulled back and forth between conflicting and non-coordinated demands and emphasize unintended effects of the tagging/tracking activities.

Researchers: a confusing situation due to multi-affiliations status; uncomfortable feeling with the signature that should be technical and not personal; affiliations reflect multiple socialities.

Scholarly communication specialists: job profile moving to “data scientist” (from library to bibliometrics); necessity to collaborate with publishers (Elsevier) despite disagreement upon Open Access.

Publishers: selling products in a more competitive landscape in the frame of public procurements.

High-level managers: key issues at stake like increasing visibility, reliability of benchmarkings and better self-understanding.

Unexpected effect: Analyses reveal that, despite Civil engineering being the main activity of the institution, it is not the most important domain where researchers publish their work in. It has consequences on its position in international rankings.

Perspectives: Work in progress...
Recommendations and efforts are quite ineffective. Is it specific to the French case?