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Editorial

This issue starts with a paper on homœopathy, a subject which raises many a hackle, including among those we asked to referee the paper. Experts in homœopathy were least supportive in that they seemed to be unfamiliar with the process of peer review and were unwilling to say anything at all about the paper. Referees from the science policy community were actively opposed to anything to do with homœopathy and reluctant to lend it respectability by refereeing a paper even mentioning the subject. The attitude of experts in the boundary work community was quite different; from their perspective, homœopathy provided an excellent example of the techniques of marginalisation. Their reports on the paper were enthusiastic. There would seem to be a lesson for editors here: particularly in contentious areas, the perspective of referees is likely to colour the referee's report.

Joanne Greenwood, from the University of Wollongong, has not, of course, written a paper on homœopathy. Rather, she draws upon the case of homœopathy for evidence of marginalisation by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the body which distributes research funding on behalf of the Australian government. She examines and classifies the various techniques used – perhaps unconsciously – by the NHMRC to marginalise homœopathy and to maintain the dominance of conventional medicine.

A team from a number of Dutch research institutions is also critical of the means by which dominant technology and institutions act as constraints on innovation. Chris Seijger, Gerald Jan Ellen, Stephanie Janssen, Esther Verheijen and Gilles Erkens have looked at sinking deltas around the world, but focus here on the subsiding city of Gouda to test their hypotheses. The more the city compensates for subsidence by heaping up material, the more the city subsides under the weight of the material, what Seijger *et al.* call a 'dual lock-in'. Clearly this is not a sustainable strategy. Seijger *et al.* consider not just alternatives likely to be more sustainable, but also the means by which communal involvement can determine such strategies and help implement them.

It is comforting to think that the paper by Tomas and Christina Hellström, from Lund University and Göteborg University respectively, might disturb those determined to measure the impact of academic research. Their paper is especially relevant to those with a mission to evaluate academic research by requiring evidence of research impact in narrative form – less a case of qualification replacing quantification than of serving its needs. The story is intended to show in more fulsome manner than the metric just how useful academic research has been. But just how accurate, how objective can the narrative be, particularly when the incentive to show a certain sort of outcome can be so very powerful? The Hellströms employ examples from three Swedish impact evaluation reports, analyzing the various ways in which

impact is presented. Always there must be simplification in such narrative accounts, and simplification offers both challenge and opportunity to those anxious to encourage a particular perception of impact.

It is pleasing to be able to publish a range of book reviews in this issue. Once again, Steven Umbrello, our book review editor, has worked his magic.

Stuart Macdonald
General Editor