# Athena or Hydra? Measuring gender diversity as a tool for change in the quantified university

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## Extended Abstract

The contemporary university is more and more a quantified institution. Whether it is the monitoring students’ activities and progress or quantified measures for staff’s productivity, numbers and figures are important means in the university’s governance. The constant scrutinising of indicators achieved or missed is a key feature of university life. Research policy at EU level further promotes a model of knowledge production that relies on quantification. This can be seen in the emphasis EU institutions put on quantified indicators as tools to foster gender balance in research teams, panels and advisory groups.

In this paper, we use the example of a Horizon 2020 project (GEDII: Gender Diversity Impact) in which we develop the Gender Diversity Index, a composite indicator that merges different quantitative measures into one figure. The Gender Diversity Index has a dual aim. The first is research-orientated and seeks to assess the impact of gender diversity on the performance of research teams. The second is more practice-orientated and foresees the use of the Gender Diversity Index as an online self-assessment tool for teams, so they themselves can compare and monitor how gender diverse their team is and at which level they could use further improvement. Consequently, the Gender Diversity Index can be seen as another expression of the quantification as tool for organizational governance.

We discuss the potential benefits and risks of a quantified university through a tool such as the Gender Diversity Index. We ponder whether a composite indicator can represent either a source of insights that fosters wisdoms and informs strategies – comparable to the mythological Athena – or is instead a fierce and dangerous behemoth who brings harm and deadens empowerment or creative processes, such as the mythological Hydra. Questions that we address are (1) whether, and how, the Gender Diversity Index can be used not only as a descriptive measure but also as a tool for reform; (2) whether it democratizes gender expertise and helps universities and other research institutions to deal with the need to become more accountable and transparent regarding how they tackle gender inequalities within their organisation; (3) whether it renders the role of gender change agents in universities redundant or rather needs such experts to be applied properly; (4) whether it can be distorted or used as yet another indicator in educational managerialism; (5) and finally whether it can also have unintended consequences and hinder gender equality initiatives.

In this paper, we aim at providing a critical voice on the role of indicators in a meaningful transformation of universities and other research-orientated organisations, by creating a more nuanced understanding of indicators in both their development and their use. To do so, we first elaborate on the trend for higher education institutions to move towards the model of quantified organisation within a neoliberal regime. We then examine at the need for gender equality measures within universities and other research-orientated organisations, focussing on science, technology, engineering and math. We outline to what extent measuring gender diversity can be used as a tool to promote change towards more equity and elaborate on the use of quantitative indicators for benchmarking processes in the governance of universities (for instance through funding bodies). We then briefly outline the Gender Diversity Index, what it measures and with what aim in mind, before we elaborate on the five questions outlined in the previous paragraph. Finally, we conclude on what is needed for a quantified university to embrace measures such as the Gender Diversity Index as a tool of Athena, rather than a fang of Hydra.