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Petri Turunen
Petri.N.Turunen@helsinki.fi
Tuula Huuskonen
Tuula.Huuskonen@helsinki.fi
Terhi Sandgren
Terhi.Sandgren@helsinki.fi
Helsinki University Library Metrics team

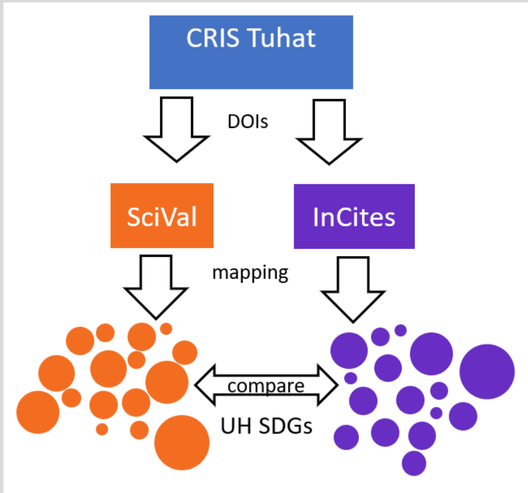
THE SDGs AND PUBLICATIONS OF UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI: Tracking Contributions Responsibly?

TRACKING SDGs

- The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development launched in 2015 introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Universities have been interested in evaluating how their research relates to these goals.
- In University of Helsinki we are developing ways of monitoring and analysing the share of publications related to sustainable development.
- Several analytical tools for tracking SDG contributions have cropped up in recent years.
- Problem: SDGs are very general in scope and consequently their interpretation at the level of publications can often be ambiguous.
- Major databases tend to use different methods for relating publications under various SDGs.
- We wanted to find out how these differences in methodology are reflected in the resulting SDG distributions for our university.

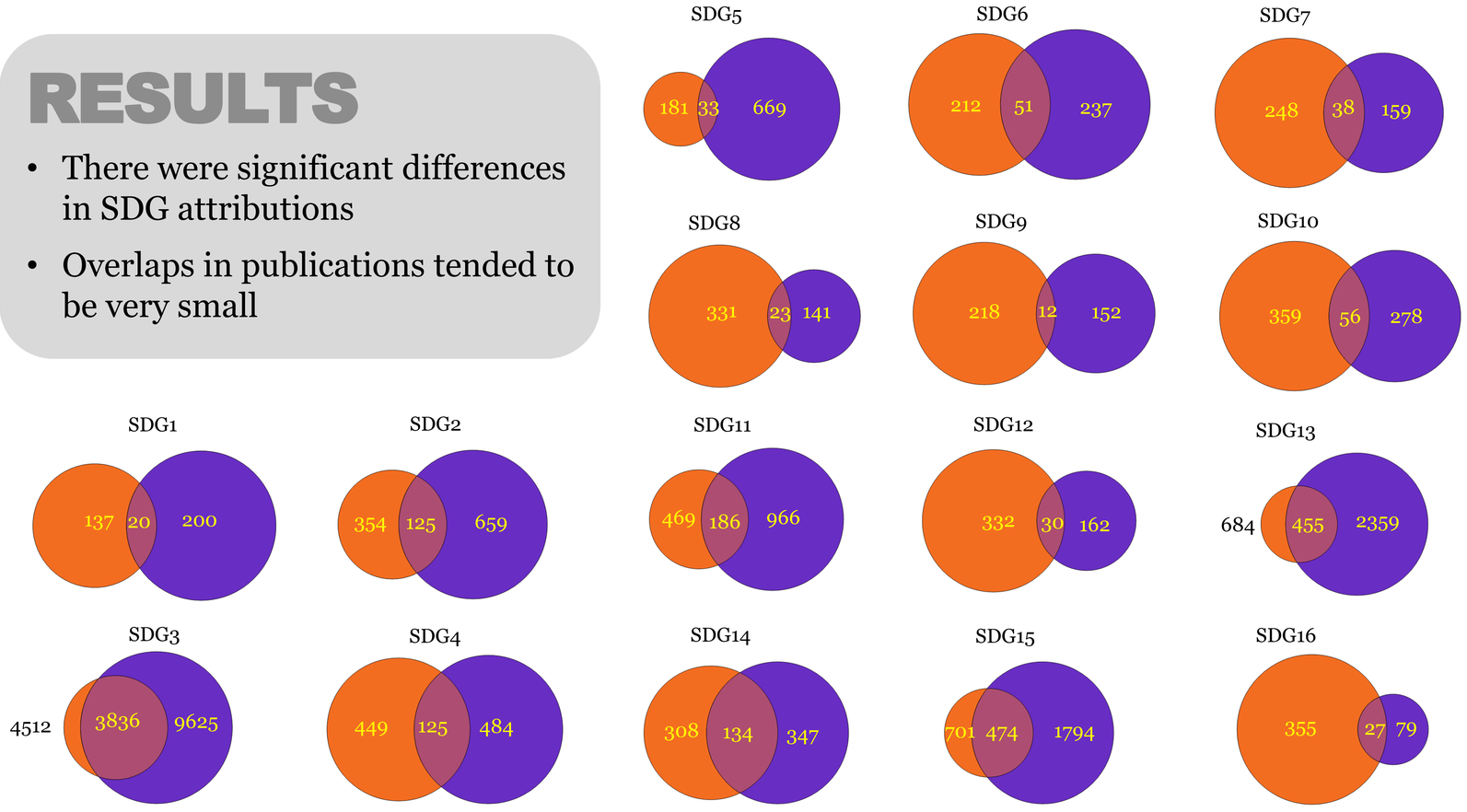
METHOD

- Gather all peer-reviewed University of Helsinki publications between the years 2020-2022 with a DOI-identifier (22563 publications in total)
- Analyse their SDG distributions in InCites and SciVal.
- Compare the distributions and look at their overlaps.



RESULTS

- There were significant differences in SDG attributions
- Overlaps in publications tended to be very small



MAPPING SDGs

- SciVal uses AI enhanced keyword searches
  Read more: Elsevier 2023 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Mapping https://elsevier.digitalcommonsdata.com/datasets/y2zyy9vwzy/1
- InCites uses citation-based clusters (Citation Topics).
  Read more: A more sustainable future for all: Introducing the UN Sustainable Development Goals in InCites https://clarivate.com/blog/a-more-sustainable-future-for-all-introducing-the-un-sustainable-development-goals-in-incites/

PITFALLS

- SDG-mappings can undergo significant updates. In our case the InCites April 2023 update almost doubled our SDG-output.
- Using organisational affiliations for tracking SDG:s can give varied results. SciVal only found 25%-72% of our output whereas InCites found 96%-125%(!).
- Human and social sciences are not well represented in these databases.
- There were differences in publication types and even years between our CRIS and InCites and SciVal.

DISCUSSION

- SDGs are ambigious and hence it is unsuprising that different methods can yield vastly different results. The scope of the difference was suprising though.
- Since there are no external criteria for determining correct SDG mappings we also can't just say which methods are superior.
- How then are we to use these mappings responsibly? What would be the use cases?
- From a university perspective, it is clear that quantitative monitoring of SDG contributions is prone to methodological choices and hence problematic.
- How are other SDG-mapping methods related to the ones considered here?