

Individual paper proposal

Submitted to the 7th Norwegian Conference on the History of Science

Oslo, 14.09.2018

Title: The state as an investor in the blue economy:

Creating trust in numbers with business tools and reflexive objectivity

Abstract: Numbers may be produced, trusted and gain widespread influence in radically different ways than we are used to expect. While Theodore Porter has shown how trust in numbers commonly stems from an expectation of ‘mechanical objectivity’ that involves strict, transparent, and unbiased quantification, this paper demonstrates that numbers may also be produced through what we suggest to call ‘reflexive objectivity’ that involves the explicit integration of qualitative challenges and uncertainties into the calculation. This is enabled by employing tools and approaches not from science and bureaucracy, from business and consultancy. When an influential number calculated in this manner (in our case a quantified grand potential of future marine value creation in Norway estimated by a prominent research institution) travels into policy and public deliberation, the qualitative uncertainties are decoupled from the quantified potentials. The number is thus interpreted as a fixed and certain result of scientific methods and subsequently made into a policy goal. We argue that the business tools allow for a new form of policy intervention that recasts the state as an investor by encouraging risk-taking and action over restraint and precaution.

Keywords: numbers, documents, calculation methods, business tools, policy goals.

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