

# Preface

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This book on the evaluation of legal research follows prior research projects in both Switzerland and the Netherlands. The Swiss Rectors Conference (swis-suniversities) was the first body to provide a strong incentive for this debate by funding a research project to study the state of the art with respect to the evaluation of legal research in Switzerland, but with an eye open to developments abroad. A research grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation enabled us to bring academics from different European countries together and conduct surveys. The surveys of legal academics in Switzerland and the Netherlands were among the first in Europe to collect data about how legal scholars feel their research should be evaluated by journals, publishers, funding bodies, law faculties, and local or national research assessment exercises. One of the striking similarities in both countries appeared to be a strong distrust of quantitative assessment methods, such as citation counts.

The surveys in Switzerland and the Netherlands taught us that evaluation cultures and practices in the field of law might also reveal strong differences throughout Europe. This fuelled the idea of a book that would present the evaluation practices applied and the debates underway in different countries. We are very grateful to each expert who took the effort to participate in this project. We also want to express our gratitude for all the work done by Karin Byland, who was responsible for a large part of the project organization, but also for contributing content for the book, for a joint publication about the survey results from Switzerland and the Netherlands, and for several other publications that have come out of the project so far. We also like to thank Edward Elgar, the publisher, and the three independent reviewers who commented upon the book proposal. Both the publisher and the reviewers urged us not only to take stock of what is going on in different countries with regard to research evaluation and quality management, but to go beyond this to propose an agenda for further research and debate.

One of the things we learned from this research project is that in today's higher education policies, something that often goes wrong is that academics are not actively involved in the setting up of assessment schemes and evaluation practices. This can easily lead to resistance and distrust – as we have seen in other disciplines, where rankings, journal impact factors and h-indexes seem to be meeting with growing opposition. This is why we believe it is important

that this project does not end here. Our firm conviction is that the debate should be taken to a European level. Even for a discipline such as law, which has been dominated by differences in language and legal culture, it is important to acknowledge the impact that globalization will have on legal research in the near future. Therefore, we sincerely hope that this is not the end of our joint efforts, but rather the start of a broader European-wide research project about the future of legal publishing and the way in which this could benefit the scientific and societal relevance that legal research has always had.