

The desirability of an academic career – a cross-country comparison

Franziska Lessky (University of Innsbruck), Nicolai Götze (INCHER Kassel), Alison Elizabeth Jefferson (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto), Peter Lang, Corinna Geppert (University of Continuing Education KREMS), Christian Schneijderberg (INCHER Kassel)

Theoretical framework/Definition of concepts

Academic precarity is mainly constructed through the academic career trajectories which vary greatly between the different national career systems, through policies which foster projectification such as resource allocation through third-party funding (OECD, 2021) and through laws restricting the time of employment in academic contracts. Furthermore, it can be assumed that precarity varies according to the specialisation/role and position in the academic system. The research imperative for academic careers and reputation, intensified by socio-political trends such as the “metrification” (Mau 2019) has strengthened the trade-off between different academic duties of teaching, research and transfer (Götze & Schneijderberg, 2022) at the expense of those employment groups which are confronted with high teaching loads. From a theoretical perspective, the concept of social precarity is often used to connect precariousness to wider socio-political policies and practices (Butler, 2009).

This leads to the questions, whether a career in academia is perceived as desirable by those who already work in the field, which factors influence this perception and whether there are differences related to the higher education system the persons work in.

Methodology

We draw on APIKS-data from Germany and Canada collected in 2017/18 and Austria collected in 2021. Canada was chosen as a case where the career path is clear and characterized by relatively little job insecurity, and where competition between young scientists for permanent positions is relatively low. Germany and Austria were chosen as contrasting cases, which, due to their strong competition for permanent positions, correspond to the type of the “survivor model” (Enders & Musselin 2008) to a different degree. Germany contrasts with Austria on a second-order basis, since the precariousness of young scientists is even higher, due to the increased career competition resulting from the Excellence Initiative, and the stricter law on temporary scientific contracts.

Data analysis

We use a desirability-index, which shows measurement equivalence across the national contexts, as dependent variable. This is composed of personal work satisfaction variables and variables assessing the desirability of an academic career more in general. We calculated regression analyses separately for junior and senior academic including academic career stage (0-6 years, 7-12 years and more than 12 years since doctoral degree), discipline, age, gender, parental

education level, employment status, academic age, and workload (teaching, research, administrative) as explanatory variables.

Conclusions

First results of our analyses indicate that a high teaching load in general seems to be strongly detrimental to the subjectively assessed desirability. For junior scientists, also the administrative workload is important. In addition, we found different views on the desirability of a career in academia depending on the parental educational level with academics having parents not owning a higher education degree being less likely to perceive an academic career as desirable. Country differences in the regression results reveal that the socio-political context strongly moderate the assessed desirability of an academic career. Reasons for country differences in relation to structures and regulations will be discussed in the presentation.

Literature

Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.

Enders, J. and Musselin, C. (2008). *Back to the Future? The Academic Professions in the 21st Century*. In *Higher Education to 2030, Volume 1, Demography*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264040663-5-en>.

Götze, N. & Schneijderberg, C. (2022). *Metrical valorization of performance (MeVoP): The funding-induced vertical stratification and the construction of post-Humboldtian research-teaching nexus in German higher education institutions*. In F. Huang, T. Aarrevarra & U. Teichler (Eds.), *Teaching and Research in the Knowledge Society – Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (pp. 53–76). Springer International Publishing.

Mau, Steffen (2019): *The metric society. On the quantification of the social*. Cambridge, Medford, MA: Polity.

OECD (2021). *Reducing the Precarity of Academic Research Careers*. Policy Papers No. 113, OECD Publishing.