

Academic Identity and Attachment: Job Security as a Driver of Community

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Academics have complex and competing identities. They are part of a global community of scholars within their field or discipline, with its own particular myths, ideologies, cultures, languages, and rules of conduct (Becher & Trowler, 2001). They are also part of a philosophical community with shared ideas about the nature of knowledge and the world, where the subject matter takes more of a backseat (Bunge, 1959). In addition, they are part of a national context – sometimes even several – as citizens and residents (Lawson, Salter, Hughes, & Kitson, 2019), a local and regional context as members of society (Nørgård & Bengtsen, 2016), and an institutional or departmental context as colleagues (Macfarlane, 2007). With the emergence of the knowledge society (Drucker, 1993), both the number and variety of contexts that an academic is expected to relate to have increased significantly (Jung, Jones, Finkelstein, & Aarrevaara, 2021).

This paper explores two aspects of this circumstance: one is the dominant locales of academic identity, and the other is the role of job security in driving that dominance. Using data from the APIKS survey, the paper examines the relative importance of affiliations with the academic discipline, the department, and the institution respectively for academics in participating countries – gauging the balance between global and local environments for the importance of identity formation in different national contexts. Drawing on insights from organisation theory, where job security has been found to be a strong determinant of organisational commitment (Hur & Perry, 2019), the paper analyses the effect of the duration of employment contracts for the distribution between attachment to the global, institutional, and departmental contexts. Does secure employment foster a stronger sense of belonging to the local environment due to long-term commitment, or does it enable gradual entrenchment in a specialised field that strengthens ties to the global community – and how is this relationship affected by the national context?

The results of the study provide insights into how and where academic communities are formed, as well as practical guidance for leadership functions at higher education institutions regarding how employment policies may be used as tools for building resilient and cohesive local cultures and environments. The study opens avenues of further research into how academics perceive the relationship between the formation of their academic identities and the practical circumstances of their working conditions.

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