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Early Academic Careers in Cross-National Perspective

FESTA & GARCIA Final conference, Brussels, 6-7 November 2016
SOME INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS ON THE PLEASURES & PITFALLS OF DOING COMPARATIVE RESEARCH
PLAN

• The GARCIA project has focussed on a particularly under-researched, but nevertheless strategic stage of the academic career - that immediately following the PhD defence and a 1st post-doc position

• Our research has drawn attention to the lack of systematic research and even data collection on post-docs; a group whose numbers are increasing almost everywhere, but also a number of analytical challenges.
PLAN

• Despite great improvement in the collection and availability of statistical and qualitative data, research on women’s academic careers often ignores or under-plays structural (societal) differences in academic labour markets / gendered career patterns;

• Such « grey zones » in comparative analysis are compounded by the universalistic and often un-contextualised theoretical perspectives that are used to explain women’s under-representation in the higher echelons of the academic hierarchy.
The potential of cross-national analysis

GARCIA WP3 recommendations about doing cross-national analysis:

  
  ISBN 978-88-8443-610-8
The potential of cross-national analysis

« The true value of cross-national studies lie more in the generating of new hypotheses regarding causal explanations, rather than actually testing them »

A UNIVERSAL & COMPLEX DIAGNOSIS

Several findings can be drawn from recent research on women’s academic careers in the European context:

• Academic careers are under-going a universal, albeit slow and uneven, process of feminisation;

• However, women’s representation at the top of the academic hierarchy remains below that observed in other highly qualified occupational settings;

• The rhythm and pattern of academic feminisation varies considerably, both across national settings and across disciplinary fields in a given societal context.

• The effects of academic gender equality policies are potentially ambivalent.
## Analytical challenges for cross-national comparisons: the French case

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<th>DISCIPLINES</th>
<th>% W (tenured) senior Lecturer</th>
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PLURALISIC EXPLANATIONS OF « WHAT’S THE PROBLEM »?

1. Micro-social, dispositional approach

The main problem = gender socialisation

(Most) women are (still) lacking in the social characteristics that are required for a « successful » academic career (ambition, taste for competition, mobility, unlimited availability, etc.).
PLURALISIC EXPLANATIONS OF 
« WHAT’S THE PROBLEM »?

2. Macro-social, structural approach

The main problem = gender + care + employment regimes (the universal assignment of women to unpaid care + gender division of labour), combined with the (*universal?*) expectations of academic employment (competitiveness, mobility, high productivity, etc.).
PLURALISIC EXPLANATIONS OF « WHAT’S THE PROBLEM »?

3. Meso-social + organisational approach

The main problem = lack of recognition for women and/or the value of their scientific ability and production (direct and indirect discrimination, invisibility or under-recognition of female applicants for academic jobs / funding).
CROSS-NATIONAL DATA COLLECTION BUT NO COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS?

- The outcomes of gender socialisation processes are presumed to be identical across time and space;
- Nationally specific gender + care + employment regimes are recognised, but analysis of their effects on academic employment patterns is undertaken seriously;
- Direct and indirect discrimination against women is presumed to take similar forms in a wide range of (academic) institutional / disciplinary environments.
CROSS-NATIONAL DATA COLLECTION BUT NO COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS?

• The structure of academic careers is presumed to be identical / similar in all national (+ historical) contexts (an idea that is implicit to the « new public management » convergence hypothesis);

• The desirability or relative attractiveness of academic careers (in comparison to other employment sectors) is presumed to be identical / similar in all national (+ historical) contexts, for men and women alike.
ACADEMIC LABOUR MARKETS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE (Musselin 2005)

- Selection procedures (centralised, nationally or regionally organised admittance procedures or direct selection to academic institutions);
- Length and philosophy of the pre-tenure period (professional status obtained through early autonomy versus prolonged subordination to academic superiors);
- Relative importance of internal or external labour markets (“local” career progression favoured; inter-institutional or international mobility required);
- Determinants of pay and remuneration structure (collective bargaining pay scales versus individualised pay schemes / relative pay rates to other potential labour markets).
These characteristics continue to influence academic careers, despite other points of convergence across countries:

1) The increasingly widespread adoption (and legitimacy) of individualised evaluation, monitoring and reward schemes;

2) The increasingly important role attributed to HE establishments / institutions in regulating academic careers (i.e. loss of professional control over admission and career progression criteria).

(Musselin 2005: 136).
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COMPARATIVE STRUCTURE OF ACADEMIC CAREERS FRANCE – GERMANY – UK - US

ON THE LADDER: IT’S TOUCH AT THE BOTTOM

Full-time academics at universities in France, Germany, England and the US

- **Senior staff**
  - Professor or equivalent
  - Associate professor, senior lecturer or equivalent
- **Junior staff**
  - Assistant professor, lecturer or equivalent
- **Assisting staff**
  - Academic employees with permanent contracts
  - Academic employees with temporary contracts

- **Source:** 2013 National Report on Junior Scholars
Number and status of US academics

Professeurs ordinaires (Tenure); 177581
Professeurs associés (Tenure); 148981
Professeurs assistants (Tenure Track); 171639
Postdocs; 89300 (estimation)

rouge: engagement à durée déterminée; orange: option sur un engagement à durée indéterminée («Tenure Track»); vert: engagement à durée indéterminée

Number and status of Swedish academics

- Professeurs (Tenured) 5311
- Senior Lecturers (Tenured) 7956
- Junior Lecturers (Tenure or limited time) 6830
- Postdocs (limited time) 7908

**rouge**: engagement à durée déterminée; **brun**: engagement à durée déterminée ou indéterminée; **vert**: engagement à durée indéterminée

Number and status of Swiss academics

Professeurs ordinaires (tenure); 2963
Professeurs assistants (avec Tenure Track); 197
Professeurs assistants (sans Tenure-Track, y. c. professeurs boursiers FNS); 486
Postdocs; 18726

 rouge: engagement à durée déterminée; orange: option sur un engagement à durée indéterminée («Tenure Track»); vert: engagement à durée indéterminée
Source: Office fédéral de la statistique et questionnaire à toutes les universités de Suisse sur mandat du Réseau Futu-re, mars 2012.
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Women’s share of R&D jobs by level of spending on research (PPS / Nº FTE)
CONCLUSIONS

Despite the internationalisation / rationalisation / individualisation processes currently at work, academic careers do not take the same form in different national / institutional contexts. We need to:

1. Better understand how women are being simultaneously included and excluded from academic labour markets in most EU countries;

2. Better understand how societal specificities in gender / care / employment regimes influence women’s access to academic labour markets.
CONCLUSIONS

Adopting a (truly) cross-national analytical perspective teaches us that:

1. The same outcomes (e.g. 30% female professors) don’t necessarily result from the same social processes in all societal & historical contexts;

2. The same processes don’t necessarily produce the same outcomes in different national contexts;

3. The same (gender equality) policies necessarily don’t have the same effects in different societal / institutional contexts...
QUESTIONS WELCOME...