Gender and Precariousness in Academia: a Multi-Method Approach

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GARCIA Gender Action Plan at the University of Trento (UNITN)

Focus on: ACTIONS TARGETED TO EARLY STAGES RESEARCHERS, mainly postdoc research fellows:
  • Diagnostic analyses
  • Implemented self-tailored actions

Fieldwork: Mainly the 2 GARCIA beneficiary departments at the UNITN
  • Department of Information Engineering and Computer Science (DISI)
  • Department of Sociology and Social Research (DSRS)
Diagnostic actions focus on temporary research staff working conditions at UNITN

- Both **quantitative and qualitative tools**
- **Statistical indicators** based on administrative information on gender differences in academic career development
- **Web-survey** with non-tenure researchers (postdoc research fellows and fixed-term assistant professors) at the DISI and DSRS between 2010 and 2014 on their work trajectories and experiences at the UNITN
- **Semi-structured interviews** with:
  - Postdoc research fellows and fixed term assistant professors at the DISI and DSRS (10 + 10)
  - PhD holders who left the DISI and DSRS departments, after having worked there as postdoctoral research fellows from 2010 to the end of 2014 (10+10)
- **Desk analyses** and data collection on teaching activities and funded research projects
Two types of temporary research positions:

- **Fixed term assistant professors**, who are part of the academic/teaching staff.
- **Postdoc research grants** ("Assegnisti di ricerca"), mainly financed on external funding/research projects. Excluded by unemployment provision.

At UNITN, more than **2/5** of the research staff is composed of people in temporary positions.
Critical features of POSTDOC WORKING CONDITIONS at the University of Trento (UNITN)

Career Development in Academia

• Strong gender unbalance along the career ladder
• General difficulty to promote “young” researchers in stable positions
• Limited awareness about gender biases and gender stereotypes in selection processes, research, and everyday working life

Invisibility

• Low level of recognition of postdocs within the UNITN community
• Problematic boundaries between formal/informal, visible/invisible work of researchers with temporary positions
• Exclusion from policy actions at organizational level

Job instability (& Leaky Pipeline)

• Job instability is the main reason to leave academia
• Gender differences in managing job instability and work/life balance (persistence of traditional gender roles)
• Strong difficulties to manage job mobility because of exclusion from social policy provisions
**Strategy overview**

**LOCAL level:** collaboration to the process of introduction and implementation of an **unemployment benefit for postdoc research fellows**

**UNIVERSITY level:**
- new institutional **web portal** dedicated to PhD students and postdoctoral research fellows with an **online mentoring area**

**DEPARTMENT level:**

**DISI:** Workshop “Making academic careers together. Recruitment, precariousness and gender”

**DSRS:** Workshop “Professional Development Workshop: Career Planning for Early Career Researchers” + individual colloquia
**Action at University level:**
**PhD-Postdoc Research Fellow WEB PORTAL**

**Participatory design:** workshops with PhD students and postdoc research fellows with the aim to identify their needs and involve them since the beginning in the creation of the web platform and its contents (*activities carried out with the collaboration of the InterAction Team at DISI*).

**University stakeholders** in order to guarantee the sustainability of the portal even after the GARCIA project.
Main Contents:

- Re-organization of already available information targeted to PhD students and postdoc research fellows
- Development of a page with the postdocs **Rights & Duties**
- **Online mentoring area:** video pills on career development strategies with senior researchers
**Video pills** with suggestions and tips target to PhD students and postdoc/early career development on:

- Career planning,
- Gender issues in career development,
- Publishing,
- Networking and scientific communication,
- Funding, writing a project proposal.

**Mentors:** Senior researchers, one woman and one man for each department of the University of Trento, associate and full professors with extensive experience in international projects.
Action at the department level - STEM
“Making academic careers together. Recruitment, precariousness and gender”

Aim: Career development strategies in academia in STEM disciplines, particularly addressed to female researchers. Our main purpose was raising awareness on recruitment and selection procedures in academia reflecting on differences between formal and actual criteria, gender practices in selection processes.

Target: Postdocs and PhD students at DISI or STEM disciplines

Main implementation strategy:
- Gender sensitive approach in selecting the facilitators.
- International learning environment.
- Workshop organized within a well-recognized conference within the information technology community.
Action at the department level - STEM
“Making academic careers together. Recruitment, precariousness and gender”

Facilitators: Bianca Elzenbaumer and Fabio Franz with the support of Maurizio Teli

Making Visible

OUR LIVES AND WORK ARE OFTEN INVISIBLE.
THE RULES OF THE GAME ARE INVISIBLE TOO.
MAKE THEM VISIBLE, MAKE OUR LIVES BETTER.

× We are not just writing machines. We are gendered bodies, we have friends, lovers, and families. Think about it when you evaluate us.

× We are asked to be totally available, always. Gender imbalance in the academia is built from the early stages of the scientific path. Don’t consider young researchers who also chase their personal development unable to meet this criteria.

× We play the academic game but its rules are opaque. Show us its mechanisms so we can be strategic players.

× We are required to be excellent. Let us understand the parameters of excellence, who defines them and how.

× We produce and share knowledge with colleagues around the world. Intellectually encourage, materially support, and institutionally value this.

* This manifesto emerged from the proposals solicited during the “Making Academic Careers Together” workshop, part of the GARCIA project and hosted by the COOP2016 conference. The workshop saw the participation of professors, post-docs, and Ph.D. students attending the conference and/or affiliated to the University of Trento.
**Action at the department level - SSH**

“Professional Development Workshop: Career Planning for Early Career Researchers”

**Aim:** Empowering early stages researchers in career development in academia and research in SSH disciplines. Provide competences useful to build an academic career in a global research environment.

**Target:** Postdocs and PhD students at DSRS

**Main implementation strategy:**
- Gender sensitive approach in selecting the trainer
- International perspective on career development strategies
- Focus on “self-tailored” career planning
Trainer: Barbara Risman (Vise Presidency of ASA)

Two activities:

1) Workshop on Career planning for Early Career Researchers focuses on practical skills needed for career development (such as cv-writing, preparation of job applications and interview strategies).

2) Individual colloquia to receive a personalised counselling on early stages professional development.

Professional Development Workshop: Career Planning for Early Career Researchers

June 13th, 2016 – h. 14:00
Meeting Room – 3rd Floor, Via Verdi 26 Trento

The seminar is designed for non-tenure researchers. It will be in English. Professor Risman will focus on the practical skills needed by early career researchers for their career development such as cv-writing, preparation of job applications and interview strategies. Professor Risman will also have individual follow-up meetings with some of the participants. These individual advising and counselling appointments will be on the researcher present projects, future applications and more broadly about his/her career development. If interested in booking an individual session, please email francesca.fiore@unitn.it. The number of individual colloquium is limited.
Conclusions
What we have learnt from the GARCIA project:

• Diagnostic analysis and participatory processes based on multi-method tools are crucial to define and implement effective context-specific Gender Action Plans

• Actions target to early stages researchers - temporary researchers - should be systematically included in university Gender Action Plans:
  • Growing part of research activities are carried out by precarious researchers
  • Women disadvantages in career development start already in the first phases of career. They are particularly visible in the processes to access stable positions

• Relevance to combat gender inequalities and asymmetries both in STEM and SSH fields.
  • Even if in SSH fields there is a higher presence of women, gender biases and discriminations persist in career development processes in all fields of science.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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