

University of Bamberg



Publish or Perish? Academic Performance – Are Researchers only Publishing Machines?!

dr. Sofia Pagliarin

Chair of Governance of Complex and
Innovative Technological Systems

Nachhaltigkeitswoche 2019

Bamberg

<https://www.uni-bamberg.de/nachhaltigkeit/nawo/2019/>



First, a bit about me

- **Sociologist** (Italy, Sweden, Spain)
(but also worked as **employee in logistics** in Italy and Spain)
- Phd in **urban studies** (2014) at Bicocca University of Milan (Italy) and KU Leuven (Belgium)
- **Post-doc** (2016-2017) at WSL (Switzerland)

Research topics: urban sprawl, land consumption, (urban) sustainability, spatial planning, (land) governance, comparative methods



First, a bit about me

- **Akademische Rätin** (since August 2018) at the Chair of Governance of Complex and Innovative Technological Systems, Uni Bamberg (Germany)
- We give a course called „**Politics and policies of Sustainability**“:

https://www.uni-bamberg.de/fileadmin/complexsys/Lehrveranstaltungen_SS_2019/Governance_of_Technological_Systems_Politics_and_Policies_G1_.pdf

My presentation will be about:

1. What does it mean to „do research“ today?
1. **Cheetah**
(Gepard)
2. Performance in academia
 - Impact factor
 - Competition (individual and institutional)2. **Ox**
3. **Elephant**
3. Slow Science network
4. **Snail**



1. What does it mean to „do research“ today?

Becoming a researcher: getting a PhD

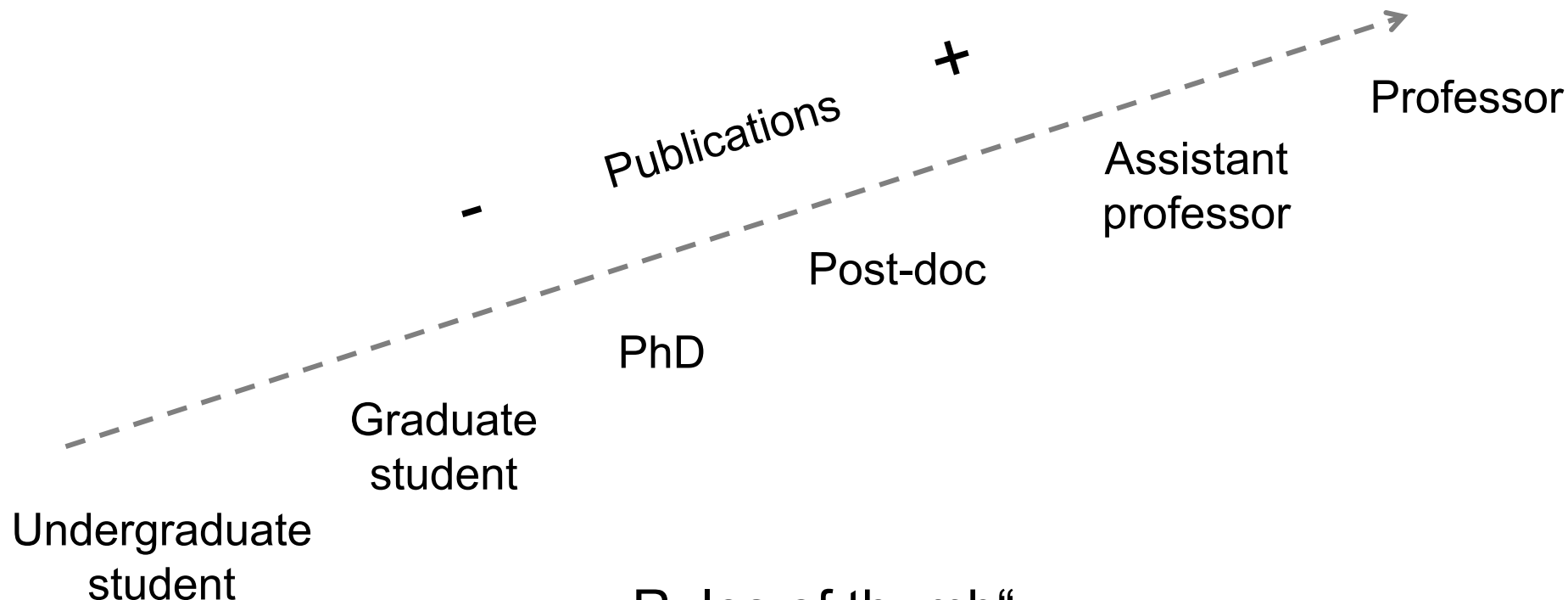
- Overall: after your master, you start your PhD (Doktorat)
- Ideally, work on the same topic as your master thesis for your PhD
- You work on your PhD between 3-5 years
- Ideally, part of a larger project team (or scholarship)
- PhD thesis in monograph, but better as „cumulative“ papers

Becoming a researcher: After the PhD

- Get a post-doc
- Get a tenured position (assistant professor, professor)
- Have **a lot** of publications (articles, books)

„Race to publications“
(„rat race“)

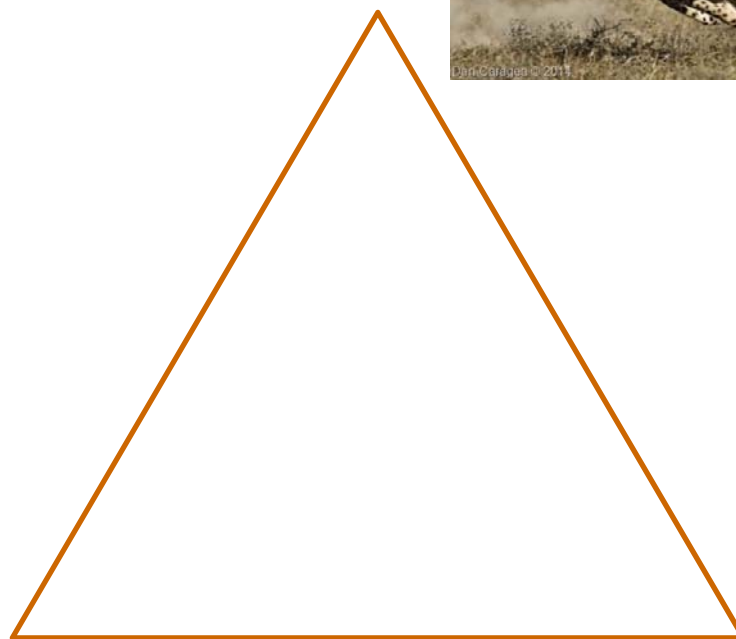
Becoming a researcher/academic



„Rules of thumb“:
the more **linear** this path, the better
the **faster**, the better
the **more** publications, the better

„Fast“ academic performance

**Production of
knowledge**



Picture from: <https://dan-caragea.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Ghepard.jpg>



2. Performance in academia: The Impact Factor (IF)

What are academic papers?

- Papers are articles published in recognised (inter)national journals
- Academic journals are disciplines-specific (e.g. mathematics, engineering, psychology)
- Goal: disseminate scientific advancements/research results to the international academic community



Scientific journals

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Science journal website. It features the "Science" logo on the left, followed by navigation links for "Home", "News", "Journals", "Topics", and "Careers". On the right side of the header, there is a search bar with a magnifying glass icon and a hamburger menu icon. Below the search bar, there is a small thumbnail of a Science journal cover with the title "GRIP". To the right of the thumbnail, there is a "Become a member" section with links for "Renew my subscription" and "Sign up for newsletters". Below the search bar, there are links for "Log in", "My account", and "Contact Us". The main content area below the header features a large image of a night sky with a bright light source illuminating a layer of clouds. On the left side of this image, there is a text box with the heading "The overworld" and the subtext "A new NASA mission will probe threats to the ozone layer over the United States". Below this text, the name "SANTIAGO BORJA" is visible. On the right side of the image, there are navigation arrows.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the SAGE journals website. It features the "SAGE journals" logo on the left. To the right of the logo, there are navigation links for "Browse" and "Resources" with a dropdown arrow. In the center, there is a search bar with the text "Search: keywords, title, autho" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, there is a link for "Advanced". To the right of the search bar, there is a section for "Access Options" with three icons: "Sign In" (a person icon), "Institution" (a building icon), and "Society" (a group of people icon). Below the navigation bar, there is a large image of a night sky with a cityscape. On the left side of this image, there is a text box with the heading "Urban Studies". On the right side of the image, there is a text box with the number "2.604" and the text "Impact Factor". Below this text, there is a link for "Journal Indexing & Metrics »".

Scientific journals

- There are countless scientific journals
- Discipline-specific
- International and national
- Several issues over the year
- Owned and managed by different publishing houses (e.g. Sage, Elsevier, Taylor&Francis)

How to „navigate“ through this „sea“ of journals?

Impact factor

- Synthetic indicator to rank journals by discipline
- Ratio between cited items and all published citeable items of the previous two years
- Changes over time
- Institute of Scientific Information (ISI), Thompson Reuters
- E.g. Science: 37.205; Urban Studies: 2.604

Goal: Map the important journals discipline-wise
by frequency of citations

<https://clarivate.com/essays/impact-factor/>

Impact factor: “an exaggerated reverence“

- Synthetic indicator to ~~rank journals by discipline~~ **evaluate** scientific performance, institutes and personal careers
- **Extremely effective for „objective“ decision-making**, i.e. to allocate resources to departments/individual professors or researchers
- A **productivity** measure: publish or perish
- Sometimes, a „performance short-cut“: Open Access

Paolo Cherubini (2008) Impact Factor Fever. Science, Vol. 322, Issue 5899, pp. 191
DOI: 10.1126/science.322.5899.191b

And „Slow Interview“ to Paolo Cherubini:
<https://slowspace.be/2018/06/04/slow-interview-1-an-interview-with-paolo-cherubini/>

Limits of the Impact factor

Limits:

- The impact factor is **useful to a certain extent** to evaluate performance
- The impact factor is useful for ranking journals, less for evaluating research

„Slow Interview“ to Paolo Cherubini:
<https://slowscience.be/2018/06/04/slow-interview-1-an-interview-with-paolo-cherubini/>

Limits of ... the publishing machine

- Open Access vs. Open Science
- **Who decides** if a paper should be published (double-blind review, but for free and unaccountable)

What is the difference between
a „god“ and a „bad“ peer-review process?

Open Science as an Early Career Researcher: Viva la revolución?

[https://figshare.com/articles/Open Science as an Early Career Researcher Viva la revolucion /8034746](https://figshare.com/articles/Open_Science_as_an_Early_Career_Researcher_Viva_la_revolucion/8034746)

Alternatives to the Impact factor

Alternatives:

- Importance to consider the **size** of the disciplinary community to calculate the impact factor
- Impact factor as **one of the possible measures**, not the only one
- Alternatives especially important for social sciences and humanities („**fair competition**“ with the natural sciences)

Other ideas?

„Slow Interview“ to Paolo Cherubini:

<https://slowscience.be/2018/06/04/slow-interview-1-an-interview-with-paolo-cherubini/>



2. Performance in academia: Competition (individual level)

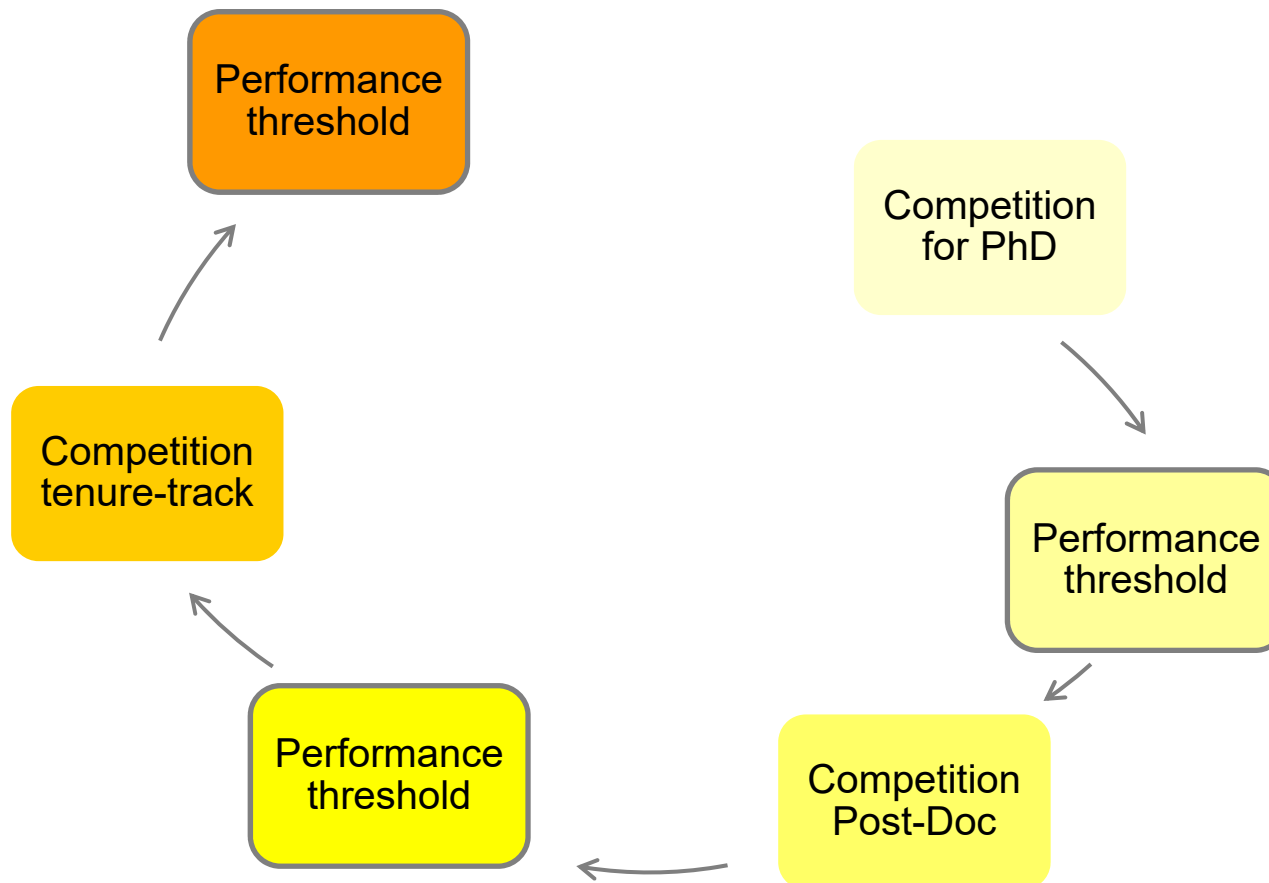
Stages of individual competition in academic research

- First: Get accepted in a PhD program
- Second: Get your PhD diploma (time and scholarship limits, working on papers, conferences, sometimes no funds for own research, no social security)
- Third: After the PhD: what to do? Generally temporary contracts (abroad), but nevertheless high pressure for publishing (to get funding, etc....)

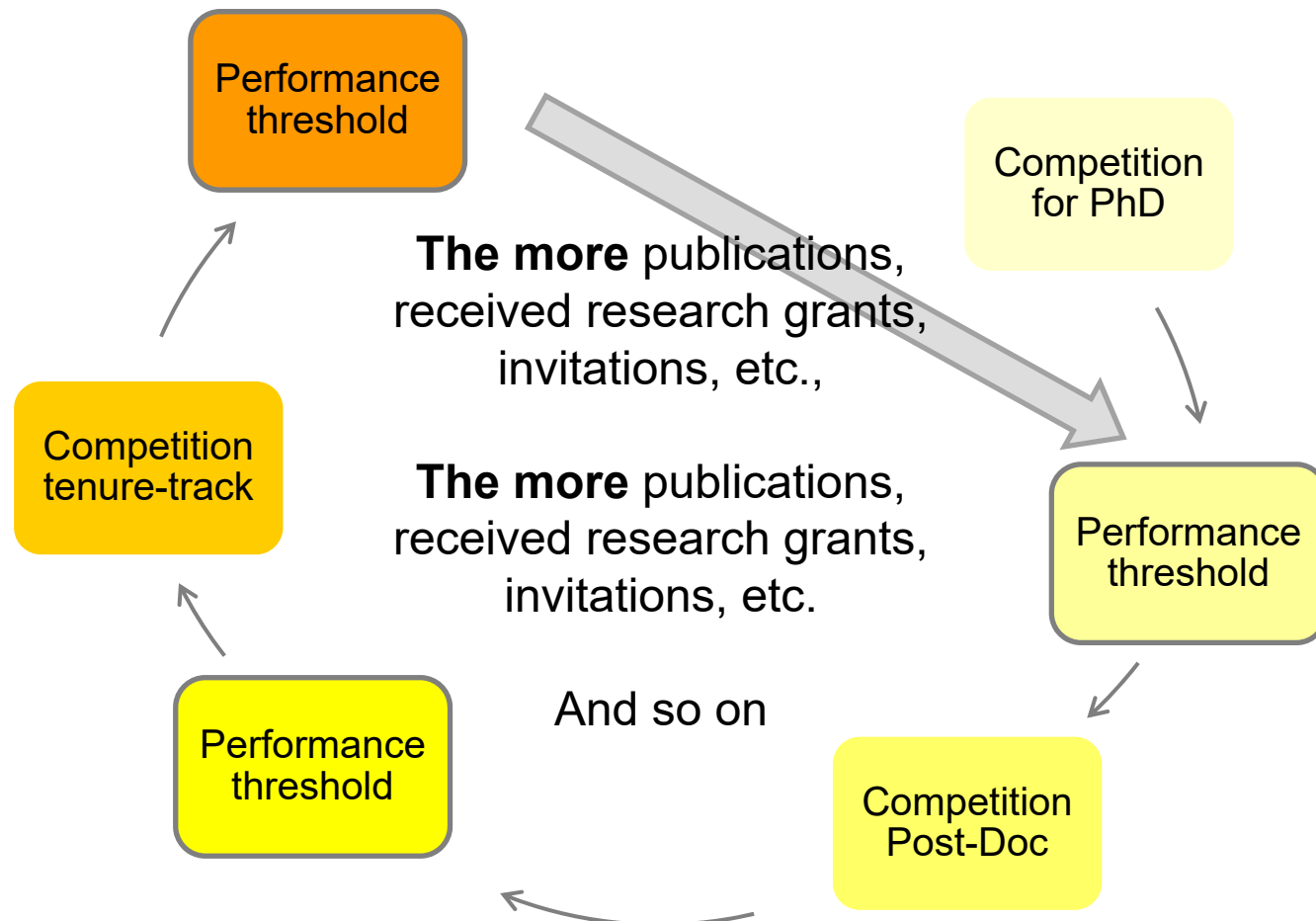
A constant pressure to valorise/capitalise on the CV

Cécile Piret, Joël Girès (2018) L'université : une fabrique de l'emploi néolibéral?
<http://inegalites.be/L-universite-une-fabrique-de-l?lang=fr>

Individual competition in research: A vicious competition cycle/spiral



Individual competition in research: Actually: a reinforcing feedback loop



Individual competition in academic research

An issue for all:

- Submission of research proposals to get funding for own research
(time consuming, uncertain result)
e.g. Horizon 2020 Marie Curie

Where is the threshold between „good“ vs. „bad“
competition in academic research?

Effects of competition in research at the individual level)

- Decreased mental health
 - stress
 - depression
 - anxiety
 - burn-out
- Total engagement
 - overexploitation vs. flexibility/vocation/Beruf

What is the threshold between own flexibility and overexploitation?

Cécile Piret, Joël Girès (2018) L'université : une fabrique de l'emploi néolibéral?
<http://inegalites.be/L-universite-une-fabrique-de-l?lang=fr>

Individual competition in academic research

- Academic researchers/staff/professors are privileged
- But increasing job instability and uncertainty

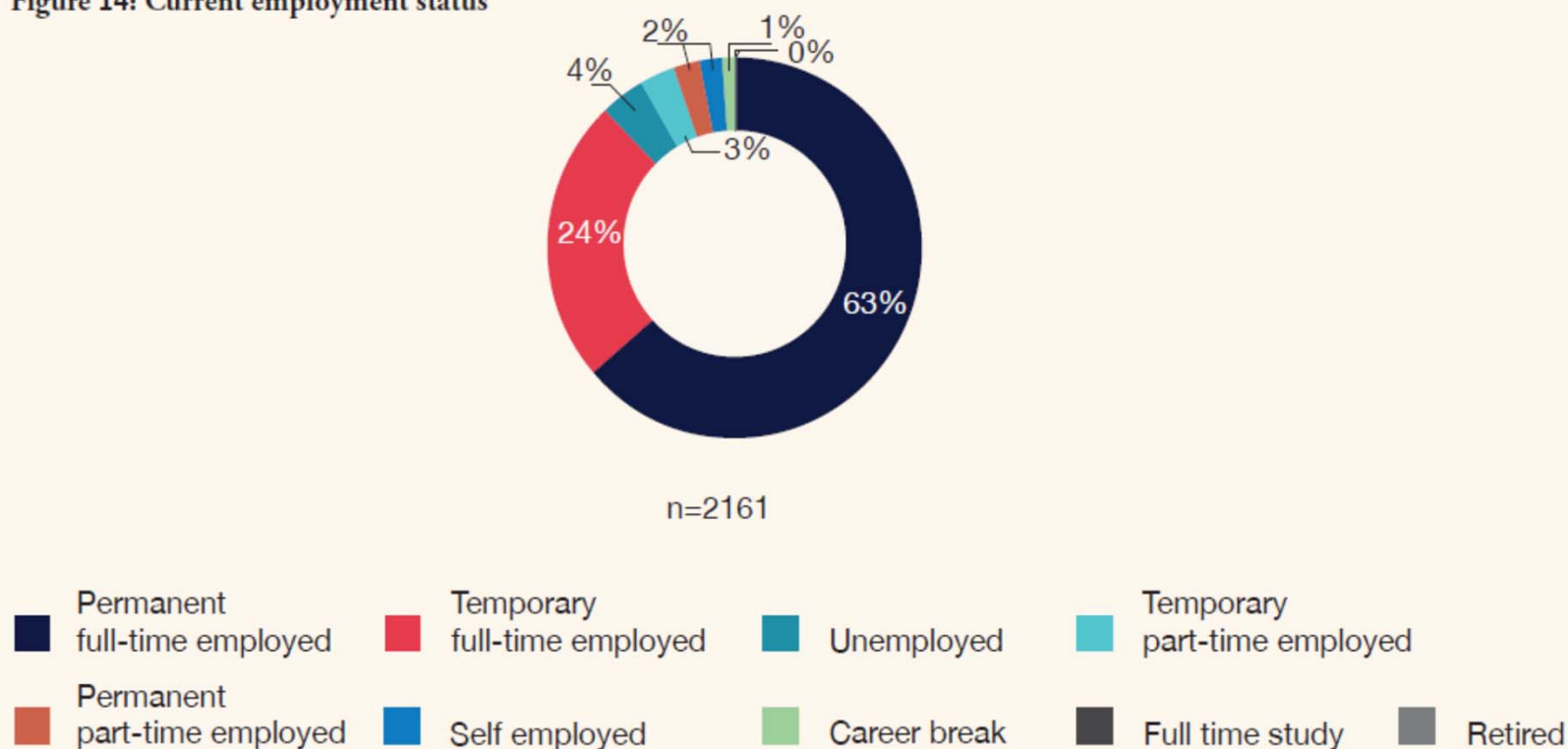
ESF (2017) data:

- High employment rate (95%) of PhD holders
- Unemployment rate in the Humanities higher (9%) than for other research domains (4%)
- Less permanent contracts in academia than non-academic sectors

European Science Foundation (ESF) (2017)
Career Tracking Survey of Doctorate Holders Project Report.
Retrieved from: http://www.esf.org/fileadmin/user_upload/esf/F-FINAL-Career_Tracking_Survey_2017__Project_Report.pdf

Individual competition in academic research

Figure 14: Current employment status



European Science Foundation (ESF) (2017)
 Career Tracking Survey of Doctorate Holders Project Report.
 Retrieved from: http://www.esf.org/fileadmin/user_upload/esf/F-FINAL-Career_Tracking_Survey_2017_Project_Report.pdf



Competition in academia: the issue of diversity

- Gender imbalance
 - Feminist critique to academia
 - Gender quota

Mountz et al. (2015)..For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University. ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies 14(4), 1235–59.

<https://ecampus.oregonstate.edu/research/wp-content/uploads/For-slow-scholarship-published-version.pdf>

- Minority issues
 - minority quota
 - „differently able“ people

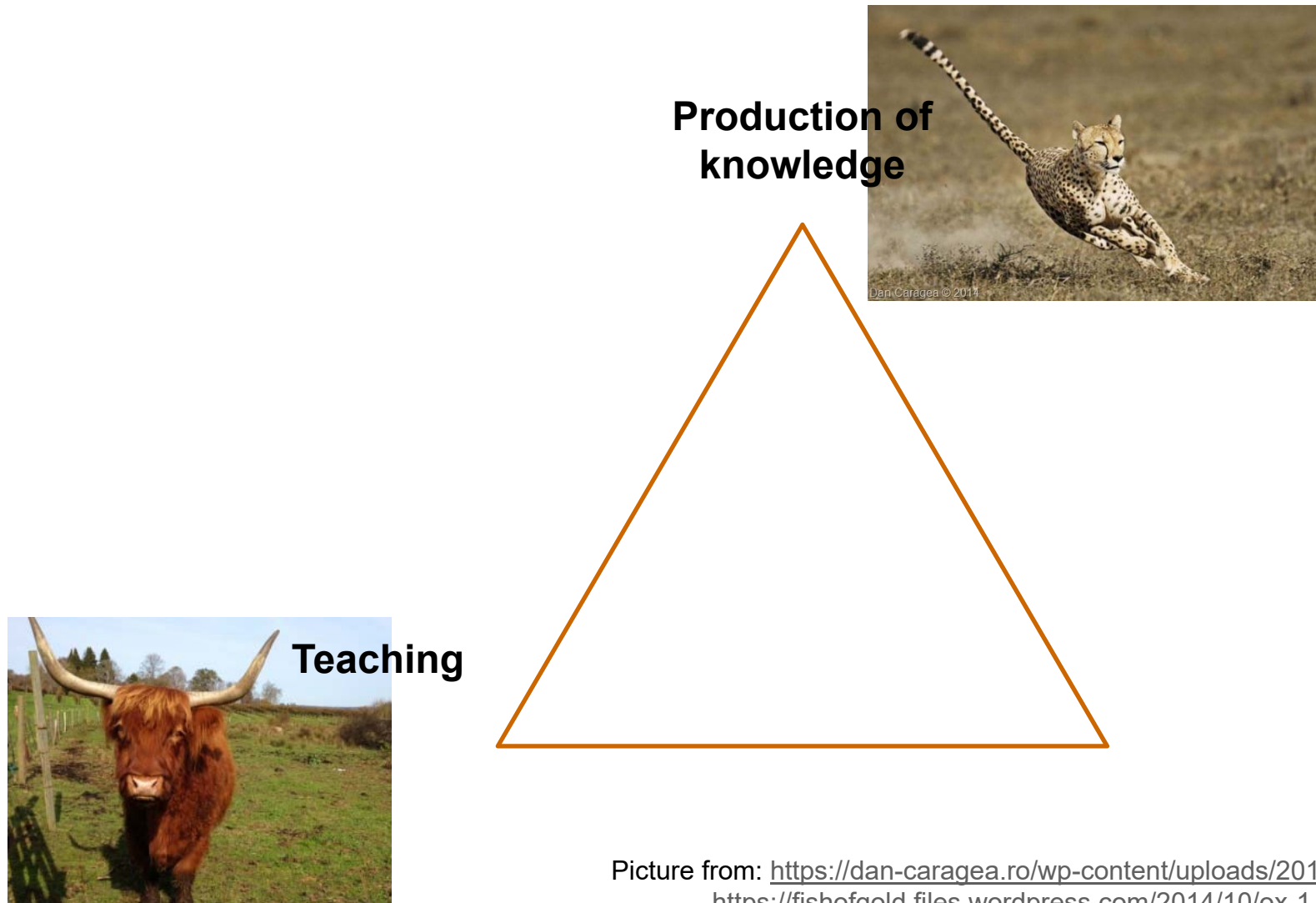
Are these policies enough?
Or is it just „ticking the boxes“?

The issue of diversity

- Students and staff (in higher education) is increasingly diverse
- Being aware that only with our presence we bring diversity
- Comparative advantage of small universities

Is this enough?

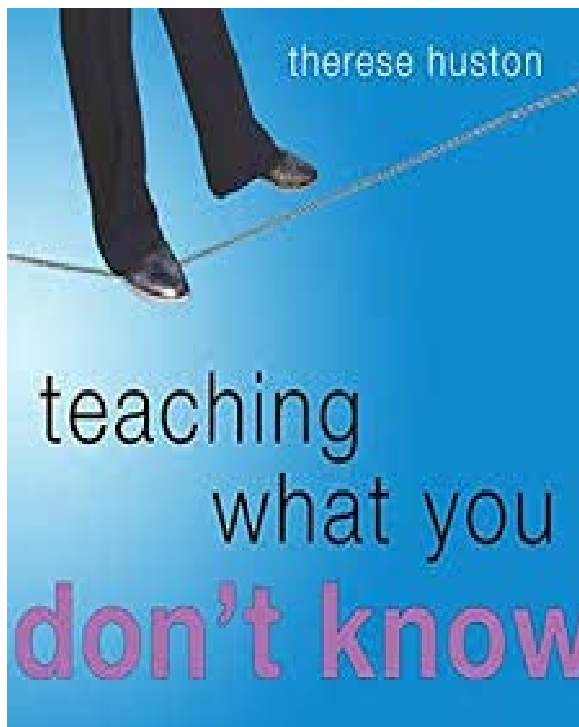
„Fast“ academic performance



Picture from: <https://dan-caragea.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Ghepard.jpg> ;
<https://fishofgold.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/ox-1.jpg?w=350&h=262>

Teaching

- Not only pressure on research/career, **but also** teaching
- Does not „pay“ career-wise
- A task for junior staff (and it is generally underpaid)



How can teaching be more sustainable?
An „impact factor“ for teaching?

„Fast“ academic performance

Production of knowledge



Teaching



Service



Picture from: <https://dan-caragea.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Ghepard.jpg> ;
<https://fishofgold.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/ox-1.jpg?w=350&h=262> ;
http://farm3.staticflickr.com/2717/5753952271_06037038bf_z.jpg

The elephant in the room: Which kind of research, and **for whom?**

 Hai ritwittato



Eve Tuck @tuckeve · 1 mag

I have spent last months traveling + visiting with members of Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Métis, Cree, Dene, Yukon, and Inuit Nations + communities; what I have learned is that they are totally exhausted by the new wave of clueless academics showing up to do research on them

 Traduci il Tweet

 45

 1548

 4444



<https://twitter.com/tuckeve/status/1123543935610228736>

The elephant in the room: Which kind of research, and **for whom?**



Eve Tuck @tuckeve · 1 mag

All of these researchers show up wanting to do a study that has been approved by the university, funded by a grant, and is often on something that the community has already studied or doesn't want to study. The researchers say the same thing: but I already have the funding!

Traduci il Tweet



8



134



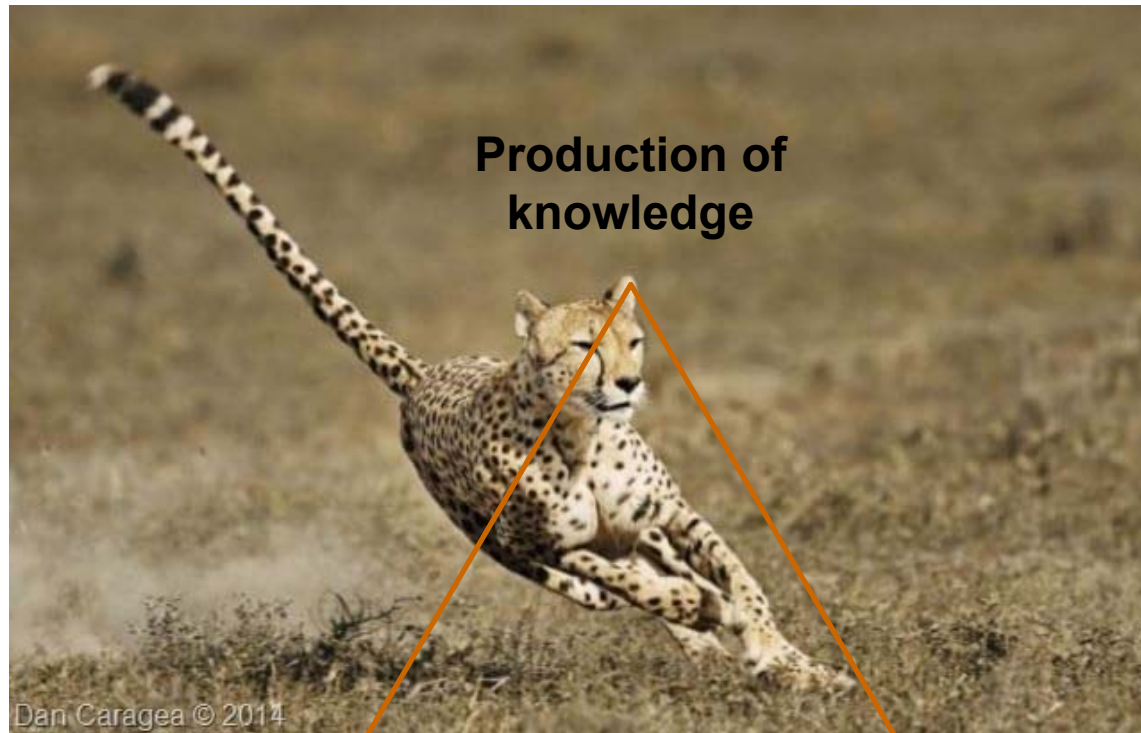
961



<https://twitter.com/tuckeve/status/1123543937275310080>

A provoking thought:
instead of 20+ articles,
isn't it better to have "just" 2 good books that also
consider the needs of the object/subject of study?

„Fast“ academic performance



Picture from: <https://dan-caragea.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Ghepard.jpg> ;
<https://fishofgold.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/ox-1.jpg?w=350&h=262> ;
http://farm3.staticflickr.com/2717/5753952271_06037038bf_z.jpg



Performance in academia: Competition (institutional level)

Institutional competition in academia

- Competition among **universities** (rankings)
- Selected **global centres of knowledge** production
- Hegemony of the **English language** in academic research
e.g. studies on Latin America published by English speaking scholars

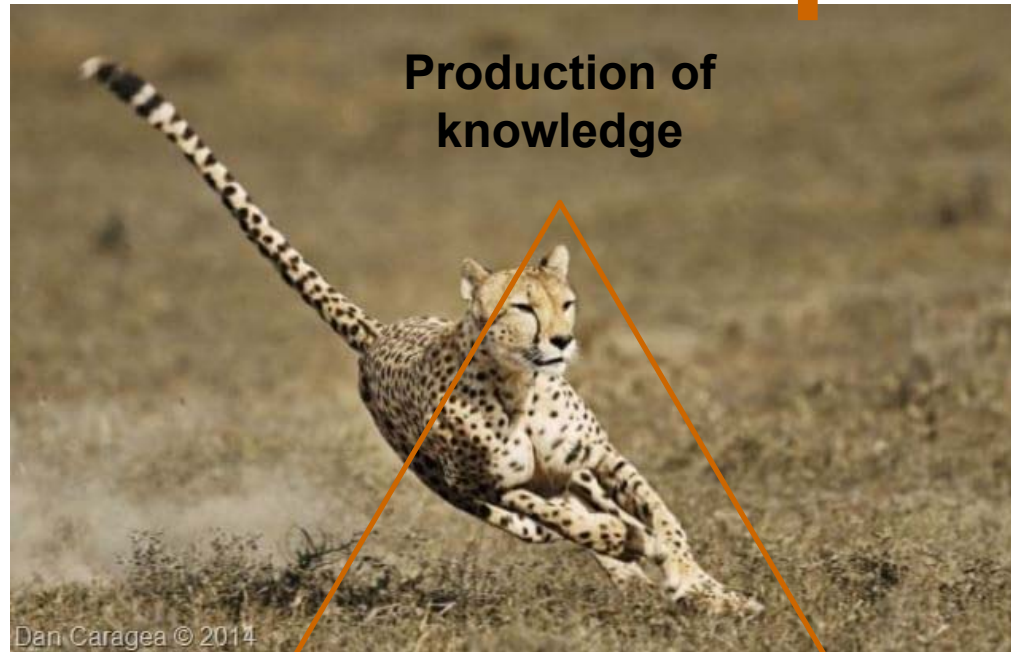
Can technology be a solution?

„Slow Interview“ to Javier Ruiz-Tagle

<https://slowscience.be/2018/09/28/slow-science-interview-2-an-interview-with-javier-ruiz-tagle-2-4/>

„Fast“ academic performance

Is an alternative possible?



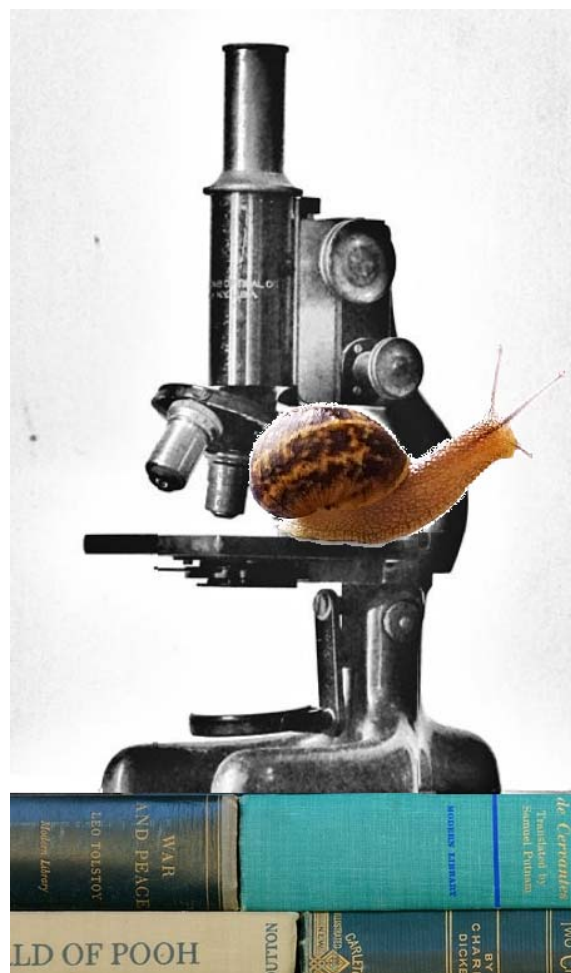
Teaching



Service

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http://farm3.staticflickr.com/2717/5753952271_06037038bf_z.jpg

3. Slow Science network





Slow Science network/platform (in Belgium)

An interuniversity platform for discussion
on academia's future

Web: <https://slowscience.be>

Twitter: @slow_science_

Slow Science: Doctoral school workshop



4 UNIVERSITIES, WORKSHOPS, DEBATE & ACTION

INTER-UNIVERSITY
DOCTORAL COURSE
6TH EDITION

WHAT DOES
IT MEAN TO
BE A
RESEARCHER

IN 21ST CENTURY
ACADEMIA?

APRIL 4, 25 & 26 2019

ANTWERP (UA), BRUSSELS (VUB & KU
LEUVEN CAMPUS BRUSSEL) & GHENT
(UGENT)

MEMBER OF THE OFFICIAL DOCTORAL SCHOOL TRAINING PROGRAMME <http://bit.do/ejXki>

Vlaamse
overheid
UNIVERSITEIT
GENT
VUB
Universiteit
Antwerpen
KU LEUVEN

<https://www.ugent.be/doctorschools/en/doctoraltraining/courses/transferableskills/all/what-does-it-mean-2019.htm>

Slow Science: Reclaiming study practices

A banner for a conference at KU Leuven. The top part has a blue header with 'KU LEUVEN' in white. Below it, a light blue bar contains the text 'PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2019'. The main part of the banner is a photograph of a large audience in a lecture hall, many with laptops open. Overlaid on the bottom left of the photo is a white box with the text 'RECLAIMING STUDY PRACTICES' and '18-20 September 2019, Leuven, Belgium'.

<https://ppw.kuleuven.be/phec>

Slow Science: vision

- Heterogeneous group of scholars
- Debating on which kind of academia we want in the future (direction, speed, linkages with broader society)

“against the **fast, competitive, benchmarked** research that not only restricts the choice of research topics and curricula but also threatens the **quality of the knowledge**”

“**movement of resistance** against the restructuring of the university into a science enterprise”

<https://slowscience.be/our-vision/>



Slow Science.be: manifesto

1. Science is not a business
2. Science at the service of society as a whole
3. Education and science for all – knowledge as commons
4. Accountability in knowledge „production“ / generation
5. Developing other conditions and practices for “respons-able” research
6. Independent and critical inquiry should be favoured
school (scholè, free time) vs. ‘busy-ness’ (a-scholè)

<https://slowscience.be/the-slow-science-manifesto-2/>

Also (but different): <http://slow-science.org/>

„Slow“ academic performance Possible?



Teaching



Service



Production of knowledge

Picture from: <https://fishofgold.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/ox-1.jpg?w=350&h=262> ;
http://farm3.staticflickr.com/2717/5753952271_06037038bf_z.jpg

UGent new personnel policy: A good practice?

new personnel policy called
“stepping out of the rat race” and
“no longer wishing to participate
in the ranking of people”

- Since 2018
- Promotion based on research, teaching and service (quality), not only on number of publications (quantity)

But:

Which indicators? Which qualitative assessment?
i.e. which/how to find a **balance**?

<https://slowscience.be/2019/04/10/is-ghent-university-stepping-out-of-the-ratrace-an-interview-with-jan-dumolyn-about-the-goals-strengths-and-potential-pitfalls-of-the-new-personnel-policy/>

Other useful references

Halffman, W., & Radder, H. (2015). The Academic Manifesto: From an Occupied to a Public University. *Minerva*, 53(2), 165–187.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-015-9270-9>

Shahjahan, R. A. (2018). Re/conceptualizing time in higher education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 0(0), 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2018.1550041>

Whelan, A. (2015). Academic critique of neoliberal academia. *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies*, 12(1), 130–152.
<https://doi.org/10.11157/sites-vol12iss1id258>



Thank you for your attention!

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<https://www.uni-bamberg.de/nachhaltigkeit/nawo/2019/>



Questions?

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