

# **Being an academic in Europe and the U.S.: role differentiation, shifting identities and protected spaces**

Prof. Dr. Liudvika Leisyte  
Center for Higher Education (ZHB)  
TU Dortmund

Brussels, November 21, 2013

## Research questions

- How are academic roles changing as a result of reforms and organizational shifts on both sides of the Atlantic?
- Does organizational managerialism replace disciplines as the source of identity for academics?
- Is the holistic academic identity threatened?

## Academic roles

- Holistic view of an academic - Humboldtian model : teaching and research are closely linked
- Napoleonic model – institutional separation of the two roles (Schimank and Winnes 2000)
- Multiplication of roles in the context of blurring boundaries between organizational structures (De Weert 2009, Musselin 2005, Leisyte and Dee 2012)

## Professional autonomy and protected spaces

- Professional autonomy- freedom of faculty to decide on lines and priorities of research and design of curriculum and content of courses and modes of instruction (Substantive autonomy – one of the most cherished and protected values in academia (Berdahl 1990), autonomy of academic affairs (Braun and Merrien 1999).
- The independence of pursuing own priorities in research depends on the availability of ‘protected spaces’ (Rip 2012, Whitley 2012, Felt 2013)

## Traditional academic norms and identities

- Academic profession has been traditionally governed by scientific norms and disciplinary communities
- Academic identities as shared – individual identities intertwined with a particular discipline, ascribed by the discipline
- Academics belong to tribes, they occupy distinct territories with ‘gatekeepers’ and ‘hostile natives’ upholding community norms and exhibit guild like behaviour typical of Tönnies’ Gemeinschaft
- Disciplines have commonality, limited interaction with people outside community (boundary maintenance), closeness via shared beliefs and norms

## Changed academic identities

- Academic identities are achieved as in Tönnies' Gesellschaft.
- Credibility is built in multiple arenas where entrepreneurial networks provide access to resources, prestige and status
- Relationships between academic and universities are impersonal monetary connections, social ties within faculties are instrumental and superficial with self-interest and exploitation being a norm
- Academics show organizational persona and acquire social capital to be promoted within organization and follow the organizational strategies

## Changing institutional context

- New Public Management approaches in European higher education: efficiency, effectiveness and accountability
- The U.S.- more autonomy, less funding from the states, stronger management
- Academic capitalism both in the U.S. and Europe - competition for research funding, students and knowledge commercialization
- Policy emphasis on valorization and collaborative research
- Universities become 'complete and corporate' organizations with strategic capacities (Krücken and Meier 2006, Leisyte and Dee 2012)
- Changing performance expectations in universities: profiling, HR policies, matrix structures, standardization.

## Trends: Changing academic roles

- Functional, structural and social differentiation
- Teaching, research and academic entrepreneurship
- Multiplication of roles 'serving' different audiences
- Commodification of academic work
- Separation of academic roles lead to differentiation among academic staff to more prestigious tenure track academics involved in both activities versus teaching-only or research-only academics
- Teaching-only and research-only academics are more likely to work in the new structural entrepreneurial units
- Tenured and contingent faculty



## Trends: Academic identities

- Academics maintain traditional roles of teaching and research as primary endeavours with the third service function being more pronounced in the U.S. context
- Crowding out of certain academic roles
- Emerging hybrid identities
- Ascribed identity of academics means academics become active agents in markets and politics, and not disinterested academics following the moral framework of an academic guild

## Findings: The U.S. and Europe

- A shift away from a holistic view of an academic towards differentiated academic roles
- Audiences to build credibility have broadened - academic community, business/industry networks, policy-makers
- Faculty identity is shaped by the organizational context and academic capitalism, especially in the U.S.

## The challenge for academics

- Restrictions of professional autonomy?
  - Steering towards distinct research priorities
  - Requirements to increase relevance in research proposals
  - Requirements to publish academically and to patent

## Limited 'protected spaces' in Dutch universities

- The scope of protected space is relatively low in the Netherlands as it includes professors and people with independent labs due to start-up packages, and some of the non-professorial researchers on career grants (Laudel 2012).
- The protected spaces of studied physics, biomolecular and history researchers is limited by the duration of external grants

## Professional autonomy - 'fundable' topics

- “I wouldn't possibly immediately have chosen [the research topic] although it's actually very much connected; it's not central to my research. And so it's influencing....Market funding has influenced what my future research expectations would be over a period extending about 2 to 3 year period. I would actually have to say, ok, I will be concentrating on something which I might not concentrate or probably would not concentrate otherwise” (Post-doc, History).

## Discontent from the academic commons



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDZyRyfJjVk>

## Credibility matters

- The standing in the field (the amount of credibility) reflects the ability of academics to maintain their professional autonomy and what strategies they use in their problem choice (Laudel 2006, Leisyte et al. 2010, Schimank and Stucke 2004).
- High credibility department leaders are pro-active in dealing with the management and with the external funders influencing research agenda setting – epitomizing ‘elite academic capitalists’ (Slaughter and Leslie 1997).

## Conclusion

- The duality of occupations and organizations in the case of academic profession and universities can be bridged when academics, follow the Type III or Type IV change dynamics.
- The enriching Type III is a preferable scenario to bridge the duality of academic and organizational manager as in such case a hybrid identity is formed. Then organizational, entrepreneurial and disciplinary values are embraced at the same time, although perhaps to different degrees.



# Thank you for your attention

## Related publications:

- **Leisyte, L. and Dee, J.** (2012) Understanding Academic Work in a Changing Institutional Environment. Faculty Autonomy, Productivity and Identity in Europe and the United States. In Smart, J. and M. Paulsen (eds.) *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- **Leisyte, L. and Hosch-Dayican, B.** (2014) Changing academic roles and shifting gender inequalities: A case analysis of the influence of teaching-research nexus on academic career perspectives of women in the Netherlands. In Eggins, H. (ed.) *Gender in Higher Education*. Springer, forthcoming.
- **Leisyte, L.** (2014) Changing academic identities in the context of a managerial university – bridging the duality between professions and organizations. Evidence from the U.S. and Europe. In Cummings, W. and U. Teichler (eds). *The Relevance of Academic Work*. Dordrecht: Springer, forthcoming.