

## The influence of (inter-)disciplinary research orientation towards academic identities in European higher education systems

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### Research Domains

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

### Abstract

The formation of academic identities has traditionally been tied to disciplinary academic formation processes. Disciplines remain dominant as sources of academic identity, but institutional processes have gained importance. Further, interdisciplinary research leads to new, multiple, or hybrid forms of academic identity. Thus, based on the assumption that academics' affiliations towards disciplines and institutions are the source of academic identity, this study aims to investigate how (inter-)disciplinary research orientation affects academics' affiliations to their disciplines and institutions across disciplines in selected European higher education systems. The study uses a comparative analysis of representative data from the international APIKS dataset. The analysis draws on the literature on local and cosmopolitan identities and classifies scientific disciplines according to Biglan (1973) and Kolb (1981). Preliminary findings show that disciplines remain the primary source of academic identity for academics in monodisciplinary research, while academics in interdisciplinary research place more emphasis on their institutional affiliation.

### Full paper

The formation of academic identities has traditionally been strongly tied to disciplinary academic formation processes, reinforcing what Becher (1989) has referred to as guild-like and strongly discipline based behaviour. However, academic identities are multifaceted and dynamic, shaped by individuals' perceptions and experiences within their disciplines as well as institutions (Beijaard et al., 2004; Henkel, 2000). Academic identities include both ascribed and achieved aspects, construct self and other, and contribute to social reproduction within disciplines (Jenkins, 2014; Czarniawska, 2002). Studies suggest that so far, disciplines have retained their dominance as a source of academic identity (Leišytė, 2014). However, academic identities are increasingly influenced by institutional structures and values transcending disciplinary cultures (Leišytė & Dee, 2012), including institutional processes (Trowler, 1998). Some strands of literature argue that the protected spaces of academia (Leišytė, 2016) and, consequently, traditional forms of academic identity are challenged by the influences of managerialism and academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Further, the rise of interdisciplinarity in research and higher education has led to assumptions of the emergence of new, multiple or hybrid academic identities (Darbellay, 2015; Jacobs, 2010). Thus, based on the assumption of the literature above that

academics' affiliations towards disciplines and institutions are the source of academic identity, this contribution aims to investigate how (inter-)disciplinary research orientation affects academics' affiliation to their disciplines and institutions across different types of disciplines across selected European higher education systems. Specifically, we ask the following research questions:

1. *How does an (inter-)disciplinary research orientation influence the perception of institutional and disciplinary affiliation of academics?*
2. *How does this compare across disciplines and higher education systems in Europe?*

In order to answer our research questions, we conducted a comparative analysis of data from different European higher education systems in the APIKS International Database, focusing on academics' research orientation (mono- versus interdisciplinary) and the importance of their affiliation (discipline, institution) across different types of disciplines and higher education systems in Europe. Our analysis is informed by the literature on local and cosmopolitan identities (Fumasoli, 2017; Gouldner, 1957) - locals refer to academic staff who are loyal to their institutions, while cosmopolitans adhere to the ideals of the academic profession and have a strong disciplinary sense of belonging. Further, we draw on the writings of Biglan (1973) and Kolb (1981) to distinguish four main types of scientific disciplines, namely hard pure/abstract reflective, soft pure/concrete reflective, hard applied/abstract active and soft applied/concrete active sciences.

Preliminary findings indicate that academics in all disciplines have a similar focus on monodisciplinary and interdisciplinary research orientation. However, there are slight differences, with hard applied/active and soft pure/reflective researchers being slightly more interdisciplinary in their research orientation. Moreover, preliminary results show that for academics engaged in monodisciplinary research, scientific disciplines remain the primary source of academic identity and sense of belonging, often referred to as "cosmopolitans". Interdisciplinary engagement significantly affects academics' sense of belonging, with those involved in such research placing more emphasis on their institutional affiliation, described as "locals". An in-depth analysis of differences between higher education systems still needs to be conducted.

To conclude, the overall trend observed across the case study higher education systems in Europe confirms theoretical assumptions regarding the influence of research orientation on academic identity and affiliation. The preliminary findings revealed a range of areas for future research. Further research should include an analysis of contextual factors, such as the degree of managerialism, and a more nuanced analysis by discipline type.

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