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Academia as a (gendered) career choice: The role of tourism

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Objectives | There is a solid body of research on the academic labour market and academia as a place and sphere of work, as well as on the determinants of career choice pertinent to an academic profession. What we know to date, is that there exist different approaches explaining certain career choices: intrinsic and extrinsic motives (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Janger & Nowotny, 2016), self-efficacy and previous experience in academia (Bandura 1986, 2012), social contacts and their power of inclusion/exclusion of individuals into field-related networks (Jungbauer-Gans & Gross 2013; Gewinner, 2017). Previous research also elucidates that career choices are often gendered: in case academia, a horizontal segregation can be observed (European Commission, 2013).

Against the background of established approaches that speculate about career choices pertinent to academic profession, there is surprisingly little research on academic, or scientific, tourism as a specific type of (gendered) academic mobility affecting scholarship as a career choice. Under certain circumstances, – and these will be discussed below – this particular kind of mobility can epitomise a determinant of a choice of an academic profession. So far, scholars broached the issue of mobility of academic workers for scientific reasons – this sub-field of knowledge is known as academic, or scientific, tourism (Hall & Williams, 2002; Musselin, 2004; Molokáčová & Molokáč, 2011). In this contribution, I will use the term 'academic tourism' and define it as a short – less than a year – stay of a (young) scholar in a new, unusual environment with a purpose of study, education and research, with an intention to return to the country/place of origin (UNWTO, 2010).

Until now, academic tourism has been used to describe how students travel to study abroad (e.g. Erasmus programs within the EU), rather than how scholars (e.g. early career academics and professors) travel for work related reasons (e.g. conferences, research stays). Although dispersed studies delineate general and local trends in academic tourism, they did not theorise it as an important factor of career choice of a scholarly career path. I will incorporate both types of mobility into my approach, since both refer to a choice of an academic profession at different stages of an individual life course.

Methodology | Building upon a theoretical framework on postcolonialism that understands the European thought and European academic tradition as a dominant one, I argue in this contribution that academic mobility, in general, and academic tourism, in particular, represent a significant determinant

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of choosing an academic career by young individuals after completion of their tertiary level studies at the latest. This circumstance has been largely neglected in previous research, although scholars tackled the issue of academic tourism as a new type of mobility (Burns & Holden, 1995; Rodríguez et al., 2012; Janger & Nowotny, 2016). Specifically, moving away from the popular, or mass, tourism paradigm with its economic benefits but extensive cultural, social and environmental disadvantages, scholars approached an alternative paradigm of tourism (Burns & Holden, 1995). This one can be characterized by such features as smallness, vogue and exclusiveness (Novelli & Benson, 2005) – and academic tourism fulfils these conditions. Apart from serving as an instrument of career advancement, academic tourism is quite attractive especially for young individuals at early stages of their scientific career. Indeed, some studies demonstrated that most European early career academics perceived academic mobility as a personal strategy, an investment in their future career in their place/country of origin (Musselin, 2004).

Main Results and Contributions | Previous research documented that the Western knowledge production is considered a hegemonic canon (Altbach, 2011; Mbembe, 2016). It regards its own production modes as universal and acknowledges information in terms of theories produced by white male scholars as the only valuable and plausible, thus putting 'others' in an unequal position of knowledge recipients. Two important implications are crucial for these findings: firstly, according to the statements of Hall and Williams (2002), that new forms of mobility rather enhance than diminish place differences, academic mobility is especially attractive for academics acting under conditions of postcolonialism and postcolonial knowledge production modes in academia (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015). According to these statements, Western, or Eurocentric, epistemologies enjoy more acceptance and recognition in academic circles as opposed to all others. For that reason, they attract more scholars from the countries that are presumed to be recipients of knowledge.

Secondly, when choosing an academic career as a future occupation, young scholars distinguish between the benefits of domestic and international academic tourism. This circumstance has essential relevance for gendered strategies of academic tourism, since female and male scholars are likely to have different estimations of benefits and constraints regarding their career advancement. For instance, since female scholars are less motivated to travel due to various reasons (Gewinner, 2017), they consider domestic academic tourism more attractive, whilst mobility at the international level is only beneficial under the conditions of directly anticipated career benefits.

Limitations | Although providing a comprehensive theoretical debate, this approach needs to be tested and verified on a basis of a one country example and in a comparative perspective. Further research is needed to justify the presented model.

Conclusions | Academics who work in or close to the Western centres of knowledge production, regard domestic tourism as more attractive, as it can bring more benefits in terms of career advancement, as compared to those originating from countries/places that rather serve as consumers of knowledge. This peculiarity has diverse implications for gendered academic career choices associated with academic tourism, such as pursued scientific interests, composition of academic networks and publication behaviour, as well as family formation aspects.

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