

Addressing gender balance: Promoting sustainable careers

ERC workshop: “On the way to the top”

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Taking a careers' perspective

- Inspiration:
 - Women in SET: Creating Sustainable Careers (2009)
 - Delft UoTechnology careers project (2010)
 - Project ERCAREER (2012-2014)
 - Studies of managerial and other professional careers



The ideal scientist

- Science is a greedy institution that does not tolerate part time work, nor the distractions that children provide (Benschop & Brouns, 2003)
- The stereotype of the “ideal academic” is one of the most influential contributions to gender inequality in academia (Benschop & Brouns, 2003)
- Criteria for excellence feed into conventions and stereotypical beliefs, reflecting a masculine stereotype and the traditional male breadwinner model (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012)



The ideal academic career?

- The content of the ideal academic stereotype is fluid and context-specific (Bleijenbergh et al., 2013)
 - But “othering women” is a constant
- How the ideal academic stereotype translates into career conventions is unknown
 - But the often implicit notion of a conventional career is compelling
 - Inextricably tied to excellence, independence, and mobility
- Empirical evidence of career patterns is limited (Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012);
 - Because of methodological restrictions
 - Because CVs do not provide complete pictures



Career conventions in selection decisions

- Less well defined than excellence criteria:
 - Emergent, often based on irrelevant attributes
 - Intransitive selection process allows for decision bias (Vinkenburg et al., 2013)
- Implicit but persistent injunctive norms:
 - E.g. mythical proportions of a stay in the U.S.
- Intergenerational inequality:
 - Dominant elite holds newcomers to standards that they themselves do not meet
 - Example: breadwinner notions vs dual career and single parent realities



Sustainable excellence?

- Career systems put in place in most scientific institutions to promote excellence may not be sustainable, as they can no longer guarantee optimal outcomes under changing demographic conditions (Vinkenburg et al., 2013);
- At the same time, there are persistent gender inequalities in career advancement and funding success ratios;
- Allowing unconventional careers is one of the ways in which scientific institutions such as the ERC deal with these issues.



Allowing for unconventional careers

- Is perceived as fair, generous, and inclusive; creates “space”, promotes women, is considered “state of the art”;
- But...
 - Typically puts burden of responsibility with applicant
 - Dilemma of disclosure: entitlement versus stigma
 - May have ironic effects if underlying beliefs not challenged
- To understand potential impact
 - We need to know more about career patterns and conventions
 - We need to study career consequences of career breaks and of using allowance for both men and women

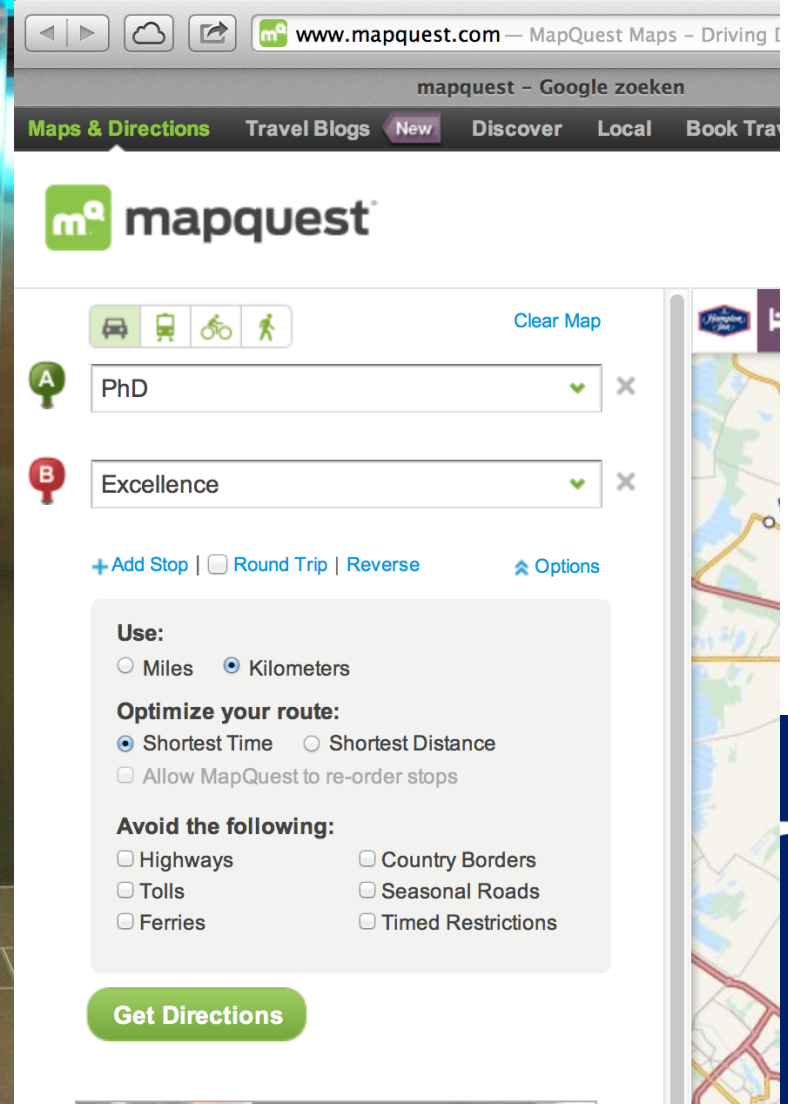
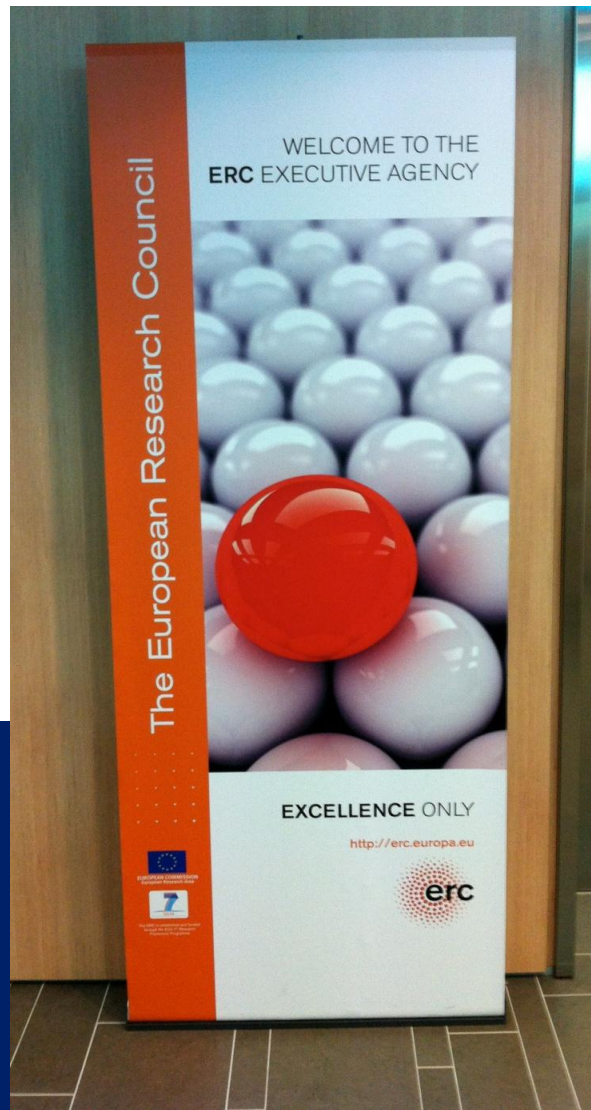


Effects of career breaks: by gender x parental status

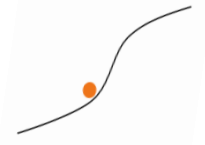
- For women career breaks are expected, but...
 - Disclosing parental status may result in motherhood bias;
 - Not taking a break may result in penalty for not meeting ideal mother norm (Vinkenburg et al., 2012).
- For men career breaks are less expected, thus...
 - Asking for leave may result in flexibility stigma and backlash (Vinkenburg et al., 2012, Williams et al., 2013);
 - Differences across countries in paternity leave lead to differential expectations and potentially different outcomes.



Main question for ERCAREER: Are there more roads to excellence?



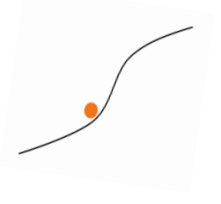
ERCAREER – project overview



- Project for ERC-2012-CSA (Call "Gender aspects in career structures and paths")
 - http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/ERC-CSA-2012-GfA-final_EN.pdf
- ERCAREER: Capturing career paths of ERC grantees and applicants
- Objectives:
 - Mapping the road to excellence: (un-) conventional careers.
 - Charting the institutional role in shaping research careers for those with care responsibilities.
- Multimethod multisource study, 2012-2014:
 - Existing archival data on careers (CVs), survey data, interviews.
 - Multivariate techniques, a.o. Optimal Matching Analysis (OMA).
- Desirable impact:
 - Creating recommendations for the development and improvement of evidence-based policies, procedures, and practices to achieve greater gender balance among ERC applicants and grantees.



Exemptions: the case of the ERC



- Career breaks allowed
 - Maternity/paternity/parental leave, medical training, military service, illness, “other”
 - Criteria, max. length, and documentation needed explained in guide for applicants
 - Part time work is not taken into account, half time counts as full time
- What unconventional career paths are is *not* defined, for applicants or reviewers
 - Burden of responsibility and framing lies with applicant
- “Reviewers should also take into account possible *breaks* in the research career of the applicant and/or *unconventional* research career paths, especially in the case of women scientists.” (from Work Programme Ideas ERC, emphasis added)
 - Guide for reviewers and review forms do not mention these matters
- Exemption decisions (on eligibility window, career stage) made by ERC panel
 - Procedure, criteria, documentation requirements change, room for bias evident



Preliminary results

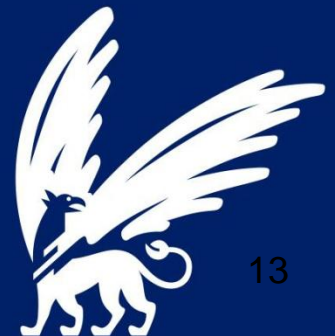


- CV analysis served as input for career inventory
- Interviews provide stories of lived experiences
 - Dual careers, mobility, trying to fitting the mould of the ideal career
- Exemption requests StG 2012 quite informative
 - Both men and women request exemptions
 - Framing of request differs by country and discipline
 - Success ratio overall does not differ compared to non-exemptions
 - However, there might be an interaction with gender



In conclusion...

- We need to know what is considered “conventional”
 - Before we can allow “unconventional” careers;
 - Is paternity leave as conventional as maternity leave? How about working part time? Being a mountaineering guide?
- To prevent ironic effects it would help to uncover disciplinary specific normative beliefs about careers
- Can we change what is considered a conventional career in order to create sustainable excellence?



Actions addressing gender balance:

- Track careers beyond CVs to expose (un)conventions
- Make career criteria and evaluation procedures explicit
- Help build evidence base on career consequences of various policies to compensate for time to care:
 - Accepted / common: Stop the clock or *Extension* (e.g., 18 months per child),
 - Less common: *Adaptation* (e.g., 80% publications when working 0.8 FTE),
 - State of the art: *Compensation* (e.g., research sabbatical without teaching obligations after parental leave).
- Make use of allowance or policies *opt out* rather than *opt in*

