What do social scientists do?
Mapping careers, mobilities and impacts in the social sciences and humanities.

(Project report 1)

The POCARIM project is coordinated by Professor Louise Ackers at the University of Liverpool, and funded by the Directorate-General for Research & Innovation of the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7), Specific Programme Socio-economic Science and Humanities.
Project context and objectives

Across national settings there is an increasing expectation that higher education, and postgraduate research training in particular, is an investment that should have clear social and economic returns. This expectation is reflected in the strategies of policy makers, in Europe and beyond, who have sought to link researcher training in various ways to other sectors, especially industry and business. Of particular note is the emphasis on investing in and exploiting research in the sciences, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), resulting in a paradigm of impact that arguably underplays the contribution of the social sciences and humanities (SSH). At the same time, there is a consensus that various types of mobility – disciplinary, sectoral and geographical – can play an important role in the dissemination and creation of knowledge and innovation.

In practice, European policy makers at national and regional scales have sought to promote the mobility of researchers in these several ways through, for example, the pursuit of a number of freedoms, including the movement of persons and of knowledge. Schemes such as the Marie Curie Actions and Erasmus have funded mobility of researchers and students within the European Union and beyond; whilst the Bologna Process has initiated a harmonisation of higher education systems in order to make such mobility increasingly possible. The ultimate goal of these strategies is to contribute to the creating of a common European Research Area and Higher Education Area to meet the demand of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs for the “most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”.

In the context of these developments, the POCARIM study explores the practices and experiences of doctoral graduates in the social science and humanities. The target population were awarded their doctoral degrees between 2000 and 2012.
in one of 13 countries (France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and the UK), and is conducted collaboratively between researchers from those same countries. Its core aims are to understand the SSH doctoral populations and their production in the POCARIM countries; to identify their mobilities across disciplines, sectors and borders; and to identify and understand the types of impacts that are generated, as well as how and according to what timeframes these impacts are felt.

The project is divided into a number of Work Packages, led by different national teams, each one dedicated to exploring and understanding a particular dimension of the project. Work package 1 takes the form of a review of existing research on relevant themes at the relevant geographical scales and contexts; Work Package 2 is a review of relevant policy, again on national and European levels; Work Package 3 is a review of available data sources that contribute to the mapping of the SSH doctoral graduate population; Work Package 4 takes the form of a survey of the experiences and practices of a sample of the SSH doctoral population; and Work Package 5 consists of a qualitative interviews with 25 respondents to the survey in each POCARIM country, 325 in total. The results of each Work Package will be analysed and synthesised in a report to the European Commission in 2014.

**Work performed since the beginning of the project and the main results achieved so far**

At the close of the first reporting period a great deal of work has been done on the POCARIM project, and several Work Packages are now complete. The key output of Work Package 1 has been the production of a review of over 350 studies which address the issues of SSH human resources and organises them into two clusters: employment trends, career paths and graduate destinations; and impact, engagement and contribution of SSH research. All 13 POCARIM member
countries took part in sourcing country-specific research, and also contributed to
the collection of European-wide sources. The report found a great variation in
both the quantity of studies from each national context, the types of publication
(scientific, peer reviewed articles, scientific non-reviewed articles, evaluation
reports, work papers, position papers, books, conference papers and policy
papers), and the specific foci of research. The report found that “while there is an
abundance of studies at international and European level, some countries are
doing considerably more research and evaluation studies in this area than
others”.

A second report was produced for Work Package 2, which focused on the
“identification and review of relevant policies and practices shaping the
population of doctoral graduates in the SSH, their characteristics, career paths
and impacts”. The report collated and analysed national and European-level
policies according to three themes: policy responses to resource constraints;
policy responses to inter-disciplinarily and impact; and policy responses to the
Bologna Process and doctoral; training. The report found significant differences in
the policy approaches of each national context, in terms of both the quantity of
documents available for analysis, and the focus of the policies themselves. The
report finds, for example, different degrees of impact of the economic crisis and
responses to it in each POCARIM country, with the Southern European countries
being most affected. These differences are reflected in the funding and policy
priorities in higher education and research systems, with some countries cutting
investment, some increasing it and others remaining more or less stable.

Work Package 3 resulted in a report on the existing and available data sources on
the SSH research population in the POCARIM countries. A number of interesting
findings were noted, such as the differing representation of women in SSH and the different disciplinary mixes across the POCARIM countries. The report also finds that there is a great deal of variation across the POCARIM countries in the collection of relevant data. This variation is evident not only in the extent of available data but also the ways in which disciplines are disaggregated; the collection of data representing the post-doctoral sectoral locations of SSH (and in particular those from the humanities) graduates. The report recommends the inclusion of a new ‘Scientific Researcher’ category in the ISCO occupations codes to facilitate comparability and tracking of career paths in different countries.

In the course of Work Package 4, a survey was designed and deployed electronically across the POCARIM countries, generating over 1,000 responses. The survey found that in the POCARIM sample the public sector was the most common area of employment for SSH graduates, with Germany having the largest proportion of graduates switching to the private sector. Moreover, the majority of SSH doctoral graduates in all POCARIM countries found their first job in an HE or research institution. On the other hand, on average only around 10% of SSH doctoral graduates found their first job in business or commerce, although this figure was 19% in France – a finding almost certainly affected by the sampling.

From the responses to the survey, each national team conducted interviews with 25 SSH doctoral graduates (325 in total) in order to contribute to the objectives of Work Package 5. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner around themes 13 themes negotiated by the partners: pre-PhD work; PhD field/discipline; first job after PhD awarded; career path after PhD; internationalisation (including mobility); intersectorality; interdisciplinarity; impact of work; future plans and aspirations; significance of language (mother
tongue, English or other) in career; role of networks; family and other caring responsibilities; and impact of the economic crisis. The interviews were transcribed, translated and anonymised before being entered into NVIVO for analysis. Coding and analysis of the interviews is on-going and will contribute substantially to the final report.

The expected final results and their potential impact and use (including socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project so far)

At this point, the analysis of POCARIM data has already begun to generate outputs. Several team members have presented outputs of the research in conference or policy papers. A full list (regularly updated) of the outputs can be found on the POCARIM website. Recently, POCARIM representatives from Italy, Portugal, Hungary, France and the UK presented findings at the 26th CHER (Consortium of Higher Education Researchers) Annual Conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, in September 2013.

The final report will be submitted to the European Commission at the end of August 2014. The final report will synthesise all the phases of the project and incorporate an in-depth analysis of the data. The report will contribute to the understanding of the mobilities and impacts of SSH researchers in the POCARIM countries and beyond. In addition to the final report, several regional dissemination workshops are being planned which will appeal to policy, practice and research audiences in different parts of Europe and beyond the POCARIM countries themselves. Further dissemination will take place through conference papers and publications for which individual members of the POCARIM project will take responsibility, although there will be either an edited book or a special issue of a journal to bring them together in a single volume.
The nature of the potential impacts will be several and varied. As noted, the research will be of interest to policy makers, academics and practitioners in the field of researcher training. There has already been interest from, for example, institutional postgraduate research trainers, career advisors and alumni offices who are interested in tracking the kinds of careers open to SSH doctorates. The POCARIM team are beginning to identify some of the many ways in which SSH doctorates contribute to society and the economy beyond the higher education sector, as well as some of the issues which both problematise and facilitate these impacts.

The breadth of the research and the relatively open approach to the interviews in particular promises to generate original and useful insights across a number of important themes. Not only have we started to identify the types and modes of impacts, but we are seeing the implications of, for example, families, language proficiency and mobility in the internationalisation of SSH research careers and impacts. Working collaboratively and informed by specific national contexts as well as broader, transnational and regional considerations, the national POCARIM teams are exploring the data. The range of disciplinary and methodological backgrounds the teams bring to this phase promises to make it particularly interesting and productive.
Thirteen national case studies are being conducted.

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