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How To Become a Sociology Professor: Opportunities, Inequalities, Alternatives

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Content

Introduction

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The academic job market in Switzerland and its neighboring countries is highly competitive, with a significant bottleneck in the pathway to professorship (see Rost in this volume). The market is characterized by a huge supply of highly qualified candidates, especially at the PhD and postdoctoral level, where many researchers spend years in temporary positions without clear prospects for permanent academic roles. As Rost (in this volume) highlights, this competition appears to be especially intense within sociology compared to other disciplines.

The overall situation of the academic job market in Switzerland and in some of its neighboring countries is also related to the fact, that the tenure-track system is less established compared to the U.S., and professorships are thus often scarce in relation to early- and mid-level career positions. Therefore, the primary bottleneck in the academic career arises from the limited number of permanent academic positions, particularly full professorships. As Kohl and Steinhardt (2024) show, the number of advertised professorial positions are declining over time in the German-speaking area (including German-speaking Switzerland and Austria). In France the number of professorships in the social sciences seems to be stable or also declining (data.gouv.fr 2024). Therefore early-career researchers face fierce competition for the few available positions, which typically require not only an outstanding research track record but also substantial teaching experience, networking, and in some cases securing external funding. Kohl and Steinhardt (2024) show in their analysis that the expectations outlined in job advertisements for professorships in the social sciences have clearly increased over time. This situation on the academic labor market leads to the so-called "leaky pipeline", where a huge percentage of academics drop out in the course of their career and leave the academia. In the past this leaky pipeline was strongly gendered, with more women opting out of the academic career compared to men. However, as Lutter (in this volume) shows, this is no longer the case in German sociology, where women have higher chances than men of achieving a professorship. Since this finding was surprising to him, he enlarged his data coverage and did several follow-up studies to check the robustness of his results. However, as he shows in his article his results are not only confirmed for German sociology but are clearly in line with further studies for other disciplines and fields. Recent data of the Federal Office of Statistics on careers of post-docs in Switzerland also do no exhibit gender differences in the attainment of professorships anymore (BfS 2023). Thus, it seems that careers in the academic field are increasingly less structured along the line of gender divisions.

The structure of the academic job market is also consequential for the employment situation of non-tenured academics, which is marked by instability and precarious conditions, with limited opportunities for long-term career progression. Non-tenured academics, including PhD candidates, postdocs, and adjuncts, often work on fixed-term contracts, sometimes for many years, without clear pathways to permanent positions. This creates job insecurity, as these academics frequently move between institutions and countries in search of opportunities, while sometimes facing high workloads, limited benefits, and unclear career prospects. This has also led to public discussions, campaigns by early- and

mid-level faculty, and studies by the relevant players in the field of science and university politics. This topic was also taken up in least years bulletin of the Swiss Sociological Association (Burton-Jeangros and Steinmetz 2023). In Switzerland, for example, a campaign by midlevel faculty (https://campaign.petition-academia.ch/, accessed November 7, 2024) was successfully launched in 2021 and affirmatively discussed in the national council of Switzerland. In Germany, the "#IchBinHanna" debate, sparked by a tweet from the German Ministry of Education and Research, highlighted the frustrations of early-career academics (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/IchBinHanna, accessed November 7, 2024). The ministry's portrayal of temporary positions as necessary for fostering innovation sparked widespread criticism, with academics expressing grievances about the lack of permanent positions, excessive reliance on short-term contracts, and the mental and financial strain this imposes. In Switzerland, *actionuni*, an association representing early-career researchers, has advocated for improved working conditions for non-tenured academics (http://www.actionuni.ch/, accessed November 7, 2024). They argue for more transparency in hiring, longer contract durations, and the expansion of tenure-track positions. The paper by Balliff and Zinn (in this volume) shows how these conditions have been exacerbated by the Covid-Pandemic, leading to extra effort and work to reconcile academic career and family and to aim for the necessary mobility within this framework of temporary and uncertain employment. The role of family responsibilities is also highlighted by Lutter (in this volume). He shows that the gender gap in publication activity is increased by the birth of a child. However, the effect of founding a family is especially pronounced among women, which had a lower level of achievement already before the birth of their children. Pap and Velicu (in this volume) show in addition that factors like low salaries, high workload and intense pressure lead to reduced satisfaction with academic work, whereas autonomy, opportunities for development increase work satisfaction. Overall, they find a small gender difference, with women slightly less satisfied with their situation at work. Furthermore, perceived competition has no effect on the evaluation of men, but a negative impact on the satisfaction of women.

Academic careers and the aim to reach a professorship are also strongly shaped by the conditions of the respective disciplines. Sociology, in contrast to many other disciplines, is not characterized by a canonical theoretical and methodological orientation, but by a differentiation into different theories, sub-disciplinary fields, and methodological orientations. As Schneickert and Wimmer (in this volume) show, this differentiation does also come along with diverging criteria of academic merit. Lutter (in this volume) demonstrates the number of articles listed in the SSCI is the best predictor for achieving a professorship in sociology. However, according to the results by Schneickert and Wimmer, sociology professors, in general, are not highly internationalized in terms of publications and, on average, do not achieve astronomical numbers of citations. This is where differentiation comes into play. Fields such as social inequality research and social policy exhibit a much higher degree of internationalization and a significantly greater average number of citations per professor compared to other areas. For early- and mid-level career scientists, this also means that they must not only specialize in their topics and methodological approaches, but also have to cater to different evaluation criteria. Lutter (in this volume) shows for example that especially women profit more from a specialization (in terms of reaching a professorship) and a focus

on quantitative methods. Men seem to profit more from a broader research expertise which matches the results of Schneickert and Wimmer (in this volume) that men are more strongly represented among sociologists with a focus on sociological theory and cultural sociology. The role of different thematic specializations and methodological orientations is also put forward in the contribution by Benz, Rossier and Araujo (in this volume). They show that the success rates for grant applications at the Swiss National Science Foundation vary not only by methodological orientation and topic, but also for different career stages.

Overall, this Bulletin gives an overview of structures and factors, which shape career trajectories in the social sciences, especially sociology in Switzerland and the neighboring countries. It shows that academic careers are still highly competitive and rather uncertain in their chances of success. This continues to put stress on some early- and mid-career researchers, especially when they simultaneously pursue an academic career and attempt to raise a family. This leads to rather high drop-out rates from the academic career track ("leaky pipeline"), which does not seem to be structured along gender lines anymore. However, even if the overall success rates of women and men do not differ anymore, the specializations, methodological orientations, and conditions which enhance their success continue to diverge to a certain degree. The contributions in this Bulletin highlight that early- and mid-career sociologists therefore have to ponder their topical specialization and their methodological orientation in their career plan, since the discipline is highly differentiated and different subfields come with varying evaluation criteria and chances for success. However, in contrast to many other disciplines, sociologists in Switzerland are able to rely on a rather strong labor market outside of academia and may think about academic careers outside of sociology, since their theoretical and methodological skills are transferable to other disciplines.

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A Sociology Professorship as a Hotly Contested Winner-Takes-All Market with Attractive Outside Options

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Professorships are a Typical Winner-Takes-All Market

The competition for professorships resembles a winner-takes-all market: only a few will emerge as winners from the rat race for top positions. This is illustrated by recent recruitment: In 2023, Swiss universities employed 24 592 full-time-equivalent research assistants and 4 454 professors (Bundesamt für Statistik 2024). Approximately half of these research assistants are employed part time, but only a small proportion of professors are (SKBF | CSRE Schweizerische Koordinationsstelle für Bildungsforschung 2023). In a rough model calculation, this means that there are around 36 888 research assistants compared to only 4 454 professorships. In addition, a professorship is occupied for an average of 30 years, whereas assistant positions are filled approximately every six years. This results in a ratio of 41.4 research assistants to one professorship, corresponding to a probability of 2.4% of a research assistant becoming a professor. This figure fits very well with the analyses of the Federal Statistical Office. According to these analyses, 2% were employed as professors at Swiss universities six years after starting their postdoc (Bundesamt für Statistik 2023).

Competition is Keen in Sociology

Of course, this ratio does not take into account the actual competition in a field of specialization: not all research assistants aspire to a professorship. A survey of around 10 000 students and mid-level staff at UZH and ETHZ in 2023 shows clear differences between subjects (Osterloh and Rost 2023). Broadly speaking, the results show that the attractiveness of a professorship, and thus the competition, increases the fewer the options in a subject outside the university (see Table 1). Competition is highest—twice as high as average—in linguistics and literature. The lowest—only two thirds as high as average—is in engineering, construction, and architecture. Competition in the social sciences is roughly the same as the average for all subjects. However, the social sciences are a diverse field with clear differences between specializations. Sociology bachelor students evaluate a professorship as broadly as attractive as the average of all students in other subjects (see Table 2). The competition in the sociology bachelor's program therefore does not seem very high. However, this changes at the master level: scholars who complete a master in sociology—a different selection of students—aspire to a professorship twice as often as those in other subjects (see Table 3). This keen competition sets sociology apart from most other social sciences. Only in psychology and economics is the competition at the master level more pronounced.

This result suggests that the path to a sociology professorship is characterized by more competition than in other subjects. Such a conclusion is also supported by the observation that the number of applicants for a sociology professorship is usually significantly higher than in other subjects such as business administration (der Smitten et al. 2017). Moreover, sociology is an interdisciplinary science consisting of the "hyphenated sociologies": subfields such as economic sociology or religious sociology. As a result, sociologists compete more often than average with academics who have acquired their qualifications in other specialist fields. Conversely, sociologists often perceive a professorship outside sociology as an unattractive

option and a professional downgrade for which they therefore do not apply, despite the fact that they undoubtedly would also have opportunities due to their interdisciplinary nature.[1] One reason for this can be assumed to be the different weighting of incentives for a professorship. Reputation and interest in the subject seem to play a far greater role in sociology than, for example, the expected salary or the position of the professorship itself.

The Path to a Professorship in Sociology Offers Attractive Options Outside the University

One conclusion to be drawn is that achieving the career goal of a sociology professorship is the exception and not the rule. As is usual in winner-takes-all markets, the majority of people who are interested in and qualified for such positions finish empty-handed. However, the chances of obtaining a professorship can be improved significantly by applying for professorships outside sociology. Such opportunities are currently only insufficiently exploited by sociologists. However, a professorship in another subject area is not a professional downgrade, as seems commonly to be assumed. On the contrary, many innovations and new approaches within sociology come from people who have held chairs outside sociology and affiliated to other departments. One example is Ronald Burt, who held a chair at a business school.

Furthermore, from a Swiss perspective, applications abroad are also far too rare (see also Bundesamt für Statistik 2023), as such positions are perceived as economically unattractive. However, applicants who are solely interested in professorships in Switzerland have only marginal chances of obtaining one. First, the domestic market in Switzerland is very small, in contrast to larger countries such as Germany, France, and the USA. Second, the academic system seeks innovation and diversity, which implies that external applicants often have better chances of succeeding. Without the willingness to move abroad, pursuing a professorship as a career goal is inadvisable.

But there is one piece of good news: unlike many other subjects in which a professorship is perceived as an attractive job option, sociologists have excellent options beyond the academic system. As graduate studies show, sociologists in Switzerland have very low unemployment rates and earn above-average salaries (Universität Luzern 2022). In this respect, all those interested in a professorship should be advised to look also for alternatives on the job market at an early stage. Anyone in sociology who has a plan B beyond a professorship and realizes this before the end of their 40s usually has excellent job market opportunities. It is not only professorships that can be intrinsically fulfilling but also many other professional positions. Moreover, the salaries potentially achievable in many of these professional fields are far higher than that of a professor, for example in management positions in business or the federal government. In this respect, personal risk can certainly be limited, at least in sociology.

1 An analogous picture can also be observed in other highly competitive social sciences. For example, economists rarely apply for business administration professorships (Jones and Sloan 2024).

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Table 1 Competition for professorships according to broad subject areas

Rank	Current subject fields	I aspire to a professorship.		
		No	Yes	Total
1	UZH: Social Sciences and Education	80.65	19.35	100
2	UZH: Law and Economics	83.06	16.94	100
3	UZH: Linguistics and Literature	64.86	35.14	100
4	UZH: Natural Sciences	75.89	24.11	100
5	UZH: Mathematics and Computer Science	76.80	23.20	100
6	UZH: History and Cultural Studies	73.26	26.74	100
7	UZH: Medicine and Health	77.39	22.61	100
8	UZH: Theology and Religious Studies	64.29	35.71	100
9	ETH: Architecture and Civil Engineering	87.30	12.70	100
10	ETH: Natural Sciences and Mathematics	73.53	26.47	100
11	ETH: Humanities, Social and Political Sciences	84.13	15.87	100
12	ETH: Engineering sciences	87.38	12.62	100
13	ETH: System-orientated natural sciences	86.88	13.12	100
	Total	81.48	18.52	100

Source: Osterloh and Rost (2023).

Table 2 Competition for professorships according to bachelor major subject

Rank	Major bachelor subject	I aspire to a professorship.		
		No	Yes	Total
1	UZH: Psychology	48.94	51.06	100
2	UZH: Philosophy	56.25	43.75	100
3	UZH: Theology	62.16	37.84	100
4	UZH: English Linguistics and Literature	62.50	37.50	100
5	UZH: Economics	62.91	37.09	100
…				
22	**UZH: Sociology**	**78.86**	**21.14**	**100**
…				
49	ETH: Agricultural Sciences	92.31	7.69	100
50	ETH: Spatial Engineering	92.59	7.41	100
51	ETH: Chemical Engineering	93.18	6.82	100
52	ETH: Civil Engineering	93.52	6.48	100
53	UZH: Computer Science	100.00		100
	Total	81.48	18.52	100

Note: Subjects with fewer than 20 responses were excluded from the analyses. Source: Osterloh and Rost (2023).

Table 3 Competition for professorships according to master major subject

Rank	Major master subject	I aspire to a professorship.		
		No	Yes	Total
1	UZH: Linguistics	44.90	55.10	100
2	UZH: Philosophy	47.62	52.38	100
3	UZH: Psychology	50.00	50.00	100
4	UZH: Economics and National Economics	50.00	50.00	100
5	UZH: Physics	52.54	47.46	100
…				
12	**UZH: Sociology**	**65.38**	**34.62**	**100**
…				
60	ETH: Food Science	90.91	9.09	100
61	ETH: Mechanical Engineering	92.08	7.92	100
62	ETH: Pharmacy	93.33	6.67	100
63	ETH: Chemical and Bioengineering	94.44	5.56	100
64	ETH: Environmental Engineering	100.00		100
	Total	81.48	18.52	100

Note: Subjects with fewer than 20 responses were excluded from the analyses. Source: Osterloh and Rost (2023).

Gender Disparities and Determinants of Tenure in German Sociology: Insights from Four Longitudinal Studies

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Despite efforts in promoting gender equality in academia, women tend to be concentrated in lower academic ranks and are less likely to hold senior positions, such as tenured professorships. Whether this discrepancy still is a result of gender discrimination—or rather a result of preference differences in career and family orientation—remains subject of ongoing academic debate. To investigate whether and under what conditions women face lower chances of becoming tenured professors, Isabel M. Habicht, Martin Schröder, Mark Lutter, and Lisa Wunsch conducted four studies on the correlates and determinants affecting academic careers in German sociology (Habicht et al. 2024; Lutter and Schröder 2016; Lutter and Schröder 2019; Wunsch et al. 2024). This long-term project started in 2013 when Lutter and Schröder began manually collecting all available CV and publication data for sociologists in Germany, by coding the webpages of 72 sociology departments (essentially all sociology departments in Germany).

From this data, they constructed individual career profiles for tenured and non-tenured sociologists, doctoral students, postdocs, junior professors, and full professors. The final dataset consisted of full career profiles for 530 doctoral students (47% female), 433 postdocs (43% female), including 36 junior professors (47% female), and 267 professors (32% female)—a total of 1260 individuals. In examining the data, a first publication in this project focused on understanding the role of both meritocratic factors (such as publication output) and non-meritocratic factors (such as gender, symbolic capital, and social networks) in becoming a tenured professor in Germany, as well as gender differences (Lutter and Schröder 2016). The study aimed to determine what a typical professor "looks" like at the point of their first tenured position—how many publications, what types of publications, how many institutional changes, how many interim positions, and, among other things, how many months abroad an average sociology professor had at the time they obtained a permanent professorship at a German department.

One of the most significant findings of the study was that, contrary to what the authors expected, women were not less but actually more likely to obtain tenure than men, even though they typically had fewer publications at the time of hiring. The results specifically showed that women secured their first permanent university positions with 23% to 44% fewer publications compared to their male colleagues. After adjusting for factors such as scholarly output, women were found to be 1.4 times more likely to be hired as full professors than men. This counterintuitive finding—women having better odds despite lower publication rates—suggests that factors beyond publication output play a critical role in tenure decisions for female academics.

The study also revealed interesting details on the average differences between men and women in the years they obtained their first professorship. Counting from the start of their academic careers (their first publication), women obtained their first professorship on average two years earlier than men, despite having a lower publication record. In all types of publications, men published significantly more: 1.8 times as many SSCI articles, 1.7 times as many non-SSCI articles, 1.4 times as many books, 1.3 times as many edited volumes, 1.4 times as many book chapters, and 1.8 times as much gray literature

as women (Lutter and Schröder 2016, 1004). However, women accumulated more academic awards throughout their doctoral and postdoc careers: with an average of 0.52 awards before their first tenured position, women received 1.7 times more awards than men. Women also spend more time abroad during their career, although this difference was not statistically significant at conventional levels.

The multivariate analysis revealed additional insights into the sex differences in achieving tenure in sociology. First, the overall female advantage could not be fully explained by the fact that women specialize more often in the field of gender studies, an influential subdiscipline in sociology; the results remained the same when professorships in gender studies were removed from the sample. Generally, women had a higher chance of becoming professors in the field of gender studies—of 14 professors in total, 12 were women. The chances of becoming a professor decreased from 41% to 36% when excluding professors with a gender studies denomination, suggesting that part of the female advantage may indeed be explained by women's disproportionate access to these positions, though this is a small percentage of the overall advantage.

Lutter and Schröder also examined the odds of becoming a full professor (W3/C4 pay scale) versus of becoming an associate professor (W2/C3 pay scale in Germany). Interestingly, women are much more likely than men to become associate professor. However, for full professorships, women were still 20% more likely than men to secure W3/C4 positions. The female advantage was also substantial when considering assistant (junior) professorships.

Regarding different publication profiles, the study suggested that refereed SSCI articles are the main predictor of tenure success for men, while for women, SSCI articles play a lesser role, though still an important one. Instead, monographs and edited volumes have had a relatively larger impact for women. The strongest predictor for women, however, was symbolic capital in the form of academic awards; each award increased a woman's chance of becoming a professor by 67%, whereas there is no such effect for men. In sum, for men, the number of SSCI journal articles seems to be the most important predictor of obtaining a tenured position, while for women, individual reputation, the publication of edited volumes, books, and SSCI articles are key factors. Academic awards, however, were the strongest predictor of tenure success for women.

A key issue raised by the study is the potential for survivorship bias in the dataset. The analysis focuses on individuals sampled and observed in the year 2013. While the dataset consists of retrospective longitudinal panel data, the CV information itself was collected at one point in time. Therefore, the study accounts only for those who remained in academia long enough to compete for tenure, excluding those who dropped out earlier. Dropout risks are potentially gender-specific, however. Women are more likely than men to leave academia early due to structural and personal factors, possibly including the challenge of balancing work and family life, lack of mentorship, or even better opportunities outside academia. This could result in an overestimation of women's success in obtaining tenure, as only the most resilient women—those who survive the "leaky pipeline"—are included in the analysis. This may explain the female advantage observed by Lutter and Schröder.

To address the study's potential survivorship bias, the authors extended the original 2013 dataset by adding two additional waves of observation, updating the data in 2016 and 2019, and collaborating with Isabel Habicht (Habicht et al. 2024). This follow-up generated a full longitudinal sample

with observation points in 2013, 2016, and 2019. The updated data now included 699 doctoral students (53% female), 903 postdocs (48% female), 59 junior professors (54% female), and 486 tenured professors (39% female).

In comparing the original with the newly updated data, the authors reveal novel additional insights into the gender dynamics in sociology. Between 2013 and 2019, the proportion of female full professors nearly doubled, rising from 21% to 39% (Habicht et al. 2024, 410). Compared to 2013, women are no longer recruited earlier than men (both genders now take about 15 years on average from first publication to tenure), but the publication gap remains: men still have significantly more publications at the time of their first tenured professorship—about 1.5 times more SSCI journal articles, 1.6 times more non-SSCI articles, 1.4 times more books, and 1.2 times more book chapters than women. There is no longer a significant difference in winning academic awards, however. Replicating the multivariate models of the original study, Habicht et al. (2024) confirmed the female advantage with the updated data. The effect increased to 46% in the new study, meaning that women are 46% more likely to receive tenure compared to men. The effect increased to 48% when controlling for parenthood.

Due to the three-wave design, this study is now one of the first that provides information on those who left the academic career since 2019, revealing so far unknown gender-specific dropout patterns. According to their data, if women in sociology decide to leave academia, they tend to do so early in their careers, particularly before completing their doctoral studies (pre-doc stage). In contrast, if men decide to leave, they are more likely to exit during the post-doc stage. Despite these dropout patterns, the higher female success rate in obtaining tenure remains, suggesting that the effect is not a result of survivorship bias in the data.

The most recent study in this project examines impact of research specialization on academic career success in German sociology (Wunsch et al. 2014), particularly with a focus on gender differences in publication output. Based on a computational text analysis of all journal abstracts of all tenured professors in their updated dataset on German sociology, Wunsch et al. (2024) find that specialization benefits women more than men, whereas a generalist publication record benefits both men and women, but women to a lesser extent. Interestingly, women particularly profit from specializing in quantitative sociology, while they have no benefit when they build their career in qualitative sociology. For men, it makes no difference whether they specialize in qualitative or quantitative sociology.

Finally, Lutter and Schröder (2019) look into the effect of parenthood on publication productivity in German sociology. They utilized a combination of their manually coded career dataset along with an email survey directed at the scholars in their sample to gather information about their parental status. The data shows that childbearing leads to a considerable decline in publication productivity for female sociologists, whereas male sociologists experience no such impact. Moreover, the authors observe that the gendered impact of parenthood on productivity does not sufficiently lessen the overall disparities in publication output between genders; women continue to publish about 20% less than men even after controlling for the negative effects associated with childbearing. Therefore, the female publication gap seems to originate from other factors than childbearing. Interestingly, the authors also find that the consequences of childbearing vary depending on women's prior academic achieve-

ments, indicating a mechanism of performance-driven self-selection. Specifically, women with lower academic performance experience a more pronounced motherhood penalty, while the publication output of high-achieving women remains largely unaffected by childbirth. Consequently, women who achieve early career recognition tend to encounter less severe declines in productivity associated with parenthood.

In conclusion, the presented research points to recent changes in gender inequality in academia. Overall, we find that women in sociology seem to be not at disadvantage anymore when it comes to them being promoted to tenured professorship positions. This result is in line with several newer studies on the changing dynamics of female representation in academia (Bol et al. 2022; Carlsson et al. 2020; Lutter et al. 2022; Schröder et al. 2021; Schröder et al. 2024; Solga et al. 2023; Williams and Ceci 2015). Ceci et al. (2023), reviewing in a meta study six key domains in academia, conclude that "contrary to the omnipresent claims of sexism in these domains appearing in top journals and the media, our findings show that tenure-track women are at parity with tenure-track men in three domains (grant funding, journal acceptances, and recommendation letters) and are advantaged over men in a fourth domain (hiring)" (Ceci et al. 2023,15). Despite an increase in the number of female professors, the persistent publication gap indicates that structural challenges or preference differences continue to affect women's advancement in academia. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, ensuring our knowledge about current gender (in-)equalities in academia.

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Invisible Burden: The Unequal Impact of the Pandemic on Postdoctoral Researchers[1]

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When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Switzerland in March 2020, we were postdoctoral researchers and parents of young children. We struggled to balance work, family responsibilities, and academic mobility while trying to continue our research. The interruption or delay of our research activities had immediate effects on our lives as academics and will likely have persistent implications for our career development. However, almost five years after the onset of the pandemic, the unequal impact of the pandemic on our generation of early career researchers has still received limited attention from academic institutions.

The Swiss academic landscape already exhibited significant gender inequalities before the pandemic, mirroring trends observed in academic institutions worldwide.[2] Despite women's overrepresentation among students in all disciplines, they constitute only 29 to 30 percent of professors in Swiss higher education institutions.[3] Female researchers struggle to reach tenured positions, publish less overall, and have a smaller professional network compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, academic mothers tend to shoulder most of the unpaid reproductive labor at home as well as teaching and service loads in academia in comparison to their male colleagues—a burden that Flaherty (2013) called the "mom penalty". The pandemic has exacerbated the preexisting unequal distribution of care work within families and institutions. There has been a significant decline in women's journal submissions attributed to the challenges they faced in balancing research and childcare during lockdowns (Krukowski et al. 2021).

However, the differences within the category of academic mothers, which translated into very different experiences of the pandemic, have often been overlooked. Factors such as the age, number, and health status of children played a critical role in determining the impact of the pandemic on mothers (Myers et al. 2020). Therefore, an analysis that considers diverse "intersections of difference" (Sullivan and King Thorius 2010) is crucial to capturing the unequal impact of the pandemic. For a nuanced and detailed analysis of how the pandemic exacerbates inequalities among academics, we need to consider both structural elements, such as gender, race, and age, as well as social and economic conditions like job precarity, parenting status (single or co-parenting), or health status of family members.

We focus here on the impact of the pandemic on Swiss early career researchers, based on our own experiences. Approximately 80 percent of research personnel in Switzerland hold fixed-term contracts. Swiss postdoctoral researchers face thus an extended period of precarity lasting from 10 to 15 years as they strive to secure one of the scarce tenured positions. This academic career model is commonly characterized as the "survivor model". As such, postdoctoral researchers are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic (Her-

1 This text is based on a paper published by the two authors in *Gender, Work and Organization (Ballif and Zinn 2024)*. A previous iteration of this work was published in French (Ballif and Zinn 2023).

2 For bibliographical references, please see Ballif and Zinn (2024).

3 See the Federal Statistical Office data on higher education institutions: https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/education-science/educational-staff/tertiary-higher-institutions.html (accessed November 11, 2024).

man et al. 2021). Moreover, female professors are often recruited internationally rather than from the pool of Swiss postdoctoral researchers. The stakes were particularly high for postdoctoral researchers during and after the pandemic since reduced productivity and a lower publication rate were likely to jeopardize their prospects in academia.

In what follows, we use autoethnography to highlight the different forms of additional labor that the pandemic created for postdoctoral researchers—what we term "Covid labor". We reflect on inequalities among postdoctoral researchers in the distribution of Covid labor as well as how Swiss academic institutions addressed – or did not address – the impact of the pandemic on that category of researchers.

The Hidden Lockdown Labor

It's 12:55 p.m. on a Friday in early April 2020, and I have 20 min to finish preparing my two-hour online lecture for students at a Swiss university. The room that serves as my home office is filled with chaos: the cries of our ten-month-old baby pierce the air, and our other child is shouting from the bathroom across the apartment. The pandemic turned our family organization upside down by brutally depriving us of the last support we had thanks to the school and daycare. The aim was to alternate between work and childcare, but the reality often deviates from the plan, with work extending into the weekend and night. The pressure of trying to manage work and family life is overwhelming, the days are long, and the weekends are filled with work, leaving little room for rest, but I press on, determined to find a way to make it all work. (Isabelle Zinn)

The transfer of childcare responsibility from collective structures or private individuals to parents during lockdowns has burdened working parents with a simultaneous "double shift": caring for children while fulfilling work obligations without any opportunity for respite between these demanding tasks. The fusion of personal and professional realms—and the blurring of reproductive and productive spheres—has transformed family spaces into areas allocated to paid work. The labor of reorganizing one's space and schedule involved practical tasks, including acquiring the right equipment as well as finding a spatial arrangement that allowed for both the necessary focus on work and the mental availability to attend to the children's needs.

The Covid labor of reorganizing time and space has been largely ignored by academic institutions despite being a prerequisite to academic work under lockdown. Furthermore, the fact that these spatial and temporal negotiations were heavily constrained by the size of one's housing and household was largely invisibilized. Covid labor did not occur in a vacuum but was and still is woven into a complex fabric of structural factors and economic conditions.

Institutional Responses to Covid Labor

On August 3, 2020, I am leaving Switzerland for the United Kingdom along with my partner and two young children to start a postdoctoral fellowship. Until the last minute, we weren't sure if our flight would proceed, if the borders would be open, if our belongings would arrive safely, or if the house we had rented from afar would exist. The organization funding my scholarship, however, declared they were "unable to provide any help" in case we ended up stranded between two countries because it was "my responsibility" to manage our travel arrangements. Four months later, on January 4, 2021: The British government announced the closure of schools for nine weeks. I have only 28 days left to complete a grant application and compete with the best researchers in

my field, but my work time is now halved as I have to homeschool my child. My funding institution would not grant any additional time for submitting my application nor any extension for my current research project. (Edmée Ballif).

Starting in the spring of 2020, Swiss academic institutions implemented exceptional measures to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic. The Swiss National Science Foundation offered opportunities to extend research project funding. Some universities extended expiring fixed-term contracts by a few months. Most Swiss universities announced that the time spent on childcare and homeschooling during the Spring 2020 lockdown could be counted as working time. These measures, while commendable, came with conditions and were only valid for a very limited period, thus not fully addressing the impact of the pandemic. Schools and daycare facilities continued to operate with strict eviction rules when cases of Covid-19 were detected, therefore causing disruptions to parents' schedules well into 2022.

Academic institutions largely overlooked other types of Covid labors. One example is the organization of academic mobility by postdoctoral researchers. In Switzerland, international mobility is considered a hallmark of scientific excellence and therefore a prerequisite for accessing grants and tenured positions. Academic mobility was already in conflict with a balanced family life before the pandemic and remains a major obstacle to increasing the number of women in professorial positions. In times of health crisis, organizing mobility has become a thorny challenge, as expressed in the vignette. Planning an international move in a context where air travel was scarce and expensive, where entry requirements to countries could change overnight, and where many administrations were operating at a slower pace became a delicate and time-consuming task. Besides, Swiss researchers living abroad sometimes faced much longer and more significant school closures than in Switzerland.

One's disciplinary and methodological orientation also had a significant impact on the extent of Covid labor. Working with qualitative methods created additional work in the pandemic context, as these methods often rely on direct and close contact with a social group, sometimes over an extended period. Unlike laboratory work, fieldwork often could not resume as soon as university buildings reopened as restrictions on social life persisted. Embarking on a new field site typically demands a significant conceptual and theoretical overhaul of one's research. This Covid labor extended well beyond the spring 2020 lockdown and has been neither acknowledged nor compensated by funding institutions. In Switzerland, the humanities and social sciences encountered an unprecedented decline in funding applications during the spring of 2020, in contrast to other disciplines, which is most likely linked to the higher proportion of women in these disciplines but also to their frequent reliance on direct interactions with research participants.

The invisibilization of Covid labor linked to childcare, mobility, or modifications of research plans particularly affected categories of postdoctoral researchers who were already in the minority and precarious within the academic world due to their gender, parental status, race, health status, or other factors. The fact that academic institutions in Switzerland neither recognized nor compensated for Covid labor made some people's situations more fragile than others'.

The Long-Term Impact of Covid Labor

As early as 2020, we were concerned about the long-term impact of the pandemic on our career

prospects. We wondered how our chances of obtaining grants and positions would be affected by the time we had to devote to Covid labor. As young researchers, we were acutely aware that we were in constant competition. Up to this day, grant and job applications put us in direct competition with colleagues whose careers were less affected than ours by the pandemic—and, unfortunately, with others who have suffered more than us. Most interviews for academic positions or grant applications we have completed since 2020 have made no room for an assessment of the impacts of the pandemic on our track record. Similarly, the fact that academic institutions have focused their response on a very narrow definition of what Covid labor consisted of—mainly, additional childcare tasks—and on a single indicator of the gendered impact of the pandemic—the decline in journal submissions—sidesteps the long-term impact that the pandemic has on female postdoctoral researchers. Overlooking the significance of Covid labor demonstrates once more that academia and society more generally still do not account for gender as an organizing principle and largely continue to consider workplace cultures to be genderless.

The amount and nature of Covid labor can only be understood with a particular focus on the many factors of inequalities between and among categories of researchers. In addition to the significant impact of sexism and racism on career trajectories, our experiences add parenthood, job (in)stability, international mobility, and disciplinary and methodological background to the list of social factors and disadvantages that influence one's ability to meet academic standards of excellence. It is crucial that academic institutions recognize and address the challenges faced by underrepresented groups in academia, including academic mothers, to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field.

Outlook

Almost five years after the onset of the pandemic, one of us has secured a tenure-track position, while the other one continues to navigate a series of short-term contracts, exemplifying the persistent precarity in academic employment. To both of us, it is frustrating to observe that Covid labor and its unequal distribution among postdoctoral researchers remains largely undiscussed in Switzerland.

Without decisive measures, Swiss academic institutions may struggle in their efforts to achieve equal opportunities and a more representative community capable of effectively addressing societal challenges. The upcoming generation of scholars is likely to remain predominantly male, white, and childless. Swiss academia could face a significant loss of postdoctoral researchers from minority groups, leading to the continuous underrepresentation of women, mothers, and ethnic minorities in academia.

We believe that there is still an opportunity to mitigate the effect of the pandemic. It is an unprecedented opportunity for academic institutions to lay the groundwork for a fairer and more inclusive academy by questioning the traditional, white male-dominated model of careers and the way universities operate. The assessment of applications for positions or fellowships should better account for such inequalities. Research on the effects of the pandemic on young researchers should be urgently led, particularly examining the impact of gender, race, and parenthood. We believe that academic institutions in Switzerland, largely publicly funded, should set an example to pave the way for a more egalitarian and diverse society.

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Stay or Stray? Evaluating Job Satisfaction in Academia

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Introduction

Around one-third of postdoctoral researchers in Switzerland leave academia (Würth et al. 2024). The literature reveals that this happens due to factors unrelated to their qualifications or abilities (Nielsen 2017; Spoon et al. 2023). Understanding these underlying mechanisms is crucial, especially when the dropout rate is driven by systemic factors unrelated to scientific competence. When these factors disproportionately impact certain groups, they become underrepresented in top academic positions, raising doubts about the meritocratic nature of academia and its ability to foster excellence and innovation.

Job satisfaction, defined as an individual's overall attitude toward their work, plays a pivotal role in retention as it affects not only professional fulfillment but also overall life satisfaction (Zhu 2013; Filiz 2014). Given the substantial investment of time and energy in academic careers, satisfaction with one's work is crucial for persevering through the many years of training, research, and competition for academic positions (Llobet and Fito 2013). Daly and Dee (2006) demonstrate that intentions to stay in academia are shaped by structural (e.g., autonomy, workload), external environmental (e.g., job opportunities, family responsibilities), and psychological factors (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment). Positive emotions such as job satisfaction foster affiliative attitudes like organizational commitment (Llobet and Fito 2013), which, in turn, are strongly correlated with continuance intention (Daly and Dee 2006). Hence, job satisfaction not only directly affects a researcher's decision to stay or leave but also contributes to a deeper organizational commitment, which reinforces long-term retention in academia.

The aim of this article is therefore to study to what extent the perception of specific job characteristics and work conditions in academia covary with job satisfaction, and if these effects vary by gender? Using data from 2020 in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, we examine whether job-related factors correlate differently with job satisfaction for men and women, underscoring the importance of gender-based insights given women's underrepresentation in higher academic positions.

Previous research on job satisfaction in academia has produced inconsistent results (Bentley et al. 2013; Shin and Jung 2014; Webber and Rogers 2018). These discrepancies may stem from changes in institutional structures, but also from how academic systems function across countries (Höhle and Teichler 2013; Kwiek and Antonowicz 2013). Therefore, focusing on academic staff in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, where the academic systems are similar, provides valuable insights into the current state of job satisfaction in these countries.

Conceptualization and Mechanisms of Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is commonly defined as a positive emotional or attitudinal response that an individual has towards their job and how content they feel with it, constituted by both affective and cognitive components and shaped by personal experiences and institutional environment (Zhu 2013; Filiz 2014. Locke 1976, 1300). Job satisfaction in academia is a complex and multidimensional construct. While it is often argued that academics are primarily driven by intrinsic motivators such as passion for their field and intellectual fulfillment, rather than by extrinsic rewards like salary (Bentley et al. 2013; McInnis and Anderson 2005, 134), understanding

the full scope of job satisfaction in the academic profession requires a more nuanced exploration.

Herzberg (1959) distinguishes between two types of factors: hygiene and motivators. Hygiene factors include external work elements such as salary, security, conditions, and company policies. They do not directly promote job satisfaction, but their absence causes dissatisfaction. When hygiene factors are adequately met, employees typically feel neutral. In contrast, motivators—such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for growth—are intrinsic to the job itself and directly contribute to job satisfaction, leading to personal growth, self-actualization, and a sense of fulfillment in work. The model suggests that long-term satisfaction comes primarily from motivators.

Hagedorn (2000) expanded the understanding of job satisfaction by introducing triggers and mediators, emphasizing its dynamic and context-dependent nature. Triggers are significant life events—such as changes in family circumstances, rank or tenure, institution, or emotional states—that can shift how individuals perceive their work over time and therefore impact satisfaction. Mediators explain how triggers affect job satisfaction and fall into three categories: 1) Motivators and hygiene factors, which mirror Herzberg's original theory. 2) Demographic factors, such as age, gender, and race, which shape how different individuals respond to the same work environment. 3) Environmental conditions, including institutional policies, organizational support, and external opportunities, which affect the context in which job satisfaction is experienced. This model provides a more nuanced understanding of job satisfaction by highlighting the interaction between individual experiences and institutional dynamics, which explains why satisfaction levels can vary significantly even among academics in similar roles.

Work conditions in academia are key determinants of job satisfaction, with significant variation across countries (Bentley et al. 2013; Höhle and Teichler 2013). For instance, higher salaries are generally associated with greater satisfaction, though income levels differ widely across Europe (Kwiek and Antonowicz 2013). Many academics face considerable stress due to pressures to secure external funding and publish, which is particularly impactful in competitive systems with limited institutional resources, negatively affecting job satisfaction (Drennan et al. 2013; Shin and Jung 2014). Furthermore, a collegial work environment with shared decision-making and peer support fosters higher satisfaction compared to hierarchical structures (Bozeman and Gaughan 2011). Perceived career prospects also influence satisfaction, with academics in Norway and Switzerland expressing higher optimism, while those in Austria and Italy report lower expectations for advancement (Kwiek and Antonowicz 2013).

Differences in job conditions highlight the importance of academic systems and institutional practices in shaping satisfaction levels. Market-driven and managerial systems which reduce job security increase stress and dissatisfaction (Shin and Jung 2014; Castellacci and Viñas-Bardolet 2021). These findings align with Herzberg's concept of hygiene factors, where job security acts as a key element in preventing dissatisfaction. Castellacci and Viñas-Bardolet (2021) argue that having tenure, especially at earlier stages of a career, allows academics to plan their professional trajectories, focus on meaningful work, and manage personal aspects of life, such as purchasing a home or starting a family. This supports Hagedorn's model, which emphasizes how broader life and institutional changes—such as obtaining tenure—serve as triggers and mediators that influence overall job

satisfaction. Furthermore, demographic factors, career stage, and family responsibilities influence how academics prioritize different job conditions, affecting overall satisfaction.

In summary, while job conditions are fundamental for understanding job satisfaction in academia, they cannot be considered isolated and must be viewed in interaction with demographic factors and individual life events.

Gender and Job Satisfaction

Research on gender differences in job satisfaction reveals a complex picture (Hagedorn 2000). Some studies report higher levels for women overall, while others suggest minimal differences or even show that men report greater satisfaction (Ward and Sloane 2000; Machado-Taylor 2014). However, when specific job-related factors are examined, clear gender-based differences emerge. Men generally report higher satisfaction with aspects such as salary and benefits, whereas family-related factors tend to play a more significant role in shaping women's satisfaction (Hagedorn 2000; Webber and Rogers 2018). Women in private and non-tenure-track roles report higher satisfaction than their peers in public institutions or tenured positions, potentially due to greater flexibility that accommodates other life responsibilities. Cerci and Dumludag (2019) further underscore how factors like job security, workplace harassment, pressure to publish, and available research time impact job satisfaction differently by gender. Specifically, the study reveals that women are more adversely affected by informal pressures and hostile work environments, while men's satisfaction decreases when research time is perceived as inadequate. These results suggest that gender plays a crucial role in shaping how these factors are experienced and valued, with women potentially deriving more satisfaction from intrinsic aspects of their work, rather than extrinsic rewards.

In conclusion, Herzberg's hygiene variables—such as job security and salary—can be analyzed through a gendered lens (Acker 1990). Researchers in lower academic ranks usually express greater dissatisfaction with these aspects, which is often worsened by gender disparities. Men typically hold the highest academic posts, which are associated with higher pay, more security, and generally better working conditions (Woodhams et al. 2022). In contrast, women are commonly concentrated in lower academic posts, a situation known as the "leaky pipeline", in which their representation decreases as they advance in their careers. Another study of academic staff across twelve European countries found that women are more likely than men to feel they lack influence over departmental policies (Goastellec and Pekari 2013). After controlling for variables like academic status, institution type, discipline, age, and part-time work, significant gender differences in perceived influence disappeared in most countries. This finding suggests that women's lower sense of influence is more closely tied to their academic rank than to gender alone. Consequently, gender inequities persist in key hygiene-related job conditions, with women in academia more likely to experience dissatisfaction with income, job stability, and career growth opportunities.

Given that the literature presents mixed results due to system and country-specific differences, we aim to clarify this picture by exploring gender differences in a specific region and therefore within a more controlled context: the German-speaking countries of Switzerland, Austria, and Germany.

Data and Measurement

To address our research question, we draw on large open-source web survey data conducted in 2020 among 15 778 academics in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria (Rauhut et al. 2024)[1]. Detailed information about the survey design, sampling, and data collection procedures is available in the method report (Rauhut et al. 2021). Our dependent variable, work satisfaction, is measured using a single-item metric scale ("How satisfied or unsatisfied are you with the following areas of your life: Work" rated on a 0 to 10 Likert scale). Additionally, our analysis includes a set of independent variables that encompass gender [female, male], academic position [PhD, Postdoc, and Professor], children under 7 years old [yes, no], field [Humanities, Life science, Natural science, Engineering], country [Germany, Austria, Switzerland]) and specific working conditions unique to the academic environment (autonomy, development opportunities, salary, meaning work, advancement opportunities, collegial environment, competition, pressure to publish, pressure to acquire funding, workload—see Table 2 for exact wording). The distribution of these variables can be found in the methods report (Rauhut et al. 2021, 67ff).

Results

We begin our discussion of the empirical results by looking at the distribution of the dependent variable in Table 1, which indicates that academics report a solid level of job satisfaction, with a median score of 7.09. The difference between men's and women's job satisfaction is minimal (correlation coefficient = –0.050), with men reporting a slightly higher average value. In the next step, we calculate linear regression models to examine various independent variables, including them stepwise into the models. The models are further split into subsamples for men and women.

Table 1 Job satisfaction by gender

	Mean	SD	Sample
Both	7.09	2.47	15 644
Women	6.96	2.46	6 839
Men	7.20	2.46	8 701

Source: ZSoA (Rauhut et al. 2024).

Model 1 includes solely gender, having young children, academic rank, field, and country. The results show that women have a slight, but significantly lower level of job satisfaction compared to men. However, this difference is no longer significant when we implement job conditions (Model 2). Furthermore, Model 1 shows that having young children is associated with lower job satisfaction and this effect remains significant in the fully specified model (Model 2). Postdocs and professors report significantly higher job satisfaction than PhD students. Furthermore, Life Sciences covary negatively with the satisfaction level, although this effect becomes non-significant in subsequent models. Working in Austria and Switzerland is consistently associated with higher job satisfaction across all models, with Switzerland showing a particularly strong positive effect.

Working Conditions: Overall Sample

Work conditions appear to be vital determinants of job satisfaction. Autonomy, opportunities for professional development, meaningfulness of work, and a collegial work environment show strong positive correlations with job satisfaction. Conversely,

1 Data collection occurred during the onset of COVID-19 lockdowns across Europe. Raabe et al. (2020) compared scientists who filled out the survey before and after lockdown measures and found that overall satisfaction remained overwhelmingly stable.

Table 2 OLS Regression analysis with job satisfaction as dependent variable

	Model 1 Coef (SE)	Model 2 Coef (SE)	Model 3 Coef (SE)	Model 4 Coef (SE)
Sample	*All*	*All*	*Men*	*Women*
Women (ref: men)	–0.089* (0.044)	0.024 (0.030)	–	–
Children 0–6 years	–0.107* (0.050)	–0.140*** (0.040)	–0.152*** (0.050)	–0.125 (0.070)
Postdoc (ref: PhD)	0.196*** (0.050)	0.200*** (0.050)	0.244*** (0.050)	0.153*** (0.060)
Prof (ref: PhD)	1.110*** (0.060)	0.523*** (0.060)	0.529*** (0.060)	0.554*** (0.080)
Life Science (ref: Humanities)	–0.200*** (0.060)	0.016 (0.040)	–0.060 (0.060)	0.091 (0.060)
Natural Science (ref: Humanities)	–0.030 (0.060)	0.006 (0.040)	0.022 (0.060)	–0.045 (0.080)
Engineering (ref: Humanities)	0.100 (0.060)	0.171*** (0.050)	0.199*** (0.060)	0.078 (0.100)
Austria (ref: Germany)	0.330*** (0.060)	0.294*** (0.050)	0.247*** (0.060)	0.360*** (0.070)
Switzerland (ref: Germany)	0.530*** (0.050)	0.386*** (0.040)	0.284*** (0.050)	0.512*** (0.060)
Work conditions				
I enjoy considerable autonomy in my everyday working life.	–	0.233*** (0.020)	0.213*** (0.020)	0.254*** (0.020)
I am given opportunities for continuing subject-related and professional development.	–	0.210*** (0.010)	0.235*** (0.020)	0.180*** (0.020)
My salary is too low.	–	–0.092*** (0.010)	–0.082*** (0.010)	–0.105*** (0.020)
My work is meaningful.	–	0.534*** (0.010)	0.547*** (0.020)	0.518*** (0.020)
Academia offers me long-term opportunities for advancement.	–	0.235*** (0.010)	0.251*** (0.020)	0.211*** (0.020)
My work environment is pleasant and collegial.	–	0.423*** (0.010)	0.435*** (0.020)	0.405*** (0.020)

Continuation of Table 2 on the next page.

Continuation of Table 2.

	Model 1 Coef (SE)	Model 2 Coef (SE)	Model 3 Coef (SE)	Model 4 Coef (SE)
Sample	*All*	*All*	*Men*	*Women*
The competition among those working in my discipline is intense.	–	−0.010 (0.010)	0.014 (0.020)	−0.040* (0.020)
In my subject area, there is considerable pressure to publish.	–	−0.031* (0.020)	−0.040* (0.020)	−0.021 (0.020)
In my subject area, there is considerable pressure to attract third-party funding.	–	−0.081*** (0.010)	−0.094*** (0.020)	−0.060*** (0.020)
My workload is excessive.	–	−0.173*** (0.010)	−0.173*** (0.020)	−0.176*** (0.020)
Cons	6.660*** (0.050)	1.037*** (0.130)	0.858*** (0.170)	1.322*** (0.190)
N	13 459	13 459	7 577	5 882
Adjusted R^2:	0.047	0.423	0.441	0.398

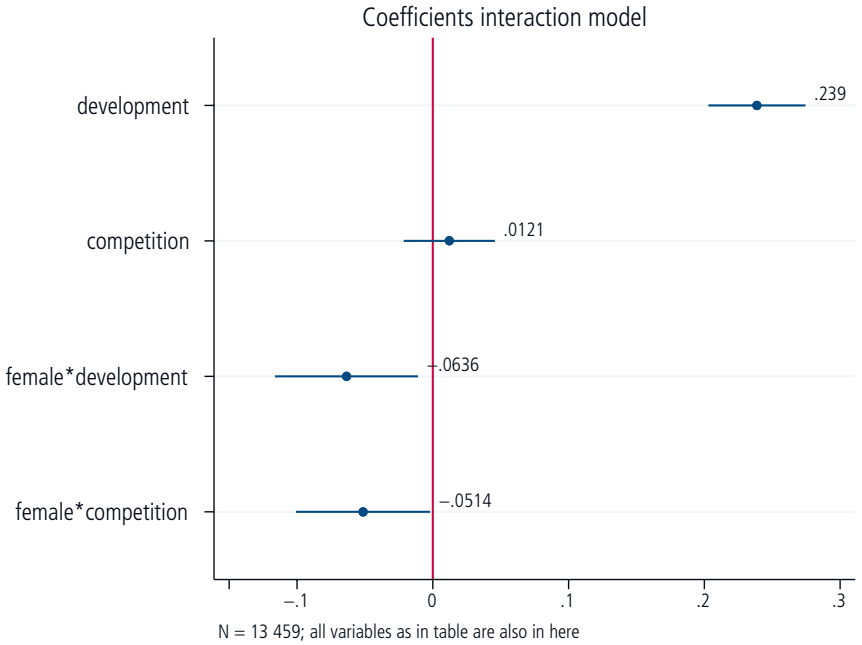
Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.
Source: ZSoA (Rauhut et al. 2024), own analyses.

low salary, excessive workload, and the pressure to secure third-party funding are strongly associated with lower levels of job satisfaction. Surprisingly, the impact of competition within a field is largely insignificant.

Working Conditions: Subsamples of Men and Women

Examining the subsamples for men (Model 3) and women (Model 4) reveals no overwhelming differences in effect size, direction, or significance between the two groups (Table 2). Nevertheless, some noteworthy distinctions emerge. First, having young children is not significant in the female subsample but is negatively associated with job satisfaction for men. Second, Engineering is not significantly positively correlated with job satisfaction in the female subsample, which may be due to the small number of women in this field. An interesting discrepancy between the two subsamples is that competition has a significant negative effect on job satisfaction in the female subsample, while it remains non-significant for men. This finding suggests that women are more negatively affected in their job satisfaction from intense competition than men. Furthermore, the negative correlation between publication pressure and job satisfaction is not significant in the female subsample, while it remains significant for the male subsample. This may suggest that men's job satisfaction is more strongly influenced by publication pressure than women's. Focusing on the gender difference in the Adjusted R^2 values, the model explains slightly more of the variance in work satisfaction for men (0.441) than for women (0.398).

Figure 1 Gendered impact of development and competition on job satisfaction



Note: The analysis includes a sample of N = 13 459, with job satisfaction as the dependent variable. Independent variables comprise gender, academic position, children under seven years old, academic field, country, and all working conditions, along with interaction terms of each working condition with gender. The figure highlights only the coefficients for professional development and competition, as well as their interaction with gender.
Source: ZSoA (Rauhut et al. 2024), own analyses.

In a further analysis, we included interaction terms of the working conditions and gender to statistically test potential gender differences. The findings suggest that professional development opportunities and competition work differently for men and women (see Figure 1). While professional development generally enhances job satisfaction, this effect is weaker for women than men. Additionally, competition in academia detracts more significantly from women's job satisfaction than men's.

Conclusion

In this contribution, we asked to what extent certain job conditions in academia covary with job satisfaction, and if these effects differ by gender. We analyzed the responses of 13 459 academics from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, to examine potential gender effects of certain work conditions while controlling for academic rank, discipline, country, and caregiving responsibilities. At first glance, our findings show a modest but noteworthy difference in satisfaction levels, with men reporting

slightly higher satisfaction than women, although this difference is minimal. However, when different work conditions are included in the analysis, the difference between men and women is no longer significant.

Focusing on work conditions, the results show that these factors are strongly correlated with job satisfaction. Positive correlations are observed for autonomy, collegiality, meaningful work, and opportunities for development, while negative associations are found with low salary, high workload, and intense pressure for funding and publication. Overall, there is not a strong gender effect across these working conditions. However, our analysis reveals that certain factors affect men and women differently: while professional development is a positive factor for both groups, it has a less pronounced effect on satisfaction for women, suggesting that existing opportunities may not fully address the specific factors that could enhance women's professional experiences in academia. In addition, competition is not statistically significant correlated with job satisfaction for men, it is significantly negatively correlated for women. A descriptive look at the data shows that women overall do not assess competition as more intense. This suggests that women respond to competition differently, with women potentially more affected in terms of job satisfaction than men. This finding aligns with other research showing that women are more likely to leave competitive work environments, particularly when attractive alternatives are available in the labor market (e. g., Flory et al. 2014). Especially in Switzerland, where the unemployment rate is low, the median income is relatively high, and the labor market offers numerous attractive positions with favorable conditions, it might be more appealing for women to leave academia.

Although this study provides valuable insights, it is limited by its cross-sectional design, preventing analysis of the dynamic role of life events or "triggers" on job satisfaction, as suggested by Hagedorn's model, which could be captured by future research using longitudinal data. Moreover, we did not test for external factors such as discrimination and stereotyping which can affect women's job satisfaction and careers (Webber and Rogers 2018).

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The Social Field of German Sociology and its Professors

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The professors of an academic discipline can be considered as the elite in their field. Since they occupy positions of power, their appointments reflect not only meritocratic excellence, but also the latent state of antagonisms in the relevant field at a particular time.

In order to discuss the question "How does one become a professor of sociology?", it can therefore be helpful to analyze the state of the discipline using a specific sociological theory. Bourdieu's field theory combines differentiation-theoretical considerations of the logics of a specific field (e. g. the scientific field) and corresponding subfields (e. g. the sociological field) with considerations of inequality, conflict, and power (Schneickert et al. 2020). It is therefore particularly suited for providing practical information about the conditions, opportunities, and inequalities on the way to becoming a sociology professor.

This article outlines the central findings of a study we conducted on sociology professors in Germany about ten years ago (in 2015; Wimmer and Schneickert 2018). One of the key findings was that the sociological field in Germany is highly heterogeneous—to such a degree that it might be legitimate to speak of different (sub)disciplines (Schmidt-Wellenburg and Schmitz 2023). If young scholars are socialized in their respective academic "bubbles" and have no realistic assessment of the state of the field as a whole, they may find it difficult to assess their own career opportunities realistically. In this sense, the perspective presented here also has the practical purpose of showing which "sociological society" is the one in which we are conducting research (Schmitz et al. 2019).

In the following, we examine German sociology as a social field and approach it empirically via its professors. In 2015, we collected and analyzed structural data on 370 sociology professors from their websites. In addition, nine qualitative guided interviews were conducted with elite professors with high capital endowment. The main result at the structural level was the great heterogeneity of professors in terms of institutional power, type and scope of publications, research priorities, and internationalization. From the perspective of the respondents, the lack of conflict resolution was emphasized, and this was seen as endangering the autonomy of German sociology as a multi-paradigmatic discipline.

From the perspective of Bourdieu's field theory, social worlds as disparate as the economy, art, or religion have invariant laws of operation (Bourdieu 1993). The existence of a field is determined by a shared central interest (*nomos*). This concerns knowledge of the rules of the game, but also the existence of individuals who strive for this nomos and share a belief in it. During "field socialization" (Schneickert 2013), the rules of the field must be incorporated to recognize this nomos as a "basic law".

A general assumption of field theory is that actors tend to follow either conservative or subversive strategies, depending on their capital configuration and position within the field. In a particular field, the opposition between the dominant and the dominated corresponds in principle to the opposition between orthodoxy and heresy. Such things as publications in respected journals and presentations at conferences are therefore not only the result of qualifications, but also depend on position(ing) in the field and on the current intellectual fashion. The prevailing orthodox pole has accumulated a great deal of field-specific capital and therefore has a monopoly of power and authority (Bourdieu 1993).

Table 1 Forms of capital of German sociology professors (2015)

Indicators	N	Mean (SD)	MIN	MAX
Citations (Google Scholar)	370	1998 (2833)	12	24396
H-Index (Google Scholar)	370	19.1 (10.69)	4	68
English SSCI publications (3+) (2005–2015)	366	0.451 = 45.1%	0	1
English SSCI publications (6+) (2010–2015)	364	0.082 = 8.2%	0	1
Employees	349	2.9 (2.2)	0	14
DFG-projects	362	0.41	0	4

Source: Wimmer and Schneickert 2018: 191.

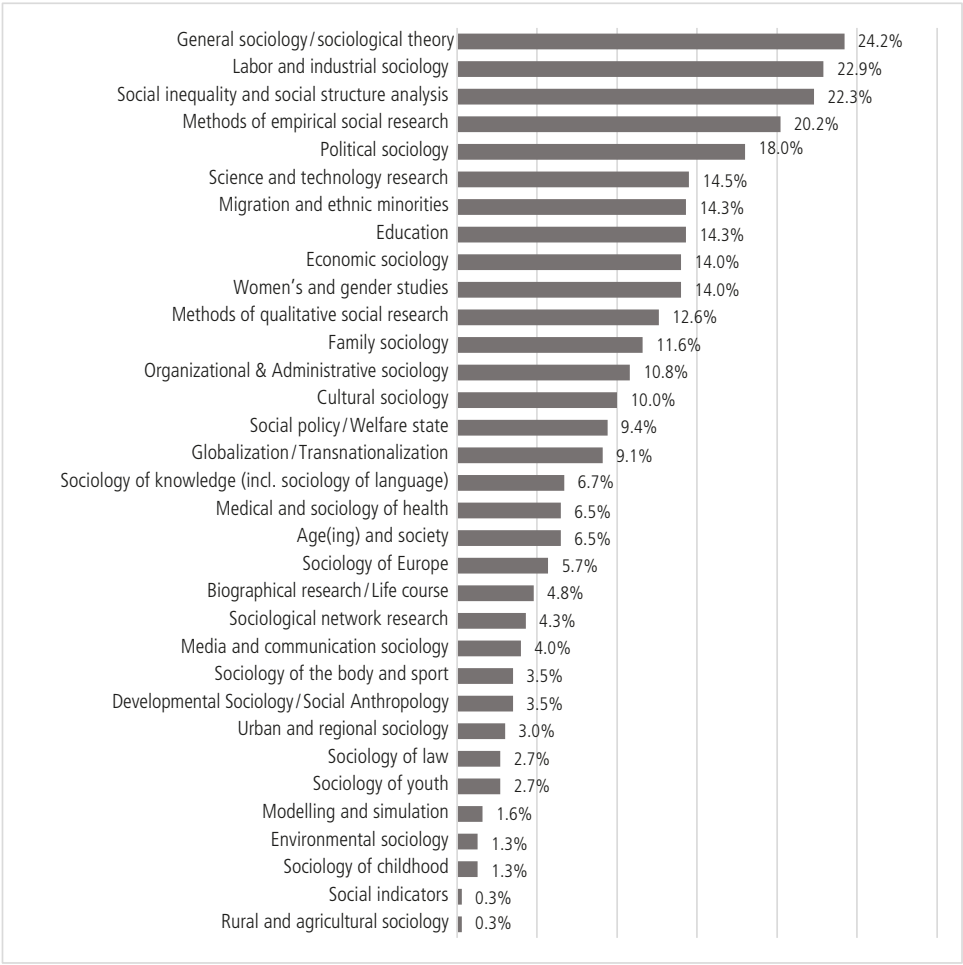
Within the scientific field, sociology is in a competitive and hierarchical relationship with other disciplines (Bourdieu 1988 [1984]). In both Switzerland and Germany, sociology is generally not considered a "hard" science like natural sciences. Access for "laypersons" is easier here than it is, for example, in the highly specialized and autonomous field of mathematics. Journalists, writers, and politically interested people also deal with sociological issues, and the demarcation between sociology and psychology, economics, or political science is sometimes blurred. The resulting *heteronomy* of the sociological field partially prevents the development of a strong orthodoxy in the sense of a dominant doctrine.

This multi-paradigmatic structure also explains the greater importance of regional peculiarities, or the local specialization of sociology departments. From a field-theoretical perspective, however, we can assume that in all disciplines there is a differentiation between prestigious and better-funded locations and those that educate a broader mass. In particular, we assume that sociology departments in universities have a strong regional profile with certain disciplinary orientations. Furthermore, these locations are likely to be hierarchically structured within the field.

Litzenberger and Sternberg (2005) compared article publications for ten German universities using the Social Science Citation Index and identified some sociology institutes as particularly prominent: Bamberg, FU Berlin, HU Berlin, Bielefeld, Bremen, Frankfurt/Main, Jena, Mannheim, and Munich. Later, Mau and Huschka (2010) examined the social structure (gender, origin, and age) of sociology professors (N = 336, with the proportion of women being 25 percent). A study by Lutter and Schröder (2016) found 297 individuals with a full professorship, of whom approximately 32 percent were female. Our data showed a proportion of 37 percent female professors for 2015 (N = 370). In principle, this is good news for young female sociologists, since there has apparently been an increase in the number of female professors in the field.

Table 1 provides a descriptive overview of the capital endowments of sociology professors. It is interesting to note that the average number of Google Scholar citations for German sociology professors was not unattainably high, at just under 2000 citations (with quite some variance), and that the number of publications in English-language specialist journals was also rather moderate. On this basis, young sociologists could be advised that the often cited "publish or perish" advice is

Figure 1 Research interests of German sociology professors (2015)



Note: Multiple answers possible, figures in percent. Categorization by DGS sections and based on the classification of the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat 2008). Source: Wimmer and Schneickert 2018, 195.

true, but that one should not focus on highly cited papers alone.

More decisive is the internal differentiation and specialization within sociology (Warczok and Beyer 2021). The main research areas provide insights into the general focus of sociology nationwide (Figure 1). The type and number of research interests of German sociology professors given on their websites varies greatly: the professors list between one and ten areas. In total, the 370 professors listed 1 160 research interests. This indicates an enormous diversity of sociological research interests

Table 2 Citations, internationalization and gender by research focus

Research focus (N >= 10)	Share of females (36%)	Citations (mean) (1998)	Internationalisation (SSCI > 3) (45%)
General sociology/sociological theory (N = 89)	19%***	2433	30%**
Age(ing) and society (N = 24)	46%	2232	57%
Labor and industrial sociology (N = 84)	42%	1933	54%
Education (N = 53)	38%	1796	53%
Biographical research/Life course (N = 18)	56%	1856	59%
Developmental Sociology/Social Anthropology (N = 13)	15%	2261	31%
Sociology of Europe (N = 21)	38%	2543	67%*
Family sociology (N = 43)	58%**	1782	37%
Women's and gender studies (N = 52)	79%***	1384*	36%
Globalization/Transnationalization (N = 34)	38%	2704	47%
Sociology of youth (N = 10)	30%	997	11%*
Cultural sociology (N = 37)	14%**	2925	38%
Media and communication sociology (N = 15)	27%	1579	21%
Medical and sociology of health (N = 24)	50%	1378	42%
Methods of empirical social research (N = 75)	28%	2475	53%
Methods of qualitative social research (N = 46)	48%	1791	20%***
Migration and ethnic minorities (N = 52)	50%*	1346**	54%
Organizational and Administrative sociology (N = 40)	38%	1709	33%
Political sociology (N = 66)	38%	2138	48%
Sociology of law (N = 10)	20%	1000	30%
Sociology of religion (N = 18)	11%	2513	56%
Social problems and social control (N = 17)	24%	902*	47%
Social inequality and social structure analysis (N = 83)	40%	2022	59%**
Social policy/Welfare state (N = 35)	37%	2353*	69%**
Sociology of the body and sport (N = 13)	46%	3782	33%
Sociological network research (N = 16)	25%	1849	44%
Urban and regional sociology (N = 11)	36%	1675	55%
Economic sociology (N = 52)	31%	1397	50%
Science and technology research (N = 53)	32%	2519	54%
Sociology of knowledge, incl. sociology of language (N = 25)	52%	2368	25%

Note: Mann-Whitney-U-test (citations), Fishers exact test (share of females and internationalization); *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001. SSCI-3+ = min. three publications in English in international SSCI-journals between 2005 and 2015.
Source: Wimmer and Schneickert 2018, 196.

in Germany, but also reveals a lack of conceptual clarity and canonization (Schneickert et al. 2019). This illustrates the heterogeneous character of German sociology (Volle et al. 2024; Wieczorek et al. 2024) and provides a rough overview of its main focus.

Furthermore, it is striking that those who pursue a highly internationalized publication strategy are particularly concentrated in certain research areas, such as European sociology, social structure analysis, and social policy (Table 2; see Benz et al. 2024 for effects of research topics on funding and careers of Swiss sociologists). This is also reflected in the higher total number of citations for professors in these research areas and the share of women among them.

Table 2 shows the proportion of female sociologists and their citations and internationalization by research area. A gendered social structure can be seen, in which male sociologists are more frequently represented in the traditional areas of theory and cultural sociology, while female sociologists are instead represented in the areas of family sociology, women's and gender studies, migration and ethnic minorities.

Subjective reconstructions

In addition to the structural conditions, the subjective (habitual) perception by the actors is also highly relevant for the reconstruction of a field. Therefore, we conducted qualitative guided interviews with nine elite sociologists from our sample.

In addition to working in specific educational institution, holding tutorial or student assistant positions was mentioned as being particularly important in early career patterns; through this, the interviewees gained their first insights and were socialized into sociology (Schneickert 2013). The final theses of six of the nine interviewees were supervised by "renowned" sociologists such as Ulrich Beck and Axel Honneth. With regard to their own socialization, the interviewees described themselves as acting strategically in appropriating and internalizing the balance of power in the field, and their connections and strategic positioning in the course of earlier struggles had led to the current state of the distribution of specific capital (Bourdieu 1993). Mentors and networks were mentioned as very important in this regard.

All of the interviewees regarded sociology as a discipline that was multi-paradigmatic and not very canonical. As Prof. 6 described it: "[C]anon is too much to say, because there are very many 'paradigms,' some of which are very divergent and contradictory" (1, 2–26). One professor did at least emphasize the canonical function of reading the classics: "I hope that there is a canon, but (…) there is paradigmatic and methodological pluralism (...) But I would already describe the classics of the discipline as canonized" (Prof. 7, 1, 27–29).

However, the unifying power of the classics is hardly able to mask the distinction between theoretical and methodological "schools". This was also seen as a problem by the professors interviewed, as one emphasized: "The fragmentation of social science debates and discourses (...) leads not only to fragmentation but also, (...) in part, to a division of the field" (Prof. 4, 2, 29–32). According to the interviewees, there is a frequently mentioned divide between empirical research and theoretical work. One interviewee explained:

> *The empirical social researchers say "thank God, nobody takes philosophically and culturally orientated research seriously". But I would say that no one takes anything else seriously either, because the mountains of data and numbers*

produced there are of no interest to anyone either. (Prof. 5, 3, 32ff.)

This statement obviously addresses a fundamental conflict between theoretical, philosophically and culturally oriented sociology and empirical research, which is presented here as exclusively descriptive and unproductive. The criticism is to be read as a defense against one of the harshest accusations in an academic field, that of irrelevance and a lack of seriousness. This structural change is—according to various interviewees—reinforced by the growing importance of specialized journals. The following quote from Prof. 9 illustrates that this division is not only due to a more differentiated object of research, but also to the (re)production of power and the fighting of battles within the field:

However, this is a dispute that is fought over and over again (…) when it comes to appointments to professorships, publication strategies or reviewerships at the German Research Foundation (DFG). There is certainly a dividing line in this dispute between those who conduct sociology as empirical social research and do so with a distinctly quantitative orientation and others who tend to see sociological theory as their domain and who then often collaborate with those who work with qualitative methods. (Prof. 9, 4, 3–9)

From the interviews, a latent conflict appears between, on the one side, qualitative research and sociological theory and, on the other, empirical–quantitative research (without theory). The latter is viewed as dominant by the representatives of the former, which is paradoxical since, according to our data, they themselves are among the most capital-strong and, consequently, dominant players in the field. This point also touches on the attitude of sociologists towards the heteronomous character of sociology, insofar as dealing with topics such as social inequality, social theory and transformation always also concerns questions of the public and politics—as a normative, public and "critical sociology", as one professor (Prof. 4, 3, 33) put it. This indicates that sociology as a discipline participates in two competing logics at the same time: the specific logic of the scientific field, but also the logic of the political field. Accordingly, a large part of sociological debates is overshadowed by homologous disputes in the political field, such as the opposition between the individual and the collective through the conflict between liberalism and socialism (Bourdieu 1991).

Although German sociology is therefore characterized by a variety of (thematic) orientations and has some latent conflicts, all the interviewees stated that there is hardly any open debate on these conflicts. Prof. 5 summarized this as follows:

Disagreement is not a bad thing. Of course, it's good for the discipline and for both sides if there is a debate about content. But it doesn't actually happen. (…) The schools hardly talk to each other anymore and that's a bad thing. Everyone has their own island and disdain for the other side. (...) Everyone is in danger of becoming sectarian or forming cliques and then only dealing with each other and treating each other with a certain disdain. In other words, there is no real dialog. (Prof. 5, 5, 2–12).

Dahrendorf (1996) had earlier referred to this simultaneous fragmentation and lack of debate as the "boredom" of sociology. Prof. 3 added, in this context:

> *There is a pacification of fundamental issues (...), with the result that many things are becoming boring. People have settled into their niches: (…) There is a kind of mutual tolerance: everyone should do what they think is right. Basically, I don't think that's a good thing because the different groups don't communicate with each other. There are hardly any major disputes anymore. Everyone has settled into their niches, is relaxed, and there is a certain boredom. (Prof. 3, 4, 12–18)*

Fundamental discussions and content-related conflicts are also of great importance in raising the profile of sociology vis-à-vis politics and the public, which Prof. 8 mentioned:

> *You should start to take other people's positions more seriously and make the effort to argue against them if you can sharpen your own position and give the other person the chance to strengthen theirs. And because it's simply more fun when you don't have the impression that everything is valid, but that there is sometimes conflict or invalidity. (...) Unfortunately, we hardly ever argue (…). There is actually no more passion on this point and rather the view prevails that everyone should do what they want instead of saying, what you write doesn't make sense to me. (Prof. 8, 7, 38–42)*

Specialization, particularly the differentiation of "special sociologies" (Prof. 2, 1, 30f), is often cited as a reason for the professors' lack of aggression. This makes it difficult to evaluate the work of colleagues, as Prof. 4 noted:

> *You often sit on appointment committees and report on candidates and then realize how specialized certain areas are. How high the hurdles are to be able to have a say as a sociologist or even understand what is being done. This applies not only to methods, such as multi-level analyses, but also to theoretical discussions. (Prof. 4, 6, 11–16)*

It could now be argued that this development follows the development of the older, scientific academic disciplines and has created an ever more pronounced division of labor in the field, which will ultimately lead to a differentiation into further sociological subfields. However, the necessary connectivity of sociological knowledge to society and politics speaks against this. This results in the special position of sociology at the heteronomous pole of the scientific field and the relationship between the sociological field, the scientific field and the field of power (Bourdieu 1991; 1988 [1984]).

So, what can we learn from using a field theoretical perspective in the field of German sociology that enables us to answer the question of "how to become a sociology professor"?

1. Sociology is a rather open field, which, for example, increases the career opportunities of women. There are, however, internal differentiations within this social structure.
2. Sociology is a multi-paradigmatic discipline in which the different schools often exist side by side; specialization, and reflection on the part of the field in which you want to make a career, are therefore of great importance.
3. Depending on the subfields of the field, the strategies and forms of capital (publications, conferences, importance of third-party funding, methodological orientations) sometimes differ considerably.
4. The various sociologies differ in terms of their size and available positions. Large subfields

(e. g. theory, the sociology of labor, methods) offer more positions, but are also more competitive. More specialized areas require greater specialization but can be risky "sector bets". Overall, you should know your field well and explore whether the objective opportunities are compatible with your subjective goals.

5. In the early stages of your career in particular, social networks play a significant role (e. g. assistant positions, mentors, famous supervisors, conferences), which is why networking can be even more important than publications and theses.

Furthermore, the qualitative findings point to a somewhat chaotic, multi-paradigmatic discipline with many conflicts, high levels of competition, and a great deal of uncertainty. Accordingly, a career in sociology requires a resilient habitus that does not shy away from disappointment and conflict and is then rewarded in an intellectually interesting and challenging field.

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The Role of Research Topics on Securing Funding and Careers for Swiss Sociologists

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Introduction

The decentralized structure of the Swiss academic landscape grants research organizations significant autonomy, hence fostering competition among scholars and heightening their reliance on external funding to pursue their career (Benninghoff and Braun 2010; Baschung et al. 2011). In this context, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) plays a pivotal role in shaping the careers of Swiss researchers. SNSF grants stand as particularly crucial for Swiss sociologists to overcome the bottleneck represented by the limited number of stable jobs in this discipline within Swiss universities. However, studies identifying structures and mechanisms of the labor market for Swiss sociologists are scarce (Diaz-Bone and Jann 2019). A pending question relates to the role of research topics on securing funding and advancing careers. This issue is particularly pertinent to sociology, often depicted as a fragmented discipline, structured by competition along epistemological or methodological lines (Kropp 2013; Wimmer and Schneickert 2018; Warczok and Beyer 2021; see also Schneickert and Wimmer in this volume). To inquire this question, we propose to map the space of Swiss sociology topics based on all SNSF grant abstracts with sociology as the main discipline (2010–2023). First, we draw on an innovative methodological approach combining Latent Dirichlet Allocation with Multiple Correspondence Analysis to summarize the dimensions that best resume the diversity of the Swiss sociological epistemic landscape. Second, we show how vocabulary profiles vary according to the SNSF funding schemes and the applicants' status in 2024, considering methodological approaches and thematic orientations.

Data and Methods

Drawing on the open access SNSF grant database, we specifically use the "Project with abstracts" dataset, which contains all the records of the projects from 1975 onwards. We limit our analysis to the period from 2010 to 2023 due to the unavailability of project abstracts for earlier years. We focus

Table 1 All SNSF grants in sociology (2010–2023), n = 589

funding scheme	number of grants	frequency (in %)
Early career grants	200	34.0
Advanced career grants	35	5.9
Projects (Div. 1, SSH)	248	42.1
Programs (NRPs, NCCRs, etc.)	74	12.6
International short research visits	32	5.4

Note: Early career grants (e. g. Doc.Mobility, Postdoc.Mobility) are essentially international mobility schemes at the doctoral and postdoctoral level. Advanced career grants (e. g. Ambizione, Excellenza, PRIMA) are designed to secure academic careers in Switzerland, often following a period of international mobility.
Source: https://data.snf.ch/datasets.

Table 2 Status of responsible applicants in 2024, n = 415

status	number of applicants	frequency (in %)
University professor	129	31.1
Other permanent in university	40	9.6
UAS professor	59	14.2
Other permanent in UAS	13	3.1
Assistant professor	11	2.7
Permanent in RPO	13	3.1
Non-permanent	95	22.9
Left academia	55	13.3

Note: UAS = University of Applied Sciences; RPO = Research Performing Organization.
Source: A combination of https://data.snf.ch/datasets and CV information.

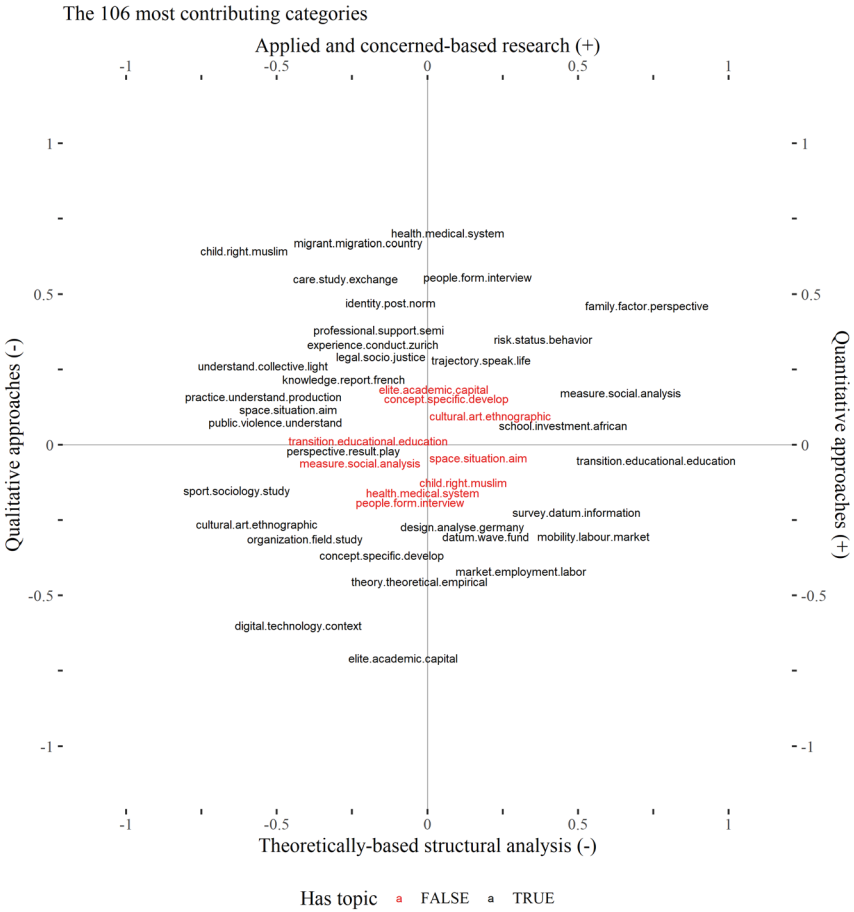
on all grants where "Sociology" is recorded as the main discipline, resulting in a sample of 589 grants with available abstracts, and 415 unique responsible applicants. Table 1 summarizes the sample by funding scheme, while Table 2 displays the status of all unique applicants as in 2024, as retrieved from available CV information.

We define a topic as set of "highly probable words" automatically inferred from their co-occurrence in documents (Blei and Lafferty 2009, 72). Each document—specifically, each SNSF grant abstract—is considered a collection of topics, with the appropriate probability of each document belonging to each topic (Blei 2012). We follow Kropp and Larsen (2023) and Rossier et al. (2023) and combine Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) (Blei et al. 2003) with Multiple Correspondence Analysis (Le Roux and Rouanet 2004; Hjellbrekke 2018) using the "topicspace" package for R by Benz and Larsen (2024). Several topics are attributed to each document, and the resulting topic space depicts the distribution of topics based on their association with documents. Hence, topics that are commonly shared are displayed close to one another in the topic space, while topics that are rarely combined in documents are displayed farther apart. Hierarchized dimensions summarize the principal axes of structure among topics. This approach allows us to identify the topics that contribute most to structuring the space. In addition, we can measure the distribution of the most prevalent vocabulary associated with SNSF funding schemes and applicants' status in 2024. For this, we calculate the risk ratio (RR) as the relative risk of a certain event—being attributed a term—occurring in one group, such as a specific funding scheme, compared to the risk of it occurring in another group.

The Space of Swiss Sociology Topics (2010–2023)

Figure 1 displays the distribution of the topics ($k = 75$) along the two first dimensions of the factorial plan. Although there are multiple dimensions, their relative importance in explaining the structure of the space deceases progressively. Here, we focus on two dimensions, which account for 46.4% of the variance explained by the model, with a Benzecri's adjusted inertia 35.3% for the first dimension and 11.1% for the second.

Figure 1 Space of Swiss sociology topics (2010–2023). The first dimension is shown horizontally, and the second dimension is shown vertically



Source: https://data.snf.ch/datasets.

The first dimension opposes "qualitative approaches" to "quantitative approaches". At the left-end side, the most contributing topics are formed of the expressions *practice.understand.production*, *understand.collective.light*, *political.process.context*, and *cultural.art.ethnographic*. Research in this fraction of the space centers on the interpretive analysis of everyday social practices (e.g., cultural, artistic, political production) and interactions within specific contexts. Ethnography is a key method in these studies, often relying on direct observation and thus constituting qualitative

research. At the right-end side, the most contributing topics are *inequality.datum.social*, *survey.cohort.longitudinal*, *transition.educational.education*, and *family.factor.perspective*. Research here typically focuses on inequalities, sometimes employing a life course framework to study transitions across key life stages (e.g., educational transitions) and dimensions (e.g., family), and using longitudinal surveys as their main data sources. This data-based research is primarily quantitative.

The second dimension reflects an opposition between "applied and concerned-based research" and "theoretically-based structural analysis". At the upper-end side, the most contributing topics are *health.medical.system*, *people.form.interview*, *gender.woman.equality*, *child.right.muslim*, and *migrant.migration.country*. Research in this fraction of the space focuses on health, gender, children's rights, or migration, reflecting more applied and socially-grounded topics. These studies might rely on empirical methods such as interviews for addressing pressing social concerns. At the bottom-end side, the most contributing topics are *elite.academic.capital*, *theory.theoretical.empirical*, *digital.technology.context*, and *concept.specific.develop*. Research here is oriented toward macro-level dynamics and structural analysis, empirically examining how the social world is shaped (e.g., elite studies, science and technologies studies). This type of research is characterized by broader theoretical and conceptual developments.

The distribution of topics in Swiss sociological research is primarily influenced by the methodological approach of the research. The thematic orientation is secondary, with research focused on pressing social issues and practical applications contrasting with more theoretical and fundamental research centered on science and elite studies.

The Most Prevalent Vocabulary According to the Funding Schemes and Applicants' Status in 2024

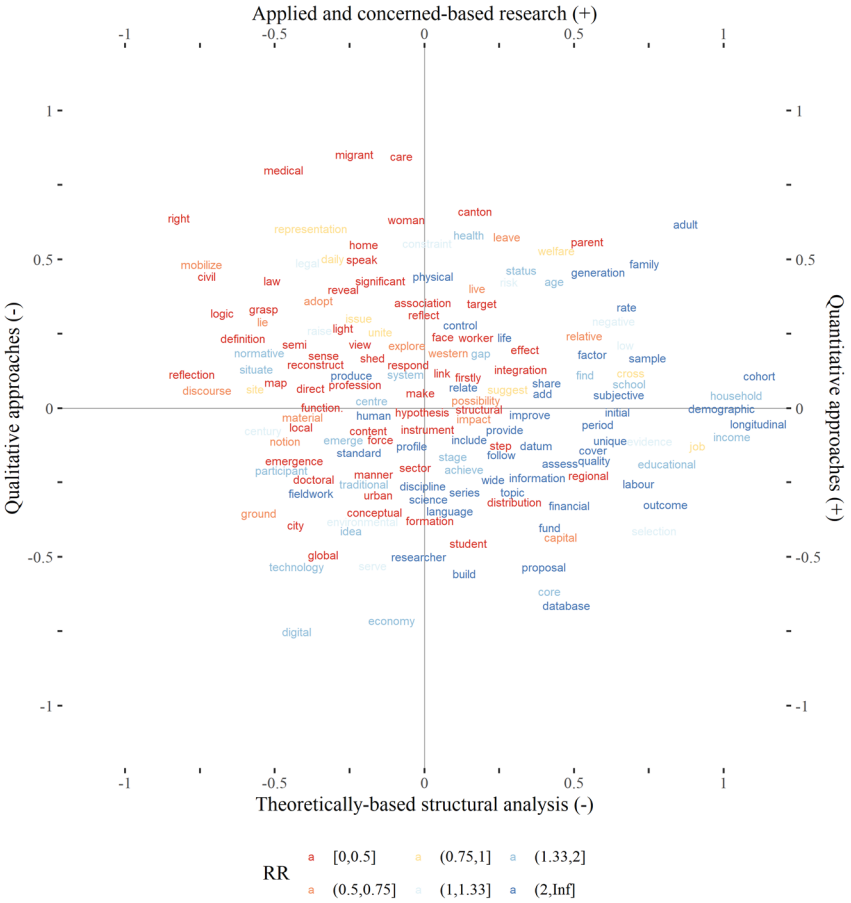
In this paper, we assume that the importance of some terms varies according to the funding scheme and the current status of the main applicants. Figure 2 displays the risk ratio (RR) for each term to belong to the top five percent of most funded projects.

Figure 2 illustrates that terms such as "cohort", "longitudinal", "labor", and "dataset" (highlighted in blue) are among those with the highest risk ratios when examining the top 5% of most funded projects. Conversely, terms like "reflection", "logic", "conceptual", "regional", and "women" (highlighted in red) have the lowest risk ratios, indicating they are rarely mobilized within these top-funded projects. While the most prevalent terms may appear in different locations in the space, there is a noticeable concentration of vocabulary towards the right-end side, which represents "quantitative approaches", and, to some extent, towards the lower-end side, which represents "theoretically-based structural analysis".

To systematically compare vocabulary across different funding schemes, we calculate the x and y coordinates of terms associated with the highest risk ratios for each funding scheme. By doing so, we are able to describe and situate specific vocabulary based on the coordinates of the most prevalent terms (Figure 3).

The distribution of the terms along the first dimension reveals a significant difference in the methodological approach associated with each funding scheme. We observe that the schemes *programs* and *advanced career grants* predominantly use vocabulary from the right-end "quantitative approaches" side of the topic space, similar to the top 5% most funded projects. In contrast, vocabulary

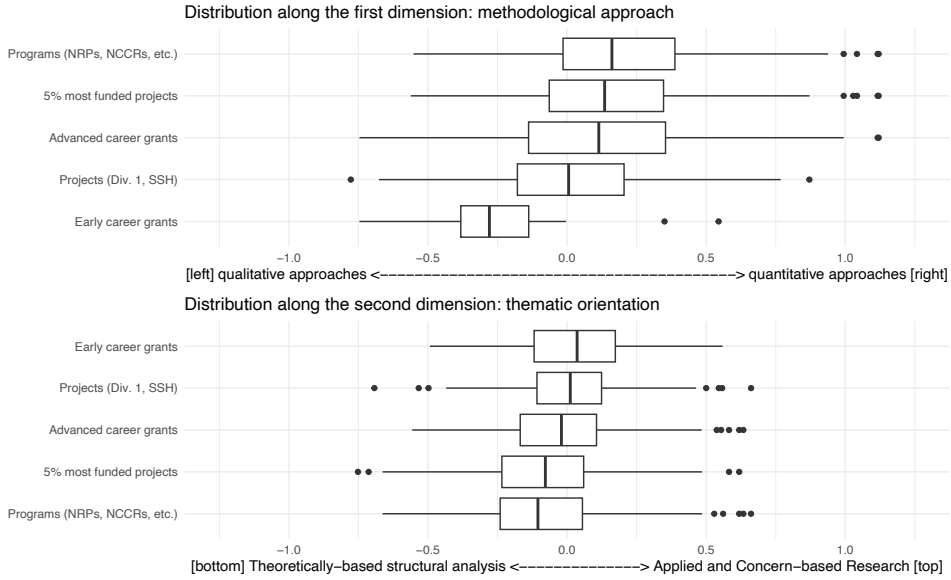
Figure 2 Space of vocabulary. Higher risk ratios (RR) for belonging to the top 5% of most funded SNSF projects are displayed in blue, while lower risk ratios are shown in red



Source: https://data.snf.ch/datasets.

associated with more ordinary *projects* (Div. 1, SSH) is evenly distributed across the space, reflecting the broad range of topics these projects are susceptible to cover. *Early career grants*, on the other hand, are more likely to mobilize vocabulary from the left-hand "qualitative approaches" side. These patterns are empirical evidence of the existence of a preference for "quantitative approaches" vocabulary when success rates are low and career stakes are high. The distribution of terms along the second dimension shows less pronounced differences across funding schemes. Vocabulary for ordinary *projects* (Div. 1, SSH) is evenly distributed, as are the terms for early and advanced career grants. Programs, however, appear slightly more aligned with "theoretically-based structural analysis".

Figure 3 Distribution of the most prevalent terms' coordinates along the first and second dimensions according to the funding scheme



Source: https://data.snf.ch/datasets.

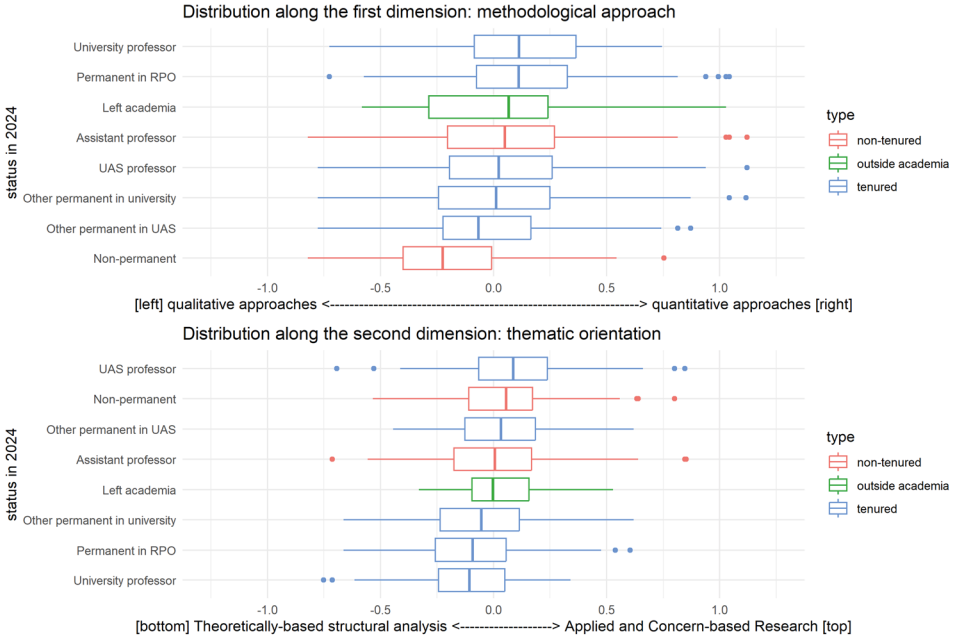
Distinction based on thematic orientation is more salient when comparing the most prevalent terms according to the status of applicants in 2024 (Figure 4).

The first dimension of Figure 4 reveals the absence of pronounced differentiation in methodological approaches among sociologists with tenured positions. In contrast, sociologists with non-permanent positions in 2024 predominantly use terminology that leans towards the left-end side, reflecting qualitative methodologies. The second dimension highlights the effect of applicants' status on the most prevalent vocabulary describing the thematic orientation of their research. Professors at universities of applied sciences (UAS) are more likely to mobilize terms associated with "applied and concern-based research", while university professors are more prone to orient towards "theoretically-based structural analysis". Sociologists with non-permanent positions in 2024 are more likely to produce "applied and concern-based research". Applicants who have exited academia do not exhibit a distinct vocabulary profile. Therefore, there is no evidence suggesting that either methodological or thematic orientation significantly influenced the chances to remain in or leave academia.

Conclusion

In this short original study, we aimed to provide empirical insights into the role of research topics on securing funding and advancing careers of Swiss sociologists. To this end, we constructed a topic space using all sociological abstracts recorded in the SNSF grant database from 2010 to 2023. By

Figure 4 Distribution of the most prevalent terms' coordinates along the first and second dimensions according to applicants' status



Source: A combination of https://data.snf.ch/datasets and CV information.

employing Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and multiple correspondence analysis, we mapped the distribution of specific vocabulary across funding schemes and the status of applicants in 2024.

Our findings indicate that the principal dimensions structuring the space of Swiss sociology topics—methodological approach and thematic orientation—significantly impact the likelihood of securing funding and career progression. Specifically, our analysis reveals that early career grants tend to be associated with qualitative approaches and applied or concern-based research, both more commonly linked to non-permanent academic status in 2024. In contrasts, those sociologists who have obtained critical—advanced career—grants for pursuing an academic career and eventually achieving tenured professorships tend be aligned with quantitative methodologies and mobilize a vocabulary, which closely aligns with that of the top 5% most funded projects.

Although these findings should be confirmed with further analyses, the difference in vocabulary profile between sociologists who secure advanced career grants and those who obtain early career grants is intriguing. While early career funding allows for a broad diversity of topics, advanced career grants are more methodologically restrictive and somewhat thematically constrained. Given the critical role of SNSF grants in helping Swiss sociologists navigate the bottleneck of limited

stable academic positions, this situation is poised to exacerbate future inequalities within the field of Swiss sociology. It creates a scenario in which those with a certain "sense of placement" (Bourdieu 1991)—the ability to anticipate the symbolic profit of adopting a dominant vocabulary profile—are better positioned to accumulate future grants.

Lastly, these results imply that early-career sociologists aspiring to become professors have better chances of securing advanced career grants—often perceived as necessary for obtaining tenure—if they adopt quantitative methodologies and align with more established thematic orientations. However, this trend poses a challenge to the valorization of epistemic diversity within the Swiss sociological field. By favoring certain methodological approaches and topics, the current funding structure risks marginalizing alternative forms of scientific knowledge production.

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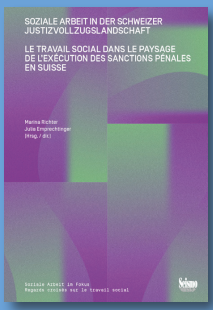

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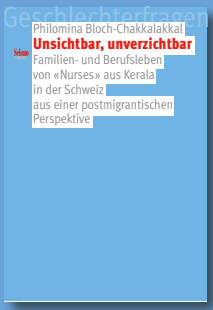

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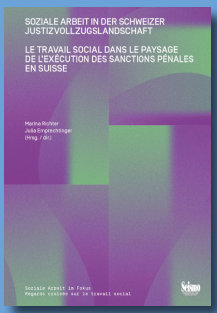

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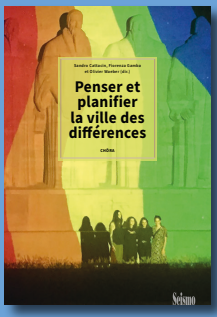

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