Academics' Societal Engagement in the Humanities and Social Sciences: A Generational Perspective from Argentina, Germany, Portugal, and Sweden

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Political discourse and policy reforms worldwide have highlighted the importance of promoting the knowledge economy by stimulating academics' societal engagement (ASE). Such narratives partly aim at influencing academics' attitudes and behaviors. Earlier work that has investigated such influence has tended to overlook the development in Humanities and Social Science (HSS), and focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. This paper contributes to filling this gap. Based on the assumption that academics' views are, to a significant extent, shaped during their early years in academia, we investigate whether there are generational differences in attitudes to ASE. Four different higher education systems are investigated: Germany, Sweden, Portugal, and Argentina, based on the international Academic Profession in the Knowledge Society survey (APIKS 2018). We used a confirmatory technique, as it allowed us to test the relationships between the dependent variable (ASE-importance) and independent variables (Table 1). Data analysis reveals marked country-level differences in the way academics perceive the importance of ASE activities. Overall, there are marked country-level differences in how academics perceived the importance of ASE activities. Academics in Argentina and, in particular, Portugal were markedly more likely than their peers in Germany and Sweden to state that they saw ASE activities as 'very important'. The exception to this pattern was that Portuguese researchers did not perceive much connection between their ASE activities and their careers, which may be due to the lack of recognition of ASE activities in Portuguese performance assessment systems. In the case of Argentina, there was a striking difference across all three generations between the strong perception of the importance of ASE activities and the low level of ASE activities reported (Table 2). Overall, there is no strong evidence that the current generation of HSS academics has very different attitudes to ASE than previous generations.

Name	*Description*	*Range*
Dependent variables		
Research	Importance of ASE for academics' research	1 (Not important) – 5 (Very important)
Teaching	academic's teaching	
Reputation	academics' reputation	
Career	academics' career advancement	
Discipline	academics' discipline	
HEImission	mission of academics' HEI	
Independent variables		
	Individual characteristics	1 = professor
Rank	Professors (professor and associate professor; senior faculty)	0 = non-professor (assist. prof, lecturer, researcher, etc.)
	Non-professors and junior academics	
Gender	Gender	0 = male 1 = female
ExternalWork	Work experience outside of universities in government, industry, and self-employment	0 = no 1 = yes
TimeBudget	Time budget (average per week) for ASE	0-1 (percentage of time dedicated to ASE in relation to other functions. (100% = time devoted to research + teaching + management + ASE + other)
Applied	Research characteristics Applied/practically oriented	1 (Not at all) – 5 (Very much)
Inter-/ Multidisciplinary	Inter-/Multidisciplinary	
FundingExpectations	HEI expectation Raising substantial amounts of external funds	1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a very high extent)

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FIGURE 1
Source: APIKS-survey 2018.

FIGURE 2
ASE activities in Argentina, Germany, Portugal, and Sweden across different generations of academics in HSS (in percentages, with number of observations in brackets; multiple answers possible).
Source: APIKS-survey 2018.

Country	*ASE Activities Index*	*Post-2006 Generation*	*1995–2006 Generation*	*Pre-1995 Generation*	*Total*
Argentina	Commercialization	29.63 (72)	32.14 (54)	41.44 (46)	32.95 (172)
	Industrialization	14.40 (35)	18.45 (31)	20.72 (23)	17.05 (89)
	Dissemination	34.98 (85)	45.83 (77)	49.55 (55)	41.57 (217)
	Supervision	12.35 (30)	17.86 (30)	23.42 (26)	16.48 (86)
Germany	Commercialization	45.07 (466)	60.58 (252)	63.54 (183)	51.84 (901)
	Industrialization	50.29 (520)	50.48 (210)	51.74 (149)	50.58 (879)
	Dissemination	68.96 (713)	84.38 (351)	83.68 (241)	75.09 (1305)
	Supervision	58.41 (604)	63.70 (265)	68.75 (198)	61.39 (1067)
Portugal	Commercialization	54.38 (87)	54.25 (217)	57.35 (195)	55.44 (499)
	Industrialization	64.38 (103)	65.25 (261)	65.88 (224)	65.33 (588)
	Dissemination	75.63 (121)	82.25 (329)	85.88 (292)	82.44 (742)
	Supervision	50.63 (81)	60.75 (243)	53.24 (181)	56.11 (505)
Sweden	Commercialization	51.61 (48)	54.67 (193)	58.91 (281)	56.55 (522)
	Industrialization	35.48 (33)	47.31 (167)	41.09 (196)	42.90 (396)
	Dissemination	67.74 (63)	71.67 (53)	71.07 (339)	70.96 (655)
	Supervision	21.51 (20)	20.40 (72)	25.37 (121)	23.08 (213)