Developing an academic career in regional studies: Some reflections on key milestones towards progression

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Aim:
Drawing on my own experience in research writing and editing - to provide some tips for optimising chances of success in your academic career

Overview:
- My own journey & strategy for research publication
- Managing the PhD process & your own research career
- The publishing process
- Some concluding remarks
Background

- Had a real life before academia—when I became a mature student
- Civil servant, researcher, Company Director, still Company secretary for my son’s Design company
- Did my first publication during PhD at Warwick, after BA Politics, MA (Durham) and teaching training
BACKGROUND

Professor of Public Leadership & Management, Aix-Marseille-Visiting Prof at other UK and international Universities-taught & researched at many Universities
Still Honorary Chair of the UK Joint University Council, the Learned Society
-advises government and research councils on PhD s
-nominates individuals to sit on journal rankings committees (esp ABS and Global Ranking), Research Excellence Framework committees, PhD training forums
Fellow (formerly)Academician of the British Academy of Social Sciences, Fellow of Regional Studies Association
Journal editor, Chair, European Editor and EAB member of international journals chief editor, European editor, editorial advisor, member of 6 x EABs, book editor, reviewer etc)
Supervised hundreds of post graduate research projects/PhDs/DBAs
Examined over 60 PhDs/DBAs, internationally
Validated Doctoral Programmes internationally
Advised many universities on structuring their Doctoral programmes
External expert advisor to 5 UK Universities in the run up to REF 2014
Work with policy and practice a lot
Journey and strategy

- Getting the PhD
- Working with collaborators who are trustworthy—esp. early career researchers—on interesting topics
- Doing a strategy of research—updating regularly
- Mapping research councils—forthcoming bids

- Writing, researching, submitting bids
- Networking or creating my own research networks
- Attending conferences, organising conferences/seminars
- Convert conference papers into publication
Key, inter-related research areas

- Public Sector Leadership & Management
- Public Entrepreneurship
- Leading Regeneration—described in RAE as a ‘pioneer’
- Strategic Commissioning—Cabinet Office OCS
- Leading Partnerships
- Collective Collaborative Leadership
- Regional-Local Leadership & Governance
- Convenor International RSA Leadership Network (Birmingham, Finland, France)
- LEPs
Leader of RSA Research Network Urban & Regional Leadership

LOCRef European cross-National Survey - Austerity in Local Govt

Marie Curie - Social Innovation in 5 Euro countries


Conference theme leader 2017

ISBE BELFAST RSA DUBLIN CMS LIVERPOOL PSA GLASGOW EGPA MILAN

Some current research projects
Developed my own Regeneration network—Started in 2000 in Durham

Grants/Bids/KTPs Publications PhD/DBA Completions/Examinations

External Research links—Support early career researchers

Maintain personal research profile & update strategy

Supervise PhD/DBAs Enhance esteem/reputation

Network—Professional, academic, learned societies, key conferences, practice & policy worlds

KEY PRIORITIES FOR RESEARCH

Improve quality of publications EAB and editorial work

ENHANCES IMPACT
LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE IN SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

EDITED BY MARKKU SOTARANTA,
INA HORLINGS AND JOYCE LIDDLE
Critical Perspectives on International Public Sector Management

Editors

John Diamond Edge Hill University, UK and
Joyce Liddle Aix-Marseille University, France

The primary purpose of Critical Perspectives on International Public Sector Management is to provide an extended space for researchers and practitioners to reflect upon what they see as the emerging and potential trends in public sector management and to anticipate the directions they may take. The series aims to focus upon those informed yet tentative or speculative discussions which permeate both worlds.

The editors recognise that received ideas of what constitutes legitimate areas of public policy and especially public management or public administration have been called into question by the financial and banking crises of 2008. In addition, the consequential political challenges to governments to provide political leadership and to be held accountable challenge particular concepts of neutral public managers acting in the interests of civil society. This series actively invites those who are both engaged with the practice of public management (in all its forms) and those who are active researchers to share their ideas, reflections and informed thinking with a wider readership.

Coverage includes (but is not limited to):

- Public sector management education
- Relationships between higher education institutions and the public sector
- Public sector management and leadership
- Strategic management
- Public sector agencies and civil society
- Accountability and governance
Critical Perspectives on International Public Sector Management

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Editor: John Diamond and Joyce Liddle

Subject: Sociology and Public Policy (view other series in this subject area)

Information: Author guidelines

Other: News (Inc. call for papers) | Recommend this book series
Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurship Research

New Perspectives on Research, Policy & Practice in Public Entrepreneurship

Editor
Joyce Liddle Aix-Marseille University, France

Synopsis

The term "entrepreneurship" has usually been associated with private sector activities. The term has appeared frequently in public sector literature, with scholars challenged to find new multi-disciplinary frameworks. This collection contributes to the debate due to a confusing array of terminology on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Scholars and practitioners are looking for flexible and adaptable approaches to shaping organisations. Key challenges face public sector institutions and partners, and success will be dependent on how well the public sector finds new ways to deliver excellent public services, and leverage support and resources from non-state partners. Public sectors across the globe have a poor record on productivity despite a dramatic expansion in public expenditure, but the on-going global economic recession has brought into focus the "innovation and enterprise imperative" (Brown & Osborne, 2013). Innovation is embedded into daily routines and interactions with non-state actors, but these chapters illustrate ample evidence on how innovative actors can be.

Scholars have contributed studies of flourishing innovation and enterprise in this important field.
Personal Qualities/Skills needed to undertake a PhD ........and a research career

Well being & energy
Strong mental health
Determination
Tenacity
Resilience
Ability to deal with constructive criticism
Time management
Verbal and written communication
Planning and organisation
Note taking
Time to relax away from the PhD & research
The PhD journey

Choose a topic that will sustain your interest for 3 years...and longer !!!

Supervisor/Student relationship is THE MOST SIGNIFICANT factor in success

If you don’t get on with your supervisor, for whatever reason, ask to have a change of supervisor—personality clashes do happen !!

Satisfy entry requirements—if it is a detailed 10,000 word proposal—then follow all guidance to the letter
Manage your supervisor

Agree regular meeting times
I wont see my students unless I have received something in writing at least a week in advance
- ‘own ‘your research—it is no one else’s and you have to defend it at viva/Jury
- set clear objectives for what you want to achieve at each Meeting
- take detailed notes & and have action points to follow up—useful if you appeal later!!

- read widely and intensively in the early stages to develop your research questions/hypotheses

- Always read with a purpose
- Take detailed notes of all complete references and file them in either cards or in a data base set up for that purpose
- set yourself realistic targets
- write, write, write—get into the habit of writing
- seek out research methods courses in your department and beyond, also on using databases, libraries, end notes etc
Establish connections with other PhD students, other academics, in your university and beyond.

ISOLATION is one of the major reasons that PhD students withdraw from their studies.

- Manage your time systematically - use GANTT charts or any other method to record/measure and assess your own progress against targets - good if you can agree these with your supervisor.
- Ensure that you follow all University requirements on when certain documents need to be submitted e.g. progress reports, transfer documents, fee payments etc.
Get into good habits - go to the library or set aside a comfortable place to work regularly and set yourself reading/writing targets.

Accept that there will be times when you just cannot get motivated - this is normal.

Break down work into manageable chunks.

You will be drawn into diverse directions, OR want to follow new ideas and trains of thought/argument - that's OK.

But STAY FOCUSED - once you decide on your key research questions.

If you are having any problems, seek support from peers, supervisors and others - do not let problems build up.

PhDs can be stressful.

You will ask yourself on numerous occasions:

'Why am I doing this?'

'Am I clever enough for this?'

Should I just leave and get a job?

Every PhD student does this - you are not alone!!!

Accept that you will often receive contradictory advice from 2 supervisors - again this is normal.

Learn to accept criticism - it is for your benefit and is not personal.
Do not consider submitting your thesis against the advice of a supervisor as this is a VERY RISKY STRATEGY INDEED

The best students are those who set up a rapport with supervisors, other PhD students, other academics and seek out networks beyond their own university.

Good PhDs are also always prepared for supervisory meetings—always take notes—a supervisory meeting should not just be for a chat—has to have a purpose and outcomes.

Attend conferences/seek out the work of others researching in your field.

Create your own research networks and set up internal/external seminars.

Set up a ‘working paper’ series between PhDs—will give you editorial experience.
Preparing for the Viva/Jury

After examining over 60 PhDs I can honestly say that the dynamics of each one is so very different. Different topics, PhD student, examiners, place, university regulations SO it is very difficult to prepare for, other than to know your PhD research work inside out and mount a good defence.

Be assertive but not aggressive-I have had a few of the latter and believe me it does not help the case-in one case it annoyed examiners so much that the student was given an MPhil rather than a PhD-it happens!!

The key to managing a viva/jury is for the examiners to engage in a rigorous but fair conversation.

It should not be the Spanish Inquisition.

BUT

It can turn into a POWER RELATIONSHIP-depends on the examiners and student.
Preparing for the Viva/Jury

Convince examiners of

Clear research questions
Filling a gap in understanding & knowledge
Plausible and appropriate methodology and design
Sound theoretical framework
Appropriate method
Critical evaluation of literature
Collection, analysis of useful data
Sound arguments and valid conclusions.

Must be

rigorous, systematic, valid, representative and generalisable to other settings
well written, have a ‘golden thread’ of argument, be sectionalised, with figures/tables/supporting materials and have no spelling/typing or referencing errors

Plagiarism is a hanging offence too!!!!

You can read guides to ‘How to prepare for a PhD viva’ but I think it better to defend your work with the hallmarks of scientific rigour

……………………..
Hallmarks of Good Research

- **Purposive**: has a definite aim
- **Rigour**: Scrupulous, careful, exact. Good theoretical base and sound methodological design
- **Testability**: developing hypothesis and testing data against them
- **Replacability**: Can the results be repeated?
- **Precision**: Accuracy/probability of estimations to be true
- **Objectivity**: Based on facts/data and not subjectivity and emotions
Hallmarks of Good Research

- **Generalisability**: Can be transferred from one setting to another
- **Parsimony**: Simple and not complicated
- **Validity**: How valid are the findings?
- **Representative**: Have you sampled the total population correctly?
- **Reliability**: Are findings reliable, or are they open to challenge?
Do remember that......

A PhD is a research training exercise to prepare you for an academic career—it is the start of a very long journey, not the end, so try to enjoy it, if you can!!!!!

You should also be attempting to develop non-academic and transferrable skills in the event that you may not secure an academic position.
A PhD is only an 80,000–100,000 word thesis so try not to think you are changing the world with your research.

You are producing a thesis, and once it is successfully defended, you can write as many world leading books as you like.

The Viva/Jury is a significant hoop to be jumped through-so do choose a supportive supervisor and have faith as they will have jumped through the same hoops, and supported many others to jump through the hoops!!!
Ask your supervisors for relevant literature, key people in the field, connections with journal editors, conference chairs

Get used to the following questions:-
How is your PhD going?
When do you finish?
They will drive you crazy BUT do motivate you

Start drafting articles either alone or with supervisors/other students

Make speculative approaches to journal editors on your ideas for a paper/always send a short, structured abstract
Structured Abstracts

- **A structured abstract** – in 250 words or less (no more than 100 in any one section)
- **Purpose** – Reasons/aims of paper
- **Design** – Methodology/‘how it was done’/scope of study
- **Findings** – Discussion/results
- **Research limitations/Implications** (if applicable) – Exclusions/next steps
- **Practical implications** (if applicable) – Applications to practice/‘So what?’
- **Social implications** (if applicable) – Impact on society/policy
- **Originality/value** – Who would benefit from this and what is new about it?
Why publish in journals?

Being published means:

- Your paper is **permanent** – enters the ‘body of knowledge’ for your subject area
- Your paper appears in both the **print and electronic** versions of the journal
- Your paper is **improved** by suggestions from reviewers and/or the editor via the review process
- Your paper is actively **promoted** by the publisher – reaching a large audience
- Your submission is **trustworthy** – material that has been published carries a QA stamp
Why publish in journals?

What’s in it for me?

• Work in print – name in print
• Share your ideas – develop your career
• Prove success – support/influence future decisions
• Demonstrate your knowledge – gain external recognition-esteem
• Highlight new initiatives – gain internal recognition
What makes a good paper? Editors and reviewers look for:

Originality - what’s new about subject, treatment or results?

Relevance to and extension of existing knowledge

Research methodology - are conclusions valid and objective?

Clarity, structure and quality of writing - does it communicate well?

Sound, logical progression of argument

Theoretical and practical implications (the ‘so what?’ factors!)

Recency and relevance of references

Internationality/Global focus

Adherence to the editorial scope and objectives of the journal
The publishing process

Review Cycle

The Editor(s) do an initial read to determine if the subject matter and research approach is appropriate for the journal (approx. 1 week)

The Editor(s) identify and contact two reviewers (approx. 1 week)

Reviewers usually have 6-8 weeks to complete their reviews

The Editor(s) assess the reviewers' comments and recommendations and make a decision

Michael Derntl
http://www.pri.univie.ac.at/~derntl/papers/meth-se.pdf
Surviving peer review

Reasons for rejections

• Not following instructions – author guidelines
• Inappropriate to the journal scope
• Problem with quality (inappropriate methodology, not reasonably rigorous)
• Insufficient contribution to the field
Surviving peer review

“Many papers are rejected simply because they don’t fulfil journal requirements. They don’t even go into the review process.”

- Identify a few possible target journals/series but be realistic
- Follow the Author Guidelines – scope, type of paper, word length, references style, etc
- Find out where to send your paper (editor, online submission e.g. Scholar One). Check author guidelines which can be found in a copy of the journal/series or the publisher’s web site
- Send an outline or abstract and ask if this looks suitable and interesting (or how it could be made so)
- **Read** at least one issue of the publication – visit your library for access
- Include a cover letter – opportunity to speak directly to the editor, convince them of the importance of your manuscript to the journal
Surviving peer review

Rejection tips

Don’t give up!
Everybody has been rejected at least once

Ask and listen
most editors give detailed comments about a rejected paper.

Try to improve and re-submit.
Do your homework and target your paper as closely as possible

Don’t be in the 16% who gave up
Surviving peer review

Revision tips

✓ Acknowledge the editor and set a revision deadline
✓ If you disagree, explain why to the editor
✓ Clarify understanding if in doubt
✓ Consult with colleagues or co-authors
✓ Meet the revision deadline
✓ Attach a covering letter which identifies, point by point, how revision requests have been met (or if not, why not)
Typical criticisms (journal dependent)

- Paper motivation is weak
  - is there really a gap in our understanding? Did it need filling?
- Theory development is weak
  - theory by assertion, or reinvention of existing theory
- Empirical work is weak
  - methodology not plausible, tests don’t rule out alternative hypotheses
- ‘So what’?
  - nothing wrong with the paper – but nothing very insightful either
  - only incremental research, doesn’t affect an existing paradigm
How to select the right journal?

Choosing a journal to publish in is an investment decision. A good choice can enhance the impact of your work and your reputation.

Factors to consider are relevant readership, recent articles, communicative, societies and internationality, likelihood of acceptance, circulation, time from submission to publication.

What type of paper are you planning to write i.e. practice paper, research paper, case study, review, viewpoint? Check first what type of paper the journal accepts.

Be political (e.g. national vs. international) and strategic (e.g. five articles in ‘low ranked’ journals vs. one in ‘top ranked’ journal).
For 40 years or so there has been a Global demand for Universities-
Demand is levelling off in North America and Europe

ALSO

Reduced Government support
Reduction in funds from Research Councils, HE Funding bodies, Industry,
Health and Local Government for example
Public scepticism on the value of degrees
Increased competition
Advent of disruptive technologies, social media, on-line learning,
Facebook, Twitter, Linked In
Outdated business model of opening campuses in other states or students
travelling to be educated
Need for Global Visibility, Financial viability and Sustainable Business
Model

PRESTIGE, QUALITY AND REPUTATION are THE KEYS TO THE FUTURE
How will these changes affect researchers and research

- Universities will need high quality research—perhaps more innovative research using social media????
- They will need to attract funding from sources other than Governments and Research Councils
- Good teaching will need to be underpinned by research

- ALL should lead to higher Visibility, Reputation and Prestige
- BUT How is Research Quality measured?
- UK has REF-France is developing national system, as is Italy Australia and many others
Thomson Reuters ISI is the most well known ranking, but others exist. Citations are a good, but not a complete, guide to quality

- Impact Factor
- Harzing
- Scopus
- H-index
- SCImago Journal Rank
- Usage/Peer perception

**BUT** Open Access Publishing will SIGNIFICANTLY alter the Business Models of existing or new Publishers

- ABS RANKING AND EAJB-Global RANKING but all countries have different ranking systems

- Eg I've spoken in Finland, France, Italy, Brazil on the topic

- All metrics have strengths and weaknesses
In the UK, there is the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

Measured on

- Quality of Outputs
- Impact of research beyond the academy
- The research environment
- Four outputs from each academic, plus impact case studies

NB As Honorary Chair of UK JOINT UNIVERSITY COUNCIL, I (together with Executive members) nominate REF Panel members and also ABS/EAJB Global ranking Committee members)
There have been many critiques of simplistic use and impacts of ABS Guide and other metrics

Problems conflating journal quality with quality of an article

- Even if a guide ‘accurately’ ranked the quality of journals, each journal still publishes articles ranging over a broad spectrum of quality
  - So we can’t infer the quality of an individual article from the quality of the journal in which it has been published
So in conclusion
Have a strong research focus-which field do you want to be a main contributor in?

Set yourself research targets (keep a log, update regularly)

Collaborate if you can find trusted collaborators-% of contribution-whose name goes first?

Try not to be Einstein-refrain from being self centred and arrogant

Make the right connections/networks or create your own

Do book/article reviews/write a blog-practice writing

Don’t be disheartened with rejection-even negative feedback can be used for improvement

Be realistic

Choose the right journal/publisher for your type of work

Enjoy !!! Research cannot be forced-it must be something you enjoy-otherwise you are in the wrong job
Do remember….

A PhD is not the end—merely the beginning of a research journey.

Try to enjoy the process without too much stress (difficult, I know!)

Take advice from supervisors, peers, others who are trying to help

Being inquisitive is key to research—in the short and long term.

Take criticism as constructive.

Most of you could be in the armed forces being shot at, or have a life threatening illness—so put the PhD into perspective !!!