

**BRICOLAGE AND THE LATE-MODERN ACADEMIC  
HABITUS OF EXTERNAL PHD. CANDIDATES**

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## **Abstract**

In this article I address two interrelated questions. The first question is, what role do external PhD. candidates play in the emergence of paradigms? The second question is, if anything, what do external PhD. candidates actually contribute to the process of emerging paradigms? In order to answer these questions, I conducted an exploratory study into the vicissitudes of external PhD. candidates in the Netherlands. As my findings suggest, they display a fully-fledged academic habitus. Their main concern is the complexity of the professional practices they work in, which they want to understand and innovate. This complexity refuses standardized methods. Therefore, external PhD. candidates turn to bricolage. Although they bring rich empirical data and innovative methods into the academy, they encounter difficulties addressing the academic public. They seldom feel welcome as academics and are critical about the socio-cultural elements of academic practice. In general, their impact on emerging paradigms is low. This does not mean that this impact is worthless. On the contrary, the contributions of external PhD. Candidates deserves appreciation in the light of valorisation. Moreover, bricolage reflects the more general late-modern trend of de-standardized biographies. This goes for non-academics and academics alike. Can external PhD. candidates pioneer in the development of a late-modern habitus?

**Keywords:** external PhD. candidates, academic habitus, bricolage, late modernity

## 1. Some Theoretical Notions on how Paradigms Emerge

Kuhn takes paradigms “to be universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners” (1962). He reflects on the necessity of both divergent and convergent thinking for scientific progress. Hence, he speaks of an essential tension, in which “the successful scientist must simultaneously display the characteristics of the traditionalist and of the iconoclast” (Kuhn, 1977). Most scientific work is done in the context of normal or mature science, but once in a while this context is dramatically restructured by a revolution. Although this suggests a radical break, the new scientific structure seldom comes out of the blue but emerges from the complexity of the prerevolutionary context. Becher and Trowler (2001) argue that Kuhn does not develop this implication of evolution. As they put forward, “subtle interactions between disciplinary knowledge and the various social processes operating in and around academic cultures” explain why some disciplines develop consensus while others remain divided. The relation between culture and epistemology is succinctly labelled “epistemic cultures” by Knorr Cetina (1999), who defines them as:

“those amalgams of arrangements and mechanisms—bonded through affinity, necessity, and historical coincidence—which, in a given field, make up *how we know what we know*.” (Knorr Cetina, 1999)

The socialization into an epistemic culture requires both a cognitive and a cultural endeavour from the newcomer. As in most jobs, being competent in a cognitive sense is not enough. Social competences, for instance being able to network and knowing when to speak and to whom, are equally important. This socialization is both overt in educational programs and covert in what Bourdieu (1980) coins “habitus”, the active construction of the objects of knowledge as a system of structuring positions constituted in practice and always oriented towards practical functions. If, in the setting of official educational curricula, students acquire the cannon and therewith learn convergent thinking, then also, at some point, they will have to see through the system of structuring positions and gain a sense of the habitus that generates knowledge production, so that they recognize the blind spots and loopholes where divergent thinking is fruitful. As Bourdieu (1980) suggests, growing into a habitus requires the immersion in an academic practice. This immersion is a matter of both affordances and engagement (Billet, 2002). The first are the tangible and intangible experiences and assets a workplace offers employees for their development, the latter is the extent to which an individual actually uses them. In most workplaces, affordances are coupled to the career span and develop along with seniority. An academic workplace is no different in this. When it comes to partaking in a paradigm, the start of a career is highly uncertain as most academics spend their first postdoctoral years in limbo, as Becher and Trowler (2001) put it. To assure a sound career, academics invest a lot of effort into the acquisition of specific competences in a particular field. From a collective standpoint this results in inertia or conservatism built into the academic enterprise (Becher and Trowler, 2001).

## 2. External PhD. researchers in the Netherlands

To understand Dutch external PhD. candidates, a few words on the academic part of their context might be useful.

### *2.1 Rough Guide to Dutch academia*

Although nowadays the cry for excellence is widely heard and repeated internationally, in the Netherlands time and again the principles of egalitarianism and proportionality are fiercely advocated and successfully regain territory. As Sonneveld (1997) explains, out of the efforts of different denominations to ensure peaceful coexistence a consensus model evolved into a pillarized society. The consequences for universities were the distribution of economic and scientific capital and therewith an anti-elitist model and a power balance in which all parties could count on an equal share. Consequently, supervisors of PhD. candidates are strongly dependent on each other in their evaluation of PhD. research. Sonneveld (1997) calls this a feudal patronage which is supported by habit and law.

Although the situation regarding regular PhD. candidates is changing, in the Dutch university system regular PhD. candidates are part of academic staff. In their discussion of the American tenure track versus the Dutch human resource policies in universities, Van Balen and Van den Besselaar (2007) note that the latter have a hierarchical career pattern based on institutional programs whereas the former is focused on individual career paths based on individual qualities. In the Netherlands, an academic career builds on some functions which have no English equivalent, such as the “universitair docent” (assistant professor) and “universitair hoofddocent” (associate professor). Both are hierarchically lower in rank, but the difference between associate professors and full professors is mostly theoretical. Practically, the former partake in the research program of the latter but, although they are usually the ones who actually supervise PhD. candidates, they may not carry the title “professor” nor do they have *ius promovendi*. The American system is less hierarchical as there are no formal differences between the two positions nor are there institute directors who decide whether or not a program of a tenure tracker fits the faculty program. A tenure tracker carries out his or her own research program without necessarily taking part in the research program of the professor and also has *ius promovendi*. In fact, independently and successfully developing and carrying out a research program is precisely what the tenure tracker has to demonstrate he or she can do (Van Balen and Besselaar, 2007). In the Netherlands, efforts are made to make the careers of academics more flexible and individual. The term “excellence” becomes prominent in this discourse.

The term “excellence” refers to a meritocratic selectivity (Sonneveld, 1997), that is, PhD. candidates are selected on their academic skills. This selection, as opposed to the egalitarian selection, is the outcome of a historical process that lead to a new PhD. culture. Sonneveld (1997) summarizes the elements of the new pedagogical regime as a standardized and in time compressed trajectory, in which the student is subjected to a strong (self) discipline. Time management is key and the hierarchical gap between professor and PhD. candidate is widened as the professor is the genius of the research question, thus limiting the intellectual freedom of the PhD. candidate. There is a shift from a negotiation-based, collegial relationship between supervisors and PhD. researchers to a hierarchical relationship between masters and apprentices or students (Sonneveld, 1997).

Unto the 1980s all PhD. candidates were external, that is, none of them were employed by a university to prepare a PhD., although many were employed as teachers and researchers. This changed with the introduction of research schools and formal contracts with PhD. candidates. As regular PhD. candidates became the norm, external PhD. candidates became the aberration. In general, they remain invisible until professors publicly question the quality of their work or debate about precisely how undesirable it is that they produce work of a lesser quality (Basten, 2010). Either way, external PhD. candidates do not fit the current master-apprentice model and therewith are out of the control span of their supervisors. At the same time, they highly depend on those same supervisors for the approval of their PhD. Moreover,

they seem to occupy a hybrid space which is both academic and non-academic, inside and outside the university. In my research I focused on this space. However, as said, the external PhD. candidates are highly invisible. Some universities register them, but most do not. For this reason it is difficult to estimate their numbers. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science there are 2,000 external PhD. candidates in the Netherlands, whereas the Association of Universities of the Netherlands speaks of some 10,000. Can they even be considered a group, with a self-consciously shared identity, maybe even a shared habitus? To develop hypotheses, I conducted an exploratory research into Dutch external PhD. researchers in social and business studies.

## 2.2 Method

In 2008, I initiated a research network. Respondents for this particular study were recruited by open invitation in a newsletter I distribute in this network (the mailing list contains some 380 addresses) and which was passed along by the recipients to their own connections, be it spontaneously or on my request. Also, I posted a call for participation on a LinkedIn group for external PhD. candidates. In total, 27 PhD. candidates in social and business studies responded, of whom two were from my own network and 25 came via via. There were no exclusion criteria such as the commitment of a supervisor, as I wanted to explore what it was like to be an external PhD. candidate. The sole criterion for participation was thus that the respondents considered themselves to be external PhD. candidates.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with an average time of 50 minutes and extremes of 35 minutes and one and a half hour. This range can be explained by the use of both a topic list and the freedom of respondents to talk about the issues they felt were important. Some took a more business-like style and provided short and to the point answers, while others took a more conversationalist style and shared their narratives. When they raised issues that could be important to ask other respondents as well, I added their input on the topic list. This is in line with the exploratory status of the research, which is intended to develop a theoretical framework and not to test hypotheses in a representational sample of the population. Again, this population is ill defined both in numbers and characteristics, so a representational sample was out of the question in this stage of the research.

I carried out an analysis based on the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), as there was little to none known about Dutch external PhD. candidates. A study by Hello and Sonneveld (2010) was helpful in offering some possible coding categories, but this study did not provide a full picture as it was based on a survey of 38 respondents from one university. I started with open coding and after 10 interviews developed provisional categories by clustering the codes. I then applied the provisional categories on the first 22 interviews, incrementally making them more definite. I conducted another five interviews. These could all be coded with the thus developed coding system, so I concluded that the categories were theoretically saturated and stopped recruiting respondents. Next I present the results of the categories that are relevant for the present paper.

## 2.3 Sample

The sample consisted of ten females and 17 males. Although the literature suggests that the average age of Dutch external PhD. candidates is 45 (Hello and Sonneveld, 2010) and that of their British counterparts is older than 46 (Hooley *et al.*, 2009), in my sample ten respondents were younger than 40 (five females and five males), nine were between 41 and 55 (four females and five males) and eight were older than 55 (one female and seven males). All but one of the respondents were Caucasian.

As for employment, seven respondents were self-employed, 17 were employed and three combined employment with entrepreneurship. Regarding the home situation, all but one had a partner and many had children. The age of the children was roughly what could be expected regarding the age categories mentioned above. The younger respondents had small or no children, the older ones had children who had already left the house and the respondents in between had teenagers or young adolescents.

Of the 27 respondents, 11 were invited to start a PhD. research by their current supervisor. They knew their supervisors from work or because they graduated with them. There was a broad range in how far they were in the process of their PhD. Some started in 2010 and some were to finish in 2010, but most were somewhere in the middle.

#### *2.4 Results*

The results presented here reflect the categories found in the data. Although a university is an example of a professional practice, for the sake of clarity I will here use “professional practice” solely for non-university practices. Similarly, although an academic is a professional, I will only use “professional” to refer to non-academic professionals.

#### Lifelong learning

The image of the external PhD. candidate is that of an elderly person, mostly male, who at the end of his professional career surrenders to a long-held desire to gain an academic title (Basten, 2010). However, my sample suggests an upcoming group of younger PhD. candidates who start their research as the self-evident apotheoses of a long, often part-time career in education. The image of an interrupted learning line is thus corrected, as this younger generation starts within two years of formal education. Also, the older generation is often still connected to the university as they read their literature, teach students and publish articles. In other words, a lot of the external PhD. candidates remained with one leg or foot in the academy. The respondents considered their career of lifelong learning as the manifestation of their inborn curiosity and their PhD. research as a natural stage in their learning:

“Yes, the origin is very old, because in the past [...] I was fascinated with the way certain opinions about people and organizations influence how managers take decisions and how this in the end reaches the clients. So that desire to make that as it were visible, that’s an old one, also very closely connected to my own biography, I think.”<sup>1</sup>

“I feel that my study isn’t completed until I have my PhD. It hasn’t been until I started my PhD. research that I felt I was truly studying.”

Respondents call this urge to learn a “mindset”, “a constant background noise that sometimes comes to the fore”, “a permanent passion that sometimes breaks loose”, “the extension of who you are”. As one respondent put it, his PhD. research changed his professional identity: “I have pretty much reinvented myself as a consultant.”

Learning and doing a PhD. research is part of who these respondents are. Related to this is the habit to seek challenges and put the bar high:

“One of the reasons why I enjoy doing research, apart from that I like to work with the subject matter, is that, because I’m inclined to involve everything with everything,

also in consultancy, this helps me to focus. As a consultant, but also as a researcher. So I must say that I appreciate that they keep me on my toes every time and that I am forced time and again to go to that millimetre.”

“Because it gives you the discipline to order your thoughts. And because it makes me start reading other authors. So it is a kind of discipline I wouldn’t have otherwise. [...] And I find it a challenge in PhD. research that you have to verbalize your thoughts and that on top of it there has to be some logical coherence in it. That I find the beauty of PhD. research.”

In the next subsection intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are further explored.

### Motivations and ambitions

Respondents expressed several motivations for their PhD. research. The first motivation was to satisfy one’s own curiosity. Doctoral research is then seen as a leisure which satisfies personal interest and the pleasure of learning (Eicher and Levy-Garboua, 1979):

“The hours I put in I see as an investment in myself. I really have my mind set on it, but I think the road to it, at this moment, is the most fun... I don’t yet have a ‘PhD.’ feeling. I find it very challenging and enjoy keeping myself busy with interesting things. [...] I have broad interests and this fits perfectly. I just like it a lot.”

Respondents were also driven by the ambition to change and innovate. This drive was directed at themselves as learners and reflexive practitioners, but also at other targets, making this motivation a missionary one: from old to young professionals, from young professionals to future practices, from science to society and from practice to science. The ambition to pass knowledge on to the next generation of professionals was expressed mostly by older respondents. They engaged in a PhD. research driven by generativity (Erikson, 1974), the awareness that one has acquired knowledge that is valuable for future generations and the desire to share this with them:

“Also that I, I’m 56 now, want to be somebody in my profession. So I really love my profession a lot and I’m like, yeah, I’m in that master period of my career in which I can truly leave something behind, can be a master, and want to teach it.”

In contrast, respondents who were at the beginning of their careers expressed their ambition to become a highly qualified professional and to develop knowledge for the innovation of current and future practices. These younger respondents were very keen on developing products and theories that were useful to their professional peers:

“I hope that in the end there will be teams that think, oh yeah, this will help us further. I would really like that. I believe that I find the academic value less important, in that sense I am really more of a practitioner. Still, I do believe that it is important to have a sound argumentation, otherwise you cannot write a thesis anyway. It has to be validated that it has added value for practice and how.”

Some older respondents who had spend more time in practice were motivated by frustrations and irritations about the way large-scale systems were non-productive or even counterproductive to the challenges society face. The missionary motivation was then also directed to society at large:

“For me it has been the very personal observation that there is something wrong in society and that something has to be done about it. That is very fundamental indeed.”

A final missionary motivation for starting a PhD. was the ambition to innovate science by adding new angles and perspectives:

“I have given myself the assignment to get a PhD. and give what I do identity in science. [...] I’m looking for a way of theorizing that is not very grounded in existing sciences.”

“[...] I read somewhere that scientific research is choosing one direction and sit on blisters for the rest. So you choose a certain focus and then you also exclude other options [...]. I chose a social-constructivist approach, so I know that the hardcore functionalists will not consider that as fully-fledged science. So be it. [...] I know that I’m sticking out my neck with my epistemological approach. I like that and that’s why I like doing research and it has been a very conscious choice in this regard.”

The latter motivation also has an extrinsic variant in the desire to become an academic and to enter the scientific discourse and “have a voice in the scientific community”:

“I’m not someone who’d want to work at a university fulltime, without my feet in the professional practice. But I do have enough academic interest to want something with it one way or the other. This research does open the door to, for instance, a part-time chair or researcher in another construction. I think I’d find that interesting. [...] I just like to publish and the academic world is a good place for that.”

Some of the respondents, mostly males, mentioned they wanted an academic career, but none of them wanted a fulltime academic position. The reason for this was twofold. They had made a positive choice for working in a professional practice because they enjoyed the dynamism and versatility there and/or they were not attracted to academic life for socio-cultural reasons (see below). None of the respondents mentioned a PhD. as a necessity in their professional career, but several said it had some advantages for the image of their firm and the acquisition of new orders.

Interestingly enough, some respondent were not in it for the title, but for the opportunity to do high-level research. If for some reason their research would not result in a PhD., they would still engage in research activities:

“So I wanted to continue doing research and stuff, and if it turns out to be a PhD. research, fine, because then at the end of the day you also have a thing like a title. Eventually I want to have result, but that [title] is not my primary goal. If I were to have a good time and learn a lot but wouldn’t get my PhD., then that wouldn’t keep me up at night. I do want to become a doctor, but it is not my primary goal. My primary goal is to do fun research and to go deeply into the matter.”

This suggests that the intrinsic motivators for research and innovation are more dominant than the extrinsic motivators such as career opportunities and financial gain.

### Experiences with academic life

Van der Rijst (2009) identifies six dimensions of the academic habitus. These are the desire to know, understand, innovate, be critical, share and achieve. All 27 respondents displayed all six dimensions, be it that some were more critical towards “normal science” (Kuhn, 1962) than others. All took a critical stance, but towards different aspects. This subsection is about the positive and negative encounters with academic life.

All but a few were dissatisfied with the affordances (Billet, 2002) the university offered. Most had no access to libraries, databases or helpdesks from their homes. Although these kinds of practicalities were annoying, most respondents found ways to compensate. There were six respondents who taught at university and they appreciated this opportunity to receive feedback and straighten their story.

Of the respondents, 24 had supervisors, ten of whom were positive about their current supervisor. They enjoyed the combination of intellectual freedom and constructive criticism. They also experienced moral support. The rest was (partly) negative about their supervisors. Their professors lacked knowledge of content and/or methods and/or were poorly accessible. Also, respondents noted that they missed attention for the process.

The abovementioned elements are all part of the tangible affordances of universities. What about the intangible ones? These would be the experiences of feeling accepted as external PhD. candidates in the epistemic cultures (Knorr Cetina, 1999). A minority felt welcome as academics.

“Of course I have only a limited number of anchor points in the academy and with them I just keep good contact. [...] In that sense, not really like ‘oh, external PhD. candidate’, or ‘he is in practice’, that that is looked down upon. No, on the contrary. I like it, it’s ‘come join us. Have you got anything new? That’s great, show us.’ Yes. Not that we see each other on a weekly basis, but in this area there is a certain group of people, also young ones, who all know each other and are all on LinkedIn. And once a year there is a conference and then you meet. They are genuinely curious. ‘What are you doing?’ So I’m really part of that group. Of course you sense that. It is all extensive, but it’s not like there’s a distance, no.”

“In fact, they respond very well to me as an academic. Recently I had to present my story to a number of professors from different universities. And I noticed that when I stayed really close to my own interest I got a lot of reactions like ‘how great that finally we have someone who is so enthusiastic about the profession and the content’.”

“Last Friday I was at the university and then I entered—at work it had been very hectic that morning—and then I thought, this is also a bit mine, here is also where I belong. And I really liked that.”

In contrast, the majority of respondents were quite cynical about the academy and the way they were treated. Only in the course of time and by trial and error did they learn about issues of authorship, of the premium of 90,000 euro a university receives when they pass their PhD., of the fear of professors for their reputation, et cetera. Most would have appreciated some insights into the academic customs and habits beforehand.

“[...] as a scientist you have to [...] be able to focus, you have to be able to seclude yourself from other stuff. And that’s what I also feel a bit when I come to the university as an external PhD. candidate. It doesn’t run over with empathy for my situation, like ‘gosh, this guy is new here, let’s go part of his way and show him a bit around.’ That will never happen. It’s not unwillingness, but they just don’t see it. It would have helped me, as external PhD. candidate, to have had some tips and tricks.”

A large minority had mixed feelings about university life. They got along well with their supervisors and most others directly concerned, but also encountered arrogance and disdain.

“It is just one experience, but it can be an experience about the difference between our discipline and the true scientist, quote unquote. That was an experience that I stumbled upon a special issue of a journal, there was also a Dutch name attached to it of a teacher here at the university. He responded very enthusiastically by mail, like ‘well, you’re nearby, why don’t we talk soon?’ But he gave me the feeling that ‘well, you only just arrived.’ [...] And well, he gave me a few digs, what statistically seen in my practice was at the least scientifically very dubious. He then gave me a couple of articles with the most complicated types of statistical reasoning. And then I thought, okay, these are two worlds.”

As the last quote suggests, the level of social acceptance is intertwined with the cultural acceptance. Here we see the experience of the external PhD. candidates in regard of their entrance into the epistemic culture (Knorr Cetina, 1999). For 11 of them, this was a disappointment:

“Well, next you notice that that science is also politicized as hell, so you fall from one disappointment into another. It also has a certain disenchanting effect. Once a summer school had been organized for external PhD. candidates. Also very interesting, but you’re mostly confronted with the landscape that for instance the PhD. candidates in the one university are quite a different tribe from the boys and girls from the other university. In itself it’s quite amusing, but it’s not that I think, this is very helpful.”

Respondents mentioned rivalry, machismo, non-cooperation, theft, sabotage and other events of unsavoury nature. When confronted with the academic habitus in terms of the dialectic of the opus operatum and modus operandi (Bourdieu, 1980), most respondents react rather pragmatically:

“It is disillusioning, but it also brings some joy, [...] some relativism [...] and hilarity. One of the things that has become clear to me is, there is no such thing as objectivity. I mean, that’s just non-sense. If you think otherwise, then you’re at least a bit of this world. But in universities they constantly sell each other the idea that there *is* such a thing as objectivity. Well, there isn’t. It’s just ‘this is what I think’, even in the natural

sciences. But that doesn't mean that that battle [...] isn't a very fascinating one, of course."

In short, most—but not all—respondents do not see all six dimensions of the academic habitus as described by Van der Rijst (2009) in the academic practice where they themselves stay. They explained this as a personal trait of the academic concerned or as a structural aspect of a culture in which one must choose between the camps of “true science” and “applied science”. Within a camp it is safe and people show an interest, but between camps there are hard confrontations. This side of the epistemic culture is recognized by the respondents. A lot of them wanted to belong to the “true science” camp, but without letting go of the element of practice. As they saw it, they were engaged in serious science and the origins of their data should not matter. However, a lot of them were automatically treated as members of “that other camp”. As they analysed it, the desire of academics to know and to understand was constrained epistemologically to small fragments of reality, which are also considered only from one, narrow perspective. In contrast, their own ambition was to know and to understand the complexity or professional practice from the perspectives of multiple disciplines and without reducing it to small fragments of reality. They interpreted academia as a culture wherein too much emphasis on wanting to achieve (overspecialisation in response to competition) and to be critical (in a defensive way) clouded the desire to share and to innovate. In contrast, the respondents were driven precisely by this sharing and innovating, based on constructive criticism.

So far, I have presented some aspects of the vicissitudes of external PhD. candidates in academic life. However, most external PhD. candidates spend far more time outside the reach of academic practice. In the next section I will discuss how they manage to combine upholding the standards of academic research in a non-academic research setting.

#### Extra-academic qualities

As can be expected and is also supported by literature (Hello and Sonneveld, 2010; Hooley *et al.*, 2009), external PhD. candidates do their research in different circumstances than regular PhD. candidates or, for that matter, most academics. The respondents in this study were no exception. All worked in a professional environment and some also worked part-time in an academic environment, self-employed or as an employee. In this section I focus on two interconnected strategies they developed to balance between the immersion in data and critical distance.

Structure and discipline are mechanisms to control behaviour. Respondents mentioned time and boundary management as relevant competences. Time management regards the amount of time they spend on their research. This varied from half a day to three days a week, a day on average. However, they found it difficult to allocate this time structurally. Time management was also about attuning the rhythm of daily work and its primary process on the one hand and the rhythm of their research on the other hand. Respondents in the profit sector noticed that their primary process depended on the contingency of the market, respondents in education found the curriculum-based process of teaching interfering. One way of handling this was boundary management as the effort to keep work and research separated. This was considered as an important means to assure critical distance. Some respondents had chosen a topic that was not directly related to their work. For them, boundary management was easy, but they struggled with time management. Most respondents however did have work-related topics. This created a dependency on practice as a source of data. However, daily work was

characterized as complex and some respondents struggled with the separation between research and work. These respondents were also the ones who struggled most with time management. Other respondents gave up the idea of separated fields and saved time by letting go of the boundaries between their work and their research.

All respondents with work-related topics had access to data, but the complexity of their professional practice sometimes precluded preferred methods. For instance, a change agent wanted to study the effects of his interventions longitudinally, but found that the organizations he studied changed in the course of time due to other influences than his (mergers). A professional practice is not a laboratory in which variables can be controlled. Several respondents note that their practice is too complex to study from one disciplinary angle and/or that this complexity cannot be captured in a reductionist model. Their ontologies and epistemologies reveal a social-constructivist perspective that is not yet generally appreciated and acknowledged in their academic contexts. Moreover, as they blur the boundaries between research and practice, they involve their practices as active participants in their research. In other words, the objects of their studies become sites or networks of knowledge production in which they themselves fully participate as researchers. This so-called transdisciplinary approach marks the hybridism of the space in which they operate, which is neither inside or outside university and neither inside or outside practice. They notice that this space is not fully appreciated by academia as they experience hesitation to participate from that side. In other words, they try to bridge the gap between practice and research only to find that their efforts strand on the coasts of the latter.

### **3. Emerging Paradigms.**

The first question was, what role do external PhD. candidates play in the emergence of paradigms? If we look at the level of their participation in the development of new knowledge and new methodologies and to the extent to which they can put their mark on scientific knowledge and scientific knowledge production, then we can conclude that their impact is rather low. The addition “external” to “PhD. candidate” is telling. They are outside and academia is inside. They do not belong to the academic in-group in which symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1980) circulates. In fact, there is a strong inclination to introduce the professional doctorate in the Netherlands, which would make the divide even more tangible. Further, the sphere of feudal patronage (Sonneveld, 1997) and the negative sides of the academic habitus is what these researchers only encounter after entering the academic arena and these are why they do not want to fully enter the epistemic cultures (Knorr Cetina, 1999). The second question was, if anything, what do external PhD. candidates actually contribute to the process of emerging paradigms? Regarding their habitus the external PhD. candidates in this study turned out to be fully-fledged academics, who happened to deviate only in the subjects they like to study and the methods to do so. They were fascinated by the complexity of the organizations and systems they worked in and designed new methods to map this complexity with an eye on structural innovation. They brought rich empirical data and innovative participatory methods into the academy, but, as the answer to the previous question suggests, were unable to have their approaches fully legitimized. Learning the academic customs and habits is time consuming and can be frustrating, but at the same time gives rise to new insights into the academic enterprise. As Gödel put in his incompleteness theorem, any self-consistent recursive axiomatic system contains propositions that cannot be proved from the axioms (in Hofstadter, 2007). This would mean that normal science is as self-referential as any other closed system. Making this system more open and taking the

input of extra-academics seriously could mean an impulse in the innovation of science and the rise of new paradigms, epistemic cultures and a late-modern academic habitus. I conclude with some sensitizing concepts that can give directions for future research into the potential of these extra-academic researchers.

### *3.1 Valorisation*

Valorisation “encompasses all activities that contribute to ensuring that the outcomes of scientific knowledge add value beyond the scientific domain” (Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2009). It involves making academic output broadly available and accessible outside academia as well as the co-production of knowledge with non-academics. However, Benneworth and Jongbloed (2009) note that as a term, valorisation has largely become narrowed down to commercialisation. They relate this to the success of the hegemonic discourse of academic capitalism and the ideology of the entrepreneurial university, which in turn float on the successful commercialisation of physical and life sciences. Yet, the conditions for this success are not transferable to humanities and social sciences, as these are dealing with complex matters and are unequipped to generate simple responses with fast returns on investment. Their output is more diffuse and difficult to enumerate, their beneficiaries often have lower purchasing power. Also, policy makers generally lack capacities to exploit wider benefits of humanities and social sciences (Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2009). At the same time, Spaapen *et al.* (2007) note a shift from science to research as the boundaries between academy and society are upheld less rigidly. There is a growing interest in open innovation as developing products and services in collaboration with end or future users (Chesbrough in Spaapen *et al.*, 2007). This, they suggest, might help solve the knowledge paradox, in which the increase of our knowledge decreases its usefulness. As Tennant (2004) notes, relevance no longer equates the “application” of knowledge “to” the workplace. Instead, the workplace itself is seen as a site of learning, knowledge and knowledge production. Reversing the required adaptation of external PhD. candidates to the academy, he claims that academics, as players in the knowledge economy, need to develop the comportment of the knowledge worker. Can extra-academic researchers, with their desire for innovation and transdisciplinary methods, be helpful in this and play a part in solving the paradox?

### *3.2 Bricolage*

Somehow external PhD. candidates manage to develop an academic habitus without being in an academic practice fulltime. They compensate for the absence of an academic environment with the academization of their professional practice. To this hybrid space they bring their network skills and learning identities. Networking here implies transdisciplinary activities, bringing people with their theories and concepts from divergent backgrounds (both academic and non-academic) together and creating connections between them. The dynamic of practice creates contingency and chance in the process of research. Bricolage, then, is the strategy to keep a grip on their research question in authentic contexts they do not always have a grip on. It is the moving between theories, paradigms and methods in which they make choices based on the way the research situation develops (Denzin *et al.*, 2005). Bricolage is not the opportunistic use of whatever is incidentally at hand, but an eclectic process in which the researcher is conscious of his or her own position as a researcher and of the role of theorizing and method. It is the active construction of methods that fit the practices to be researched and therewith rejects standardized methods of knowledge production. The complexity of practice and the way humans make sense of it are important starting points. This kind of research is typical for critical theory and activist research (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005). The respondents in this study were not all outspokenly activist, but they did have a strong drive to

innovate and the ambition to make society smarter, healthier, more just, humane and efficient. Can their ambition to innovate truly contribute to more open, democratic societies?

### *3.3 A Late-modern Academic Habitus*

The academic habitus external PhD. candidates display reflects general life in late modernity, in which de-standardization and bricolage of biographies is taking place (Giddens, 1991). Informal and loose networks that people (co-)construct around the issues they really care about replace the formal, unconditional, geographically bounded and tightly coupled bonds of family, neighbourhood and work. Making sense and choices in late-modern societies is less informed by categories of gender, class, region, religion and ethnicity. Moreover, information on which to ground one's biographical choices itself is increasingly ambiguous. This de-standardization and ambiguity go for non-academics and academics. The latter are confronted with it in their workplace and career path, but also in their disciplinary contends and methods. Specific for knowledge in the social and business sciences is their reflexive nature. More sociological knowledge does not lead to more control of social development, because of what Giddens (1991) coins the "double hermeneutics". The reflexive relation between the social and science actively constitutes behaviour and practices. As a consequence, knowledge of the social is fluid, dynamic, contingent and open for revision. In 't Veld (2008) posits that there is a paradoxical relationship between knowledge production about behaviour and the situation it produces. As knowledge production grows, society learns to respond more quickly with a potential negation of that knowledge as a consequence. Society can undo knowledge about itself. Can society also re-evaluate its knowledge about how to best organize knowledge production? There is no reason to assume a decrease of external PhD. candidates as the internal motivators are strong. In fact, their proportion might even grow as the numbers of regular PhD. candidates decrease with the rise of meritocratic selectivity (Sonneveld, 1997) and consequent elitism. Moreover, the European Code of Conduct encourages academics to more detachment from and non-involvement with social parties (Drenth, 2010). This might mean that the academic habitus will become more self referential as it takes itself as the sole judge of excellence. Can external PhD. candidates be regarded as essential in Kuhn's "essential tension" and become the pioneers of a late-modern academic habitus?

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

The questions with which the previous sub-sections ended can be rephrased in two tentative but challenging conclusions. First, social and business studies cannot deny the social reconfigurations, complexities and ambiguities that go along with late modernity. In the study of biographies—and is that not an important angle in understanding humans, ourselves?—the late-modern dimension of de-standardization cannot be ignored. This touches the very core of paradigms that depart from standardization of methods and disambiguated variables. However, if we did ignore the de-standardization of biographies and its consequent opening up of choices, opportunities and dilemmas, its consequent contingencies, we would only understand half of our social world and probably explain less. As research is still an important source for policy, facts that do not reflect social dynamism but fixate it in static categories potentially inspire us to come up with the wrong conclusions and strategies. We need, in other words, the emergence of a paradigm that also embraces research designs and methods for bricolage and transdisciplinary collaboration.

Second, in the hybrid space that external PhD. candidates create and occupy we actually see the outlines of this paradigm emerge. This underscores their value for social and business studies that seek to reinvent themselves in order to adapt to changed circumstances. External PhD. students, with their research amidst society, might just be the weak, but early warning signals for what is yet to come.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are mine.