

Forum Bibliometrie

Grundlagen • Best Practice • Networking
23. – 25. November 2016

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Valuing Young Researchers: Evaluation, Knowledge Production and the Making of Academic Careers

Abstract

This talk discusses the interplay between how research is valued and how young researchers learn to live, work and produce knowledge within academia. Drawing on collaborative work with Maximilian Fochler & Ulrike Felt (University of Vienna) the talk traces how life sciences researchers in Austria engage in practices of valuation – that is practices of attributing worth to people, objects and practices – when they talk about their present and future lives in academia. Comparing interviews with PhD students and postdocs, the paper explores how researchers are socialized into and apply different practices of valuation at different stages of an academic career. We find that PhD students and postdocs refer to different forms of valuation to account for their actions, e.g. how they organize their work or which research questions they follow. Introducing the concept of “regimes of valuation” we show that PhD students relate to a wider evaluative repertoire that supports a diversity of ways of living and working in science, while postdocs base their decisions on one dominant regime of valuing research that is strongly shaped by quantitative and metric forms of evaluation. This narrowing of the evaluative repertoires in the postdoc also leads to a narrowing perspective of what forms of living and working in science postdocs experience as possible. The talk concludes by discussing the possible implications of such narrow regimes of valuation for the epistemic and social development of the life sciences, and possibly other scientific fields.

Zur Person



Ruth Müller is Assistant Professor for Science & Technology Policy at the Munich Center for Technology in Society (MCTS) at the TU München. She is a researcher in the interdisciplinary field of Science & Technology Studies (STS), with a background in molecular biology (MSc) and sociology (PhD). Her work explores i.a. the interactions between science & technology policy, institutional norms and values and academic knowledge production.