

From local informalities to meritocracy. How Central and Eastern European social scientists perceive the norms of their field

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Abstract

While there is extensive literature that discusses the historical and institutional background of the relative underdevelopment of Central and Eastern European (CEE) academia in social sciences, we have a limited knowledge on how academics of the region perceive the culture of their scholarly fields. Building upon survey data from 481 social scientists from 16 CEE countries, this paper analyses the perceived meritocracy of the academic system. We found significant positive associations between meritocracy, publication requirements for promotions and international publication records. Moreover, results show that academic capital is typically accumulated through informal networks and even from the family, while the role of formal education is less important. Our findings suggest that raising the level of meritocracy in promotion and recruitment processes might help increase the international visibility of CEE social sciences through a growth in international publications, but also indicated that research institutions should motivate CEE scholars with both financial rewards and a reduction in teaching duties.

Keywords: Central and Eastern Europe, tertial education, career development, internationalization, meritocracy

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Introduction

Due to the internationalization of scholarly research and the globalization of higher education (Ennew and Greenaway, 2012), country-level analyses of academia gradually lose their importance. Contrarily, there is a growing emphasis on cross-country, cross-regional or even global comparative studies (Kaulisch and Enders, 2005). However, research tradition that scrutinizes the operation of the academic field and the career development of scholars is far from being balanced, since, in most cases, it focuses on the scholarly operation of the economically wealthiest countries (Locke *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, either implicitly or explicitly, it is usually assumed that the so-called international standards are aligned with the standards of the Anglo-American academic culture (Ha, 2016). It is generally held, too, that social sciences are more exposed to geopolitical biases than natural sciences, where the role of culture, language and epistemic norms is less important than in sociology, media research or political science (Main *et al.*, 2019; Nuernberg and Thompson, 2011). Language barriers were especially prevalent in the CEE region as “teaching English as a second language had been substituted by the Russian language that was a compulsory subject in elementary schools of countries under the oppression of the USSR. But since the global language or the lingua franca of international science was, by that time and since, exclusively English, it caused extraordinary linguistic disadvantages in the region (Demeter, 2018a, p. 240).

While there is an expanding literature on the homogenizing nature of these uniformizing/developmental approaches, scholars have also expressed the need for international perspectives on global knowledge production (Demeter, 2020). Notwithstanding, while the internalization of academia cannot be questioned, analyses of different world regions should reflect the historical, cultural and epistemic traditions of their subject (Canagarajah, 2002; Dobbins, 2011). Considering the complex situation in which both the uncritical uniformization of international scholarship and the unreflective regionalization of local academic culture should be avoided, we argue that the interpretation should deal not only with the detailed analysis of a given academic field but should also examine its relations to so-called international standards. In most cases, studies that measure and assess the academic performance of different world regions are based on bibliometric data or historical evidence, they provide limited information on what are the most common motifs behind research production. To this end, the present paper offers an empirical analysis and a field-theory interpretation (Bourdieu, 1988; Havas and Fáber, 2020) of CEE social sciences with a focus on the perceptions of scholars working in the region. Drawing upon empirical data retrieved from 481 scholars from 16 CEE countries, our study contributes to the literature of regional academic culture by showcasing the relations between formal international standards and informal social networking. Our paper contributes to the ongoing discussion on CEE academia by offering a micro-level analysis that can supplement our rich historical

knowledge on the development of higher education in the region (Dobbins, 2011; Dobbins and Kwiek, 2017) by providing insights on how social scientists perceive and interpret the realities of CEE academia. Finally, recommendations for raising the region's international visibility through meritocratic criteria and appropriate incentives are also discussed.

1. Literature review

While most of the literature dealing with academic career development has focused on Western societies, several research projects have taken a CEE focus (Dobbins and Knill, 2009; Warren *et al.*, 2020). Researchers agree that the development of CEE scholarship has faced a plethora of obstacles, including the formerly mentioned linguistic disadvantages regarding poor English knowledge, from which many were related to the lack of ideologically open research under the Soviet oppression (Karady and Nagy, 2018; Warczok and Zarycki, 2018). In addition, during the Cold War, Western scholarship was considered as suspicious at least, if not banned outright (Dobbins, 2011). Accordingly, it was not easy to access international literature, and it was even harder in the case of the ideologically more sensitive social sciences. Finally, CEE scholars were forced, both ideologically and linguistically, to publish almost exclusively in regional periodicals, thus their papers remained invisible to the wider international community (Berend, 2009). However, these historical explorations usually lack the analysis of the perceptions of CEE scholars themselves that experiences burdens to international visibility.

Authors from the region extensively discussed the legacy and the present state of CEE academia and analysed local issues in the broader European context. As Antonowicz *et al.* (2017) put it, the global competitiveness of higher education and a need to promote excellence have become key European policy issues since the drafting of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. In the new global and European excellence discourse, scientific publications have become the most important measurements of research excellence, but this notion of excellence was distant from the historical legacy of most CEE institutions. Boyadijeva (2017) adds that, amongst other factors such as politicization and centralization, the post-communist legacy includes the arbitrary institutional division between research and teaching: the former is typically conducted in science academies, while institutions of higher education are considered as teaching facilities (Dobbins and Kwiek, 2017). Notwithstanding, the academic field is not homogenous in this respect as, similarly to the Western world, there are research-oriented universities with more emphasis on research than on teaching, while the majority of universities consider teaching as their primary profile. For example, in Hungary, some universities that strive for better positions on global rankings, let their faculty members choosing more research focused career trajectories whit reduced teaching load, while others who do not aim to conduct

research have to teach more. Some universities also offer a “mixed trajectory” with balanced teaching and research duties (Urbanovics and Sasvári, 2019).

The chronic underfunding of higher education is also evident from statistical data. This poses several obstacles to research excellence, since it is hard to conduct internationally recognized research under conditions of low mobility and underpayment (Kwiek, 2012). Kwiek also argues that these communist and post-communist legacies may result in CEE scholarship being effectively cut off from the emergent European Research Area. However, even if underpayment might be an important factor in explaining the lack of internationalization, our current research aims to find other important factors that can explain CEE scholars’ perception on internationalization such as the lack of motivation or a general distrust in meritocratic promotion processes.

While ideological rapprochement and the significance of the communist legacy slowly dwindled after the transition to a market economy, economic underdevelopment and the underfunding of higher education remained typical of the CEE region (Karady and Nagy, 2018; Warczok and Zarycki, 2018). However, more recently, many CEE countries have realized that, as they rely on external funding, they should make themselves more competitive (Kohoutek, 2009; Wodak and Fairclough, 2010). Thus, in several CEE countries, research performance indicators similar to those used in Western states have been introduced (Dobbins, 2011). However, even in the CEE region, different countries followed different paths for internationalization (Ianoş and Petrişor, 2020). Hladchenko and Moed (2021) specify two typical policies in this respect. First, there are countries where the policy is directed towards “real” internationalization, as researchers are called for publishing the “best” international journals. But in the case of the second type, internationalization remains formal and superficial. In this latter case, it is more typical to establish English language journals (with national focus and authorship) and have them indexed in Scopus or Web of Science than pursuing researchers to publish in established, high-ranked international journals (Hladchenko and Moed, 2021). The authors argue that research policies that tolerate the latter strategy might endanger real international visibility as, even if they are indexed in international databases, national journals are typically written and read by local authors, and thus they have low impact measures on an international scale.

Despite new state strategies of CEE countries to make their academic fields more competitive (Dobbins and Kwiek, 2017), the region is still lagging behind developed Western countries in terms of research funding, publication excellence and scholarly collaborations (Dobos *et al.*, 2020). Luczaj and Mucha (2018) found that due to poor infrastructure and low salaries, Poland (and most CEE countries) are not popular destination countries for international scholars, thus the internationalization of the academic field is relatively low. Poor working conditions, faculty being forced to work at multiple jobs because of low university salaries, an

excessive teaching course load and thus less time for research, were found to be the most important factors that lead to a lower level of quality in research (Luczaj, 2020).

2. Theoretical framework

Besides academic factors, there are more general features of CEE societies that shape regional academic culture. Building on Bourdieu's field theory, as it has been applied to the field of academy in general (Barker and Hoskins, 2017; Demeter, 2018b; Gokturk, and Yildirim-Tasti, 2020), and to CEE academia in particular (Havas and Fáber, 2020), the present paper empirically analyses and theoretically discusses how CEE social sciences developed into a specific field that is still struggling between international formalities defined by Western scholarship, and regional informalities that are defined by national social networks (Böröcz, 2000).

The academic field is shaped by such agents as individual scholars, their employers and institutions, and the states of these institutions that define national academic policies (Demeter, 2018a). Beyond the national context, there are international or transnational agents that define international norms and transnational capital. These latter sets of agents include the publishers, editors and reviewers of high-profile international journals, the selection committees of international higher education and research institutions, and the most recognized international associations with all their presidents and honorary fellows (Pooley, 2015; Zelizer, 2015). An extensive research shows, however, that the transnational field is heavily influenced, if not totally determined, by Anglo-Saxon academic traditions that define the almost exclusive use of the English language (Canagarajah, 2002; Curry and Lillis, 2018), the main thematic clusters and research methodologies and internationally accepted forms of higher education (Heilbron *et al.*, 2018). As a result, when non-Western world regions aim to be part of global knowledge production, they must adapt to so-called international – albeit actually Western – norms (Freelon, 2013; Günther and Domahidi, 2017; Neuman *et al.*, 2008). Historically, Western academic fields developed in a way that formality became an important norm (Böröcz, 2000). Western scholarship mostly operates with professionally written, explicit and transparent, thus publicly available rules. Both academics and institutions must adapt to these formal regulations, and scholars must incorporate them into their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1988) through education and various forms of academic mentorship (Manson, 2016).

Formal rules govern the career paths of international scholars in many ways. First, academic vacancies are typically advertised as open calls that specify the exact requirements that successful candidates should meet. An excellent international publication record is most likely to be a mandatory requirement for both lecturer and researcher positions at every level (Herschberg *et al.*, 2018). While the role of social networking may be important, it would be very hard, if not impossible, to obtain a tenured position or a large research grant without showing a significant publication

record and international impact (Ennew and Greenaway, 2012). Candidates' compliance with the requirements can be assessed by their CVs (da Silva *et al.*, 2020), thus the process follows the norm of formality (Böröcz, 2000). In short, while both the concept and its fairness are contested (Sandel, 2020), the Western, and, consequently, the international academic field is generally considered to be meritocratic, meaning that competing agents of the field play by transparent rules, and their careers depend, mainly, on whether the tasks assigned by these rules are successfully completed (Ha, 2016).

In contrast with the development of most Western societies, informality is so widespread in the CEE region that it is almost impossible to engage in any undertaking without encountering it (Böröcz, 2000; Havas and Fáber, 2020). The informal behaviour of both institutions and individual agents constitutes a field where activities are conducted without reference to any formal criteria or, if there are existing formal regulations, the agents of the field systematically try to avoid or circumvent them. In the case of informality, accomplishments and career success are mediated through informal decisions and social networks, and not by any transparent evaluation. In a system based on informalities, introducing any formal criteria is not easy. While there are professional arguments in favour of the application of international frameworks, the introduction of such research assessment and recruitment criteria is either contested or ignored by many CEE countries (Dobos *et al.*, 2020; Luczaj and Mucha, 2018; Sasvári and Urbanovics, 2019). However, research policies in most CEE countries try to balance between national and international norms as a “copy and paste” application of Western research assessment protocols such as the British REF or the Spanish ANECA might not be successful in a culturally and historically different environment. Moreover, several scholars acknowledge that the internationalization process has its detrimental features as well, such as the speculative use of metrics, questionable publication strategies, the effacement of research with local significance and the Matthew effect (Demeter, 2020) that favours already established scholars and mainstream topics against young scholars and more innovative approaches (Ianos and Petrisor, 2020).

3. Hypotheses and research questions

The analysis of the field of CEE social sciences within an international context should consider both the aspirations and the realities of the region. Thus, our research question aims to be as wide as possible in order to grasp the regional features of CEE social sciences without isolating the field from international research patterns.

RQ: How do CEE social sciences perceive the norms of the field and how does it affect their habitus?

In line with the literature review and theoretical framework, three hypotheses (listed below) associated with the most important features of the region guide the study: the trade-off between the reality of local informalities and the desire for

international visibility through meeting international formalities. The former includes the importance of social networks and the rejection of formal regulations, transparency and open competition in promotion processes. The latter includes the development of formal criteria for research assessment and promotion, typically in the form of rigorous publication requirements. Thus, our hypotheses aim to establish connections between meritocracy, academic promotion, and publication requirements as they are perceived by CEE social scientists. Accordingly, we *pose the following hypotheses*:

H1. Meritocracy in the process of academic promotion is positively associated with international publication.

H2. Publication requirements for promotion are positively associated with international publication.

H3. The effect of meritocracy in academic promotion is contingent upon the role of publication requirements for promotion, thus candidates reporting higher scores in a meritocratic system for academic promotion will have more international publications, and publication requirements for promotion will also include international publications.

4. Survey methodology

4.1. Sample and procedure

To develop our pool, we defined 154 universities from 16 CEE countries through an extensive online search conducted by 12 MA students supervised by the first author. Then, we collected the email addresses of all faculty members working at social science departments (See Table 2 for a detailed description of data sources). Our final data consisted of 4,431 email addresses.

We sent an email to all researchers that contained a brief description of the project, guaranteeing them anonymity. We included a link to the survey we developed using Google Forms. Two follow-up reminders were sent two weeks and four weeks after the initial message. In the end, we received a total of 481 completed surveys. The overall response rate was 12 percent, lower than the mean response rate for online surveys (Cook *et al.*, 2000). This could be explained by the fact that the survey was written in English and therefore only scholars with at least an elementary knowledge of English were able to fill it in. To increase the number of respondents, we used simple English throughout the survey.

4.2. Measures

We developed the “Academic Culture of CEE Scholars in Social Sciences Survey”. The items of the survey were formulated based on a review of the relevant

literature and the authors' cumulative experience and former studies with a similar focus.

Nominal scales regarding the demographic information about faculty members and their family background was solicited at the beginning of the survey. The questionnaire, basically descriptive in nature, used a mixed-methods analysis that included: 1) questions with nominal scale for descriptive statistics, 2) questions with ordinal scale for testing hypotheses, and 3) an open-ended question for qualitative data in which respondents could add their specific comments freely. A detailed item description can be found in the online appendix[†].

Family background: This item relates to the education background of respondents and their parents. With this item we investigate whether family background, as one of the most important factors in developing habitus (Bourdieu, 1988), has a perceived impact on academic career development in the CEE region. This construct also measures the motivations and career plans of the respondents.

Meritocracy: This construct computes scholars' perceptions of the meritocratic process in their academic promotion. Specifically, it taps into respondent's perceptions of the transparency, competitiveness, and application of criteria when it comes to their academic promotion (three-item averaged scale: $M = 2.51$; $SD = .61$; Cronbach's $\alpha: .70$).

Doctoral school and supervision: This construct explains the role of doctoral studies in the development of academic habitus, especially in terms of publication. It investigates whether scholars received training related to academic publication in their PhD programs, and examines the role of the doctoral supervisor in the development of publication habits.

International publication: This construct explains the publication habits of the respondents. The *PhD School* subconstruct analyses the publication requirements of candidates' doctoral schools as well as the publication habits of supervisors. The *International Publication* subconstruct explains the publication requirements of the respondents' current academic institutions. The *Publication Requirements for Promotion* subconstruct explains the role of international publication in awarding promotions. The *Motivation* subconstruct details current incentives offered by employers, and how, according to our respondents, employers should motivate them to publish in international journals.

Controls: To control for potential confounds, the statistical models also include a set of variables that might explain the relationship between our variables of interest and our independent variable. Specifically, the regression controlled for gender, age, rank, academic family (dummy), and publication internationality during PhD.

[†] The online appendix is available at ejes.uaic.ro/appendix/EJES2022_1301_DEM_A01.pdf.

4.3. Analysis strategy

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a hierarchical OLS regression analysis with international publication as a dependent variable (Tables 1 and 2). The independent variables were introduced in three different blocks. The first block comprised the set of demographics; the second included our variables of interest (meritocracy in academic promotion and publication needs for promotion); and the third block, the interaction terms. Finally, we tested the moderation effects using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2013; Model 1; 5.000 bootstrap samples).

5. Results

Almost one third of our respondents (28.1 percent) had a member of their immediate family who worked in the academic field. In this group, 24 percent of the respondents reported that this person inspired them to choose the academic career, 6 percent were motivated, and 24.6 percent told us that they were both inspired and motivated by that academic person in their family. More than half of the respondents with academics in their families reported that they were supported by this person during their career (18.2 percent = significant help, 17.1 percent = moderate help, 16.5 percent = slight help, 42.4 percent = no help). Most of our respondents choose their academic career during their MA studies (42.4 percent), followed those who made this decision at the PhD level (17 percent), BA (12.9 percent) and high school (10.2 percent) levels. A significant number of respondents chose an academic career later in their lives (7.3 percent), and 2.9 percent reported that they had wanted to be academics since childhood.

Table 1. Zero-order correlations

	Age	Rank	PhD Internationality	Meritocracy	Publication Req.	International Publication
Age	1	.565**	-.078	.049	.006	.024
Rank	.565**	1	-.048	.164**	.104*	.046
PhD Internationality	-.078	-.048	1	.048	.307**	.104*
Meritocracy	.049	.164**	.048	1	.138**	.258**
Publication Requirements	.006	.104*	.307**	.138**	1	.319**
International Publication	.024	.046	.104*	.258**	.319**	1

Source: Authors' representation

The main sample characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of the sample

Characteristic	Percent	Characteristic	Percent
<i>Age</i>		<i>Country of current affiliation</i>	
Under 30	2.5	Albania	0.004
31-40	29.9	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1
41-50	35.6	Bulgaria	1.9
51-60	17.9	Croatia	6.9
over 60	14.1	Czech Republic	8.9
		Estonia	3.3
<i>Seniority</i>		Hungary	14
Assistant prof/lecturer	41	Latvia	1.9
Associate prof/senior lecturer	41.2	Lithuania	7.3
Full professor	17.9	Macedonia	1.9
		Montenegro	0.2
<i>Gender</i>		Poland	31.2
Male	47.3	Romania	4.6
Female	52.7	Serbia	3.7
		Slovakia	6.7
<i>Mother's highest degree</i>		Slovenia	5.6
Elementary school	11	<i>Father's highest degree</i>	
High school	36.6	Elementary school	12.7
BA	12.5	High school	34.9
MA	26.4	BA	12.9
Ph.D.	13.5	MA	25.6
		Ph.D.	13.9

Source: Authors' representation

Speaking of their motivation, most respondents reported that they chose an academic career because of their own engagement in studying in their research field (75.8 percent). This was followed by those who chose academia because of the flexible workload and schedule (44.7 percent) and their own engagement in lecturing (39.5 percent). Another 25.8 percent reported that social appreciation was a motivation, too, and many respondents cited pressure from either their professors (14.8 percent) or their family (3.1 percent).

5.1. Education and career plans

As Table 3 shows, most of our respondents completed their education within the CEE region, most typically in their own countries. The share of non-CEE degrees is the lowest at the BA level, and the highest at the MA level.

Of the respondents, 27.4 percent stated that they did not have a career plan when they started their academic career, while another 55.1 percent had only short-term plans. Only 17.5 percent reported that they had long-term career plans with a clear vision of their future prospects. Speaking of their current states, 63 percent reported that they have plans for career advancement now: 56.3 percent reported being familiar with the detailed criteria for academic promotions, 39.3 percent were familiar with the basic criteria and only 4.4 percent reported that they were not aware of the formal criteria for academic promotions.

Table 3. Education trajectories of CEE scholars

	BA percent	MA percent	PhD percent
Current country of affiliation	84.2	81.5	80
Other CEE country	10.4	10.4	11.6
Western Europe	4.2	6	5
UK	1	2.5	1.7
US	0.2	2.5	2.1

Source: Authors' representation

When respondents were asked about the most important conditions for academics to develop a successful career in their home countries, most respondents reported that a social network is the most important factor (65.7 percent), followed by hard work (62.4 percent), talent (53.6 percent), continuous professional development (51.1 percent) and endurance (40.3 percent). One third of the respondents thought that who you know is more important than what you know (31.6 percent). Finally, diligence (24.9 percent), political backing (18.5 percent), and professional humility (15.6 percent) were also mentioned.

5.2. Doctoral school, publication requirements and supervision

With regards to their own doctoral studies, 47 percent of our respondents reported that their PhD studies had not prepared them at all for international publication, an additional 24.4 percent said that they had only touched on the topic in passing, 8.5 percent had had an academic writing course, 8.5 percent received training for publishing in their national language, and 8.5 percent said that they were trained for publishing in foreign languages. Finally, 6.4 percent reported that they were taught how to publish in an international language. For 84.6 percent of our

respondents, the doctoral school preferred English as a second language, followed by German (9.4 percent), French (5.4 percent) and Russian (5.4 percent), and 10.4 percent reported that it was not mandatory to master a foreign language in their PhD programs. A further 42.4 percent said that their doctoral studies had not included training in using any international database, while 19.8 percent used the Web of Science, 18.1 percent used Scopus, and 31.2 percent used other databases. It was not mandatory for 54.5 percent of our respondents to publish in international journals during their PhD studies. Others were required to publish: 23.3 percent stated that they had been expected to publish a least one article in any foreign journal during their doctoral studies, and 22.2 percent were required to publish at least one paper in a Scopus or Web of Science journal.

More than one fourth of our respondents (25.8 percent) had a doctoral supervisor without any international publication output, but a similar number of scholars (26 percent) had a supervisor with a significant international publication record (over 10 articles in leading international journals). A slightly smaller proportion of respondents (23.3) percent reported that their supervisors had a limited number of international papers (2-5 articles), 16.6 percent said that their supervisors had published between 5 and 10 papers, and 8.5 percent stated that their supervisors had only one international article. When we asked if the doctoral supervisor of the respondents played an important role in their publication activity during the PhD program, 45.9 percent reported that they did not work on publication issues at all. Of the remaining respondents, 25.6 percent claimed that their supervisors taught them a lot about publishing, but they never wrote co-authored papers, 15.6 percent said that they wrote 1 or 2 papers together, and an additional 12.9 per cent said that they had co-authored several papers.

5.3. Meritocracy

Almost half of the respondents (46.8 percent) reported that the criteria for promotions are generally applied fairly, but that there are several exceptions. One third of the sample (32.6 percent) thought that, while the criteria were sometimes used fairly, informal aspects like social networks played a more significant role, 13.3 percent reported that the criteria are implemented fairly, thus career trajectories are easy to plan, while 7.3 percent thought that criteria are just for show, and promotions happen through informal recommendations. Transparency was reported to be contradictory for 52.4 percent of the respondents as they thought that while they have a formal list of conditions, it is not totally transparent how academics in their field are promoted. Both the conditions and the process of promotions in their departments were found to be clearly stated by 40.5 percent of respondents, and 7.1 percent said that they had neither a clear idea of the requirements needed for promotions, nor a transparent view of the promotion process itself. Regarding competitiveness, 45.5 percent of respondents reported that they have formal open calls for vacancies, but,

in most cases, it is pre-arranged who will get the job. One fourth of the sample (25.2 percent) said that their job advertisements are open and competitive, and candidates are selected by clear and transparent criteria. 23.3 per cent reported that, in most cases, they have several candidates for job advertisements, but it is not totally clear how finalists are selected. Finally, 6 percent said that they do not have open calls for vacancies, since empty positions are always filled by colleagues from the academic network.

5.4. International publication requirements

The annual publication requirements of the current academic institutions of our respondents were reported to be divided. There were no international publication requirements for 15.6 percent of respondents, but 16.4 percent had to publish one Scopus indexed international journal (unspecified), 11.4 percent are required to publish a paper in at least in the q3-4 quartiles of Scopus, and 10.4 percent should publish at least 2 papers in at least the q3-4 quartiles. Another 11 percent are required to publish at least 2 papers in high ranked journals, in the q1-2 quartiles of Scopus, and, for 8.1 percent, it was enough to publish a paper in any foreign journal (without specifications).

Finally, there are no publication requirements, either national or international for 6.9 percent of our respondents. With regards to the impact of publication on their careers, 46.8 percent claimed that publishing in leading international journals is important, but not mandatory for promotion, while it is mandatory for 34.7 percent of our respondents. For 5.8 percent, publishing in international journals is neither mandatory, nor important for promotion, and 12.7 percent declared that publishing in international journals might be important, but if the institution wants to promote someone, publication excellence is not a necessary precondition. 51.1 percent claimed that their current employer does not motivate them to publish in international journals at all, 36 percent are motivated with financial rewards, 17.7 percent with faster promotion, and 6.4 percent are motivated with a reduction of teaching duties. When asked about the possible ways in which their employees could further motivate them to publish internationally, 52.8 percent of respondents reported that financial rewards could motivate them. For 51.1 percent, reducing teaching requirements would be a good motivation, and faster promotion (38.3 percent) was also reported as desirable. However, 18.5 percent claimed that none of the above could motivate them to seek international publication.

6. Hypotheses

Our first hypothesis proposed that scholars who reported higher levels of meritocracy in the academic promotion process would have more international publications. Consistent with H1, the regression analysis (see table 4) shows a

statistically significant and positive association between academic promotion and international publication ($\beta = .226; p < .01$). Therefore, H1 was supported.

Table 4. Regression predicting international publication

Predictors	International Publication
<i>Block 1: Controls</i>	
Gender	.070
Age (1 = male)	.041
Rank	-.030
Academic Family (1 = yes)	.031
PhD Internationality	.007
ΔR^2	2.3%
<i>Block 2: Variables of Interest</i>	
Meritocracy in Academic Promotion	.226***
Needs for Promotion	.289***
ΔR^2	12.7%
<i>Block 3: Moderation</i>	
Meritocracy*Needs for Promotion	-.041*
ΔR^2	0.6%
Total R ²	15.6%

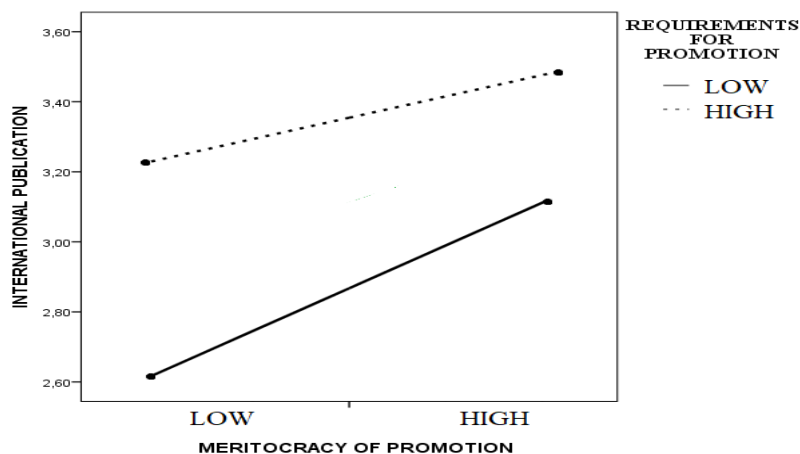
Note. Standardized regression coefficients reported. Sample size = 481; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Source: Authors' representation

Our second hypothesis proposed that scholars reporting higher levels of publication requirements for promotion would have more international publications. Consistent with H2, the regression analysis shows a statistically significant and positive association between publication requirements for promotion and international publications ($\beta = .289; p < .01$), thus H2 was supported as well.

Finally, we expected in H3 that the effect of meritocracy in academic promotion would be contingent upon the role of publication requirements for promotion, so those who reported higher scores in meritocracy in academic promotion and publication needs for promotion would have more international publications. The findings of our regression analysis showed a statistically significant interaction effect, an interaction which we plot in figure 1.

Figure 1. Interaction effects on international publication between meritocracy for promotion and requirements of promotions



Source: Authors' representation

As observed, those who reported higher scores in meritocracy in academic promotion and publication requirements for promotion had more international publications, thus supporting H3.

Discussion and conclusions

Based on our three hypotheses, we analysed how meritocracy – as a combination of competitiveness, transparency and fairness – relates to one of the most important currencies of international scholarship, namely publication excellence. First, we found a positive association between the international publication requirements of the institution that respondents were currently affiliated with and the perceived meritocracy of academic promotion. This finding can be interpreted as a practical justification of the meritocratic nature of international publication requirement: when scholars perceive the promotion process as meritocratic, they publish more in international journals, since this is not subject to significant bias from local informal networks.

The results of our second hypothesis further reinforce this assumption by showing a positive association between publication requirements and international publication. The positive connection shows that, as contrasted with a usual counter-narrative whereby it is very hard, if not impossible, for non-Western scholars to publish in international journals (Demeter and Tóth, 2020; Kaulisch and Enders, 2005), CEE scholars are able to meet international publication requirements. The

results of our third hypothesis make clear the relations between meritocracy, publication requirements and an international publication record. Regression analysis shows a statistically significant interaction effect: when meritocracy is perceived to be high and there are international publication requirements, then CEE scholars can increase their international visibility.

Furthermore, our results for the research question that investigate the perceived norms of the field of CEE social sciences contribute to the literature in four respects. First, typical education trajectories show that most scholars are educated in the CEE region, and even if they go abroad for their MAs, they might come back to the region for their PhDs. This trajectory is atypical, since former studies showed that the number of non-Western scholars with Western PhDs is greater than the number of scholars with a Western MA. In other words, a great number of non-Western scholars go West for their PhD after a regional MA (Demeter and Tóth, 2020). In accordance with former studies (Dobos *et al.*, 2020; Luczaj and Mucha, 2018), our results show a relative low level of internationality and mobility, and we also found that CEE scholars tend to come back to their native region for their PhD even after completing graduate studies abroad.

Our second contribution relates to the perceived norms of the field of social sciences in the region. Most of our respondents thought that informal aspects and social networks were the most important factors in both recruitment and promotion. Formal regulations such as publication excellence are less important than knowing the decision makers, meaning that the region still lacks meritocracy and the international norms of transparency, fairness and competitiveness (Böröcz, 2000; Havas and Fáber, 2020). Respondents also reported that the appropriate or prosperous academic habitus (Bourdieu, 1988) includes several informal features such as social networking and even political backing, and one third of our respondents reported that who you know is more important than what you know. The lack of formal criteria and meritocratic processes make the planning of long-term careers hard if not impossible, which may explain our respondents' lack of long-term plans, especially in the early stage of their career.

Our third contribution relates to the social, cultural and academic capital (Demeter, 2018b) that can be collected both in the family and through education. Most of our respondents came from a well-educated family, and the number of them whose parents held a PhD was 13 times higher than the OECD average. Moreover, one fourth of our respondents reported that there were academics in their immediate family, thus, in line with former research, family proved to be an important source of academic capital (Bachsleitner *et al.*, 2018; Barker and Hoskins, 2017; Wei *et al.*, 2020). Education is another important place for academic capital accumulation (Egalité, 2016), but results show that, in most cases, neither CEE doctoral schools nor doctoral supervisors were able to prepare their students for international publication. Publishing in indexed international journals was not mandatory in most

PhD schools, and it was unusual to write co-authored international papers with supervisors.

Our fourth contribution relates to the possible development of the visibility of social scientists working in the CEE region. More than half of respondents reported that their current institution did not motivate them at all to publish internationally. As the most typical type of incentive, about one third of respondents mentioned financial rewards, followed by faster promotion. It was relatively rare to motivate employees with reduced teaching duties (6 percent). This latter data is especially important, since more than half of our respondents claimed that the latter would motivate them, and this type of motivation was rated as being just as important as financial motivation. More than one third of the respondents reported that faster promotion could be an important motivation as well. However, almost one fifth claimed that no incentive would motivate them to publish in international journals. This finding should be further analysed by future research, since it shows that a significant proportion of current faculty is immovable, which can pose a serious obstacle to international visibility.

Limitations and future research directions

One of the main limitations of the study is that we advertised the survey in English thus most likely the sample is biased towards scholars with good English. To minimize this effect, we tried to construct a survey that can be easily understood with a medium level English, however, we assume that the response level was higher for scholars with English proficiency. We can also suppose that, based on historical facts discussed in the introduction, scholars with better English are younger and have more positive attitudes towards internationalization that might have an influence on our results. While it would need comprehensive resources, future research can repeat the analysis with national languages.

Second, we did not conduct cross-country comparisons to test if there are significant differences across countries in terms of scholars' attitudes on internationalization processes and national academic culture. Using the framework of formal studies on the different development of CEE internationalization policies (Hladchenko and Moed, 2021), future research can repeat our study with a different analysis strategy that uses geographic categorization as a control variable for measuring scholars' attitude.

Third, in our descriptive reports regarding past education, we did not differentiate between age groups. Thus, differences between the education histories of younger and older scholars are not present in the analysis. However, the focus of our research question and our hypotheses is the experience of our respondents regarding their current academic environment where former education history is less important. Notwithstanding, future studies with a focus on education history should control for the date of the PhD studies in interpreting past experiences.

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