

Excursions

Volume 11, Issue 1 (2021) | (Re)Connect



Cover Photo: (Re)Connect by Charlotte Esposito

Essays: (Re)Connecting Academia

Maruša Levstek
Could Industry-Funded PhDs
Be the Future of Academic Impact?

www.excursions-journal.org.uk

Could Industry-Funded PhDs Be the Future of Academic Impact?

Maruša Levstek

University of Sussex

Since starting my PhD in 2018, my impression of academia and its impact has changed (and fluctuated) immensely. Through conversations with fellow PhD students, I have come to realise that engagement with research end-users is a secondary agenda for many, as figuring out the world of academia is already a tough enough nut to crack. In this essay, I share my experience of how being part-funded by a non-academic organisation changed my understanding of research outreach, which led me to believe industry-funded PhDs could have a special place in the future of academic impact.

Reaching up when on unstable ground is never a good idea, especially when doing a PhD. I have observed many PhD students simply running out of time to consider their impact in the midst of researching, writing, and navigating the world of academia. However, as my research into youth experiences of music-making is funded by the music organisation Future Creators – alongside the School of Psychology – for me, outreach became a supported requirement. Receiving funding from an organisation interested in research meant that my PhD started off with an already established connection with communities that wanted to learn from me and spread my message. This did not only allow me to entirely integrate myself into the world I was researching, but also gave me the opportunity to understand how to communicate my research beyond academic publishing.

I wonder what the academic world would be like if researchers received feedback from their subjects. Having received financial support, as well as having eager participants for my research, my end of the bargain was report-writing for my industry's funders and staff meeting presentations. For me, this allowed for a unique insight into the minds of research users, along with a better understanding of what kinds of questions they are asking and how they comprehend complex psychological research. I believe this was absolutely crucial for my research communication development and enabled me to put my research findings into action immediately. Moreover, when presenting your research back to your participants and those directly involved, being a researcher becomes a two-way interaction, and not just an objective science.

To conclude, a connection with industry during my PhD taught me academic impact goes beyond incomprehensible journal publications for reference. I have observed that when the bridge between the two is established early in one's research journey, they support, inform, and enrich each other. After all, what is knowledge without change?