

PROFESSORS EMERITI: Still the Invisible Academics?

THE ROLE OF ASSOCIATIONS OF EMERITI



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A paper In Times Higher Education

On November 26, 2015, Richard M.S. Wilson and Charles Oppenheim, both emeriti and visiting professors, wrote for Times Higher Education a provocative article entitled *Professors emeriti: the invisible academics - Why are we treated shabbily when we do so much for our universities? ask two members of this overlooked group.*

The paper started by paraphrasing the saying “old professors don’t die”, which was turned into “professor emeriti don’t die, they are invisible”. The authors collected views in 14 universities in England, Scotland and Wales. Not a formal scientific inquiry but asking with intelligence among those who knew about the topic. The outcome is very scientific although lacking statistics.

The article opened with the evidence that there was no uniformity of treatment “regarding the rights, duties and privileges of professors emeriti even within a single university”. Furthermore “there is no generic expectation regarding their continuing involvement in university life and there is no standard package (comprising for example library access, email address and shared office provision)”. Everything is left to personal deals with deans and directors of department. Letting the readers understanding that you may individually achieve some goals if you are accustomed to those deals. The authors also stress the fact that “as a group, professors emeriti are not being treated as legitimate academic citizens”. However there are people who continue to work and do all activities they did before reaching the *emeritus (a)* state. Indeed universities, generally speaking, are not proud of their emeriti. In many universities it is even not possible to register the papers published in the list of the department. Recognition is scanty or nihil.

The paper includes a postscript: “Not out to pasture but we’re well definitely out of sight”.

More positive views

In 2014 a study by De Santo NG, Altucci P, Heidland A, Stein G, Cameron JS and Rutkowski B, analyzed *The role of emeriti and retired professors in medicine* (Q J Med 2014; 107: 406-407).

The study was performed in 99 departments of medicine of 99 universities in 20 countries of low, medium and high economy by means of an ad hoc questionnaire. The questionnaire was emailed to 63 active professors and 64 emeriti/retired professors. Response rate was 89.1%. In 83.8% of the university there were rules in the constitution to nominate emeriti. Emeriti could apply for grants and donations in 42.4% of the universities. In 56.7% they were allowed to keep their office and in 41.4% a laboratory full equipped with email and

phone. In 35.4% participation to meetings of the department were possible but in few of them a right to vote was granted. Teaching at any level was possible in 30% of the universities, in 41.2% of them emeriti continued to do research and published at least 1 impacted paper or 1 book in the last 12 months, many produced more than 7 items, and some more than 10 impacted papers.

A recent survey conducted among emeriti professors at University of Naples Federico II, with a response rate of 70.1%, reveals that from their retirement they have carried out teaching activities in PhD courses (23.1%), in MSc courses (35.9%), in Bachelors (12.8%). More than half (51.3%) were involved in seminars, one on five (20.5%) as mentor of PhD and 30.8% for student tutoring.

The emeriti participation in researchers of their last department has involved a 41.0% of them, with an average of 10.2 articles published in journals, 1.7 chapters in books, 0.7 monographs, 4.4 paper in conference volumes. The participation in activities outside of Federico II is also intensive and includes: research projects participation (33.3%), teaching activity (23.1%), editorial activities (17.9%), presidency of public research institute (4.1%) and private company (10.3%), counseling (25.6%) and liberal profession (17.9%).

However there is a great difference among countries. In France even Nobel Laureate Luc Montagnier was forced to leave his workplace although he was well funded by many sources because of his prestige. He was thus obliged to start a foundation with own funds and to start teaching. In USA He defined himself “turned in a Concorde professor”.

We now know that there is no specific age for producing a masterpiece, there is a random distribution and the most important discovery may be the first at the last in the career of a scientist (Sinatra R et al. *Quantifying the evolution of individual scientific impact*. Science 04 Nov 2016). In addition in USA older scientists obtain the majority of grants from NIH (Orwol E. *Passing the Baton – Harnessing the Full Value of Older Scientists*. N Engl J Med 2016; 374: 3614-2517). Recently the potential of older scientists of artists has been reaffirmed (N. G De Santo, *Creativity and scientific discoveries after 65 years of age*. Science, Art and Aging. Bull Acad Natle Méd 2017; 7-8-9:1335-1347; De Santo NG. *Creatività di artisti e scienziati dopo I 65 anni*. Rendiconti ed Atti Accademia Medico-Chirurgica 2017; CLXX: 229-244). It has also been suggested to catch the value of the facts, that centuries after Avignon, we have a reigning pope (Franciscus) who governs and directs and an emeritus pope (Benedict XV) who assists him and prays for him and with him without intrusiveness (Natzuzzi M. *La Chiesa a due papi*. Il Foglio 2017; 219: p10, col 1-6).

Role of professors emeriti: the debate in Nature in the years 2008-2018

“Retiring retirement” is the title of a commentary that Professor Peter A. Lawrence of the Department for Molecular Biology at the University of Cambridge in UK, wrote after interviewing many aging scientists. Lawrence (Nature 2008; 453:588-90) put emphasis on the fact that in USA, Australia, Canada and partly and slowly in United Kingdom age does not discriminate those asking a work place. Abolishing discrimination for age as well as that more traditional for women “ensures dignity and justice within the enterprise of science... The effects of compulsory retirement are multiple and insidious. ... it turns able academics into lame ducks: they cannot take on commitments such as graduate students and they lose their negotiating power because they cannot seek new posts. He praises the achievements in USA where due to the pioneer bill of senator Claude ‘Red’ Pepper many discriminations were abolished including that of age.

"In the United States, older scientists make various contributions. Some are great role models and mentors, some augment the international reputation of their institutes, some teach or administrate, freeing younger scientists. More importantly they can provide a deeper perspective on scientific strategy".

Megan Scandellari interviewed scientists about retirement from university positions, and on the handing their experience to the younger scientists, since in the years 1998-2014 the proportion of grants awarded to scientists older than 65 went up to 4.8% to 12%, thus it might be conducive to a limitation of availability of opportunities for young scientists (*Retirement debate: Stay at bench or make way for the next generation*. Nature 2015; 521:20-3). One solution might be the institution of an emeritus award to encourage the handing over of projects to junior faculty members. That is to say that if one has not found the phoenix in a career of 40 years one should not ask for prolonging it. It is the case to remember that the mythical phoenix (firebird) was able to rebirth from its ashes every 500 years. Her answers cover a wide range of attitudes. The first is that of people who want to retire as early as they can. "Only do things I really feel passionate about. That's the beautiful luxury of retirement". "Stopping does not mean stopping, it means do what you have always wanted to do". "The ideal would be that no one checks how old you are but just look at what you are doing and what you are able to do, but the idea hasn't pervaded into the public routine". For many scientists, "working after 65 is working because you want to, not because you have to"... "It is not understandable to force people to retire when they are still contributory". These and other reasons indicate that USA are the Mecca for older scientists (De Santo NG. *The Human Capital of Age*. JGG 2017; 65: 311-317.)

On July 17 2019 Nature published a paper of Amber Dance entitled *Stick retirement! – Scientists who step down from full-time work can find plenty of ways to remain active in their research field*. She is very positive on the quality of things which can be done although but does not that retirees carry the risk to lose the sense of the community.

Professors emeriti: still the invisible academics?

We see that there are many reasons which are now walking roads that are driving us out of invisibility. First of all the outcome of the conference on *The Human Capital of Age* which took place in Naples in September 15-16, 2016. A total of 3 publications were generated, as known by the readers of EAPE's Newsletters. The second and most important was *The birth of the European Association of Professors Emeriti* (D.V. Cokkinos, D. Spinellis, G. Vasilikiotis, V. Bonavita, L. Santini, J. Ehrlich, N.G. De Santo, Arch Hellenic Medicine 2017; 34:

8-9) which stated that the vocation for teaching is for ever, it is a call. The third reason is to be found in the growing number of national and local association of professors emeriti. They are usually recognized by the universities and in some cases have even a space in the web site of their *Alma Mater*. We would like to mention the Association of Emeriti at the University of British Columbia and its appealing programs, the Italian Association for Professors Emeriti at the University of Messina, the newborn Associazione Professor Emeriti at the University Federico II in Naples (APEF).

So for what it concerns the final answers to the relevant questions of this paper we are inclined to think that visibility will be regained. In this perspective a relevant role can be especially played today by the Associations of Professors Emeriti. They are obviously called to valorize traditional emeriti's activities aimed at qualifying the human capital (Education), and for producing new knowledge (Research), that correspond to the University first and second missions respectively. In addition they also asked to involve themselves in new scenarios regarding the so called "third mission", according to which universities are more and more engaged with societal and market demands. Current government policies tend to favor such a mission guaranteeing great funding for this role.

Emeriti Associations, likewise, can address the growing societal and economic challenges by using their knowledge capital from research and teaching to fulfil their so-called "Third Mission" in society and economy.

From this point of view the constitution of APEF has modern targets. It, according to a subsidiary approach, aims to pursue, sustainable objectives for the economy, society and environment by carrying out the following activities: interdisciplinary research of specific social interest and international scope; support for university and post-university integrative training; cultural initiatives of social interest and for educational purposes; development and implementation of projects aimed at preventing and combating school and university dispersion; assistance to students in transit from secondary school to university; support for young graduates in the phase of entry into the world of work; promotion of the culture of legality and protection of human, civil and social rights, as well as of cultural integration.

Finally it seems appropriate to make full use of Dante "E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle/ and thence we came forth to see again the stars" (Divine Comedy, The Hell XXXIV, 139).



DATING OF CEMENT MANUFACTURES

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The opportunity to identify an aged cement material makes possible both a better evaluation in the determination of possible interventions of consolidation (in the field of the civil building) or restoration (in the field of the cultural heritage), and its dating, in order to sort out legal disputes concerning the temporal position of civil buildings.

Several chemical-physical processes occur in the first phases of the cement manufacturing, beginning from the mixture with water up to the next phases of setting. The diagnostics can be carried out with rapid techniques, that don't need pretreatments like the thermoanalysis TGA and DTA and X-ray diffractometry (XRD).

After 28 days the structure and the composition are more defined; as we can see, after this period the mechanical tests are planned and the results have to satisfy the legal requirements concerning the work of civil buildings. But, in practice some processes occur with so slow kinetics and depend on the surrounding environment, that some modifications of the products appear only after several years since its preparation. The modifications of the chemical-physical features due to the ageing of the material in addition to be important for the possible dating of the products of historical and artistic value or significant for the civil building, can affect the mechanical features and consequently the stability of the same products.

Therefore the possibility to identify modifications in the product concerning