

# Visions, needs and requirements for (future) research environments: an exploration with ERC Grantee Valeria Pulignano

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Researchers are at the very heart of the EOSC: So what do researchers really need to do outstanding research and produce high-impact research results? Moreover, how do they think could the EOSC support them in their research endeavours? Let's see what sociologist Valeria Pulignano has to say.

## “Helping research and researchers growing in a world without boundaries of any kind”

**TU Wien:** What does your work currently focus on?

**VP:** My work focuses on examining the challenges individuals and their families encounter as a result of transformations occurring in society. Recently I have been awarded an ERC Advanced Grant, which looks at precarity across the paid/unpaid dimension of work. Socio-political and economic drivers of changes have and are continuously shaping the world within which people live and work. They have transformed the conditions under which employment systems and labour markets function and evolve. As change is a fact of life, wellbeing as well as the quality of work and life need to be carefully preserved under the occurrence of these changes in order to create inclusive and sustainable societies.

So, in my work I have been concerned to study individuals and workers who spend part of their lives under certain recognizable socio-economic conditions. As a sociologist interested in work, employment and their societal contexts such as labour markets I examine the problems, or problems related to the work people undertake, in all its forms and manifestations in order to provide sounds analysis of these problems and engage in policy responses for society. Why do I talk about problems related to work? Because workers are men and women who work under conditions that they do not determine at the first instance. But they can potentially influence these conditions through 'voice', for example. So empowering

workers while safeguarding their rights is something I care about much.

**TU Wien:** What datasets are you working with and how do you analyse these datasets? What tools and services do you use for that and what would help you to be more efficient?

“Regarding the question about how to make these datasets, more efficient one thing I would surely point to is facilitating access to these data”

**VP:** I use ethnography, narrative (biographical) qualitative methods for interviewing which aims at contextualizing subjective experiences in their working and living circumstances, including different regulatory and organizational settings as well as multiple case design in comparative research. NVivo software is used to analyse these data. I usually use EU-level database such as EWCS, ECS, EU- LFS, EU-SILC, Eurostat data to defining a statistical overview of a structural context in order to interpret qualitative data. I do also use these datasets to draw analysis on specific topics. Regarding the question about how to make these datasets, more efficient one thing I would surely point to is facilitating access to these data. There is scope for improving technicalities to make “use-friendly” and avoid troublesome when

transferring data and files. Specifically, from a quantitative perspective, I see the need to increase the scope for panel data particularly at the EU level. In order to encourage researchers to give access to their data, data disclosure agreements while guaranteeing privacy and anonymity are essential and need to be respected.

**TU Wien:** Which tools and services are you already equipped with to allow you to perform cutting-edge research and what would help you to be even more efficient?

“Stay clear on focus and above all remember that “one size does not fit all” may help moving the interdisciplinary project forward”

**VP:** Good support infrastructures at the local level and simplification of administrative burden for the researcher are essential to dedicate time to perform cutting-edge research. Networking with peers and good communication tools are also desirable. We cannot forget that ground-breaking or blue-sky research, particularly in humanities, requires substantial exchanges and inter-changes among top scholars in the field. All this requires time and resources, which are often scarce. Finding ways to maximize and optimize these resources would be desirable.

**TU Wien:** What does it take to foster interdisciplinary research in Europe and beyond?

**VP:** Interdisciplinary approaches that set up bridges between different faculties are not deprived of the risk for them to explore uncharted territories. Still, if resources are invested in order to establish the connections with scientific partners in advance, particularly when the research subject at stake suits for a cross-disciplinary approach, the gains can far outnumber the risks.

Big structures that enrich and support inter-disciplinarity are needed. However, ‘small’ structures such as clarity of meaning, motivation of staff, misalignment of old structures, time and

workload, and loss of identify can work against inter-disciplinarity. Setting up interdisciplinary workshops and curricula, increase funding and prepare people to inter-disciplinary research, establish collaborations with industry and other bodies which can stimulate inter-disciplinarity, stay clear on focus and above all remember that “one size does not fit all” may help moving the interdisciplinary project forward.

**TU Wien:** What kind of research are you currently unable to do, because you lack the knowledge, time, or technology, which administrative burdens are put on your shoulders and how can that be avoided?

**VP:** As probably many other colleagues I spend a lot of time updating profiles, improving visibility on-line, undertaking tasks which are not directly linked to what I am supposed to do such as ‘research’ like for example looking for a new password. Technology sometimes is not helping but rather increasing workload. It is not technology per se but the use (and who does it) which may create distortions. Sometimes I found myself having to make choices about which research tools I want to use and why. It is clear we have too much out there and we are often entrapped in all this, which has a clear commercial scopes. Our time is precious and we cannot afford to waste it.

Being a scholar within humanities also regularly confronts me with the duties of keeping ethics in place. I personally consider a ‘must’ for every social scientists to protect respondents and research participants. However, the tricky part may be “how to do it in such a way that it does not create burden for the respondent” and it helps the researcher to retain that respondent as a necessary condition to develop research. Finding the right and suitable technicalities, which would help respondents while fulfilling ethical requirements may prove difficult sometimes, unfortunately. I often find myself spending more time in trying to be creative enough to find the most suitable pragmatic technical solution respondents would also like and feel comfortable with, than doing effective research.

**TU Wien:** Having said all that, what would you need the EOSC to be to support you in your research endeavours?

**VP:** Liaising with universities and other interests bodies for opening alternative routes for the assessment of research outputs. For example, as we all know, citations may be critical. We also need to ensure more open access for publications of journal articles and books and finding ways to speed up the process of publications, which can take long. Providing and supporting visibility to research and researchers is also desirable.



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