



Why the road to hell is paved with good intentions - the case of output-based research funding in Slovakia

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Presentation outline

- Learning Makes Sense project
- Importance of publications as a measure of performance in Slovakia
- Effects on quality of research
- Effects on quality of teaching
- Concluding with starting of possible cooperation



Learning Makes Sense

- LMS complex reform proposal of education system in Slovakia from pre-school to HE; based on data, good and bad practices and important trends
- More than 550 interviews in 2017 and over 16 000 questionnaires collected from May till July 2018
- 852 HE academics, 7 % of the whole population, quota sampling according to the following characteristics: age, type of HEI, sex, geographic location of the HEI, weights between 0,6 to 2,9
- Focus on public HEIs



Importance of publications

- 19,5 % of the public HEIs budget is allocated from institutional funding based on publications (*other criteria – mainly number of students, received research grants, number of PhDs after comprehensive exam*)
 - 12,5 % based on 2nd and 3rd year ago
 - 7 % based on last 12 to 6 years ago – i.e. the results of complex accreditation
 - Within the accreditation the publications also influenced whether the HEI will be allowed to award PhD titles (relevant also for state and private HEIs)
 - Yet, the type of publications differed across the research fields



Effects on quality of research

- Slovak research have less than half of average number of articles in top journals (WoS) than 10 other OECD medium and small countries ([12/2016, CERGE EI](#))
- Second highest share and almost double the average of publications in predatory journals among OECD countries in 2013 – 2015 ([16/2016, CERGE EI](#))
 - HEIs in Slovakia: **3,4 %** of articles in Scopus in 2015 – 2016 ([Hudec, 2018](#))
- Publishing in local journals **23 %** of all Scopus publications in 2015 – 2016 ([Hudec, 2018](#))
- **70 %** of publications **low ranked** ([Ministry of Finance, 2017](#))
- **From our research – quantity is important:**
 - **22 %** of all respondents and 17 % of public HEIs are mainly asked to publish at any conferences (home/abroad),
 - **24 %** of all respondents and 23 % at public HEIs are asked to publish as much as possible



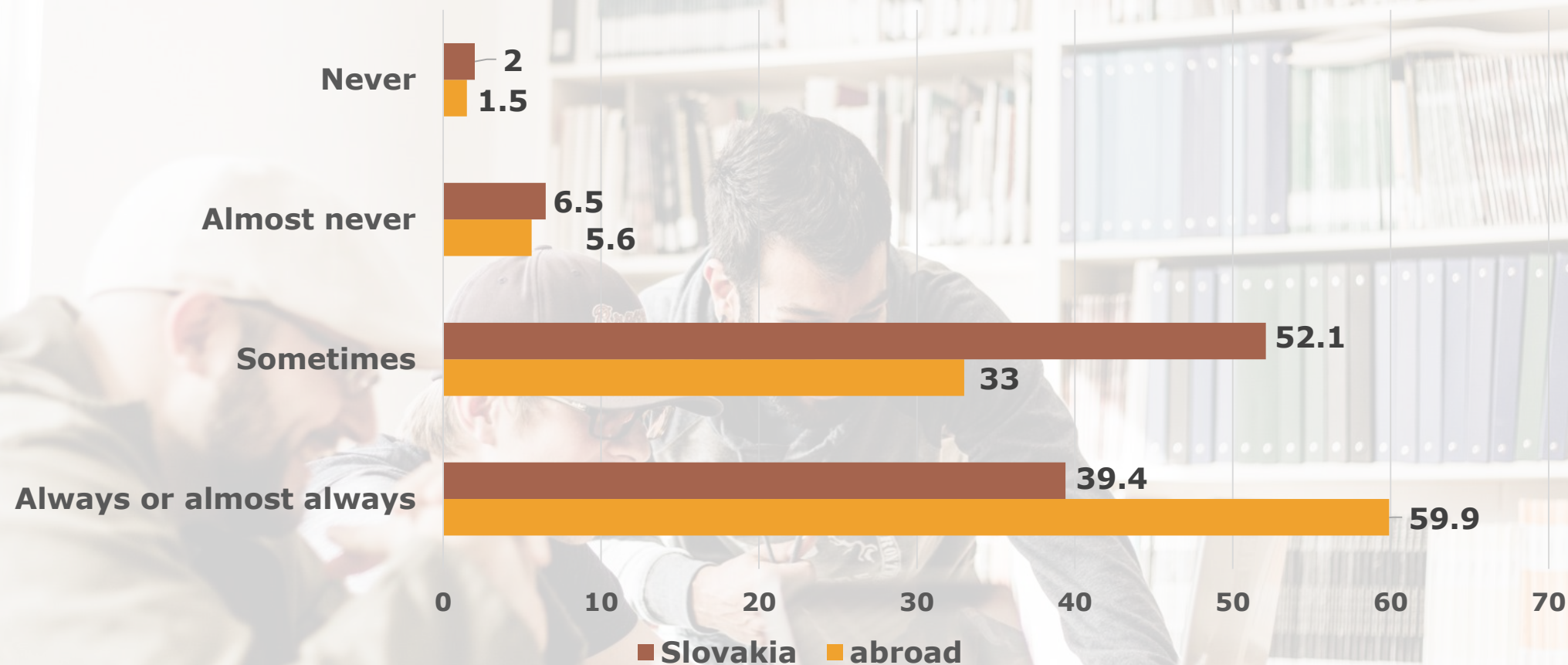
Impacts on cooperation within HEIs

"Which of the following best illustrates relationships and atmosphere at your workplace?"

	Public HEIs
People cooperate on research	38,6 %
People readily share research equipment	20,3 %
It is dominated by competition	14,1 %

Cooperation with other disciplines - Slovak academics in Slovakia and abroad

*"How often do you cooperate with researchers from **SIMILAR** disciplines?"*



Cooperation with other disciplines - Slovak academics in Slovakia and abroad

*"How often do you cooperate with researchers from **DIFFERENT** disciplines?"*

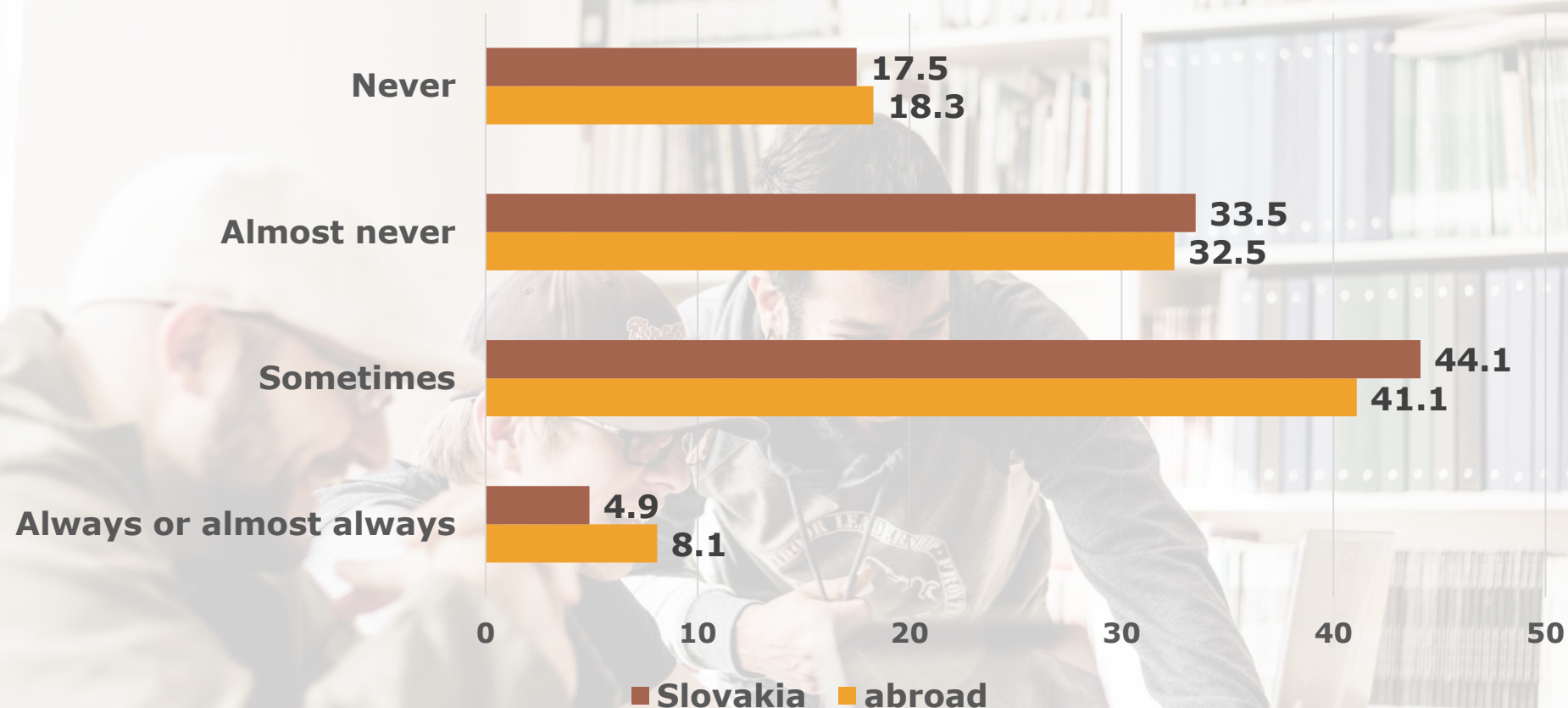


Illustration of impact on cooperation and on quality of research from an interview

"...the funding system at the level of Ministry also does everything so that universities would not cooperate. The basic problem is that in fact the same amount of money is always distributed. So if one university fulfills the criteria higher then it sucks money from other universities. So each university thinks: We will protect this territory, or we will even increase our output in publications, since they [Ministry] don't need outputs, only publication of outputs" and they suck money from universities who have the same outputs as last year. This mechanism is then reflected on the university level, so if our faculty increases its performance by 10 % on annual basis and another faculty will do so by 20 % then they will suck our money [...]

So everyone protects his little territory and unfortunately this then happens also on faculty level. This mechanism goes all the way down and each institute protects its territory, because if we would cooperate with another institute I have a feeling that it will not be taken into account enough. So the whole system of financial management seems to create berries for cooperation."
(interview with vice-dean for research)



Effects on quality of teaching

- **57 %** of academics from public HEIs said that **pressure on research outputs** has the most negative impact on quality of their teaching
- **Criteria for assessing the work** reflect **least quality of teaching at public HEIs: 28 %** agree or rather agree vs. 44 % at private HEIs and 34 % at state HEIs

Quote:

"No one cares about how teaching is delivered [...] neither dean nor the faculty management cares, because only research is important...a colleague is not delivering her classes, students complain about her, but she brings points within the assessment, because she writes articles with her father." (participant of focus groups with academics)



Sources of the problem within the system

- **Absence of use of the peer review** for assessing publications for funding purposes
- **Different criteria for different purposes**
 - 3 types of criteria at public HEIs: for accreditation (differ between research fields – the more productive academics were more strict), for career development (depends on faculties and universities), for financing – only in case of the public HEIs
- **Criteria change too often**
 - *"How do you perceive criteria according to which your work is evaluated?"*
 - 46 % of academics from public HEIs strongly or rather agreed that these change too often
 - in case of members of academic senates in all HEIs only 36 % have the same view.



Sources of the problem in the research environment

Absence of environment conducive for research

- Low funding for R&D in Slovakia:
 - according to [Eurostat](#) average for R&D in 2016 was **2,03 % of GDP** out of which **23 %** went to higher education vs. **Slovakia: 0,79 % GDP** out of which **28 %** went to higher education

Slovak academics abroad would rather go to Czech republic than Slovakia

- The top reasons:
 - better infrastructure 73 %
 - more resources for research grants 67 %
 - more resources for institutional funding 60 %
- In 2016: **1,68 % of GDP** goes for **R&D** out of which **20 %** went to higher education



Conclusion and the way out

- In Slovakia **output based funding did not lead to higher quality of research**, it rather contributed to dubious behavior in publishing
- It also contributed to **decrease of quality of teaching**
- The **causes** are embedded in the system of **criteria setting** and **implementation** but also within **wider research environment**
- Increase of quality of research but also of teaching is one of the areas for which we want to propose changes and **you can help us with your ideas and experience...**
- ...**also maybe with other areas** listed in our leaflets such as introduction of short cycle programs, individualization of HE, SCA, students evaluations, brain circulation, professionalization of HEIs management, utilization of new trends – AI/digitalization/automation, getting actors on board with the reform.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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