

*Academia (des)acelerada.**Encierros, entusiasmos y epidemias*

Dafne Calvo, Germán Llorca-Abad, Lorena Cano-Orón

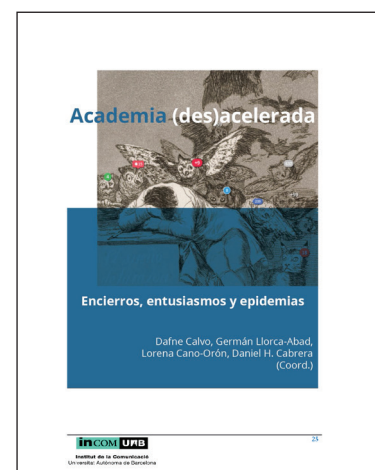
& Daniel H. Cabrera (coords.).

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BY FRANCISCO JOSÉ GARCÍA-ULL

Universitat Europea de València

franciscojose.garcia@universidadeuropea.esORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7999-4807>**How to cite:**

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The book *Academia (des)acelerada. Encierros, entusiasmos y epidemias* (2022), coordinated by the members of the Mediaflows Research Group [www.mediaflows.es] Dafne Calvo, Germán Llorca-Abad, Lorena Cano-Orón (Universitat de València) and Daniel H. Cabrera (Universidad de Zaragoza), raises, through a careful selection of authors, the need for structural changes in the current academic system. As the general feeling of the work reveals, the university co-exists with dynamics and routines that lead the institution and its stakeholders to an unsustainable situation. So much so that their very survival depends on the extent to which they meet these challenges.

The text raises the need to rethink education in the digital age and points out that the pandemic has exposed the limitations of a model of education fascinated by technology. The means prevails over the content to such an extent that the disruptive, creative and revolutionary point of view consists of transgressing this maelstrom of digital tools, stopping for a moment and reflecting on the processes and objectives of education. Educational innovation takes precedence over critical thinking to the point that, during the pandemic, “the only pedagogical discussion we had was to choose between *Teams*, *Google Meet* or *Zoom*” (p. 21).

The pandemic turned classrooms into screens and led the university to the unquestionable logic of *not stopping* and *guaranteeing* education. “Like when you learn to ride a bike, the advice was to keep going, look ahead, focus on the road and not the sides, continue in order to ensure the academic year was not lost. [...] The university, the centre of excellence of humanity, appears to function without any interest in the human beings that make it up, those who build and maintain it” (p. 5).

However, the work points out that addressing the urgency with digital tools is not transforming education. In fact, the inertia of

transmitting knowledge to *certify* the studies was emphasised. The university, like the rest of society, does not see slowing down, let alone stopping, as an option. That is why the university runs the risk of concealing the facts: education has been patched up with “tools” of a different kind in order to “keep progressing”, but there has been no serious reflection on the processes and objectives of learning and education under the transformative effect of digital technologies. In this sense, the text highlights the importance of reflecting on the relationship between digital technologies and education. It points out that education cannot be reduced to the transmission of information, but must be understood as a process of knowledge construction. Digital technologies can be useful tools to support this process, but they cannot replace it. It also addresses the issue of unequal access to education in the digital age. The pandemic has highlighted inequalities in access to digital technologies and online education. In this regard, the book highlights the importance of ensuring equal access to education in the digital age, especially for groups that have been historically marginalised. Equality too, in a “feminised but androcentric” academia (p.47).

Slowing down “does not mean abandoning the idea of progress”(p. 39), but is rather a reflexive and ethical appropriation of what has been ceded to market logic. The work proposes a pause converted into a time of estrangement, imagination and play, which allows us to turn mechanical and accumulative inertia into a diversion in order to produce meaning, to aspire to something more than a set of numerical achievements stripped of social and humanistic value. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of knowledge experts not normalising the bureaucratisation (p. 85) and precariousness (p. 231) scenario, aimed at competing and accumulating numbers, but rather generating value and knowledge.

The necessary deceleration of academia, which serves as the

central theme of the book, also involves a review of the system for evaluating research output.

The pressure to publish and the measurement of academic performance based on quantitative indicators has generated a culture of accelerated knowledge production and a lack of research quality, raising important questions about the integrity and purpose of academic work. This dynamic has become a worrying phenomenon affecting various disciplines and has deeply permeated contemporary academia.

It is important to recognise that the pressure for constant publication has led to a saturation of the academic market, where the amount of research far exceeds the capacity for assimilation and critical evaluation by the scientific community. This overproduction has generated a sense of unbridled competition among academics and has led to the emergence of academic journals of dubious quality, which focus more on the quantity of publications than on the rigour and impact of the research.

Furthermore, measuring academic performance based on quantitative indicators, such as the journal impact factor or the number of citations, has contributed to the lack of quality in research. While these indicators may be useful for a general assessment of the impact of the research, they are not necessarily an accurate reflection of its quality or scientific relevance. Instead of promoting excellence and originality, there has been an obsession with meeting these indicators, which has led to questionable practices, such as publishing studies with biased results or manipulating citations to increase the apparent impact of the research.

This culture of accelerated production and lack of quality in research also has negative consequences for academics themselves. The constant quest for publications and meeting performance indicators generates a disproportionate workload, which can lead to a lack of time and resources to carry out quality research. Moreover, this pressure may discourage the exploration of risky or innovative ideas, as safe and predictable research that meets established criteria is favoured. The book explains, for example, that the experimental research that led to the discovery of the Higgs boson (2012) “could not have been carried out in the current competitive environment” (p. 88).

As the authors argue, to counteract this culture of accelerated production and lack of quality, it is necessary to promote a change in the way academic research is evaluated and assessed. Rather than focusing exclusively on quantitative indicators, holistic evaluation mechanisms should be developed that consider the originality, methodological rigour and real impact of the research.

In addition, open and collaborative research practices using *open-source software* (p. 146) should be encouraged, where research staff share data, methods and results in a transparent manner. This would allow for greater verification and replication of studies, which in turn would strengthen the reliability and quality of academic research.

Academia (des)acelerada. Encierros, entusiasmos y epidemias is a harsh critique of the practices, structures and processes of the current academic system, written by university professors and researchers, with the aim of saving academia. The work denounces a general lack of reflection on the role of the university in society and takes a close look at the situation as a whole. A model is therefore being reformulated and will have to adapt to new realities in order to ensure its own survival.