



Studying Individuals and Institutions: Taking account of biography

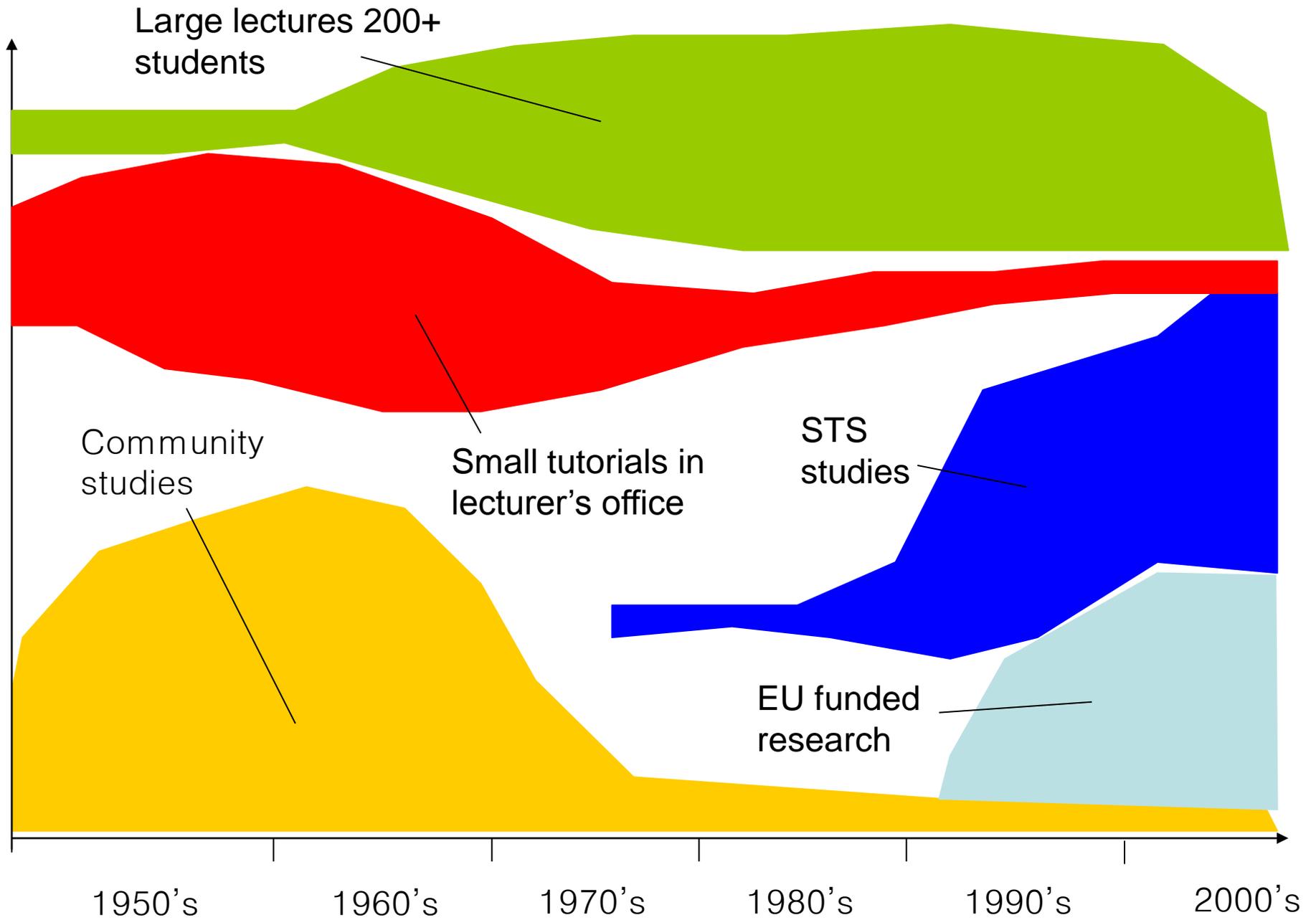
Nicola Spurling, Lancaster University

“Any organisation – no matter what its purposes – consists of the interaction of men – of their ideas, their wills, their energies, their minds and their purposes. The men who interact are involved in the organization in varying degrees, for varying periods of time, and at different stages of their careers”.

(Becker et al, 2002:14)

“We remain uninformed as to the cement binding the everyday functioning and reproduction of particular institutions in time and space with the actions, knowledge build-up and biographies of particular individuals”.

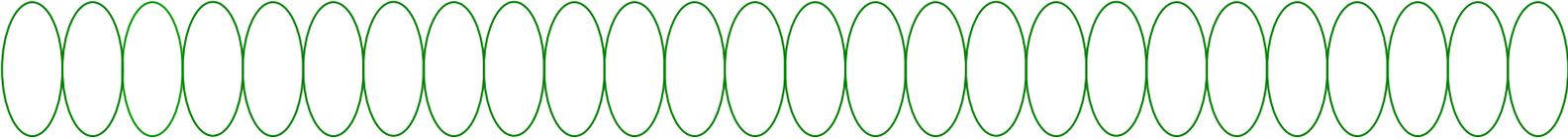
(Pred, 1981:9)



Practice of sociology



Everyday activities & routines



Careers



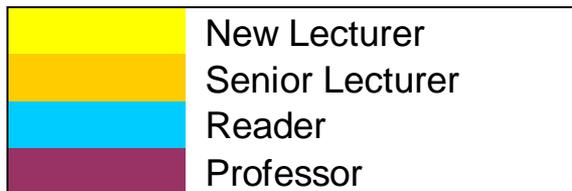
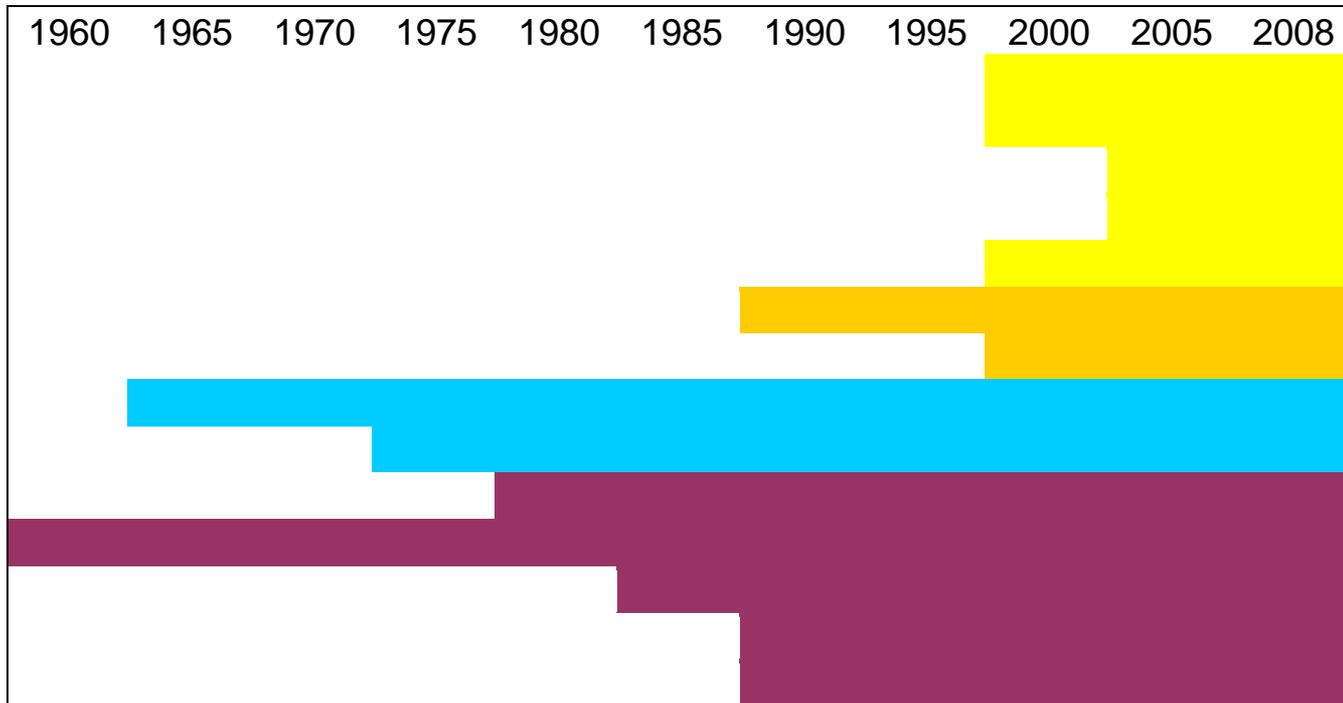
Institutions (universities)



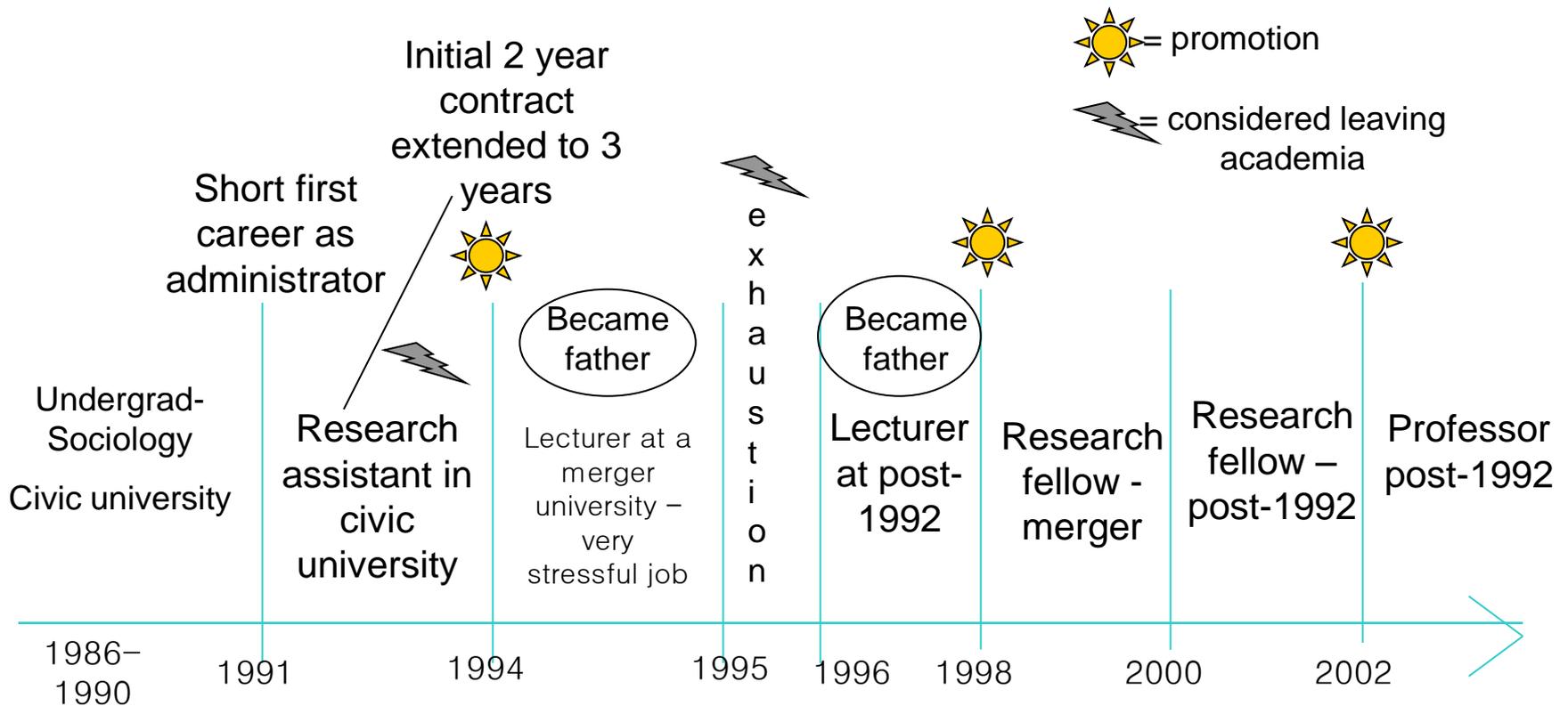
Government policy



Working lives of academics



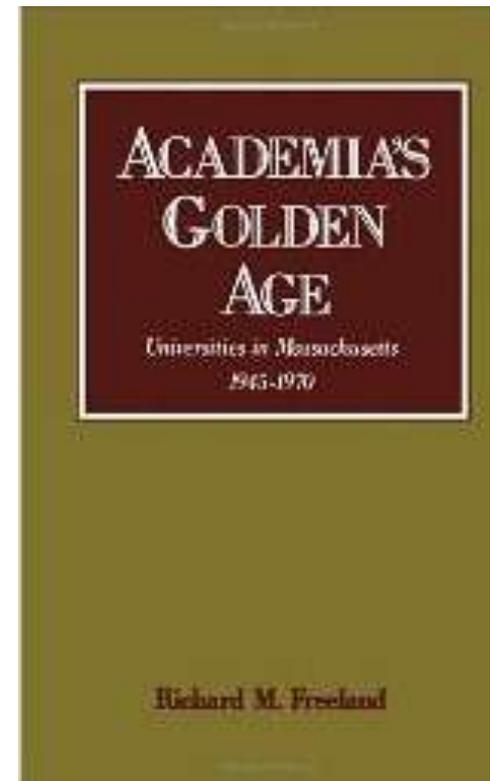
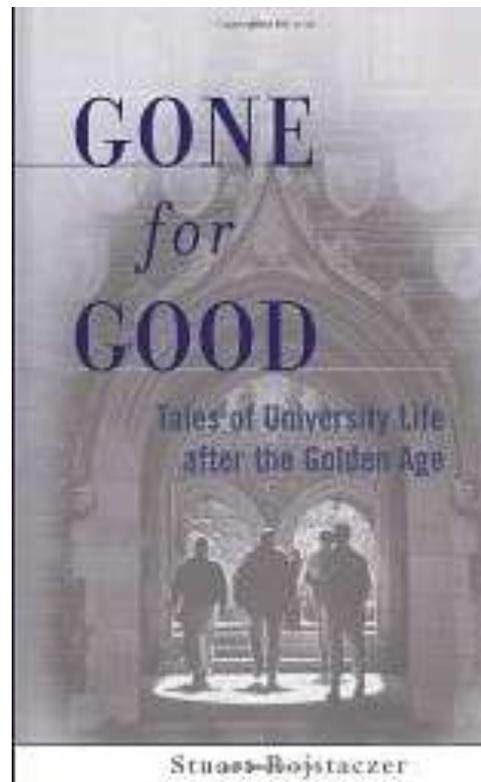
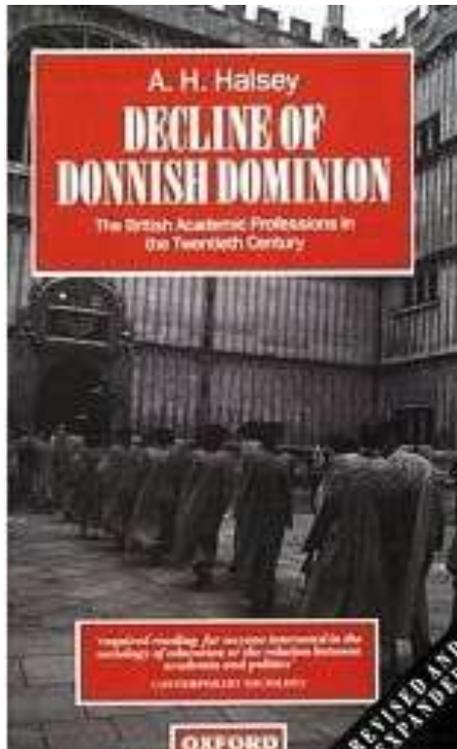
| Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Etc... |
|---|---|--|---|--------|
| Visiting Prof from Austria arrives 9am-1pm lectures & seminars 1pm-2pm Office hours Etc... | 10 am take dog to kennels 1130am-6pm writing all day Etc... | 9am-11am emails 11am-1pm research bid Etc. | 830-11am Meeting about conference 11am-1pm Lecturing Etc. | |



The current resurgence [of biographical methods] may be understood by reference to a late or postmodern culture in which some of the social scripts that shaped people's lives...have weakened

(Merrill and West 2009:17)

‘...what credence can be given to the stories people tell, riddled as they could be with self-justification or even illusion as to some idyllic past?’ (Merrill and West, 2009:18)



Oral history... makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account. In so doing, oral history has radical implications for the social message of history as a whole.

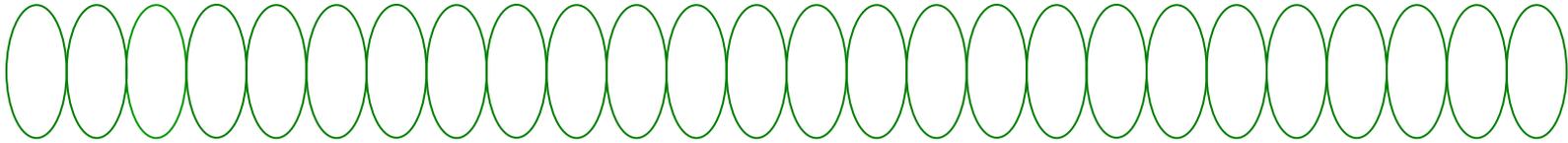
(Thompson, 2000:7)

‘recounting the past involves accounting for it’
(Chamberlain, 2006:391)

‘The past may be a painful place of lost hopes
and frustration and the stories we tell of it can
be shaped by a need for self-justification’
(Merrill and West, 2009:20)

The empirical study: data

Everyday activities & routines



Careers



Institutions (universities)



Government policy



References

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