

ERC Evaluation process -  
Do we consider ERC important for our institutions  
and for science in the Czech Republic?

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Praha, November 6, 2019



# Personal ERC experience

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- Serving ERC from 2008, AdG PE6 (Computer Science and Informatics), active in calls 2008, 2010, 2012, remote referee for various other panels and calls
- Panel Chair for the 2014 - 2015 AdG call
- Senior Scientist (50%) at the ERC CZ project MORE, PI Josef Málek (based on the ERC AdG PE1 proposal, 2011)
- Promoting ERC at home since 2008 Presentations at various information days since 2010
- System of workshops for potential applicants since 2013, developed together with NCP Petra Fedorová - Perutková, TC, continued with Zuzana Čapková



## Motto:

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First, I do believe that we do have many scientists and teams that can compete with the world. That is also why I do (among other reasons) this work for the prospective ERC applicants. However .....



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A quote from an important official document concerning science in the Czech Republic:

*"... výsledky **nadprůměrné mezinárodní úrovně**, spojené s existencí vědeckých škol, jsou generovány **excelentními** výzkumnými týmy ..."*



# Gill Wells, Univ. of Oxford, Prague, 2015, 2016, ...

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- Individual Fellowships –  
a strategic tool for development of the University of Oxford!
- Be open and attract people from all over the world.
- Invest to those that are open and create an environment for their work on behalf of all.
- Recruit and retain!



# Science?

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- How a person becomes a scientist? **CURIOSITY.**
- How a scientist matures? **EXPERIENCE.**
- How science progresses? **LEADERSHIP.**
- Are the individual contributions equal? **EVALUATION.**
- What does it mean that science has a hierarchical structure? **LIFE.**



# ERC?

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- WHAT: Identification of leaders and giving them a better chance to serve. **Leaders are servants, who take the responsibility and the burden of leadership on behalf of all.**
- WHY: **Without leadership science can not survive.** Regardless the money invested, infrastructures built, scientometry and evaluations.
- HOW: Through **trustworthy** (as much as possible) and **non bureaucratic** (as much as possible) grant agency.
- WHO: Distinguished scientists with **personal integrity**. Science aims at recognizing right from wrong. As human life, this can not be based on adoring a narrowly and/or superficially meant “success”.



# ERC: Words are meant seriously

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- IDEAS
- Frontier research
- Beyond the state of the art
- High risk/high gain

Henri Poincaré, 1909, graduate of the **Polytechnique**

*“Science has had marvelous applications, but a science that would **only have applications in mind** would not be science anymore, it would be only cookery.”*





# Evaluation of originality?

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- Comparison across fields is very hard.  
Reliable (objective) quantification of quality is a dangerous myth.
- Therefore panels and budget distribution. Taking responsibility for decisions.
- Scientific Board (rules, panel composition, supervision),  
Panels (evaluation),  
ERCEA (support).
- Discussion focuses on understanding differences in opinion.  
It consists of weighting arguments!
- Evaluators: originality of their own work, broad social intelligence and personal integrity.



# Do **we** need ERC ?

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- Chance of getting money is not high. Is preparing ERC proposal just a waste of time and energy? To the same extent as considering **what has a value in my work.**
- Is the feedback from the evaluation of the ERC projects **always** convincing and helpful? Mostly yes, but not always.
- Are the ERC grants **always** a label of outstanding quality in comparison to unsuccessful (say, “B”) proposals? Mostly yes, but not always.
- Are there negatives related to ERC? Yes, there are. **As an example, the factual overemphasized distinction between the ERC projects (grant holders) and the proposals evaluated as “A” but not funded (the associated PIs) does not serve the proclaimed goals of ERC.**

**Why should we care and apply?**



# There indeed are some good reasons

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- “I wish to let you know that I have not got the ERC grant. **Nevertheless, the preparation was for me a great experience that helped me to refocus completely my view on my scientific work in the future.**”
- ERC should foster **individual initiative, independence, responsibility, self-confidence seeing the strong as well as the weak points ...**
- **Originality** grows from doing all what we do, no matter how large or small steps, to the best of our abilities (**C. S. Lewis**). ERC is not ideal, but **it offers an opportunity.**
- ERC is only one of many **ways to serve**. There are certainly more important ones. But this can not justify or be taken as an excuse for our serious national under-performance.
- Representation of the institution and of the country **is not an empty phrase.**



# ERC – fundamental requirements

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- **StG:** INDEPENDENCE, ORIGINALITY
- **CoG:** EXPERIENCE, ESTABLISHING A SCIENTIFIC SCHOOL
- **AdG:** A WORLD SCALE LEADERSHIP
- **SYNERGY:** COMPLEMENTARY EXPERTISE OF LEADERS

**The institutions are responsible for creating an appropriate research as well as social environment!**



# Essential information that affects the evaluation

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- Acronym and Title
- Primary panel specification
- Secondary panel(s) specification
- Keywords
- Abstract



# Essence of the ERC successful proposals

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- **WHAT** is the problem to be investigated?
- **WHY** is the proposed work on the problem worth funding?
- **HOW** the the problem can be approached so that a substantial progress towards the goals can be expected?
- **WHO** are the PI and the team? Does the previous record establish credibility for getting close to a breakthrough?



# What do the evaluators look for

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- Originality. Originality. Originality.
- Vision. Ambitious goals. Well justified risk.
- It is not required that the goals are fully reached. In frontier research it makes no sense to plan the outcomes six years ahead. However, it must be clear that the outcome will be with a high probability so substantial that it is worth to retain the proposal for funding.
- Methodology. It must convince evaluators about the feasibility (B1) and the novelty of the methodology (B2).



# Challenges for PIs as well as for evaluators

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- Originality often means **going against the stream, nonconformity**, making a firm (and sometimes unrewarded) stand against common and widely accepted opinions.
- Quantification of originality is an oxymoron.  
**Outstanding means standing out of scale.**  
**Excellent means close to the best within the scale.**
- Multidisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity is good but it is **not easy to sell and it is very difficult to evaluate.** (Synergy grants.)
- Adoration of various **quantitative measures** goes hand in hand with the destruction (on even self-destruction (!)) of science.





**CONSISTENCY**



# ERC grants need healthy environment. CZ?

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- We miss funding and professional career system that has as its main priority the growth of young researchers into leaders from the early stage of their career. Why?
- Instead of focusing on breakthroughs and visions, we live in the environment of planning results and outputs (even income !) many years ahead. Does such planning make any sense? Of course it does not.
- An example from the **excellent research call evaluation** that speaks for all:

“there is a lack of appropriate indicators to measure the economic and industrial impact of the project, namely in terms of jobs created.”



# Support for ERC applicants

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ERC Pipeline and workshops: Information days, workshops focused on preparing proposals, mock interview workshops ... **Since 2010.** The goal?

## **Refocusing the view!**

Preparation of the high quality ERC proposal requires time needed for focusing on the right problem. The preparation should start at least

**one year ahead of the planned submission.**



# Do not hesitate to ask!

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**Děkuji Vám za laskavou pozornost.  
Mnoho štěstí!!!**