

THESIS STATEMENT

Judit Fináncz

Doctoral training in Europe and in Hungary: The situation of Ph.D. candidates



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**Doctoral training in Europe and in Hungary:
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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tamás Kozma

Author: Judit Fináncz

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Purpose of the thesis, definition of the subject

The aim of the thesis is to look over the history and development of doctoral training in Europe and in Hungary and to present the factors which are forming the doctoral training nowadays. In addition to, the dissertation studies the actual issues of doctoral training: effectiveness, quality, gender equality, the attraction of academic career and the situation of doctoral students.

The empirical part of the thesis focuses on the situation of Ph.D. candidates in Europe and in Hungary, in addition, the study presents the results of a survey made among Ph.D. students at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. The main issues of the survey are:

- Cultural capital of doctoral students
- Motivational factors on applying for the doctoral training
- Activity in the scope of the doctoral training
- Problems in the doctoral study
- Judgment of supervision
- Career and private plans

In this context, plans of the sample about foreign employment and the regional characteristics are examined. Moreover, the thesis appoints for finding answers the relevance of the issues described in the theoretical chapters and its practicable solutions.

The function of academic training underwent a radical change during the last several decades. The traditional academic training prepared the candidates for scientific career at the universities. The drop-out rate was very high, because the candidate was dependent on his supervisor and had to do his researches alone, in addition to his job.

After the Second World War, the demand of knowledge society has required more and more researchers and professional experts in the industry and in the private sector. Now, there is a huge lack of researchers in Europe which endangers the competitive development of the region. Recognizing the new challenges, many European countries adopted the American Ph.D. system in the 1980s and 1990s. The Ph.D. system provides student-status for the candidates, often with 3 year scholarship and there is less dependency on the supervisor. In contrast with the expectations the drop-out rate hasn't improved in these countries. This

model regards doctoral training as the last cycle of higher education instead of regarding that as the first step of academic career. In some Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway) and the Netherlands the status of Ph.D. candidate was converted from the student-status into employee-status. The young researchers enjoy attractive salaries with social security provisions (including sickness and parental benefits, pension rights and unemployment benefits) and the contract contains all the rights and duties. This attitude suits the requirements of the European Charter for Researchers accepted by the European Commission 2005. According to the statistical data of EURODOC (European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Young Researchers) the drop-out rate decreased in these countries by 20-30 percent, which verifies the effectiveness of the Scandinavian model.

In Hungary, the Ph.D. system was introduced 1993, there are 950 stated number of doctoral students with 3 year scholarship (its amount is about 330 € per month) each year. Since 2000 there are 1000-1200 thesis defenses every year, although 7000-8000 Ph.D. students take part in doctoral training annually, so the drop-out rate is very high in Hungary.

Applied methods

The survey among doctoral students was made by the author 2006 at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. 204 Ph.D. students out of 830 filled in a complex questionnaire about the following issues: motivational factors on the application for doctoral studies, study career, experience at the labour market, material conditions, circumstances of the doctoral training, supervision, career plans, plans about starting a family etc.

The survey in Debrecen 2006 was preceded by an exploring survey with small sample (N=72) of doctoral students. Its results raise issues which can be starting-points for further survey. In addition to, the 2004 survey was suited to testing the questionnaire.

The 2006 survey concerned the following faculties at the University of Debrecen: Centre for Agricultural Sciences, Centre for Medical Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Economical Sciences and the Calvinist Theological University of Debrecen.

The following questions of research were formulated about the survey:

- 1) Is the base supposition of Regional University Research (= the University of Debrecen has a regional attraction circle) valid for Ph.D. students?

- 2) What kind of motivational factors do play a significant role in applying for doctoral training? What is about the parking role of Ph.D. study in the region with high unemployment rate and the fight for keeping of the workplace?
- 3) Most doctoral students (mainly part-time Ph.D. students) are working beside their studies. To what extend can they find adequate job in the region?
- 4) According to the national statistics, two out of three doctoral students don't reach the Ph.D. degree. How do they think about their chances for getting the degree? Are there differences among the disciplines?
- 5) What kind of career do doctoral students plan after getting the degree? How do they think about the chances for finding a job in the region? How many doctoral students want to move to Budapest or go abroad? How large is the danger of brain drain?
- 6) How do all these factors influence the plans about starting a family?

Consequences

Characteristics of the sample:

- Women are a bit over represented at the sample: 53 percent of the 204 doctoral students are women. It can be explained by the lack of doctoral school in field of technological sciences at the University of Debrecen.
- The sample is quite young: 80 percent of the Ph.D. students are from 24 to 31 years old.
- 58 percent of the sample is financed by state scholarship, 42 percent has to pay tuition fee (most of them are part-time Ph.D. students)

Motivational factors on applying for the doctoral training

- The most important motivational factors on applying for the doctoral training were the scientific or professional interest and the importance of Ph.D. degree for the academic career.
- Because of regional disadvantages (high unemployment rate, families with low cultural capital, unfavourable working conditions and salaries) 30 percent of Ph.D.

students apply for doctoral training to avoid unemployment, to extend student status or to guarantee himself 3 year moderate, but secure living by the scholarship.

- The University of Debrecen has a regional attraction circle: most Ph.D. students are from the Nord-Plain Region of the country and the greatest number of them graduated from the University of Debrecen some years ago.

Problems during the doctoral training

- Most Ph.D. students with state scholarship don't satisfy with student status because of lack of social security provisions. They would prefer employee status, but they don't see any possibility for realizing this. In addition, they complain about overloading by the university (administration, lecturing, research activity on unfamiliar fields)
- Part time doctoral students complain about the lack of information about doctoral courses and they think some doctoral course are too theoretical.
- Most doctoral students mentioned infrastructural problems in research.

Career plans

- Three doctoral students out of five plan academic career as university lecturer or researcher in a state research institute.
- One doctoral student out of five want to go abroad for working after getting the doctoral degree.
- The private sector is less attractive in the east part of Hungary: there are little companies with R+D activity in the region and these workplaces are less stable than in the state organizations.

Private plans

- Most doctoral students want to create a secure living and to realize his/her imagination about career before starting a family. According to the research, starting a family doesn't appear in the plans of Ph.D. students for the next three years, although they are in their late 20s or early 30s.

Cluster groups in the sample

- The gender differences and the variances about discipline don't appear in the sample, the most homogenizing factor is the form of study.
- The population of doctoral students is very heterogeneous:
 - Students with scholarship have very few experiences at the labour market, they are younger, more mobilizable and 25 percent of them want to work abroad.
 - Part-time doctoral students often have a family, 90 percent of them are employed – mostly in educational institutions. Very few of them plan to go abroad for work.
- Groups according to the cluster analysis:
 - *Abroad planners (N=44)*
 - The group wants to go abroad for working for years
 - Most of them are full-time doctoral students with scholarship, the gender variable is balanced
 - Most of them don't plan starting a family in the following years
 - 60 percent of them are from educated families
 - *Purposive intellectuals (N=49)*
 - They plans career in Hungary
 - They applied for the doctoral training with determined, clear purposes
 - All of them are from families with high cultural capital
 - Half of them plans academic career in higher education or in state research institutes
 - Most of them are part-time doctoral students and planning starting a family in the next few years
 - *First generation intellectuals (N=46)*
 - All of them are from less educated families

- The group doesn't plan going abroad for working
 - They applied for the doctoral training with determined, clear purposes
 - The group is balanced considering the gender and the form of study
 - 66 percent of them have already started a family or and plan this in the next few years
- *In advance escapist (N= 61)*
- All of them mentioned motivational factors on applying for the doctoral training which refer to that they chose doctoral studies to avoid unemployment or to lengthen the student status or to push choice of career
 - Most of them are full-time doctoral students with scholarship
 - Most of them are from less educated families
 - They don't plan going abroad for working
 - Their plans about starting a family are postponed
 - 70 percent of the plans academic career in Hungary

Value added at the University of Debrecen

Most doctoral student are from less educated families (parents without college or university degree), which means that their cultural capital is mostly low. The question may come up: Which role does the University of Debrecen play in that, that these doctoral students have already a master-degree and now, they are taking part in doctoral training?

The issue about added value didn't raise by constructing the questionnaire, so it can't be drawn conclusions about this issue, so the added value assessment at the University of Debrecen needs further research.

Publications from the author in the field of the dissertation

- 2008 Doktoranduszok szakmai és magánéleti tervei. (*Career and private plans of doctoral students - Hungarian*) *Educatio* 2007 Autumn p. 487-496.
- 2008 Doktori képzés a doktoranduszok szemével: egy debreceni empirikus vizsgálat tapasztalatai (*Doctoral training with the eyes of doctoral students - Hungarian*). In.: Kereszty Orsolya (ed.): *Interdiszciplinaritás a pedagógiában*. Kaposvár: Kaposvári Egyetem Pedagógiai Főiskolai Kar p. 91-103.
- 2007 Doktori képzés és témavezetés a Debreceni Egyetemen (*Doctoral training and supervision at the University of Debrecen - Hungarian*). *Képzés és Gyakorlat* 2007. 2. p. 34-46.
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- 2006 A doktori képzés európai modelljei: az amerikai típusú PhD és a skandináv modell létjogosultsága. (*The European models of doctoral training: The reason for the existence of the American Ph.D. and the Scandinavian model - Hungarian*) In.: Tavaszi Szél 2006. Konferenciakötet. Budapest: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége p. 145-149.
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- 2005 Tendenzen in der europäischen Hochschulpolitik (*Trends in the European higher education policy - German*). *DU*. Juni 2005. (periodical of „Verein Deutscher Akademiker aus Ungarn”). p. 10-12.
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Conference presentations

15. Nov. 2008 VIII. Országos Neveléstudományi Konferencia, Budapest. Paper: *A doktori képzésben résztvevők jogviszonyát övező problémák (Problems about the status of doctoral students – Hungarian)*. Abstract: ONK Konferencia Tartalmi Összefoglalók 2007 p. 28
24. Jun. 2008 A harmadfokú képzés szerepe a regionális átalakulásban (TERD) Nemzetközi konferencia, Debrecen. Paper: *Kettő az egyben: oktató és hallgató. Avagy a doktoranduszlet viszonyosságai a debreceni doktoranduszok szemszögéből. (Two-In-One: lecturer and student. The trials of Ph.D. students' life with the eyes of doctoral students – Hungarian)*. In publishing: Juhász Erika (ed.): A harmadfokú képzés szerepe a regionális átalakulásban. TERD konferenciakötet. Debrecen: DE Felsőoktatási Kutató-és Fejlesztő Központ
7. Dec. 2007 Neveléstörténész doktoranduszok I. magyarországi szimpóziuma, Kaposvár. Paper: *A tudományos képzés történeti háttere Magyarországon (Historical background of doctoral training in Hungary – Hungarian)*. <http://cherd.unideb.hu/fj.html>
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6. May 2006 Tavaszi Szél Konferencia 2006. május 4-7. (Kaposvár). Paper: *A doktori képzés európai modelljei: az amerikai típusú PhD és a skandináv modell létjogosultsága. (The European models of doctoral training: The reason for the existence of the American Ph.D. and the Scandinavian model - Hungarian)*
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18. Oct. 2005 Az egyetemi hallgatók társadalmi háttere. Oktatótörténeti és oktatásszociológiai konferencia (Pécs). Paper: *Kiből lesz ma doktorandusz Magyarországon? (Who will be doctoral student in Hungary nowadays? - Hungarian)*. <http://cherd.unideb.hu/fj.html>

7. Oct. 2005 V. Országos Neveléstudományi Konferencia, Budapest. Paper: *A doktori képzés európai tendenciái (European trends in doctoral training – Hungarian)* Abstract: ONK Konferencia Tartalmi Összefoglalók 2005 p. 151.
23. Apr. 2005 *Die Zukunft der Bildung. 11. Jahreskonferenz des Vereins Deutscher Akademiker aus Ungarn. (Budapest). Előadás: Tendenzen in der europäischen Hochschulpolitik (Trends in the European higher education policy - German)*. In.: DU. Juni 2005. p. 10-12.