



Doctorate Careers and Usefulness of SSH PhD Graduation

By László Csonka and Annamária Inzelt

In the 21st century highly skilled workforce became one of the most important resources to support knowledge economies. Measures like the Bologna Process put more emphasis on the third cycle of education, on doctoral research and education which is seen as the level providing the most direct reinforcement for the highly skilled workforce. The original scientific contribution and new knowledge expected from PhD graduates are expected to bring ‘fresh air’ into our economies and further the present economic development.

We still know little about the usefulness of doctoral education for the PhD graduates themselves and for the economy. Both topics are rarely investigated in Europe.

A current international project called POCARIM (full name: [Mapping the population, careers, mobility and impacts of advanced research degree graduates in the social sciences and humanities](#); funded by the EU 7th FP), tries to draw a picture of the career and mobility of PhD graduates in the *social sciences* and *humanities* (SSH). The social sciences and humanities (SSH) are taken into account in many countries by decision makers as less important area of education and research as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). However there are some evidences that SSH are important not only for human being but for the innovative society. Not only in Hungary but in Europe too have been very few attempts to assess the impact of PhD graduation in the field of social sciences and humanities (SSH).

However recent OECD survey identified (OECD, 2010) that people graduating in the field of humanities face the highest level of unemployment in most investigated countries, and people in social sciences also face usually higher-than-average rates among PhDs. They also have to consider the uncertainties in getting a proper position or take on a lower-level job and obtaining a temporary vs. permanent contract.

Obtaining a PhD degree is a long-term and costly investment for both the individuals and the society. The usefulness of these investments is arising crucial questions for all involved parties. This research is focusing on the following questions: Does it worth to spend public sources for PhD education? What is the main impact of PhD graduation on the individuals’ career and how this career develops during and after the PhD graduation? In other words: are

these investments offering better positions on the job market, better career opportunities for PhD degree holders than others can obtain? Are there any differences among Hungary and some other European countries by the career paths of national graduates?

The POCARIM Working Paper (forthcoming publication) reviews different strands of the literature. Then it puts the research into the national context that includes overview on legal framework and on recent supply and demand of PhD graduates according to available (scattered) statistical sources. The next section describes shortly research methodology and main characters of the survey sample. The following section provides the survey-based empirical data and indexes. The special survey was crucial to identify the diversity of post-doctoral career paths of *humanities* and *social science* graduates. This mapping exercise was a precondition to investigate of the impact of PhD graduation on individual career and the availability of degree holders on society. The empirical analysis has combined quantitative and qualitative information for discussing the impacts of doctoral degree on individual career and on different circles of society. Last section is suggesting some further research topics and it makes some policy recommendations.

László Csonka

Research Fellow, IKU Innovation Research Centre

Annamária Inzelt

Funding Director, IKU Innovation Research Centre
Honorary Professor, University of Szeged