SUPERVISORS AND STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF THE NATURE AND VALUE OF THE DOCTORATE

Ana V. Baptista & Isabel Huet
LAQE – CIDTFF
University of Aveiro

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Outline

o The purpose(s) of the doctorate

o Broad overview of the research

  o Focus groups' data: doctoral supervisors and students' conceptions on the nature and value of the doctorate

o Results of the content analysis

o Final reflections & questioning

The purpose(s) of the doctorate

*"What is the essence of 'doctorateness'? **What factors must be present for a particular degree to fit into the category of 'doctorate'?** (...) How effective are current systems for assuring the quality standard of (...) doctoral awards?"* (Park, 2007, p.37 & p.39)

"The core component of doctoral training is the advancement of knowledge through research. (...) We urge universities to ensure their doctoral programmes promote interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills thus meeting the needs of the wider employment market. (...) there should be no doctorate without original research (...)" (our emphasis - EUA, 2007, p.6 & p.14)

The purpose(s) of the doctorate

o Production of original research (or *"other advanced scholarship"*)
  o Give a significant contribution to knowledge
  o Extend *"the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice discipline"*
  o Should be published and recognised by peer reviews
o Deep understanding of the field of knowledge
o Mastery of appropriate research methods according to the academic domain
o Conscious recognition of what constitutes scholarly integrity and ethical issues
o Development of high-level transferable competences
  o Communicative skills, solving problems, complex issues' analysis, capacity to deal with and solve *"unforeseen problems"* and *"unpredicted situations"* flexibility, open-mindedness
  o Autonomy to conceptualise, design and implement projects, new ideas, techniques and/or approaches

Broad overview of the research

- **Main objective**
  - Design an integrative framework about the quality of doctoral supervision - quality profiles of doctoral students and supervisors

- **Method**
  - Case study – with an exploratory and explanatory character (Yin, 1994)

- **Participants**
  - Doctoral students & supervisors
  - Several academic domains
  - University of Aveiro

Broad overview of the research

Methodological design

Interviews
- Senior Portuguese researchers/experts on pedagogical supervision
- To collect the first conceptions and opinions about doctoral supervision quality; & To reflect about specific, general and shared features regarding this issue, considering both national and international backgrounds
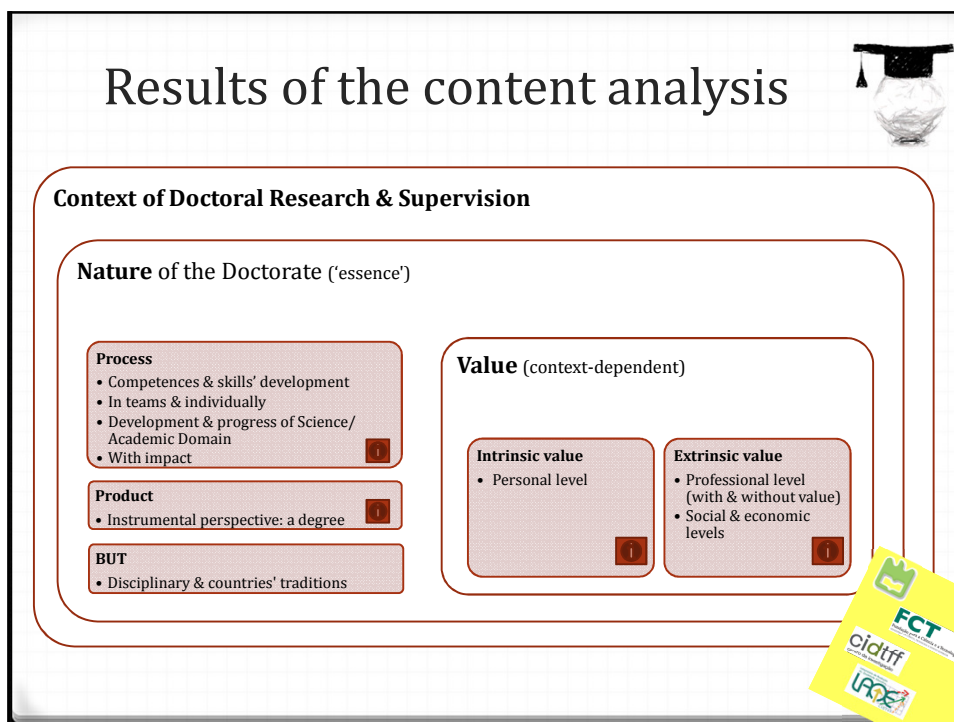
Focus groups
- Doctoral students (n=26) & supervisors (n=25) from different academic domains and with different experiences
- To 'feel the pulse': to gather conceptions and experiences on doctoral supervision

Questionnaires
- 3rd cycle community at the University of Aveiro - Doctoral students & supervisors
- To statistically understand the vision of the doctoral community on the competences doctoral students and supervisors must possess for achieving success at/quality of the supervision process

* What are supervisors and students' conceptions about the nature and value of the doctorate?

Results of the content analysis

Context of Doctoral Research & Supervision

Nature of the Doctorate ('essence')

Process
- Competences & skills' development
- In teams & individually
- Development & progress of Science/ Academic Domain
- With impact

Product
- Instrumental perspective: a degree

BUT
- Disciplinary & countries' traditions

Value (context-dependent)

Intrinsic value
- Personal level

Extrinsic value
- Professional level (with & without value)
- Social & economic levels

Final reflections

o **Similar perspectives**
  o Same institutional culture
  o 'Academic acculturation' – 'implicit norms' of doctoral research process
o **The focus is on the doctoral student**
o **Three main 'time discourses'**
  o The intrinsic value: students' expectations & motivations **[before and more or less at the moment students enter the doctorate]**
  o The process of doctoral research & supervision: process to create a product **[during the doctorate]**
  o The extrinsic value: (i) impact on students' career prospects & (ii) the impact of students' work (process & product) **[after the doctorate]**
o **Two main 'thematic discourses'**
  o **Competences** development/enhancement (-> future career and employability)
  o **Advancement/contribution** to academic domain or discipline

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ISSUE

Questioning

- To what extent do those conceptions on the nature and the value of the doctorate influence…

  - … the supervision process? As well as doctoral supervision quality?

  - … the definition of quality profiles?

  - … the design of an evaluation and monitoring process of the supervision process?

  - … the design of an institutional strategy/mission/research roadmap and consequent decision-making to stimulate doctoral process and products (at the level of supervision, research practices and environment as well as products' creation)?

- May (Are) those conceptions be transferable for other contexts? What may (will) be the consequences of assuming those transferability?

Thank you for your attention!

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Evidences: **Nature** of the doctorate

Process – Competences & skills' development

"In fact, I really think that the doctorate – as the advanced training is organised in Europe nowadays – continues to be a privileged space – if not the only one - of people 'creation' – more specifically, the development of intelligent, critical, active, reflective and engaged people/ citizens (...)" (Supervisors - FG2)

Process – In teams

"(...) they are studying a particular phenomenon and they are doing it as a part of an international network where several people study a phenomenon from different perspectives and give several types of contributions (...) so in the end that can achieve a bigger goal..." (Students - FG7)

Process – Individually

"(...) the doctorate, the process of doing a doctoral research, has a lonely component... And more particularly at a certain stage, the doctorate is a solitary process – it has to be!" (Supervisors - FG1)

Evidences: **Nature** of the doctorate

Process – Development & progress of Science/ Academic Domain – also through dissemination

"I really think that our doctoral research must be disseminated... (...) Knowledge must be disseminated... We must be able to spread out the knowledge we have developed about a topic to other people... Otherwise all that research doesn't make any sense..." (Students – FG1)

Process – With impact

"Nowadays, it is consensual that Science has/ must have a social vocation and impact: it is important for people to live better and happier (...) Therefore, I do not consider that Science is different from one disciplinary domain to another. I strongly believe that there is a common perspective, that is, the epistemological understanding is more or less the same: people try to broaden their understanding and try to do that Science has a positive impact in social well-being." (Supervisors - FG2)

Evidences: **Nature** of the doctorate

Product – A degree

"I think that, nowadays, the doctorate is another degree (…)" (Students - FG3)

Difference between academic domains

"For example, for us, that dimension of Science that has a direct and visible application does not exist… (…) I cannot justify my research considering a short-term impact (…) I understand and agree with that idea: Science must have an impact in people's well-being. It is important… But in Literary Studies, in Literature and Humanities in general, this kind of perspective cannot be formulated in the same manner, comparing with other academic domains." (Supervisors - FG2)

Evidences: **Value** of the doctorate

Intrinsic value – Personal level

"There are school teachers (…) who really feel the need of illuminating, of introducing another enthusiasm, another perspective into their professional and daily lives. They are also trying to get away from a negative professional routine and to access a challenging high level research." (Supervisors - FG1)

"I may look to the doctorate as a process of personal development, since we have to make a contribution and advance with a scientific domain (…). It is for each one of us a way of personal development as well as a way to grow." (Students - FG2)

Evidences: **Value** of the doctorate

Extrinsic value – Without professional value (over-qualification)

"If doctorate holders go to the job market, they will be considered over-qualified." (Students - FG7)

Extrinsic value – With professional value (necessity/requirement)

"Nowadays, everybody has a master degree and thus (…) we observe that many people want to achieve a doctoral degree so they can positively distinguish themselves from their peers in the job market." (Supervisors - FG3)

Extrinsic value – Social & economic level

"People are finishing their courses and are starting to have the idea that the research domain (as professional path) is developing/ growing in Portugal…" (Students - FG6).