

Paradoxes of Doctoral Studies in Education Sciences in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: Adequate staffing of university studies with qualified academics was completed thanks to the reimplementation of three-stage university education during the post-socialist restoration of higher education in the Czech Republic. Thus, the doctoral degree of education has been attained by more than four-fifths of academic staff, with over two-fifths of them being aged 50+. The current course of university studies, including doctoral study programs, is influenced by their focus on educational and research strategy. With regards to the regulations for graduating in doctoral studies, doctoral candidates act as homo oeconomicus following neo-liberal educational policy. The conditions for doctoral studies, namely, those in educational sciences, thus lead to paradoxes caused by the current higher educational policy. The objective of the paper is to analyze the neoliberal set-up of the higher education policy of the Czech Republic in the field of doctoral studies in educational sciences in particular and its possible impacts in the area of labor-market integration of graduates and university training of academics.

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Foucault's theory of governmentality, which is related to the understanding of government regulations and their application as shown by research (Raaper 2016; 2018), can currently be applied to Czech universities, to the academic profession, and possible aspirations of future academics during their doctoral studies (Burford 2018; Evans 2020). The general goal of higher education is to provide students with adequate professional qualifications, prepare them for engagement in research and participating in lifelong learning, helping them contribute to the development of civic society and international, particularly European, cooperation (Burns and Köster 2016). Changes in higher education institutions, structures, and the goals of universities affect the meaning of the quality of the particular discourse, not excluding teaching. Foucault's concept of education stems from its political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledge and power which they carry. "What, after all, is an education system, other than a ritualization of speech, a qualification and a fixing

of the roles for speaking subjects, the constitution of a doctrinal group, however diffuse, a distribution and an appropriation of discourse with its powers and knowledges?" (Foucault 1981:64). Foucault criticizes the concept of university education based on liberalism and neo-liberalism and its American version that highlights the theory of human capital through which economic theory infiltrates university education (Foucault 2008:219).

During the time of socialism, employment at higher education institutions usually required more of a political affiliation than expertise from academics in the Czech Republic (Connelly 2000; Kascak 2017). This is the reason why the higher education policy in educational sciences has been focused on support for the completion and widening of qualifications of academics due to the expansion of doctoral study programs since the 1990s, with the deficit being reduced to a minimum within more than a decade. Thus, over four-fifths of academics have currently attained a doctoral degree. Over two-fifths of them are over 50 years of age (Ministry of

Education, Youth, and Sports 2018). The “hybrid” of neo-liberalization began to assert itself during this period (Kascak 2017:163). The doctoral studies programs in educational sciences became gradually more focused on basic research in 2007, which was related to the governmental support of science and education. Full-time postgraduate students received a scholarship equal to a minimum wage during their studies, and their health insurance and social security contributions were paid up until the age of 26. As of January 20, 2016, the overall number of higher education students was 327,000. There were 24,000 (7%) in doctoral degree programs (Eurydice¹). Longitudinal research data indicate that many students do not even complete their studies. The share of doctoral study graduates in the overall number of graduates is significantly lower in the analyzed period 2001-2016 and varies between 2.5 up to 4.6 %; it was approximately 3.0% in 2016 (Beneš, Kohoutek, and Šmídová 2017:4). The above-mentioned facts take us back to the Durkheimian statement that education is merely the function of society (Durkheim 1922:60), and that the teaching of the discipline is an important part of its existence (Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences 1996; Burawoy 2007). Students and teachers act in a way usual in society and adopt patterns passed on to students. Some of them become their teachers’ colleagues, more or less influenced by the neo-liberal ideology of the established educational policy (cf. Archer 2008:281-283), threatening idealized university values. This contribution focuses on an analysis of the neoliberal structure of the higher education policy of the Czech Republic in the field of doctoral studies, namely, educational sciences, and outlines its possible impacts in the area of higher education.

¹ See: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/home_en. Retrieved December 21, 2020.

The objective of the contribution is to analyze the neo-liberal structure of the higher education policy of the Czech Republic in the field of doctoral studies, namely, those of educational sciences, and its possible impacts in the area of the labor-market integration of graduates and university training of academics. The objective is attained through an analysis of legal documents regulating the conditions of doctoral studies, as well as data on the situation in Czech higher education including the rate of graduates from doctoral studies since 1998, the date of the new Higher Education Act (Czech Republic 2017).

Education for Professions

Goode (1960:902) introduces his paper on emerging professions in medicine, psychology, and sociology with the sentence, “The industrialization of society is a professionalization of society.” This symbolizes the shift from the missions of higher education professions to the production sphere, which changes the optics of higher education.

Modern higher education systems are no longer dominated by the arts and the sciences. These core subjects have been overlaid by layers of professional education—the liberal and technical professions, principally the many branches of engineering, and the technical sciences that accompanied the successive waves of industrialization including the latest wave of the information sciences; the caring professions which were stimulated by the growth of the welfare state; and most recently the new upsurge by the enterprise professions, centred upon business, management, and accountancy. The next wave may well have the environmental sciences at its core. [Gibbons et al. 1994:77]

Economic rationality is based on the incomprehensibility of processes. Homo oeconomicus is the only

island of possible rationality within the economic process, whose uncontrolled character not only does not deny, but also rationalizes the atomic individual such as homo oeconomicus. The world of the economy is thus opaque from its nature (Foucault 2008:282). The influence of the concept of governmentality (Foucault 1988:18-19) can be seen in the discussions based on already established “truth regimes” such as marketing, performance, and standards. By means of these “regimes,” people exercise power and manage themselves and others (Ball 1994; 2016). The discourse of education not only represents and creates reality but also masks the created nature of social reality by denying alternatives (Trowler 1998). Policy-makers can limit the way of thinking about education in general and educational policy in particular, namely, through the language, in which the policies are created. The use of discourse repertoires rooted in entrepreneurship, marketing, and finance is one of the ways of achieving it. Franchising, accumulation of credits, conveying study outputs, skills and competences, skill audits, and others have become part of everyday discourse and structure the way the actors (candidates, students, etc.) think about education (cf. Olssen and Peters 2005). Policy-makers also work, however, on eliminating other possible ways of conceptualization of the character of education (Trowler 1998:132-133).

Along with the expansion of higher education (cf. Trow 2007; OECD 2019), standardization of the structure of study programs takes place. This standardization of study programs has gradually proceeded from lower study levels to the highest ones. There are two aspects of the standardization of study programs. The first aspect is standardization on the level of study grades, while the second one is represented by evaluation of study by means of ECTS. Both the levels are related to internation-

al UNESCO conventions through ISCED and EU through the Bologna Declaration (Štech 2011). Thus, standardized professionalization gradually permeates requirements in higher education. Along with the change in the educational policy of Czechoslovakia and subsequently, of the Czech Republic, the socialist concept of education shifted via emphasizing a wide range of knowledge to the gradually increasing trend consisting of the narrow, pre-graduate professionalization of university students. The above-mentioned trend is understandable in the case of the two first grades of higher education, however, the share of tertiary-educated graduates is below the EU average (OECD 2019). Education at universities in the Czech Republic is no longer understood as sharing of knowledge, development of skills, or personal development, it is instead the training of a labor force providing what is required by the labor market at all levels. Graduates from the first and second grades of full-time and part-time studies head directly for the labor market where supply and demand get balanced according to the prices prevailing on the market (Pabian, Šima, and Kynčilová 2011). The situation is different, however, in the case of doctoral studies. As demonstrated by Mareš (2013), using the case of the doctoral study program in Education, an average of 42 students graduated from this study program in 1999-2011. Most of them were, however, only integrated into the community of scholars with great difficulties, if at all. Interest in doctoral studies in the field of humanities, namely, educational sciences, has been decreasing, and this is why the graduation rate is increasing. Thus, the question is who will teach the next generation if the generation trained in this way provides its labor force where the highest price is obtained, and thus will not enter the academic environment. What is more valuable on the market?

Tensions between Teaching and Research

Due to coping with economic growth and comparability of university production, the objectives of higher education institutions have shifted towards carrying out research, the publication of its outcomes, and application of research outcomes in technologies. Thus, the time dedicated to direct teaching and training of young minds has decreased, as stated by Gibbons (1994:78), Pritchard (2005), and others. "It becomes increasingly difficult to sustain a coherent undergraduate curriculum weakening even further the traditional concern of the universities to provide trained minds" (Gibbons 1994:78). This has brought about, however, the application of technologies in teaching and gained more time for research. Technologies of distance education and textbooks for distance learning, created at the end of the 1970s for updating knowledge in technical professions where changes were quickest, were also applied at universities, even in the humanities and social sciences that are related to the interpretation of opinions, reasoning, and understanding. A possible conflict appears here between conveying single limited knowledge in contrast to knowledge as a capacity for social behavior, as discussed by, for example, Nico Stehr (1994). The question is whether such knowledge conveyed, taught in this way, is not losing its research capacity. Gibbons and colleagues (1994:79) point out that "Teaching and research may occur in different places and be funded from separate sources. Intellectually they may grow apart because technology-assisted teaching needs to be highly structured while research will deal increasingly with indeterminate knowledge."

This idea of Gibbons and colleagues (1994) is already carried out when his two research modes are applied:

- Mode 1: The complex of ideas, methods, values, and norms that has arisen to control the diffusion of the Newtonian model of science to increasing numbers of fields of inquiry and ensure its compliance with what is considered sound scientific practice.
- Mode 2: Knowledge production carried out in the context of the application and marked by: transdisciplinarity; heterogeneity; organizational heterarchy and transience; social accountability and reflexivity; and quality control which emphasizes context- and use-dependence. These are results from the parallel expansion of knowledge producers and users in society.

What should contribute to the reduction of tension between research and teaching at universities is the concept of teaching excellence pointing out the importance of teaching. Its application is merely, however, another tool of industrialization of higher education with the view to economic efficiency and ranking (Skelton 2005), which can result in teachers' negative attitudes towards teaching (Skelton 2013). Teaching consequently becomes more and more measurable thanks to learning outcomes, competencies, and teaching excellence.

Social sciences, including educational sciences, have been disciplines requiring thinking about social phenomena on the basis of acquired knowledge and skills, arranging them in systems, and assuming attitudes on the grounds of them. This is why education in the social sciences requires a great deal of discussion and explanations which cannot be simply tied down in textbooks for distance learning to be used in the profession. Excessive simplification of the social sciences has resulted in models known

in the form of social engineering (Podgórecki, Alexander, and Shields 2014) or praxeology (Kotarbiński 1965). Both these movements can have their positive sides for not very specialized work, however, with the increase in specialization, work requirements become an obstacle rather than a motor, namely, in doctoral studies that are designed as training for routine research, carried out correctly, but still original. In addition, another concealed prerequisite appears: graduates from doctoral study programs frequently find themselves in the position of university teachers. Does the doctoral study curriculum involve specialist knowledge and skills, realization, and presentation of research outcomes, as well as the knowledge and skills needed for transferring, teaching the discipline?

A university graduate is a worker with certain/individualized competencies that are offered on the labor market, and when the labor market begins to use them, their price increases; when they wear off, the price drops. The investment in education is being mentioned in the way that homo oeconomicus, as an enterprise, sells individualized competencies on the labor market (Foucault 2008:226). By comparison, this perspective also views migration as an investment, while an immigrant is an investor. They do business with themselves and make investments to improve their standing (Foucault 2008:230). Individuals are regarded as businesses, that is, investments/investors. Their living conditions are incomes from the capital (Foucault 2008:232-233). In the case of Ph.D. students, do graduates invest in the development of their teaching skills when the neo-liberal state highlights research competencies only?² The

² To maintain objectivity, it is important to state that Schultz (1968:331) describes the three major functions of higher education as discovering talent, instruction, and research in the context of human capital development, that is, one of the categories of neo-liberalism.

paper will present the results of an analysis of doctoral study programs using Foucault's approach to power and economics in education. Does a Ph.D. student act as homo oeconomicus (business) in the development of teaching competencies or research competencies when the neo-liberal state only mentions the research competency?

Doctoral Study Programs in the Educational Sciences

Doctoral study programs are covered by both educational policy (EUA 2007) and specialized studies (Hakkarainen et al. 2016; Walker and Yoon 2017). Doctoral study programs are of varying characters: individual study programs, structured study programs, doctoral schools, or combinations of the above-mentioned, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Organization of doctoral education

Organization of doctoral education	Number of countries	Countries
Individual education only (1)	5	Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Malta, Montenegro
Structured programs only (2)	4	Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, Spain
Doctoral/graduate research schools only (3)	3	France, Liechtenstein, Turkey
Mixed (1) and (2)	12	Andorra, Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Czech Republic, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovak Republic
Mixed (2) and (3)	2	Italy, Norway
Mixed (1) and (3)	2	Belgium-Wallonia, Netherlands
Mixed (1), (2), and (3)	9	Albania, Armenia, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, and Scotland

Source: EUA (2007:9).

The Czech Republic opts for structured study programs, as well as individual study plans for students. There is still the question as to which approach to doctoral studies is more advantageous. The answer is influenced by a range of variables, ranging from the field of study, individual or team research (Hakkarainen et al. 2016), up to the form of study (full-time or part-time).

In the case of study programs in the field of educational sciences, it is debatable to what extent it is possible to standardize particular stages of the study. The standardization of study programs in the field of teaching is frequently limited at the national level, and as ushered in by Durkheim's (1922:60) statement that education is a function of society, currently of the state of neo-liberal constituted society; from this perspective, teaching or special pedagogy is frequently a profession regulated by the state at the two first levels of university study, for example, in the Czech Republic. The situation is different in other study programs in the field of educational sciences apart from teaching and special pedagogy that are usually of an academic character or can be found at the third level of university study.

Paradoxes Produced by the State's Neo-liberal Educational Policy at the Level of Doctoral Studies: The Case of Educational Sciences in the Czech Republic

"Doctoral degree programs are aimed at scientific research and independent creative activities in the area of research or development, or independent theoretical and creative activities in the area of the fine arts" (Czech Republic, Higher Education Act 2017), and their contents are focused primarily on training of scientists and researchers. The following parts of the paper present the results of an analy-

sis of government regulations (Government of the Czech Republic 2016a; 2016b; Czech Republic 2017), annual reports on Czech higher education (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports 2018), OECD reports (2019), as well as an analysis of the curriculum of doctoral study programs in the field of educational sciences from all the Czech public universities providing these study programs in 2018. The results have led to the formulation of the following three paradoxes.

Paradox 1

The character of an academic doctoral study program; or the professional version of a doctoral program?

- A. The concept of the third grade of Ph.D. university study is only academic, there is no professional version.
- B. A special feature in the Czech Republic is the so-called advanced Master's degree, rooted in tradition and having no qualification significance for the labor market and higher education institutions.
- C. The design of the accreditation of doctoral study programs should be thematically aimed at the area of application (Government of the Czech Republic 2016b). Academic doctoral study programs are usually focused on basic, not applied research.

The current strategy of educational policy introduces standardization of academic study programs aimed at research and innovation, typical of the technical and natural sciences. The question is how this standardization can benefit the social sciences,

educational sciences, and not result in social engineering or praxeology.

Paradox 2

Training of university teachers who are holders of at least the doctoral degree of education.

- A. The doctoral study, defined by the Higher Education Act, is aimed at training of researchers, not that of university teachers. The share of courses focused on teaching skills is minimal or none in the study plans of doctoral study programs.
- B. University wages of graduates from doctoral study programs do not correspond with the length of study. If candidates act as homo oeconomicus in the sense of the neo-liberal perspective, they do not choose doctoral studies as the next stage in their life career.
- C. Graduates from doctoral study programs at universities where research is funded with grants is carried out to participate more in research and minimize their share in teaching.
- D. Science and research in the Czech Republic are carried out within the post-socialist model of the Academy of Sciences vs. universities. Candidates primarily interested in science and research aim at research organizations of the Academy of Science type.

Historically, there are various concepts of competencies of academic staff at universities. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1970) writes about the interconnection between research and teaching at German universities. Henry Newman (1886) states in the environment of the UK that there are two methods of

education at universities: one is philosophical, the second is mechanical; the former deals with general thoughts, while the latter is concerned with what is particular and outer. Karl Jaspers (1959) identifies three functions of higher education institutions in Germany in the second half of the twentieth century, namely, research, education, and teaching, and states that not everybody has to be capable of teaching, even though one is an excellent researcher. Skelton (2012) distinguishes between “teachers,” “mixed professionals,” and “teaching scientists” in this context. Doctoral study programs in the Czech Republic train, however, only for science and research.

Paradox 3

The system of study program accreditation at Czech universities permits the guarantee of Bachelor study programs and their core courses by Ph.D. bearers.

- A. Graduates from doctoral study programs do not have courses focused on teaching a specialization at universities in their study plans, they are specialists in a branch of science.
- B. Evaluation of a doctoral study program accreditation does not explicitly follow the structure of the study program for the training of teaching, only for research.
- C. The accreditation system requires and follows teachers’ scientific and research competencies, not teaching competencies.

In the Czech Republic, doctoral study programs provide their graduates with opportunities to guarantee courses in study programs and entire study programs at the Bachelor’s level of study together

with publication activities available after graduation from their studies. Despite not acquiring competencies for preparation of lessons, for designing study programs, and evaluation of teaching, they are adequately prepared in all these fields according to the Higher Education Act.

Discussion and Conclusion

There have been a number of changes in higher education policy in the Czech Republic since 2016, including orientation of doctoral studies in accordance with the National Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization of the Czech Republic (National RIS3 Strategy) of the Ministry of Industry and Trade (Government of the Czech Republic 2016b). The said document directly interconnects doctoral studies with economic impact. Doctoral studies should introduce innovations into the industry, similarly to other countries (Torka 2018). Thus, the question arises as to what the impact of this trend can be on doctoral studies in the field of educational sciences. The new concept of doctoral studies in educational sciences is forced to be aimed, not at understanding the education phenomena, but their changes (Baltodano 2012), innovation, and commercial application, similarly to other doctoral studies (Hancock, Hughes, and Walsh 2017). In some other countries, professional doctorates are discussed in this context (Altbach 2007), which is not the case in the Czech Republic. There are also changes in the set-up of accreditation conditions of study programs at higher education institutions in relation to Government Regulation No. 274/2016 Coll., of August 24, 2016, on standards for accreditation in higher education (Government of the Czech Republic 2016a), allowing the guaranteeing of Bachelor study programs by doctoral study programs graduates and not more experienced academics.

Preparation of doctoral study program accreditation is currently regulated by the National Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization of the Czech Republic (Government of the Czech Republic 2016b), currently administered by the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic. Thus, the neo-liberal logic directly penetrates “bodies of academics” (Foucault 2008) and circulates through academic spaces to and fro and among them. New opportunities open up for Ph.D. program graduates if they complete their studies.

The paper has pointed out the paradoxes in the diverse concepts of Czech educational policy, namely, to prepare researchers within doctoral study programs for basic and applied research, as opposed to establishing expectations laid on these graduates to guarantee bachelor study programs without a deliberately developed essential competence to teach.

If we accept the thesis formulated by Richard Pratte (1987:469) that “the exclusive function of the school is service to the society,” similar to the hundred year older idea by Émile Durkheim quoted in the introduction, doctoral study programs will keep training graduates for science, research, development, and innovations on condition that they enter these study programs with this objective in the field of educational sciences. The graduates will enter the labor market and some of them may actually find employment in science and research. As Foucault states, the market thus becomes some kind of place of truth where the governmental practice is verified and disproven and where, in general, “the real value of things is set.” Political economics becomes the central tool of liberalism, or—in Foucault’s words—“liberal governmental practice” consuming freedom (cf. Foucault 2008:63). Specifically, graduates from doctoral study programs in

the field of educational sciences, who do not find employment there due to the established governmental practice heading towards the National Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization of the Czech Republic (Government of the Czech Republic 2016b), may end up at universities, but without competencies for teaching and designing study programs. With regard to the governmental regulation on accreditations, they will not be interested in guaranteeing study programs, but will engage in research exclusively. Or they may

not be interested in doctoral studies at all. How will graduates from a doctoral study program in educational sciences act as homo oeconomicus?

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