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International Dimensions of Doctoral Students' Professional Socialization in Hungary

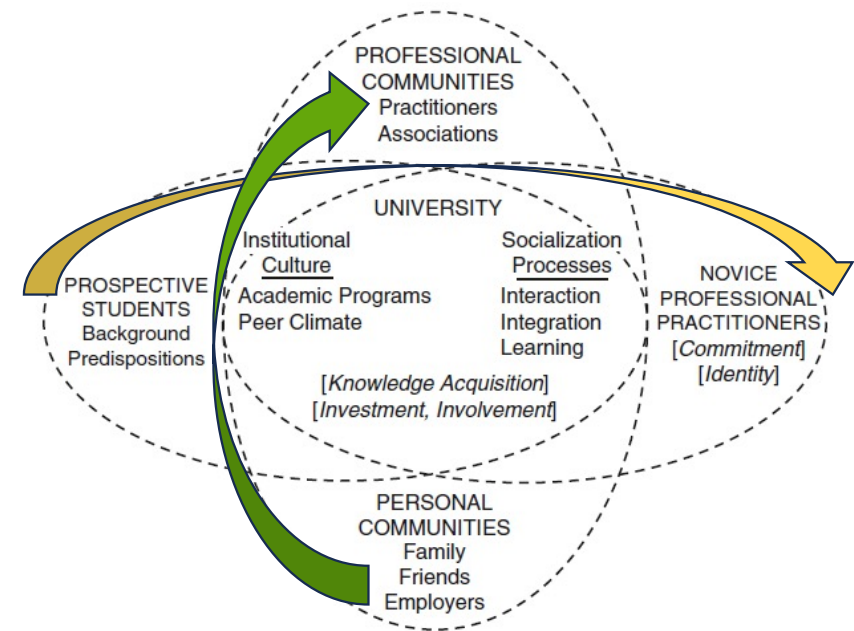
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DOC
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Concept

- Symbolic interactionist perspective
 - Active participation in
 - Becoming part of the professional community (Shahr et al., 2019)
 - Constructing professional identity (Gardner & Doore, 2020)
 - Self-development process (Platow, 2012)
- Fluid phenomenon (Weidman et al. 2001, Weidman 2020)



Eu level policy recommendations for the doctoral training

Saltzburg principles (2005, 2010)

- Young professionals (EUA, 2005)
- Appropriate and sustainable funding (EUA, 2010)

Core principles of innovative doctoral training (European Commission, 2011)

- Attractive institutional environment
- Intersectorial approaches
- International networking and transferable skills training

Transparent quality assurance processes (League of European Research Universities, Bogle et al., 2016)

- Integrity in institutional research cultures to lower stress



International mobility in doctoral education

Institution: Diversity, academic reputation (Shen et al., 2022)

Individual: Opportunities for accessing quality education

- Financial difficulties (Laufer, 2018)
- Lack of institutional transparency (Rodriguez et al., 2024)
- Cultural exclusion (Rodriguez et al., 2024)

Scholarship programmes and international mobility

- International students in doctoral education OECD 25%, Hungary 30% (OECD, 2025, p.6)

Impact on individuals

- Mobility as a form of capital (Schäfer, 2020)
- Financial constraints and isolation (López-Duarte et al., 2022)
- Academic isolation and inadequacy (Abdelghaffar & Eid, 2025)



Cultural barriers and isolation

Challenges for (1) minority, (2) first-generation and (3) international doctoral students

- impostor phenomenon (Wallace, 2022)
- Forming friendships (Rodriguez et al, 2024)
- Cultural misunderstandings (Bash, 2009), communication fatigue (Jon, 2013)
- Social isolation (Rodriguez et al., 2024)
- Racist, sexist and classist microaggressions (Ramirez, 2014)

➤ delay in students' socialization to academic norms (Le & Gardner, 2010).

Challenges for international doctoral students

- Separation of domestic and international groups (Arkoudis et al., 2013)
- Social othering (Laufer, 2018)
- Fatigue of cross-cultural communication and using a foreign language (Brown and Richards, 2012).

Cultural barriers and isolation

Coping strategies

- Cosmopolitan orientation (Bilecen, 2013)
- Complex identities (Brazill, 2022)
- Support groups (Brown & Richards, 2012)

Perceived benefits

- doctoral studies are seen as life-changing (Evans & Stevenson, 2011)
- studying abroad positively impacts
 - academic satisfaction (Mihut, 2022)
 - college completion rates (Ogden et al. 2023)

Career plans and employability of doctoral students

Role of mobility in career planning

- Mobility and international experiences are core for a research career (Leak et al., 2018)
- Geographic location and faculty composition are associated with career choices (Kim et al, 2020)
- International experiences strengthen employability dimensions (Patrício & Santos, 2019)



Research goal & questions

Goal

- To identify factors that are perceived by doctoral students as impactful when thinking about the international dimensions of their doctoral journey

Research questions

- RQ1: How are international dimensions present in the professional socialization of doctoral students studying in Hungary?
- RQ2: How do domestic and international doctoral students studying in Hungary shape their career plans?

Research structure, recruitment

- Exploratory sequential mixed methods design => analysis of the qualitative part
- Semi-structured interviews (2023-2025), 53 respondents
- 18 universities (30 universities offering international programs / 173 doctoral programs)
- Hybrid thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006)
=> helps voicing underrepresented groups (Griffin & al. 2020)

Group	Total N	Gender (M/F)	Type (2+2 / 3+)	Years since starting the doctoral studies (1st–7th yr)
Hungary	18	9/9	15 / 3	1st (3), 3rd (2), 4th (8), 5th (1), 6th (1), PhD (3)
Nigeria	9	8/1	9/0	2nd (3), 3rd (3), 4th (1), 5th (2)
China	10	4/6	10/0	1st (2), 2nd (2), 4th (3), 5th (1)
South-East Asia	16	6/10	16 / 0	1st (2), 2nd (6), 3rd (3), 4th (6),

Results: Scholarship programmes and international mobility

- Scholarships = intersection of opportunity and uncertainty

Pathway to

- international mobility
- upwards social advancement
- Full time studies
- Europe

Exposure to

- structural inequalities to academic participation
- symbolic promise of a “full scholarship”
- supplementary work, that is a source of stress and low status

*“The scholarship gave me social confidence... Without it, I may not even be able to afford a cup of coffee”
(Female from China, 4th year, CSC and SH holder)*

*“In Hungary, we receive monthly only €400, but if compared to Austria... they pay €2800 per month. [...] my supervisor offered the position for me and pays salary monthly, because he knows that the scholarship is not high enough to live on.”
(Male from Vietnam, 2nd year, SH holder)*

Results: Cultural barriers and isolation

- Separate programs
- Using English as the language of instruction
 - Lack of terminology
 - Frustrating linguistic barriers

*"They separated the programs. We don't have the chance to interact with local people. I don't think it is good. It is like segregation."
(Female from Myanmar, 2nd year, SH holder)*

⇒ new groups and new professional ties

- Collaborations
- Conferences
- Online platforms

*"I just joined in one research group at our university... we can talk about some topics together and just exchange the knowledge together."
(Female from China, 2nd year, self-funded)*

Results: Isolation

- The host country's environment remains distant
- Unable to build relationships
- Professional relationships do not turn into friendships

*"Suicide has a culture. What I'm doing now... like what is a PhD? You are like a homeless in Europe, something like that."
(Female from Laos, 4th year, SH holder)*

*"...in the third and now in this fourth year, I increasingly feel that I have been left alone in this process. [...] very often I felt that I was discussing things with myself"
(Female from Hungary, 4th year, Hungarian state scholarship holder)*

Results: Career plans and cross-sector connections

- Academic careers
- Intersectoral career aspirations
- Non-academic careers

"Professors back in my country, while they are still in the academic field, [...] they became ministers, they became a head of parastatals and became executive directors in most of the government agencies."
(Male from Nigeria, 2nd year, SCYP holder)

"Over the next ten years, I can build up some experience, make connections, and maybe save some money. Then, after those ten years, I want to have the freedom to choose the job or career that I truly want in my heart—even if it's not related to academia at all."
(Female from China, 4th year, partial CSC and SH holder)

"Honestly, what I see is that the academic career path is pretty full of obstacles for me [...] Right now, I just want something a bit more stable, something that gives me a sense of security" (Male from Hungary, 1st year, Hungarian state scholarship holder)

Results: The role of international exposure in doctoral students' employability



- Social capital
- Communication skills
- Access to advanced research infrastructure
- Networking

➤ Scientific reputation and employability

*"It is difficult to use China's super-computer, but here, the accessibility is much better... Then we had a research group in Dublin, Ireland... We would go to Ireland regularly to discuss some cooperation with them."
(Male from China, 4th year, CSC and SH holder)*

*"Right now, I'm involved in a European Union project. As part of this, I spent three months in Spain and in Parma. The idea is to build up research collaborations through these kinds of exchanges."
(Male from Hungary, 4th year, Hungarian state scholarship holder)*

Conclusion - Scholarship

- Scholarships are important opportunities
- Relationship between scholarship opportunities and the experiences of doctoral students is a complex domain.
 - A significant gap between what a “full scholarship” for doctoral studies means and how is it interpreted by students before the mobility.
 - International students often struggle due to the lack of information about the education system of the host country.

Conclusion – Cultural challenges

- Separation of programs => perceived segregation
- Diversity in the perception of academic standards (referencing practices and research procedures)
- Isolation
- Feelings of anxiety, depression due to language barriers, separation from family, loneliness

=> **coping strategies:** community formation & professional identity development

Conclusion – Career plans and cross sector connections

- Complex process, influenced by
 - academic experiences,
 - personal aspirations,
 - labour market realities
 - and international exposure.
- Academia is seen as one of several possible career paths.
- Working in academia is seen as a good opportunity for multi-sector careers either in parallel or consecutively.
- International mobility experiences are seen as core competences

Conclusion – Policy implementation gaps

- The results suggest that policy recommendations are not implemented systematically (EC, EUA, LERU)
 - Appropriate and sustainable funding
 - Transparent supervision and assessment protocols
 - Transferable skill development
 - Intersectoral and international mobility

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