

# CAN YOU CHANGE DOCTORAL EDUCATION? SOME RESULTS FROM THE FIELD

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## GOAL OF THE PRESENTATION

- „The change of doctoral education” – sounds very nice, doesn't it?
- We have a lot of excellent documents, principles, charters, policies, initiatives, funding schemes etc.
- But – what is the „reality” of change on universities?
- How is the change done and does it succeed?
- Short answer – it is not that simple as it seems

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## BACKGROUND

- Part of doctoral research
- Four universities examined – **University of Vienna**, Austria, **University of Montenegro**, Montenegro; **University of Ljubljana**, Slovenia, **Universidade NOVA de Lisboa**, Portugal
- Four case studies, based on the interviews with the leaders of change – mainly ex-rectors, vice-rectors, and heads of doctoral schools
- What we looked for – *who, why and how* were the changes conducted
- In total, 16 semi-structured interviews were done in 2017-2018
- Limited scope (only continental universities), limited generalization of the results, and the subjectivity of the interviewees/interviewer

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## WHAT DID WE FIND?

- **Why did the changes start?**
  - Several reasons for change – quality, prestige (national and international), national competitiveness, harmonization with Bologna...
  - In all cases, the Bologna process was the catalyst for changes:
 

*„We did not have that much choice...I mean, there was the task of changing to the Bologna structure” (University of Vienna)*
  - **BUT** – changes were already happening!
  - Also: role of the reforms in the:
    - internal reorganization of the universities and
    - in strengthening the integration of the university:

*„One of the ideas was how to somehow disrupt that balance of power, to take some things out of the hands of faculties and move them to the centre. This was also done with the doctoral studies.” (University of Montenegro)*

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## WHAT DID WE FIND?

### •Who started the changes?

- Again, combination of internal and external agents
- Small team of dedicated people
- Core group - „enlightened” individuals with rich international experience and a vision of change:

*„These were the people that were not paranoid [Sic!], this is very important, and these people decided that we should link and make a [doctoral] programme.” (University of Ljubljana)*

- Some were members of university associations and were „practicing what they preached”
  - In all cases → top-down approach, with different level of participation and involvement
- „If you are successful and you can convince a group of professors that it is fine, then it is like an avalanche, it's a self-feeding process. And at the end of that process, only the very conservative members of the university remain.” (University of Vienna)*

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## WHAT DID WE FIND?

### •Who started the changes (continued)?

- Role of international organizations – for example, the EUA-CDE
- Role of the ministry
- Role of professionals in doctoral education:

*„One thing without which I think there would be nothing, is the excellent support to the rectorate. So, that you have a team.... whoever comes, goes, comes back, in the doctor's office, the head [of doctoral school]... I would die without a good doctor's service, nothing would have happened. They are a repository of knowledge... You must emphasize that, it succeeds or fails on the service „(University of Ljubljana)*

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## WHAT DID WE FIND?

### •How did the changes unfold?

- Each university had its own, specific approach, depending on the context, history, tradition, culture....
- Four types of change approach, based on the scope, duration, impact and the level of involvement

Similarities	Differences
Reasons for change	Scope of changes
Increase of quality	Speed and duration of changes
Reduction and consolidation of doctoral programmes	Level of involvement
Increase of integration	Level of resistance
New PhD culture	Main change methods

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## WHAT DID WE FIND?

### •What were the obstacles?

- Some obstacles were expected - the organizational inertia, conservatism, scepticism, „academic vanity”

*„The university is a conservative environment with great inertia, it is difficult to move it, everything that comes from the rector is perceived as an imposition and a strike against the freedom of the professor, and the reforms are difficult.” (University of Montenegro)*

- But, there were some that were surprising – for example the students, or the intervention of political sphere in changes:

*„It is at this political level, the differences in terms of political platforms, political and social divisions, and the struggle for goals that do not necessarily imply the dominant interests of the university.” (University of Montenegro)*

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## WHAT DID WE FIND?

### •What were the obstacles (continued)?

- In some cases, even the public opinion had its influence on the change agents:  
*„And despite that, we had the same politicization of the public as if we did not say anything, as if we had a deaf conversation, totally, like we never did anything, so... despite all that we still had this same problem in public.” (University of Montenegro)*
- Even more, the efforts to inform and involve did not always produce expected results – compromises had to be made
- Dangers of „backfiring”, resetting of the system, and return to the earlier state

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## WHAT DID WE FIND?

### •What were the results?

- The changes were not bottom-up, although some examples were used as models
- The universities are hierarchical organizations, and are used to change from the top
- At the same time, members of the university react if their opinion is not heard
- The defining features of the university and its culture – the autonomy - played a huge role as the source of resistance
- Paradoxical situation – changes can only come from the top, but the academic community must be consulted and informed

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Case	Typology name	Scope	Goals	Duration	Involvement and participation	Resistance	Key features
Unilj	Gradual	Broad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement of international position, interdisciplinarity and research excellence</li> <li>consolidation and alignment of programmes</li> <li>integration and centralization of doctoral education</li> </ul>	Very long	Limited	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incremental and minimal changes which accumulated during the prolonged period</li> <li>relying on legal and administrative framework and support (e.g. Senate)</li> </ul>
NOVA	Non-interfering	Limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consolidation and alignment of programmes, without the centralization</li> <li>increase of skills of and improve the collaboration between academic units</li> </ul>	Long (two phases)	Broad	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"added value" to doctoral education</li> <li>absence of formal and official reforms</li> <li>limited normative and prescribed elements</li> <li>not interfering with the internal matters of the academic units</li> <li>relying on the "carrot and stick" methods of persuasion</li> </ul>
UniVie	Avalanche	Very broad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improvement of international position of the university and its research excellence</li> <li>reduction of the number of programmes</li> <li>centralization and integration of doctoral education</li> </ul>	Short	Broad	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>deep structural changes going with the reform</li> <li>wide-spread mobilization or resources and personnel</li> <li>top-down approach</li> <li>political backing</li> </ul>
UMN	Step-by-step	Very broad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improvement of quality and research excellence</li> <li>complete restructuring of doctoral education</li> <li>strengthening the integration of the university</li> </ul>	Short	Broad	Very high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>wide-spread mobilization or resources and personnel</li> <li>planned approach in several steps</li> <li>deep structural changes which follow the reform</li> <li>top-down approach</li> <li>political backing of the reforms</li> <li>relying on external authority</li> </ul>

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## IMPLICATIONS FOR MASTERCLASS

- Are all universities ready for change?
- Can the model of doctoral school be used for all universities?
- Can we change the doctoral education if we don't change the whole university?
- Can we change the doctoral education if we don't change the national higher education?

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## IMPLICATIONS FOR MASTERCLASS (CONTINUED)

- If incremental change is the goal, then *probably* yes.
- If radical change is the goal, then *probably* not! Why?

**The changes in doctoral education were encouraged and supported by the broader changes in the international and national higher education system**

- What are the conditions for change right now?
- If the resistance is too high – should you push it?
- What will happen once the „enlightened people” leave or are replaced?

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## IMPLICATIONS FOR MASTERCLASS (CONTINUED)

- Is it enough to have a doctoral school and everything else will follow?
- „Loose-coupling” and „decoupling”
- You can have doctoral school and still have a lousy doctoral education!
- How do we know that the reforms have improved the situation?

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## WHAT TO DO?

- Before you start doing anything, ask yourself this:
  - Is the national context of my university favourable for change?
  - Do I have the backup and support of the key players inside and outside of the university (including political)
  - How is the situation in the neighbourhood? What are the global trends in doctoral education?
  - Argumentation and „carrot and stick” work well, but are not guarantee of success!

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## WHAT TO DO?

- What is the **culture** of my university - is my university a loose (con)federation of very different, and often conflicting constituents, or a tight-knit community?

*„[Understand] what resources you have, what is the culture of university, I mean, just go deep, deep, kind of anthropologic work, go deep into the culture of university, and then do what you can with the resources you have.” (NOVA)*

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## WHAT TO DO?

- After you have answered these question, think about the different doctoral education models/schools and how to integrate them into your institution
- And the last quote:

*„The best students in the competition always come from a certain school, no matter what the curriculum is. They always come from a certain school. A certain professor. So, it all comes down to the professor. So, all our reforms, which we do, and we have the delusion that some things are going to go so much better, that they're going to change something. But essentially, no reform ever went to the individual, the professor.” (University of Montenegro)*

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Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

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