



DOCTORAL EDUCATION: AN ACADEMIC AND LABOR MARKET “PLUS”? AN ANALYSIS USING THE “THEORY OF THE THREE DIMENSIONAL SPIRAL OF SENSE”

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ABSTRACT

Our research dealt with PhD graduates and PhD students from different courses of study at the National University of Cuyo (UNCuyo, Argentina) and CNAM (France) (Social and Human Sciences, 2005-2015). The research model included socio-cultural, psycho-social, organizational and structural factors. Our objectives were: a) to analyze the value that PhD graduates give to doctoral education within a context of diploma devaluation and the massification of higher education; b) to observe if doctoral programs still provide an academic and labor market “plus” under current market conditions; c) to observe the effects that field choice has on Professional Satisfaction; d) to observe what role expectations/aspirations have in relation to valuing the market; e) to understand how Status Inconsistencies act on experiences and responses (micro level); f) to identify differences in representations according to academic fields and macrosocial contexts. The original approach was macro-micro-meso-macro (Aparicio 2015 a and b)[1][2]. The methodology used was in part quantitative (statistical analysis), though mainly qualitative (interviews, hierarchical evocations). This last technique allowed us to observe which aspects for each node – University, PhD degree, labor market, future expectations, etc. – were given priority for each issue, thus constituting the core of the representation, and which were peripheral. Our findings show the value given to doctoral education (in and of itself) and as relates to market offers according to institutional/disciplinary fields (meso level); macro-social context, with its “plafond effects,” and personal/professional expectations (micro level). The three levels feed each other.

Keywords: Academic Education, Market, Expectations, Satisfaction, Status Inconsistency.

1. Introduction:

This study is part of ongoing work concerning the professional performance of different populations (university graduates, drop-outs, students who take longer to complete their studies, teachers, etc.), over the 20 years that different courses of study have existed at the National University of Cuyo (UNCuyo). Comparative studies are then carried out at French institutions which offer the same type of academic programs and whose populations are socio-demographically similar to those of the UNCuyo. The latest research has been carried out on populations of scientists, educators (high school and university level) and PhDs.

The general objective was to observe what value these populations give to a diploma of the highest level, considered in and of itself and as relates to the current conditions and possibilities that the labor market offers, as well as to understand the expectations that these populations hold under current market conditions (Olivier, López, Joseph and Ryk, 2008) [3]. These groups display problems not only as regards insertion into the workplace, but also as regards permanence and promotion (Dubar, 2000)[4]; problems relating to the institutional education received not always being renewed; problems inside professional organizations (atmosphere/wellbeing/satisfaction; required social, procedural and transversal competencies in addition to disciplinary knowledge provided by the university); the *quasi* absence of education in the skills necessary for practice and negotiation, or “meta-competencies” – this absence being more or less marked depending on macro and disciplinary/institutional contexts –; among others. Professionalization becomes a necessity no matter the meso, organizational or macro context.

Other objectives were defined as *supra*.

According to these objectives, we proceed with our analysis along five lines.

Line 1: The doctorate as “education” and as a gateway to better labor market insertion.

Here we analyze the value of a PhD as education “in and of itself” and as it relates to the market; more specifically, as it relates to possibilities for labor market insertion, but also to continuing education and professional development, which could result in greater professional mobility. Despite the devaluation of their diplomas and difficulties faced, most continue to consider the doctorate as a “plus” (Giret, 2003 [5]; Giret, Moullet and Thomas, 2003[6]; Mansuy, 2004 [7]; Calmand and Haller, 2008[8]).

For Argentine PhDs, the doctorate is both highly valued and highly recognized in the labor market. Seventy percent of those who completed a PhD in Education, to name one example, experienced upward mobility during the time period considered (2005-2015). PhDs in Sociology were the exception in both countries. Their insertion into the labor market is difficult while their rejection of the market is also notable. Many times their expressions refer to anti-liberal ideologies. The words they use speak for themselves, “demands”, “disadvantages”, “difficult”, “slavery”, “injustice” “production”, “uncomfortable climate” “market”, “just work”, “harsh”, “schedule”, “inflexibility”, “little flexibility”, “lack of true leadership”, “lack of compassionate bosses”, and “complex world”, in addition to “ideology”, “politics”, “alignment”, “individualism”, “selection with long and unfair recruitment processes”, “political game”, “internal bickering”, “power”, “crisis”, “deception”, “in egalitarian”, and “demanding with no offers

for training in return with respect to work hours". Finally, they use the expressions "a world that focuses only on efficiency and effectiveness", "man means nothing", "submission", "liberal rules", and "capital in operation" (Aparicio, 2016 c and d) [9] [10].

Those belonging to fields such as Management have a more positive view of the labor market. They have been trained to be part of this market and expect more for their futures, showing optimism regarding work environment, the climate or atmosphere in which they work, and their insertion into this world (which is quite different from the insertion of those working in other areas studied). Their satisfaction is higher, globally speaking. Among their defining words, we find: "project", "quality", "motivation", "important world", "creation", "professional journey", "election", "important mastering in life", "career", and "future" (Ibid.).

Line 2: The doctorate and field choice (Borras, Legay and Romani, 2008 [11]).

We analyze PhD responses, more or less negative according to disciplinary field (Aparicio and Cros, 2015d [12]).

To summarize: Those studying Administration and who generally work in the private sector (or have the opportunity to work in the private sector) are optimistic. Whereas those working in the scientific sector or as university professors see their professional futures with many more limitations than and much more distant from their expectations. Those who opted for reorientations are, in the end, more optimistic. These reorientations are not interpreted as frustrations but rather as redirectioning towards desired life work (Borras, Legay and Romani, 2008 [11]).

Line 3: Addresses the influences that Aspirations/Expectations have on these representations or world views. Indeed there is greater discouragement among those who see doctoral education as a way to improve job prospects, to obtain a more independent career with the possibility for autonomous decision-making and generally to improve their quality of life. In line with these expectations, those in the field of Management/Administration are more satisfied, have higher salaries and more opportunities for mobility (horizontal or vertical) (Dupray, 2005 [14]; Dupray and Moullet, 2004 [15]; Aparicio and Cros, 2015d [12]).

Line 4: Expectation/Identity Strategy Relationship: High expectations regarding a doctorate's benefits, added to relatively low levels of personal fulfillment and hierarchical positioning in the workplace, result in destroyed professional identities (Expectancy-Value Theory, Feather and Davenport, 1981[16]; Aparicio, 2015a [1]; Silva and Aparicio, 2015[17]). Professional identity, as has been supported by various articles (2014-2016), emerges from the joining of a personal/familial history or biography with the relational dimension, a dimension in which recognition of the "other" plays a key role (Dubar, 2000 [4]). This allows the PhD to enter and remain in the labor market and to experience mobility. Nevertheless, problems with evaluation, criteria considered for promotion, and company norms valued, among other aspects, tend to interfere, going against professional development. It is in this moment that each individual activates his or her "identity strategies" to cope with the situation (Goffman, 1963 [18]). Lack of

recognition appears as a generalized malady in the professional world (though it is even more marked among French PhDs).

Line 5: Status inconsistency and its effects: Here we take up findings made during the last century in the US (Hollinshead, Ellis and Kirbb,1954 [19], Benoit-Smullyan, 1969 [20]; Burke, 1965 [21]; Jackson, 1962[22]) which the author has been working on since the 1990s with university graduates (Aparicio, 2000 [23]). Explained briefly, having a high level of academic education and a professional position not always in line with that level causes uneven status. This inconsistency leads to varied responses both in terms of intropunitiveness (blaming oneself for a lack of professional achievement) and extrapunitiveness (blaming structures, companies, the State, etc. for the situation). On the one hand, we observe sadness and frustration. On the other, generalized non-conformist responses and rebellion. The consequences of this situation are not minor, neither for the organizations nor for the countries as a whole. We see the three levels of the author's theory – micro, meso and macro – interacting with spiraling dialectical effects, both positive and negative (Aparicio, 2007 [24], 2015a [1]).

1.1. Objectives

Our objectives were: a) to analyze the value that PhD graduates give to doctoral education within a context of diploma devaluation and the massification of higher education; b) to observe if doctoral programs still provide an academic and labor market "plus" under current market conditions; c) to observe the effects that field choice has on Professional Satisfaction; d) to observe what role expectations/aspirations have in relation to valuing the market; e) to understand how Status Inconsistencies act on experiences and responses (micro level); f) to identify differences in representations according to academic fields and macrosocial contexts.

1.2. Core questions of this research

What do students expect as regards their PhD training? Do they hope that doctoral education will improve their possibilities for workplace insertion, permanence and promotion within the context of diploma devaluation on the one hand and growing competition and globalization on the other? How are their expectations related to feelings of Wellbeing or Satisfaction in the labor world? Are there disciplinary and institutional differences in levels of personal/professional achievement? Does the gap between the level of education and the level of professional position in terms of associated aspects (risks, salary, etc.) result in responses of non-conformism or unrest? Do these individuals display responses of fragilized identities, lowered expectations or the use of identify strategies to cope with their respective situations? Who do they blame: themselves or the current market and policies? Which aspects constitute the most notable differences between the groups of French and Argentine PhDs?

2. Materials and Methods

A quantitative-qualitative method was applied. This study refers only to the qualitative method.

Participants: PhDs in Education and Social Sciences at the National University of Cuyo (2005-2009) (UNCuyo), and doctoral students in Adult Education, Sociology and Management at CNAM (National Conservatory of Arts and

Crafts) (France). Two research laboratories took part in this work. Different profiles are expected according to the work/professional contexts in which each group is situated.

Materials: Quantitative and qualitative techniques were applied. We also used hierarchical evocation and interviews. Hierarchical evocation allowed us to identify which aspects of doctoral representations related to each node studied (qualitative line) were most important and which were of secondary importance. The resulting categories are presented in tables and figures which, due to questions of brevity, are not able to be included here (Aparicio, 2009 [25], Award from the City of Paris; Aparicio and Cros, 2015d [12]).

3. Results and Discussion

Our research findings are presented in two sections: quantitative (descriptive, correlational and explanatory) and qualitative. As we could observe, no obvious differences are noted between the French and Argentine groups.

Taking into account these diverse lines, doctoral education still appears to be a “plus,” despite the devaluation of diplomas which international literature frequently mentions. At the subjective level, PhDs are not always satisfied, this depending on their field and also on the organization where they work and the recognition that they do or do not receive. All of these factors help to constitute professional identity, or its rupture, leading PhDs to seek out other job opportunities on occasion. In other words, they use identity strategies to cope with the objective difficulties of the labor market (tiring situations) and with their workplace experiences.

In terms of expectations, comparatively, the Argentine group has higher expectations as regards the degree. The “plafond” effect, evident in various developed countries, also appears in our research, as was to be expected due to PhD saturation.

As regards status inconsistency and its effects, though not analyzed directly, it emerges indirectly in these groups of PhDs: if they are satisfied, they desire more. They do not observe a direct relationship between education and workplace positioning.

At the theoretical level, this research allowed us to: a) portray the differences and similarities between both groups of PhDs recently inserted into the professional field, and b) to not only explain but to comprehend the “reasons” for PhDs’ representations and world views, the aspects given priority, the educational factors demanded, and their representation of the market which, though tainted by ideology, allows for a vision of elements needing improvement. These elements are factors that limit professional, organizational and, in the long term, national development.

At the applied level: those in charge of the education field and labor markets rely on empirical elements which allow for the introduction of improvements where the system presents the broadest gaps.

1) The doctorate constitutes a “plus” from the educational point of view, differentiating it from undergraduate education in terms of knowledge base and personal achievement. Our findings coincide with those of Calmand and Haller, 2008 [8]; Aparicio and Cros, 2015d [12], Aparicio, 2014 [26]).

2) This “plus” is diminished when the “market” factor is taken into account and conditions of daily practice, levels of satisfaction and positioning (generally relatively low, particularly when working for the State) are valued. In the State sector there exist quotas that limit ascension and salaries depend on an occupational hierarchy and not on competencies (Guégnard, Calmand, Giret and Paul, 2008 [27]). Historically, it has been difficult to progress in this sector because of limits imposed by the system and because an individual’s efforts, continuing education, and commitment, among other aspects, are not given a central role.

3) The level of satisfaction which the doctorate represents is associated with the level of expectations (Expectancy-Value Theory). More precisely, the desire to complete a doctorate – the highest academic level in existence in many countries – is an indicator of Educational-Professional Aspirations (Aparicio, 1994 [28], 2000 [29], 2003 [30]). In this case, we may suppose that a relatively high level of aspirations was present. Nevertheless, our findings also touch on structural unemployment or sub-employment (greater in some fields) and demonstrate high demands for both insertion and permanence, and more so for professional promotion or mobility. In other words, desires at the moment of choosing to pursue a doctorate exceed expectations. Within this context, tensions emerge to which we have already made reference Goffman (1963 [18]). The gap experienced between institutional or organizational “overprescriptions” (high demands) and the means that the education and employment systems provide to cope with these demands affects individuals, who in turn affect organizations. Thus, unrest and non-conformism tend to spread.

4) The gap can be interpreted in light of Status Inconsistency theory.

What do we mean by this? That there is a disparity between the different statuses belonging to one, single individual. In this case, high academic levels are followed by difficult insertion into the workplace in a globalized world where huge and rapid structural changes are taking place. In Argentina, this phenomenon has had special impact as the country experienced extremely high socio-professional mobility after receiving a significant wave of immigrants (pre- and post-World Wars). The situation at the status level experienced a reversal over the course of three generations (Aparicio, 2005 [31], 2009a [32]). Grandparents who immigrated suffered cultural uprooting. Many came from relatively low social status and those who came from more privileged families arrived in the same conditions as everyone else: with nothing but a will to “own a piece of America” in the “breadbasket of the world,” “the promised land.” And they were able to do so, changing the country’s landscape in fifteen years within a context of remarkable integration. In terms of what concerns us here, low social origins were accompanied globally by relatively low levels of education, yet despite this fact, in a relatively short amount of time, these individuals achieved higher economic status (though not such high levels socially as they were the “parvenus,” the “newcomers” opposite traditional, rooted families). These immigrants dreamt that their children could go to University, a university free and open to all. The Italian saying “my son the doctor” comes from these times and reflects this new reality. Hence, the next generation’s social status was

somewhat higher; their levels of education had increased and many reached university. Socio-economic status remained at middle levels. This was the era of industrialization when growth was possible. And finally, the next generation – the grandchildren of the original immigrants – faced a different situation: relatively high origin status, high levels of education (due to massification of higher education) accompanied by low occupational status relative to the academic levels reached.

In this way, status inconsistency became evident and its consequences were felt strongly. Previous studies show two types of responses: intropunitive and extrapunitive. The former belonged to young people with high social origin and high levels of education who therefore could not blame the system for their relative failure in the professional world. Their response was self-blame. On the other hand, those with lower social origins who made the effort to study, reaching relatively high levels of education, did not have “anyone to blame.” Thus, they blamed the systems – the educational system for not giving them the tools they needed to meet labor market demands and the market system for holding to exclusionary laws. The response was generalized non-conformism together with progressive political militancy and even revolutionary violence (Aparicio, 1994 [28], 2000 [29]). Previous research into this situation was carried out by Hollinshead, Ellis and Kirbb, 1954 [19]. Our research constitutes the first study of this phenomenon in Latin America.

In our case, non-conformism appeared in various groups of PhDs, particularly those related to the field of sociology, and was lower among those who chose programs of study related to Management/Administration (both in France and Argentina). This non-conformism had to do not only with job position being incongruent with doctoral education, but also with working conditions in the labor market. Using hierarchical evocation, these conditions were described as being marked by freely consensual alienation or submission, tense working environments or atmospheres, blurred personal identities and a lack of expected recognition. Together, these lead to an atmosphere of generalized unrest that seems not to have decreased. In Argentina, violence has increased, reaching levels unthinkable ten years ago; discontent also continues to rise. In France, many individuals seem to experience a lack of recognition in the workplace, along with mistreatment, abuse and other issues which have never before occupied a significant place in the government agenda or in public concern (not only PhDs' concerns).

This results in a rupture of professional identity, an identity that emerges at the intersection of a personal biography, a history and relational space. This space depends on the recognition that the “other” has of all individuals (Aparicio, 2012 [33]). The use of identity strategies to cope with this situation appears clearly in many studies carried out by this author, above all in those studies in which data collection coincided with the Argentine crisis of 2001-2002.

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