Chapter 9

The Era of Hyperconnectivity: Investigating the Times for PhD Supervision

Emilia Rodrigues Araujo
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3600-3310
Universidade do Minho, Portugal

Kadydja Nascimento Chagas
Instituto Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents and discusses the results of a qualitative study developed in Portugal and Brazil regarding PhD time and the scientific supervision processes, focusing on the manner in which digital technologies are used during the preparation time of doctoral theses. Based on the analysis of data collected by 20 semi-structured interviews with students and supervisors, the main advantages and disadvantages of screen time during scientific supervision are examined. In an academic and social context of high acceleration and time fragmentation, research presents valid development perspectives for a re-evaluation of supervision processes, more specifically in the current context marked by high presence of online platforms.

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INTRODUCTION

How is PhD time being spent? How are digital information and communication technologies influencing the time available to carry out a PhD? How do supervisors and PhD students evaluate the use of these technologies? What advantages and what disadvantages do they attribute to screen time? These are the main questions to be debated in this text, which reiterates some discussions on the level of scientific supervision during the doctorate, whereas discussing some of the major changes introduced by digital media in the way time is experienced. Rosa and Scheurman (Rosa & Scheurman, 2009, Rosa, 2010) discuss the acceleration trends in contemporary societies and in the increasing rise in the value of short and immediate time. On the other hand, Hassan (2003; 2009; 2010) examines more complex approaches to acceleration. He proposes that the centrality of immediacy is a by-product of an intricate transformation carried out by the development of digital media. For Hassan (2009), the internet provides a singular experience of time and nourishes other non-physical forms of coexistence and coexisting, although they can also bring about anomia and exclusion. It is factual that the theorists of enlarged modernity, globalization and postmodern societies identify themselves seriously with the need to consider the powerful effects and ramifications of technologies and science in the transformation of modes, lifestyles and work. Appadurai (1996), for instance, underscores the role of mediascapes in the construction of globalization, considering the interconnected platforms of human and non-human elements that persistently reconfigure social reality. Partially sharing this theoretical framework, other authors delve deeper into the field of academic time studies (Menzies & Newson, 2007; 2008; Ylijoki, 2010; 2013; Noonan, 2015; Smith, 2015; Spurling, 2015; Vostal, 2015) highlighting the effects of exceedingly time-transformative technological means on academic times. It is assumed that, along with the interest in studying working spaces and the manners in which technological platforms are taking over academic processes, there is a need to study time norms and time constraints, as well as type of experiences and their meanings (Muller, 2014).

A study such as this allows for the definition of strategies that can help institutions anticipate and cope with different ways of understanding and value educational work, especially at post/graduate levels. The need to grasp the manners in which time in academia is being instituted and made use of, especially given the increasing use of online means of communication, is essential. The transformation brought about by technologies and digitization are global. They spread into all directions and have influence on everything that happens. In the context of higher education institutions, they are modifying the manners in which students and teachers relate to time in many ways. They also deeply affect the way teachers and students build and experience time for learning processes. The aim of this chapter is to discern
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