



**THE GRADUATE SPIRIT ALUMNI DIALOGUE SERIES:
“INCREASING INTER-SECTORALITY IN EUROPEAN DOCTORAL
EDUCATION”**

Claudia Canales Holzeis, Heidelberg University

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Graduate SPIRIT (GS) project aims to improve the quality of European doctoral education in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in response to the reality that most doctoral graduates ultimately find employment outside of the academic sector¹. Meeting the needs of a changing labour market requires greater emphasis on the EU Triple-I recommendations on doctoral training: to be international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral.

Alumni networks are long-established means for engaging alumni to support current students; providing greater opportunities for networking and for research collaborations; raising the visibility of educational institutions; and fundraising. Successful networks also provide valued benefits to alumni for a mutually positive experience and long-term engagement. However, many alumni networks are often very broad in scope, open to all disciplines, and in the Graduate Spirit we found no networks specifically designed for PhDs in the SSH.

As part of a series of Graduate Spirit activities to test and evaluate innovations for their added value to European doctoral training we ran a series of four international online Alumni Dialogues in February and March 2020: *“International Insights on Career Paths after a Doctoral Degree in Social Sciences and the Humanities”*.

The objectives were to:

1. Develop a set of recommendations for improving current education support systems in SSH for a professional transition to a non-academic sector, based on the experiences and insights of former doctoral researchers.
2. Determine the suitability of a virtual platform for running these types of events.

This activity sought to capitalise on the international network provided by the nine European partners that make up the Graduate Spirit consortium. Fifteen alumni generously gifted their time and participated through an online conferencing application. Four sessions were held in total, which were also attended by a small number of doctoral researchers and university administrators. The invitation letter is included in Appendix 1.

It is important to note that most Graduate Spirit partners already have alumni activities either at the level of the graduate school, the university or both (as summarised in Appendix 2). These do not focus on alumni with PhDs in the SSH. The specific requirements, level of resources and administrative and legal constraints of the different Graduate Spirit partners are very varied. Therefore, the

¹ European University Association Council for Doctoral Education (2019). Doctoral education in Europe today: approaches and institutional structures. Available at: <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/online%20eua%20cde%20survey%2016.01.2019.pdf>

attributes of a successful network for alumni with PhDs in SSH will be very dependent on the context. For these reasons, this topic is beyond the scope of this activity.

2. THE GRADUATE SPIRIT ALUMNI DIALOGUE SERIES

2.1. Format of the events

Fifteen alumni took part, and they were invited to give a short presentation reflecting on the questions below.

- Have your career aspirations changed over time? If so, why?
- What support do you think is particularly helpful to support the transition from doctoral education/research to professional life?
- Have you participated in an alumni-student programme before? Could you share your impressions? What was particularly beneficial for you (as a student)? What do you think would have perhaps required more emphasis or attention? What would you do differently?
- How could such a programme increase the benefits to alumni in the SSH? What specific benefits would be most valuable to you? Would you be prepared to get involved?

This presentation was followed by a discussion and a Q&A. The event was open to students who were encouraged to ask questions. The dialogue sessions were chaired by Liesbet van Zoonen from the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

While the experiences and career paths of the invited alumni were varied, the discussions centred mainly on a series of themes described in the following section.

2.2. Recurrent themes

2.2.1. The transition to a non-academic professional career

“Times are changing”, reflected one speaker. “In academic circles the idea that good work in your PhD will lead to an academic position persists, because that was generally true for previous generations. But this is no longer the case, and this perception likely reflects a survivor bias.”

Several of the alumni commented on the competitiveness and the small number of jobs for PhD graduates in academia as one factor in seeking alternative careers. However, the experiences related were very varied, as were the individual motivations for developing a new professional path in a non-academic sector. For many, the change was also the outcome of period of reflection that led them to an increased awareness of their own personal preferences and professional aspirations.

In the words of a speaker: *“You really have to reinvent yourself- you need to know what you want and what you don’t want to do. This transition starts well before the end of the PhD”*.

A number of speakers described the transition as being partly driven by a desire to move away from aspects of academic work that did not suit them:

“Pursuing a PhD requires a very strong goal that you have in mind because there are many, many days when you will feel unsuccessful or lonely or alone with problems that you cannot solve. This can have a bearing on your general state of mind. There are ways of managing it, but this type of work is not for everyone, and it was not for me.”

The typically solitary nature of research in the SSH was mentioned by several alumni as a difficult aspect of academic work. Teaching (in general or with respect to specific requirements or courses) and the need to devote time to apply for research grants were listed as undesirable aspects of academic research by a couple of the speakers. However, teaching was also an activity that several alumni had enjoyed. A number of speakers noted that careers in other sectors, in particular in policy institutions and in think tanks, offered the opportunity to continue doing research with fewer of the academic duties they did not enjoy.

Other speaker commented that for them, the main drawback of academic work was the lack of immediate, visible impact on society:

“In academia publications are the main goal, however there is less emphasis on developing recommendations or summaries for stakeholders and other audiences which could bring change. Working for a civic organisation gives you the feeling that you make a change, even if it is not on a big scale. Maybe you help a few people, or you support an idea that can be implemented. But you see the change”. Another speaker related how much he enjoyed his field work in the community. *“To change people’s life you need to get out of university”*, he concluded.

In many cases the transition *“to the outside world”* did not imply stop oing research, but rather doing it in a different context and for a different, and sometimes more heterogeneous audience. A couple of the alumni also commented they had not entirely *“left academia”* in their new roles, but continued to maintain professional contacts and active research collaborations with former advisors and university colleagues.

As one speaker noted: *“The key is to be open to options and to be ready to accept change. There are options between academia and non-academic sectors and if you are interested in research, look for these. It is important to have a realistic view of the situation.”* It was agreed that the ability to rebrand and reinvent oneself is very useful. Universities currently do not emphasise this enough.

The personal nature of this transition was highlighted by nearly all of the invited alumni. However, despite the need for personal introspection, the role of universities in supporting this transition was highlighted. As noted by one speaker:

“A PhD is a self-discovery journey. It includes experimentation and self-discovery, and you shift and change your mind. Many doctoral candidates feel lost and feel they need more help. It would be important for universities to create within the PhD path moments of self-reflection, to encourage young researchers to think about their future. It is important also to help them voice out their concerns and the impediments they face, and assist them in their careers by opening new doors.”

These opportunities should be provided early on during the PhD and be recurrent throughout the degree. Most doctoral candidates start a PhD with the expectation of an ensuing academic career, and it is important to not discourage this prematurely. However, academia can only offer a career to a proportion of PhD graduates in the SSH, and therefore it is essential to prepare PhD candidates for careers in non-academic sectors. If universities are to support more effectively the transition of PhD graduates to their future careers, this reality must be more widely acknowledged by everybody concerned: PhD candidates, their supervisors and the university administration.

A specific advice to PhD researchers from one of the speakers: *“Take the decision to leave academia as early as you can, and start planning the transition.”*

2.2.2. Extracurricular activities and experiences

All the alumni concurred that they owed their current job to a combination of the research and other skills they acquired during their PhD and the skills, experiences and contacts gained through extra-curricular activities, such as paid jobs, internships, or engagement in civic society organisations. Chance was also an important factor.

Extra-curricular activities allow doctoral researchers to experience work in other professional sectors and to gain “insider knowledge”, which is very valuable for working out what you would like to do, and is also very useful when applying for jobs.

In addition, activities outside the PhD provide opportunities for gaining a wide set of transferable/soft skills through practice as opposed to learning these in an academic setting, often in one-time events such as seminars. These skills include project management; administration; event organising, working in teams with short-term deadlines, and communicating effectively in different formats and to different audiences. Extra-curricular activities also helped, on the one hand to gain increased awareness of the skills acquired during the PhD and on how best to communicate them, and on the other hand, to establish which skills were still required to make a successful career move to another sector.

And last but not least, non-academic work experiences are very valuable for extending personal networks of professional contacts, both inside and outside academia. One speaker also commented on the importance of these contacts as potential references when applying for jobs after the PhD, which is effectively a period of several years outside the job market.

The types of activities described and the motivations for engaging in these were varied. For some alumni these were jobs to supplement their personal income during their PhD degree, sometimes unrelated to the topic of their PhD. Nonetheless, for one speaker this experience led to the realisation that she would enjoy more a career in sector of her extra-curricular activity than in academia, and this eventually triggered a change in professional course:

"I applied to the job to earn a few extra euros. Honestly, at first this was for the money. Then I realised how much I enjoyed the work. Something that was an accident first became something that I wanted to develop further".

Activities outside the doctoral degree can also be directly beneficial for the PhD, noted several alumni. One speaker commented on the fact that his internship provided him the use to a database for his research project that he would not have had access to. Another speaker noted that by working with different stakeholders in the community, he was eventually considered a peer, which led them to share with him information and perspectives that he would not have had without direct on-the-ground involvement.

The experiences gained during these activities in a number of cases contributed to the desire to change careers. However, in some cases they also provided additional motivation to complete the PhD.

One speaker related her experience of doing a PhD while raising a young family, and the challenges of combining two very demanding activities. Completing a doctoral degree required strong motivation and very effective time management skills: *"My project was also two children. I learned to structure my day very well and be very efficient with time."* Doing a PhD also poses challenges with respect to keeping a healthy work-life balance.

On the down side, extracurricular activities inevitably result in a conflict in the use of time. The alumni agreed that these experiences were so important as to justify a small delay in the completion of the PhD. At the same time, it was also important to ensure that the PhD project was not detrimentally affected. A risk of devoting too much time to other activities, concurred a number of speakers, is the temptation to move to a different career before completing the PhD.

What made it easier for doctoral researchers to engage in extracurricular activities? And what were the key obstacles?

Alumni had valuable advice for junior researchers on this topic: *“Take initiative”, “be curious”, “combine your personal interests with your research interests”*.

However, supervisors in particular and university administrators more generally also played a very important role.

“I was very lucky with my supervisor”, related one speaker, “he was very supportive and had the attitude that as long as you progress in your PhD it is ok to do other things. He was very well connected and made me aware of opportunities and connections. He also helped me to focus, advising me on what to go for and what not, encouraging me to apply only for the best experiences and opportunities.”

A couple of other speakers commented it was their supervisors who gave them the opportunity for additional activities, in the form of research assistantship tasks, or asking them to co-edit a book, in one example.

The experiences of other alumni were however not so positive. One speaker related how he was penalised by his supervisor and departmental adviser for his non-academic activities. Somebody else commented that while she was not penalised, the lack of formal rewards in the academic system for non-academic activities meant that she also did not feel supported or encouraged in these. It was also remarked that not all supervisors are well placed to provide contacts and alert to opportunities in other sectors because their professional experience is limited to academia.

There is also a need to develop institutional support to gain experiences outside academia. The university could play a much bigger role in assisting PhD candidates in building a more varied network of professional contacts.

2.2.3. On visible and invisible skills

“Having a PhD demonstrates the ability to take a complex project and bring it to a successful end. Completing a PhD takes a tremendous amount of self-discipline. This has a huge value if it is presented and explained properly.”

Skills figured prominently in the discussions. There was agreement on the fact that doctoral researchers acquire many transferable skills during their PhD. However, these skills could sometimes be *“invisible”* both to PhD candidates/graduates themselves, and to prospective employers. More emphasis is therefore needed for developing or improving the awareness of these skills, and for communicating them effectively to professionals in other sectors.

Research skills are perhaps the most obvious, *“visible”* skills acquired, and all speakers agreed these are important for a wide range of different jobs. Other skills include the ability to write well; synthesise a large amount of complex data in a short time; present ideas clearly and defend them with evidence; organisational skills; time management skills; fundraising (preparing grant applications); experience in working international and intercultural settings; adaptability and flexibility; and to

think critically, intended as the ability to see the wider context, establish interrelations and provide new perspectives. In a specific example, a speaker related how the methodology of her PhD is very useful to her in her current job, as it allows her to break up large projects (similar to a doctoral research project) into smaller tasks and to delegate components to different members of her team.

Some skills are acquired specifically through the experience of doing a PhD. As one speaker noted: *"Nobody can teach you how to feel frustrated with your work and carry on regardless, you have to live this."*

Other skills are perhaps less obvious, and require an effort of self-reflection: *"Doing a PhD in an ideal case makes you intellectually humble- this is very valued professionally. If I don't know something I say I don't know it, yet I am confident in what I know. This attitude helps you to ask good questions"*.

The speakers were asked to consider what skills training they would have benefitted from but were not provided during their PhD. *"Personal training and personal effectiveness would be important to allow you to determine your strengths and preferences in how you work and communicate"*, noted one speaker. The opportunity to acquire new skills - such as agile project management, event organising, book editing, and administration - by practicing, as opposed of just learning the theory, would be very valuable, agreed many.

Skills training should also be made available to doctoral candidates targeting the requirements of other professional sectors. Examples include training for writing policy briefs and recommendations, which are very different from academic texts; and communicating to non-academic audiences, with a focus on clarity and brevity.

One speaker remarked that some of the training courses he would have benefitted from but did not take were actually provided by his university, but he had not made it a priority to attend them. This highlights the need to communicate early to PhD candidates the importance of acquiring transferable skills for their future careers, included in the academic sector. Another recommendation was for universities to make available these trainings at the start of the PhD to help those candidates who decide early on change careers paths find a job.

2.2.4. The PhD: status symbol and stigmas

Many alumni commented on the usefulness of having a PhD for their work in a non-academic sector, especially for jobs that include a component of research, where it gives additional legitimacy to these activities. A PhD also provides a higher status, which is useful also in professions for which it is not a requirement, and particularly useful in some sectors. *"A PhD opens doors"*, remarked one speaker.

However, many alumni also experienced prejudices against having a PhD. Negative perceptions included the notion that doctoral graduates are unable to work well as part of a team, have difficulties following regular working hours (*“will he be able to wake up and show up in the office early every morning?”*, was a question a referee for one of the speakers was asked to answer); have a tendency to complicate work with an unnecessary degree of depth and detail; being slow in completing work; and being too theoretical and unpractical, *“disconnected to reality”*.

“These perceptions are in most cases very unfair”, remarked one speaker, *“but as a job applicant with a PhD it is important to be aware of these”*. His recommendation for doctoral candidates is to extract examples from their PhD work that illustrate the different skills acquired/required for the job they apply to disprove common misconceptions.

This was not the only stigma discussed in the alumni dialogue series. A couple of speakers noted that PhD candidates who communicate their decision to leave academia after their degree to their supervisors and departmental advisors may also experience a negative reaction. *“My supervisor sort of gave up on me”* said one speaker *“and the attitude was -if you are not going to stay in academia why are you doing a PhD?”*. Another speaker noted that universities are not always prepared to deal with students who are not happy. This should be addressed. It is also important for doctoral researcher to find a support network to avoid self-doubt.

2.2.5. On getting a job

“A PhD has two dimensions: the topic of your research and the skills that you develop along the way, for example, programming, presentation skills, organisational skills, statistical tools, summarising your work in a very dense way, etc. These are useful regardless of the topic of the PhD, and these are the skills you need to signal to your future employer, because this is what they are really interested in. It is like constructing a new narrative about yourself.”

The alumni related their experiences in applying and getting their first job after completing their PhD. For many this was a challenging time. One speaker said how in his case this took many failed applications, and eventual success also relied on a sustained effort to gain insider knowledge of the sector he had targeted.

“Making a successful application is a huge aspect of getting a job, but it is not only about writing a good CV and cover letter. You have to learn to speak the language of the field or sector you want to enter, and be able to translate what you did in academia so that it is meaningful to a non-academic audience. This is what ultimately opens the door. ”

Several speakers noted the importance of becoming *“bilingual”*, meaning the ability to translate their academic experiences to make them meaningful and relatable to people in a different sector: *“Take the time for packaging the skills you have and present them so that are meaningful to potential employers.”*

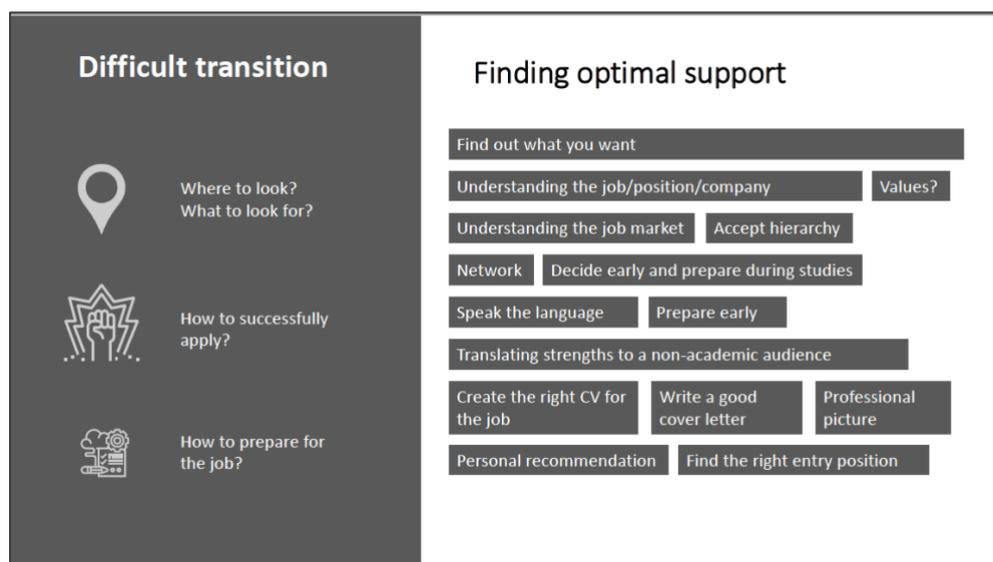
Good preparation is key, and this takes dedication: *“Don’t be shy, try to get early contacts, and contact people in target company. Give them a call and ask them what they are looking for. Remember the same job title in different companies can mean very different jobs, and it is good to find out as much as you can about it. This will also mean there will be no surprises during the interview. Job applications should not be random.”* The speaker remarked how job applications also offer a good opportunity to practice and to improve how you present your skills and experiences, and to learn what is expected from job applicants.

All the alumni concurred on the importance of a personal network of contacts for a successful career move. Contacts, both formal and informal (such as friends or friends of friends) can help you become aware of opportunities and gain useful insider information: *“You find jobs by connections, not necessarily because you may be recommended but because you find out about opportunities”*.

The approaches to build this network are varied. Opportunities are provided by attending academic conferences and associated social events (evening drinks offer very valuable opportunities for networking in a more relaxed setting); during field work; and through the use of social and professional media. The social network acquired during the doctorate is also very important. Supervisors and co-supervisors can also help in making connections, to other sectors but also in academic circles in a different discipline or in another country.

“Take your own responsibility, approach people and do not wait to be contacted. This is a mind-set” advised one speaker. *“Don’t be shy to ask, people are generally happy to help”*, noted another speaker.

“Getting s job after completing the PhD is a difficult step for most people, and like for everything else you also need a little luck. Don’t give up and be confident!”



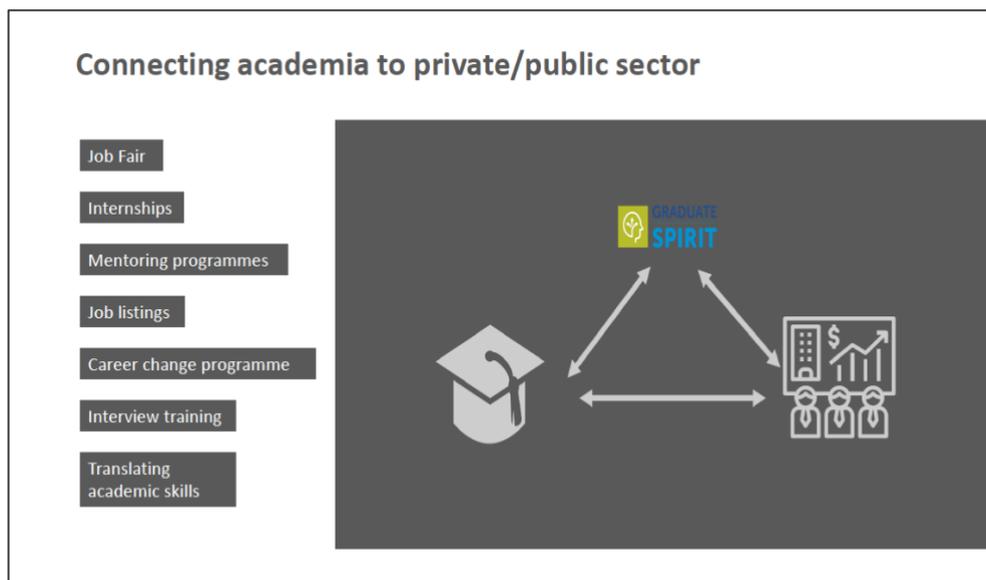
Finding a job. Image courtesy of Alexander Akbik.

2.2.6. The importance of an alumni network

As noted above, PhD supervisors and academic staff are generally not in the best position to provide specific advice and guidance on the professional requirements and expectations of non-academic sectors, because most lack personal experience in these. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many economic sectors are experiencing profound changes and innovations.

“Universities are not as well connected to other national networks, including civic societies, as they should be, and they are also not well connected to international networks”, noted one speaker. *“University networks need to evolve and reflect what is happening in society now.”*

Alumni are well positioned to provide appropriate information and support for professional contacts, for example, engaging in mentoring schemes and providing contacts and recommendations for specific professional opportunities. *“Alumni can help by sharing their experiences, provide an eye opener”* said one speaker.



Intersectoral connections. Image courtesy of Alexander Akbik

Would they be interested in participating in an alumni network? Alumni activities can be mutually beneficial, remarked one speaker. PhD candidates and graduates from their own university represent a source of collaborators and employees from a familiar institution for alumni, so potentially can be more trusted.

In some companies, there is also a financial reward for employees to recommend somebody for a position who is eventually hired, which is an additional advantage of retaining contact with the university, related another speaker. It is also beneficial

for alumni to keep up with latest research developments in their fields, and to maintain a contact with academia: *“it is a win-win situation”*.

Another participant remarked that she liked talking to students. For this reason she had already taken part in a number of evening career events at her former university. Another speaker said it was a personal mission for him: *“People who spend a lot of time in academia are undervalued, and I would like to help. We all like to help because we all have been helped in the past.”*

Personal interest was another reason cited for taking part in an alumni network. *“I am really interested in what other people are doing after a PhD. People who are pursuing PhDs have something in common, a need for devoting more time on issues, and developing a deeper understanding”* remarked another speaker. *“It is interesting to see where there are jobs that satisfy these personal demands.”*

The most appropriate composition of alumni network varied, and seemed to depend on the objectives and preferences of doctoral candidates. For one speaker, a discipline-based alumni network would be more appealing: *“To me, my narrower field would be more interesting, to see what other economists are doing in their day to day jobs.”* However, another speaker remarked that networks focusing on one specific professional sector, regardless of the topic of the PhD, would be more useful as a source of career contacts: *“A network for professionals working in the energy sector would have been more useful for me”*, she commented. *“Alumni networks need to be specialised in a field. If they are too broad they are less useful.”*

Finally, alumni networks should comprise professionals in different stages of their careers: *“It would be beneficial to offer short and long-term perspectives”*, remarked a speaker, *“and include alumni who are already well established in their careers and alumni who just made the transition to a different type of job after their PhD.”*

What additional benefits would alumni expect from taking part in a network? *“An email address. And a way of making direct contact with other alumni, to post job opportunities and other messages”*, said one speaker.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. The experiences related by the alumni indicate that in general, PhD researchers, their supervisors and university administrators still largely operate in the belief that an academic job is something that is attainable for all doctoral candidates. Ensuring that universities deliver doctoral education in SSH that is aligned with the reality of the academic job market being able to accommodate only a small proportion of PhD graduates requires therefore a very significant shift in the mind-set in all actors concerned. It is also important not to dissuade doctoral candidates from pursuing an academic career too early in their PhD, while at the same time encouraging them to have a realistic view of the situation. Changes are required also at the level of

the curriculum, staff and the university administration. Universities should consider mechanisms for formally supporting students targeting careers in different sectors. A specific recommendation is to incorporate in the PhD programme activities that promote self-reflection with regards to career choices.

- 3.2. Extracurricular activities during the PhD are very important for helping shape professional preferences and aspirations and for acquiring transferable skills and valuable professional contacts. These should be better supported by supervisors and by the university. Recommendations for universities include: explicitly recognise the value of extra-curricular activities; allow and encourage doctoral researchers to engage with other institutions and sectors by facilitating connections; develop reward systems that reflect the importance of non-academic activities; create formal opportunities to explore options outside academia, not only through seminars and learning opportunities but also through activities that provide hands-on practice such as long-term placements. These activities should be integrated in the PhD degree and be fully funded to allow doctoral researchers to survive financially.
- 3.3. Transferable skills are valuable for both academic and non-academic career paths. All universities already provide training in a variety of transferable skills, but more emphasis is needed in communicating the importance of these skills for future careers and to encourage doctoral candidates to make the most use of these resources. Universities should also consider offering more targeted training, for example, addressing the requirements of specific professional sectors (e.g. policy making). Doctoral training should also encourage PhD candidates to reflect on and articulate the skills already in their possession which are important for their career progression.
- 3.4. Universities should establish stronger networks with other professional sectors nationally and internationally, and support PhD candidates in extending their own personal networks of contacts. The establishment of alumni network would contribute to these efforts.

4. The value of virtual conferencing solutions for running international workshops

The virtual conferencing solution used was found to be very effective for running dialogue series and workshops, and a good, resource-efficient way of bringing together an international panel of speakers. Virtual conferencing for very structured events proved to be extremely efficient, but seems to lend itself less for prolonged networking and socializing. It will be important, therefore, to set up such meetings with very focused goals so that expectations for alumni and PhD candidates are clear and their effectiveness is maximized. Furthermore, it proved difficult to engage

current doctoral candidates, possibly because the event was not part of any of the curricula but perceived as an outside event offered by an outside stakeholder. It would be important to establish such online intersectoral support events as a standard part of the curriculum.

APPENDIX 1: BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPATING ALUMNI

Alexander Akbik

PhD in International Relations and Political Science, 2016, Central European University, Budapest.

Product owner at BARMER, a leading public health insurance companies in Germany, for the implementation of electronic health records. After completing his doctoral degree, Alexander worked as a Consultant for the automotive industry at Capgemini Consulting. He subsequently moved to the Berlin Startup Sector, first as a business development manager for Polyas, a provider of online election software, and later for Miss Money Penny Technologies as a digital consultant. In this role he worked with clients from the automotive, financial, healthcare, and communication industries to develop and implement mobile wallet applications.

Raluca Csernaton

PhD in International Relations, 2014, Central European University, Budapest.

Raluca is a guest professor and a senior researcher with the International Research Cluster at the Institute for European Studies (IES) of Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in Belgium. Raluca is also a visiting researcher on European security and defence and future and emerging technologies at Carnegie Europe in Brussels, Belgium. Prior to this, Raluca concluded a two-years of postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute of Political Studies (IPS) at Charles University in Prague, Czechia, where she lectured for the Master of Arts in International Relations. She has also conducted research at the Royal Higher Institute for Defence (RHID), Brussels, and at the International Security Information Service - Europe. During her PhD, Raluca completed research exchanges at the Institute for European Politics (IEP) in Berlin and at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Brussels. Her current research interests focus on critical theoretical approaches to security and technology in International Relations (IR), Security Studies, and Science and Technology Studies (STS), the consolidation of the European security and defence architecture, and emerging technologies such as drones, cyber, autonomous robotics, and AI.

Myroslava Keryk

PhD in History and Sociology, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

Myroslava is founder and Head of the Ukrainian migrant organization Foundation "Our Choice". Editor in Chief of the newspaper "Nash Vybir." In her daily work she combines design and implementation of integration activities directed toward Ukrainian migrants in Poland with research projects in the field of migration studies.

Antti Laine

PhD in Theology, 2017, University of Helsinki.

Antti Laine works as a Senior Advisor on Theology and Ecumenical Relations at Finn Church Aid (FCA), the largest Finnish NGO in international aid operating in 14 countries. In his work, he manages FCA's relations to global ecumenical organizations and develops its theological policies, including the area of Religion and Development. In his PhD, Laine studied the early years of the anti-racist programme of the World Council of Churches, a global fellowship of 350 churches. He has also graduated as a Master of Ecumenical Studies from the University of Geneva and completed advanced studies in Education. During his PhD studies, Laine was a member of the Finnish Graduate School of Theology and the research project Ecumenical Movement and Cold War Politics funded by the Academy of Finland. Before joining FCA, Laine held various administrative positions at the University of Helsinki, including the Head of Academic Affairs at the Faculty of Theology. He has written one monograph and several articles, and co-edited two books.

Olga Löblová

PhD in International Relations at Central European University (CEU), 2016, Budapest.

Olga is Research Associate at the Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge. Her research interests focus the regulatory aspects of molecular cancer screening diagnostics. Olga's previous research focused on the politics of health technology assessment (HTA), and health-care priority-setting and reimbursement decision-making. Olga has been a visiting lecturer at Sciences Po Paris, collège universitaire de Dijon (2014-2016), and a visiting professor at College of Europe, Bruges, where she developed and taught a workshop in professional development in European Health, Consumer and Risk Policy (2015 and 2016). She also has past experience as a consultant in European and global health policy, and in Brussels pharmaceutical lobbying.

Fruzsina Müller

PhD in Comparative Cultural History, 2015 Leipzig

Fruzsina is currently working on a book about the history of the Leipzig deaconess organization, their hospital, nurses and physicians, and on an edited volume about confessional charity organizations in National Socialism. In 2016 she curated an exhibition about the history of the Leipzig Deaconess House and in 2018 she organised an exhibition and a memory event on a deaconess who was killed in the Nazi murder action of ill and disabled people. Her PhD thesis was published 2017 with the title: 'Jeanssocialism: Consumer Culture and Fashion in Socialist Hungary'. She studied German Language and Literature, and Journalism at the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest.

Tobias Müller

PhD Gerontology, University of Heidelberg.

Tobias is Advisor for Nursing and Community Development at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, Baden-Württemberg. He worked as an advisor at the Department for Aging and Care in the Community at Gesundheit Berlin-Brandenburg e.V. He was also an independent consultant specialising in support for family carers and anxiety therapy. Prior to this he was Scientific Assistant at SRH University Heidelberg (Hochschule Heidelberg) in charge of the preparation, implementation and monitoring of a longitudinal study. His duties also included teaching and administration.

Dripta Nag

PhD in Anthropology at Heidelberg University, 2020, Germany

Social Expert with AECOM, a multinational infrastructure company. Dripta has 4 years of professional experience in project design and implementation in sectors of urban and rural planning, climate change adaptation, livelihood and local governance with a comprehensive knowledge of World Bank's social and environmental safeguards policies and similar policies of other international financial institutions. She has completed a master's degree in Urban Planning from School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi in 2011. She has previously worked with Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on a World Bank funded climate change adaptation project and an international development consulting company as an urban planner.

Andrej Nosko

PhD in Political Science, 2013, Central European University, Budapest.

Andrej is a Central European energy expert, visiting Assistant Professor at Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. He is member of the Advisory Board for International EU funded Project Enabling the Energy Union through understanding the drivers of individual and collective energy choices in Europe (ENABLE.EU) and a member of the of Southeast Europe Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI) International Advisory Board. He is also member of the Energy Policy Research Group, and Political Economy Research Group at the CEU. In the past, he worked for the European Commission on law enforcement and internal security policy cooperation, and was a head of division at an international philanthropic foundation dealing with policy research and innovation, democracy and governance, anti-corruption, and law enforcement.

Eeva Nyrövaara

PhD in Theology, Social Ethics, 2011, University of Helsinki.

Eeva is Acting Executive Director, Development Manager, Universities Finland (Unifi). She is responsible for Unifi's operations in promoting higher education, research and arts, influencing the Finnish higher education and research policy, and promoting the common interests of universities. Nyrövaara has worked in different

positions in research administration since 2004. Her PhD dissertation "*The Feminist Transformation of Bioethics: An Analysis of Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Applications in Feminist Bioethics*" was published in 2011.

Vija Pakalkaite

PhD in Political Science, 2017, Central European University, Budapest.

Analyst for Carbon and power markets at ICIS. Vija Pakalkaite provides qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Nordic, Baltic and central-eastern European power markets and renewable energy regulatory frameworks, as well as renewable energy auctions and Guarantees of Origin across Europe. During her PhD studies, she was a visiting researcher at Oxford Institute for Energy Studies; Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research ISI, and a trainee at the office of Maroš Šefčovič, European Commission Vice President for Energy Union.

Jeno Pál

PhD in Economics at the Central European University (CEU), 2017, Budapest.

Jeno is Data Scientist at Emarsys and a part-time teaching data analyst at CEU. Previously he was Research Assistant for CEU Microdata, and a Research Intern at Microsoft. He has a undergraduate degree in Mathematical Finance, Corvinus University of Budapest (2005 - 2010).

Levente Polyak

PhD in Sociology, 2017, Central European University (CEU), Budapest.

Co-founder of Eutropian, work on urban regeneration processes that use existing resources and connect community groups with public administrations and innovative businesses. Levente is urban planner, researcher, community advocate and policy adviser. After studying architecture at Budapest University of Technology, urbanism at the Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris and sociology at ELTE Budapest, and EHESS Paris, he was visiting lecturer at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, the Budapest University of Technology and TU Wien. He was visiting fellow at Columbia University and the École nationale supérieure d'architecture Paris-Malaquais.

Marina Renault Hopf

PhD in Global Studies, University of Leipzig.

Marina combines a professional background in branding, advertising, and design, with a Ph.D. in Global Studies. Her research on Nation Branding and international propaganda made her aware of critical aspects of global communication endeavours, teaching her to observe and analyse trends, and to be sensitive to different societies and markets. She currently works at Invia Travel Germany and is Product Owner of the native apps of the brand "ab in den urlaub," a well-known online travel agency in the DACH region. She nurtures a keen interest in designing transformative digital products and experiences which have the potential to ease daily life and improve how people interact with each other and the world.

Marjon Schols

PhD in Media and Communication, 2015, Erasmus University of Rotterdam.

Marjon is Co-ordinator of Evaluation and Policy Information at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Netherlands. After completing her PhD, she worked at the Inspectorate of the Budget of the Ministry of Finance on two spending reviews research projects in education and traffic control. During her PhD, Marjon also worked as a part-time advisor on research and strategic issues at the Research and Studies Department of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, and at TNO, a large independent research organisation. Her first full-time professional engagement was as a researcher at the Institute for Social Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau) in 2009. Marjon has degree in Sociology (2007, Tilburg University) and Political Science (2009, Radboud University Nijmegen).

Joris Tielens

PhD in Economics at the University of Leuven in 2019

Joris completed a MSc. in business economics at the University of Hasselt (Belgium) in 2012 and an advanced MSc. in Economic Studies at the University of Leuven in 2013. He obtained his PhD under the supervision of Frank Smets (European Central Bank, UGhent) and Jan Van Hove (KU Leuven). During his PhD he visited the National Bank of Belgium and the European Central Bank. His research interests lie at the intersection of macroeconomics and finance. He currently works at the research department of the National Bank of Belgium and works on various topics related to macroprudential policy.

APPENDIX 1: ALUMNI DIALOGUE PROGRAMME AND INSTRUCTIONS TO SPEAKERS

ALUMNI DIALOGUE SERIES INTERNATIONAL INSIGHTS ON CAREER PATHS AFTER A DOCTORAL DEGREE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE HUMANITIES

1. PROGRAMME

1. Wed 26th Feb 11.00-12.30 CTE (12.00-13.30 in Helsinki).

Myroslava Keryk (Warsaw). Founder and Head of the Ukrainian migrant organization Foundation “Our Choice”. Editor in Chief of the newspaper “Nash Vybir.” Career in politics.

Eeva Nyrövaara (Helsinki). Acting Executive Director, Development Manager, Universities Finland (UNIFI).

Levente Polyak (Budapest). Managing Director, Eutropian GmbH, Austria.

Andrej Nosko (Budapest). Director for Europe, PILnet (Global Network for Public Interest Law).

Marjon Schols (Rotterdam). Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Netherlands.

2. Thursday 27th Feb 11.00-12.30 CET (12.00-13.30 in Helsinki).

Jeno Pál (Budapest). Data Scientist, AI Research Lab, Emarsys Technologies Kft. Hungary.

3. Friday 28th Feb 9.00-10.30 CET (10.00-11.30 in Helsinki).

Dripta Nag (Heidelberg), Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, India.

Joris Tielens (Leuven). Research economist at the National Bank of Belgium.

Tobias Müller (Heidelberg). Education Ministry, Baden-Württemberg.

Raluca Csernaton (Budapest). Institute for European Studies.

Olga Löblová (Budapest). Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge, UK.

Marina Renault (Leipzig). Product Manager, Vizzlo.

4. Monday 9th March 9.00-10.30 CET (10.00-11.30 in Helsinki).

Antti Laine (Helsinki). Senior advisor, Finn Church Aid

Vija M. Pakalkaite (Budapest). Analyst, EU Power and Carbon, ICIS, Germany

Alexander Akbik (Budapest). Digital Consultant, Miss Moneypenny Technologies GmbH, Germany.

Fruzsina Müller (Leipzig). Historian, Diakonissenkrankenhaus.

2. INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS

The main objective of this series of online events is to discuss possible strategies for designing and implementing alumni programmes aimed specifically at doctoral candidates and alumni who have attained a doctoral degree in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH).

The meeting will take place virtually using Zoom. Please note that you have to download the Zoom App (this is free of cost and requires no registration) and click on the link which we will share with you prior to the meeting, or use the details provided in the Zoom invitation to join the call. You will need to use your computer/device audio and camera. The series will be chaired by Liesbet van Zoonen from the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

The representatives of the Graduate Spirit network will also arrange for a small number of doctoral candidates to gather together in the participating universities to view the presentations, and will facilitate the Q&A session. We would like to record the events. Could you please let us know if you have any objections to this?

Could you please prepare a 4-5 min presentation where you introduce yourself, briefly describe your doctoral degree subject and your professional career? We would be grateful if you could share your presentation and a very short biography the latest day before your participation. In particular we would like to invite you to reflect on the following questions:

- Have your career aspirations changed over time? If so, why?
- What support do you think is particularly helpful to support the transition from doctoral education/research to professional life?
- Have you participated in an alumni-student programme before? Could you share your impressions? What was particularly beneficial for you (as a student)? What do you think would have perhaps required more emphasis or attention? What would you do differently?
- How could such a programme increase benefits to alumni in the SSH? What specific benefits would be most valuable to you? Would you be prepared to get involved?

The presentations will be followed by a discussion session and a Q&A, where students will be able to submit questions in writing to the facilitator who will convey these to the participants.

After the event, we would like to send you a short evaluation questionnaire on the series and would very much appreciate your feedback.

Again, many thanks for your willingness to participate in this series and for sharing your experiences and insights!

APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE ALUMNI NETWORKS IN GRADUATE SPIRIT PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

Graduate SPIRIT partners reviewed existing alumni networks at their GS and university and their outstanding features and aims; including relevant policies, organisational structures or regulations governing the interaction with alumni (including data protection). Each GS also reflected on whether PhD candidates have the opportunity to interact on a regular basis with alumni, and whether intersectoral aspects of the interaction were highlighted. Finally, each GS reflected on their needs and challenges with regard to a network specific to alumni with PhDs in SSH.

1. Central European University (CEU)

1.1. Alumni networks

CEU has a combined pool of alumni, comprising also Master and PhD graduates. It currently comprises about 16500 alumni from about 140 countries. Out of these, about 300 are considered alumni volunteers, meaning that either they are actively engaged in managing a local chapter, helping with recruitment, or are willing to offer career support to current students.

CEU is also about to launch an Alumni advisory council, which will be open to most alumni to share ideas on the three elements of the alumni strategy (volunteering, fundraising, events).

CEU's alumni network is managed by the [Alumni Relations Office](#) which has [6 employees](#). The engagement with the alumni is based on a strategy, recently renewed, outlining the main features of the engagement (e.g. [terms of reference for volunteering](#) and their recognition) and programs. The engagement is based on three approaches: volunteering; fundraising and events.

Volunteering. The most active alumni take responsibility to manage local chapters of CEU alumni and organize events. CEU has an open call for volunteers every 2 years, and in the same time reviews the work of existing volunteers.

Fundraising. Alumni are encouraged to donate to the university. There are three funds which they can support: scholarships, academic departments, or give to an unrestricted fund.

Events. The aim is to organize periodic events to engage volunteers and bring them together. These include local events, organized by the [alumni chapters](#), and Budapest-based events, like the Alumni Reunion Weekend. During this event, an alumni leadership forum for the most engaged volunteers is held, and special trainings are on offer. Alumni chapters are either run by volunteers, who

periodically submit reports and plans for new alumni activities, or by contact persons, who are somewhat less engaged in organizing their local chapters.

CEU has a communication strategy to engage with its volunteers. The Alumni strategy has a specific clause on privacy protection, in line with GDPR. Every year four editions of the alumni newsletter are issued, which informs alumni about the main developments at the university, at the departments and generally related to the alumni network. CEU also maintains a presence on social media, with one main LinkedIn profile and about sixty local profiles.

Alumni meet with current students mostly at events and on various online platforms (e.g. LinkedIn). CEU students also benefit greatly from alumni donations, which allow them to receive a scholarship while they study at CEU. Last year, 27 students received a scholarship from alumni donations to study at CEU.

CEU alumni also receive various benefits, which include free access and use of the university facilities, an institutional e-mail account for life, and access to the library and online journal subscription.

CEU does not run events to specifically to discuss intersectorality, but CEU holds an internal job platform ([Career: Next](#)) where alumni regularly share open calls with current students. In addition, CEU has a dedicated careers office, which regularly seeks to include alumni into its events to promote employment opportunities. These events of the career office are usually thematic and focus on one aspect of the industry (e.g. career in finance, in media relations, etc.).

During the alumni reunion weekend, CEU organises a Human library, where participants can ask about the career of successful alumni.

Alumni are also involved in finding internship opportunities for current students.

2. Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR)

2.1. Alumni networks

Every faculty has some form of an alumni policy, but so far they are all aimed at Bachelor and Master alumni. This is done unintentionally as PhD alumni are simply not registered in the current CRM system. In the past few months, awareness on the importance PhD alumni has increased, and efforts are being made to register and monitor contact information of PhD alumni in order to start targeting this group in particular. The Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities (EGSH) has no budget for alumni activity, so only supports central policy.

A new central alumni policy at university level will be introduced in the coming months. This policy will impact the organisation and execution of alumni activities

for all faculties. An online platform called [EURConnect](#) has been set up to act as a forum for online communication, and this initiative has received significant investment from the central department. There are plans to expand the use of this platform in the future.

2.2. Needs and challenges of the GS/ university with regards to the intersectoral dimension of alumni work

The challenge so far mostly concerns privacy and database organization. Work is being done in this area, and in terms of privacy it appears that alumni may be contacted freely as long as an opt-out possibility is provided. Since PhD candidates are not registered in the CRM system as “students” and they do not necessarily consider themselves as such, the term “alumni” does not naturally come to mind when establishing the relationship they have with the University – more so with the GS. Moreover, their first identification is with the research group they are employed in, not with the school.

EGSH is working on the registration and categorization of PhD alumni together with the central CRM employees and other related colleagues. An idea matrix was developed to use as inspiration for the implementation of an alumni policy (events/online efforts etc.) once a strategy (with follow-up) is developed and the necessary contact information is available and categorised. As the whole university starts implementing a policy on PhD alumni, the relationship with alumni could be established at the level of the university. Intersectorality is very useful for initial contact and as a link to the EUR as a whole. The focus on social sciences and the specific fields within social sciences will be more evident and useful once everything is in place and more committed alumni are involved.

3. Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences

3.1. Alumni networks

There are no such structures in place. Alumni themselves, with encouragement from the Graduate School for Social Research (GSSR), set up an alumni organization as a legal entity, unfortunately it is not active. However, Cooperation with alumni and organizing events in Warsaw for alumni is the subject of a current grant proposal. One alumnus is a member of the Doctoral School Advisory Board.

3.2. Needs and challenges of the GS/university with regards to the intersectoral dimension of alumni work

There has been no systematic collection of contact details of students after their defence. Efforts have been made to create a database but there has been no follow-up. GSSR is part of research institute and lacks the structures that would assist with this in a university.

4. Heidelberg University

4.1. Alumni networks

Heidelberg University has a dedicated [Heidelberg Alumni International](#) (HAI) office since 1996. HAI encompasses 130 countries Its definition of alumni includes graduates, academics, members of staff and academic visitors. (HAI) offers a range of activities for its alumni and current students, including a newsletter on academic or cultural offers for alumni in Heidelberg and abroad, meetings of alumni chapters abroad, seminars and further education for alumni. HAI also helps to establish connections between alumni and current students through the mentoring and job placement programmes.

Well over 1000 alumni register with HAI each year. [78% of all alumni are from Europe](#), 13% from the Americas and 8% from Asia and the rest from Africa and Australia.

Since 2011 HAI also supports competitions about Alumni work:

- [Ideas competition "Research Alumni"](#)
- [Competition "Research Alumni Strategies"](#)
- [Competition "Research Alumni Meetings"](#)

All programmes and outstanding features are listed [here](#).

HAI does not have a direct connection with the HGGS. Graduates of the Heidelberg Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences (HGGS) can participate in the HAI network as it is open to all graduates of Heidelberg University. However, they identify more closely with the much smaller, but equally international HGGS community, and they tend to remain in touch with their peers and the coordinator. They are included in the HGGS mailing list after graduation and are invited to attend events at the HGGS. The Coordinator of the HGGS also maintains personal contact with active alumni. The HGGS does not have its own alumni officer. There is no regular contact between alumni and current PhD members.

On data protection: Heidelberg University has launched a data protection campaign in 2019 and all offices currently receive training on handling personal data.

4.2. Needs and challenges of the GS/university with regards to the intersectoral dimension of alumni work

The HGGS needs to engage its alumni in a more systematic way than before. Up to now, the Coordinator/Manager of the HGGS maintains personal contact with alumni. Due to time constraints and the lack of staff members, however, the alumni work has not been a priority.

The alumni network of the HGGGS needs to be formalized and enlarged in order to expand the HGGGS community beyond its current members. While the HGGGS invites alumni to its events and to some lectures and seminars, it has so far not developed dedicated alumni events. Establishing a regular exchange between alumni and current doctoral members would add an important new dimension to the HGGGS and give current members the chance to network with alumni in academic and non-academic jobs. Regular alumni events centred at the graduate school would boost people's identification with the HGGGS beyond graduation. It would also enhance the significance of the graduate school in terms of granting academic and post-university support. Alumni can become mentors to PhDs and enhance their own professional networks through a dedicated HGGGS alumni website.

5. Helsinki University

5.1. Alumni networks

At the University of Helsinki there are two main alumni organisations: the [Helsinki Alumni](#) and the [Helsinki Alumni Association](#). These are two distinct bodies even though they share some common interests and have some similar activities. Helsinki Alumni is the primary source of cooperation for the Doctoral School in Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki (HYMY). The Alumni Association focuses more on free-time activities and has a small annual fee, and is a smaller actor.

Helsinki Alumni prides itself as being Finland's largest network of experts with more than 30,000 registered alumni, which makes it a very extensive pool of professionals. The communications team is responsible for marketing the alumni activities and managing the secure customer relations register system. They see their strength in providing a multidisciplinary network of professionals for the registered alumni; a platform for them to interact with each other at events and to enhance life-long learning. This contributes to the fact that today's working life requirements include networking and cooperation with different sectors as well as keeping relevant knowledge up-to-date. The aim of the alumni activities is to provide both a possibility to network and gain support from peers as well as to bring meaningful connections to the university.

All previous University of Helsinki degree and exchange students as well as staff are considered alumni and can register as such. Joining the network can be done online and is free of cost. The alumni are offered the possibility to sign up to various events with different topics and speakers as well as becoming a mentor themselves. In addition, they can get a fistname.lastname@alumni.helsinki.fi email address; they have the possibility to reserve the main library's alumni coworking space; and they can read the University's magazine free online.

The HYMY itself does not have an alumni register, and its “alumni network” is more like a mind-map network/collection of people known to have graduated from HYMY’s doctoral programmes. The definition of doctoral alumni also slightly differs from the official Alumni organisation’s definition as alumni are only considered as those who have already graduated from HYMY’s programmes while Helsinki Alumni’s register shows also those who are currently studying. The whole doctoral education structure at UH is also relatively new and the current structure with doctoral schools and doctoral programmes was established only a few years back. This makes the systems slightly unharmonized as the Alumni register does not provide data on a doctoral school and programme level, but only shows the person’s major. A very recent improvement is that when someone registers as alumnus they can mark to which of the four doctoral schools they belong to, but until very recently there was no way of knowing whether or not a person in the UH alumni network holds a PhD or not. This is why it is hard to know the exact figures of doctoral alumni.

There is a dedicated alumni office but it is a rather small team of 7 people, which means that their resources are limited and even though there is a person appointed to focus on doctoral alumni issues, there is no dedicated alumni activities for the HYMY. Some individual doctoral programmes occasionally organise activities with their alumni but they do not need to report it to HYMY so we are not aware of the extent of their interactions with alumni. For example Helsinki University’s doctoral programme in social sciences just did a “*Life after the PhD*” panel discussion in their annual conference with alumni speakers.

HYMY organised in Nov 2019 a Career Day with invited alumni from different sectors and career paths for an exchange about intersectoral perspectives for PhDs. However, these types of activities are generally small, since most resources are reserved for the university level alumni activities. There are some mentoring groups at the university level but they are not specifically aimed at PhD candidates

5.2. Needs and challenges of the GS/university with regards to the intersectoral dimension of alumni work

The Helsinki Alumni has a great network but so far it has not been of much help to HYMY. One of the reasons is that the alumni team does not fully understand the needs of the doctoral schools and their CRM system is not built to serve them. HYMY cannot access the Helsinki alumni network independently but needs the communications team’s alumni people to act as intermediate. In addition, their alumni register has not been up for a very long time and even though it has already more than 30,000 names the structure of the network is still unclear, and the box to tick to indicate being a doctoral alumnus is a recent addition. This means that a large proportion of contacts are not segmented and therefore it is difficult to contact the most appropriate alumni for specific events.

In addition, the alumni activities are primarily designed to serve the alumni and not the students as the alumni are regarded as faces of the university to the world therefore the focus for the activities is on the needs of the alumni rather than of the students. Furthermore, the doctoral alumni are a minority who are seen just like other the alumni and not something that should be distinguished. However, it is possible for a PhD candidate to interact with alumni if (s)he, the supervisor or the doctoral programme is active and for example has alumni on their thesis committee. There are also mentoring programs that link alumni with students.

From HYMY's perspective, the possibility for alumni work would lie in taking better advantage of those doctoral candidates who already are in working life and write their thesis part-time. These people are potential intersectoral alumni and should be connected with those newly-started doctoral candidates to discuss career perspectives. For these intersectoral alumni, the support they probably need is to receive tips and tricks about how to combine the love for research with working life in other sectors, and how to make their PhD degree a valuable asset in their careers. The main risks for these researchers is that they are not seen as proper academics and that the PhD they work for may not necessarily help them in their career either.

6. Leipzig University

6.1. Alumni networks

Leipzig University has an alumni office and a special network for international alumni. For the alumni network of Leipzig University all former students, doctoral candidates, professors, and employees can register. The [alumni office](#) offers a platform to stay in contact with former fellow students and colleagues, the organization of reunions, and workshops within the alumni academy. Furthermore, alumni can engage by sharing their professional career experiences at an online platform for prospective students or at events organized by the career centre. [Leipzig Alumni International \(LAI\)](#) was founded in 1998 as an independent project of the university's International Centre. The majority of the alumni come from Russia, Vietnam and Ethiopia (former GDR connections) as well as from France, Spain and the US. The alumni work comprises three areas:

- 1) maintaining and strengthening contact with the University's international alumni
- 2) encouraging the exchange of knowledge and experience among alumni
- 3) enabling international cooperation

6.2. Needs and challenges of the GS/university with regards to the intersectoral dimension of alumni work

Events on career prospects by the alumni office of Leipzig University are mostly addressed at students. The alumni network offers a meeting point for people who finished their PhD but there are no options for PhD candidates looking for information on career perspectives. The [Graduate School Global and Area Studies](#)

has around 150 alumni (the PhD programme commenced in 2001). A database offers an overview about all current and former PhD candidates. Furthermore, the coordinator of the Graduate School has information about the career paths of several former PhD candidates.

However, the Graduate School does not have the resources needed for developing programmes for alumni. Since the most of the alumni from the graduate school remain in academia, there is not a need in terms of the intersectoral dimension.

7. KU Leuven

7.1. Alumni networks

The database of [Alumni KU Leuven](#) contains a total number of alumni of 285,350, of whom 64,643 are international (*i.e.* with a nationality other than Belgium). 25,135 alumni hold a PhD. The basic principle is that all former students are automatically considered alumni, members and non-members of alumni associations alike.

The structure of alumni network is as follows:

- One Vice Rector is responsible for the Alumni Policy. Currently the same VR holds the portfolio of International Policy.
- 35 Alumni Associations are linked to a Faculty or study programme (with a paid membership).
- 13 [International Alumni Chapters](#) are strongly connected to the university's international strategy (with no paid membership). Each Chapter has a Steering Committee of volunteers, and strong ties with the regional expert academics at KU Leuven. Chapters are connected to the international policy strategy and focus areas, play a role in community building and ambassadorship, with the ultimate aim to support the university for recruitment efforts, corporate relations, fundraising, etc. They organise regular networking events, often with a representative from KU Leuven, and manage a social media group.
- Regional structures in Belgium (with no paid membership) comprise 6 provincial networks.
- The Council for Alumni Policy formulates the strategy and implementation plans. The members are Faculty Deans and alumni association representatives.

KU Leuven has one central alumni database for all actors, and one Alumni Office centrally positioned among faculties, associations and international chapters. It facilitates and aligns alumni policies at central and faculty levels, supports the associations, guides the chapters, manages the database, develops new tools. [All faculties](#) have their own alumni administrators and develop their own policy and goals. These set-ups differ greatly from one another, but are strongly connected to the central policy and Alumni Office.

In terms of strategic goals, KU Leuven considers alumni part of its intellectual capital and develops programmes accordingly. Alumni volunteers develop networks and initiatives for other alumni through associations etc., supported by the university. The network of international alumni chapters is linked to the university's international policy, and to focus areas for PR and recruitment. Current priorities include:

- The development of strong [data system and digital interface](#) for relationship management.
- Specific programmes for young alumni.
- Career tracking.
- Fundraising efforts towards alumni together with the fundraising office, faculties and associations.

PhD candidates have access to the network of alumni on an ad hoc basis, linked to initiatives by the HR Dept. or the GS. The central Alumni Policy strives to put in place a digital community, where PhD candidates and graduates alike can find one another on the basis of mutual study fields, interests, regions. [YouReCa](#) Career Centre regularly organises career talks during which PhD holders who have moved out of the academy share their experiences with our PhD students and postdocs.

7.2. Needs and challenges of the GS/university with regards to the intersectoral dimension of alumni work

Building an SSH PhD alumni network has been high on the list of priorities of Leuven International Doctoral School for the Humanities and Social Sciences (LIDSHSS) for a while now, yet follow-up has been hampered by a number of factors, most notably:

- PhDs and postdocs tend to feel closer to their Faculties and to the KU Leuven as a whole than to the (comparatively relatively recent) Doctoral School;
- Existing alumni networks at the level of the Faculties (or even at sub-Faculty level in different units) are often run bottom-up by volunteers and tend to be hesitant to come together at a higher level;
- The KU Leuven's wide alumni network has been under reconstruction for a considerable period of time now, making it difficult to make strategic decisions.

However, as documented above, this university-wide network should go live before too long and LIDSHSS looks forward to making use of the new opportunities it offers. Meanwhile, a systematic exit-survey for young researchers leaving KU Leuven has been set up and the hope is that this will lead (among other things) to the build-up of a dedicated SSH alumni network that can be run by LIDSHSS, in close cooperation with both Faculties and University.

8. Loughborough University

8.1. Alumni networks

There is a formal [Alumni Relations](#) department set up for the University which liaises with all university alumni from undergraduates to postgraduates. However, there is nothing in place specifically for PhD alumni. The University has branding which includes #Lborofamily which makes it easier for alumni to connect with one another. It also networking platform called [Lboro Connect](#). However, there is nothing in place at present to formally connect alumni and current students. The Careers Advice department plans to hold events with PhD graduates who have moved on to non-academic careers; however these are still new and infrequent.

8.2. Needs and challenges of the GS/university with regards to the intersectoral dimension of alumni work

The challenge is that the alumni that typically remain in contact with their supervisors and the school are the ones that stay in academia. It is harder to keep connections with those who leave to pursue other careers.

9. Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ)

9.1. Alumni networks

There is an Alumni Platform at UVSQ, although it is not specifically for PhD holders. The Doctoral School uses the joint procedures in place in the Doctoral College to carry out a detailed survey, based on a questionnaire, and statistical analysis of doctoral students' career pathways for up to five years after the end of the doctorate (the doctorate charter requires them to complete this questionnaire and to provide their contact details). The result of this survey is available [here](#).

An alumni platform is run by the UVSQ Foundation. It is connected to LinkedIn and works pretty much that way, except that it is gated: you have to be a member to access the information, post your CV, or for businesses to post offers of internships or jobs. Inscription on the platform is voluntary and members have a right to withdraw their data. The platform allows postings, groups, discussions.

9.2. Needs and challenges of the GS/university with regards to the intersectoral dimension of alumni work

The data base exists to keep in touch with recent PhDs and ask them to contribute to intersectoral training, but there is sparse network activity. The Doctoral College organizes [interdisciplinary and intersectoral trainings](#) along various interdisciplinary career tracks. There are also occasional events such as

[CARaDOC 2020](#) (CAReers And DOCTors « a Convention to help young researchers shape their careers! » to take place on June 9, 2020.

PhD holders participate in these programs as they are invited to communicate on their experiences.

The Doctoral College actively taps the experience of PhD holders for intersectoral training with a growing variety of activities, but SSH doctoral students seem to feel that the more specific needs and skills of SSH PhD holders need to be addressed.