

PhD workshop

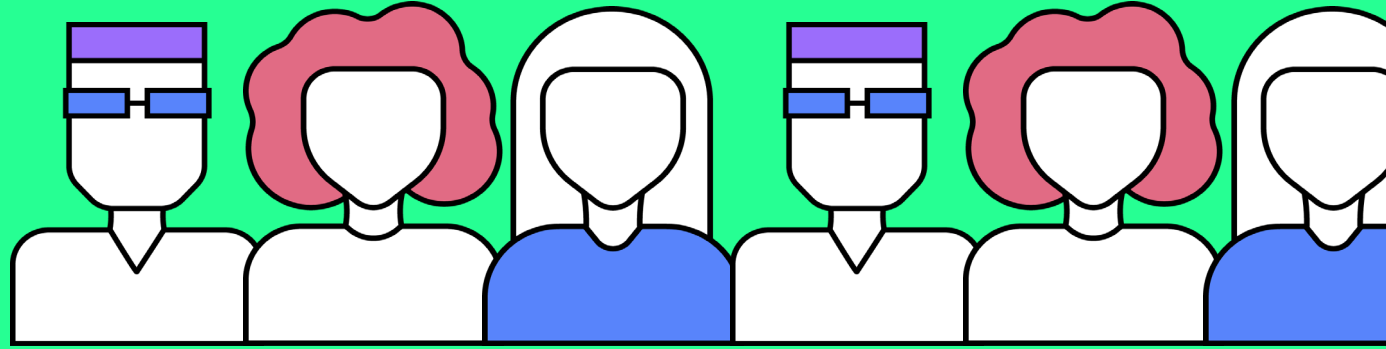
Navigating challenges in a PhD journey and the value of multidisciplinary research

Workshop facilitator: Petru L. Curseu

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Agenda



1. A few reflections on pursuing a PhD
2. Open EU in a nutshell
3. Value of multidisciplinary research
4. Collaborative group discussions (~ 15 mins)
5. Group presentations and wrap-up (~ 10 mins)

Why talk about the challenges of pursuing a PhD?

- PhD research = intellectual challenge + personal challenge
- Intellectual challenge: *highest educational achievement, deep scholarly dive into a niche topic, work autonomously and develop identity as a researcher, navigate uncertainty of feedback (supervisors & reviewers)*
- Personal challenge: *ambiguity (“what exactly am I trying to discover?”), workload and time pressure, ownership of research, emotional labor (confidence vs impostor feelings), isolation*

“Pursuing a Phd is a lonely journey” Sandra Schruijer

Are there any relational challenges as well?

- Supervisor(s): relationship with the supervisor(s) is the most influential external factor that impacts PhD candidates' experience (Sverdlik et al., 2018)
- Scholarly community & reviewers: *limited sense of belonging, dealing with (un)critical feedback, competitive (rather than collaborative) scholarly environment, helpless evaluative position (harsh personal feedback tone)*
- Peers: *competition rather than collaborative relations*

Sources:

Martínez-García, I., De Witte, H., García-Martínez, J., & Cano-García, F. J. (2024). A systematic review and a comprehensive approach to PhD students' wellbeing. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 16(4), 1565-1583.

Sverdlik, A., Hall, N. C., McAlpine, L., & Hubbard, K. (2018). The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 13, 361-388.

Open EU & WP4

OpenEU: the pan-European open university, brings together eight leading European open and distance universities and two on-campus universities engaged in digital transformation to become the European Universities Initiative's main asset for accessing, using, and exploring digital education knowledge and knowhow in the EHEA

- WP4 overall objective: to cultivate and grow an Inclusive and Collaborative Living Lab that brings together both expertise and needs from researchers, and societal and industrial stakeholders
- WP4 PhD community objective: to establish a cross-disciplinary OpenEU doctoral community to increase a) research collaboration among PhD researchers, b) PhD researchers mobility and c) joint multidisciplinary collaboration and establish joint doctoral agreements among OpenEU partners

Summarizing ...

- PhD challenges are often **relational and pedagogical**, not individual weakness

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- Open EU aims to create a framework and platform for building a vibrant European PhD community engaged in collaborative multidisciplinary research

Why multidisciplinary research?

... to address **wicked problems** that:

- (1) have no aprioric clear formulation and can be described in numerous ways,
 - (2) no stopping rule for the resolution process,
 - (3) solutions are not necessarily “*true or false*”, they are rather “*good or bad*”, “*useful or useless*”, “*better or worse*”
 - (4) there is no immediate and no ultimate test of solutions,
 - (5) solutions are often “one shot operations” with no opportunity to learn by trial and error,
 - (6) the solution set is not fixed or well described (multiple stakeholders may have different or conflicting views),
 - (7) every wicked problem is unique and
 - (8) can generate other wicked problems (solutions may have irreversible consequences)
- (Rittel & Webber, 1973)

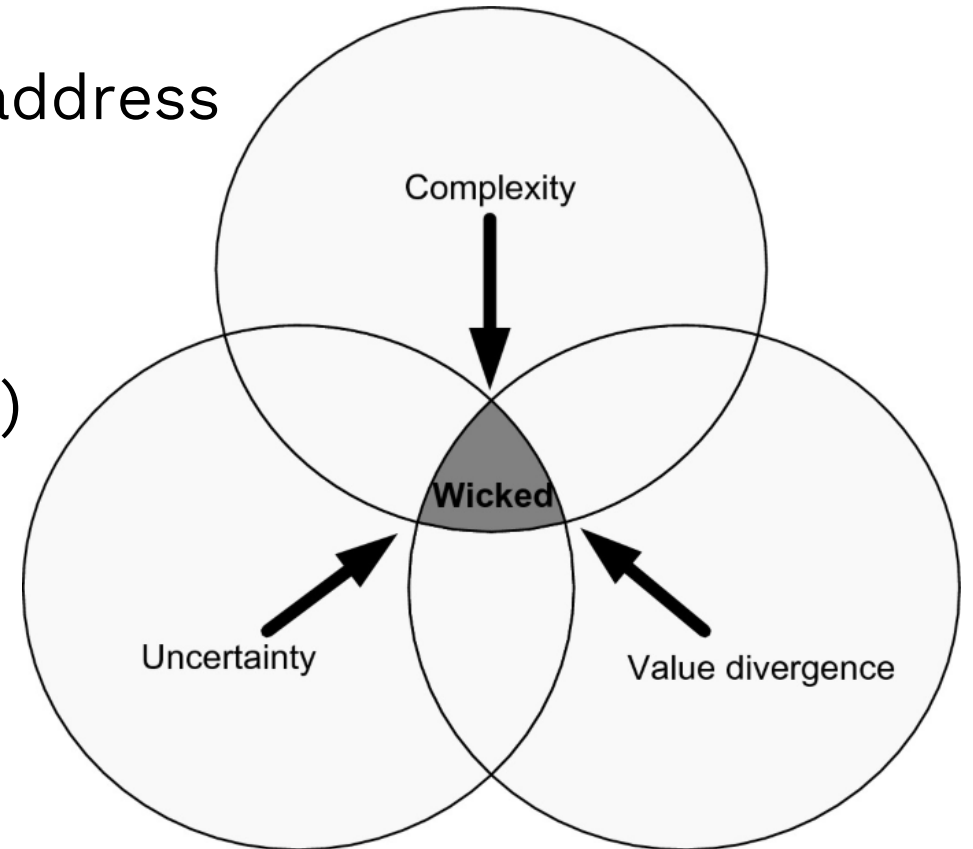
Source:

Rittel, H. W., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4(2), 155-169.

Collaboration in multidisciplinary research

Multidisciplinary collaboration is required to address wicked problems such as:

- Climate change
- Public health crises (e.g., pandemics, obesity)
- Migration and integration
- Urban sustainability
- Ethical governance of AI
- Global inequality



Framing the collaborative group discussion

Think of your expectations and experiences from your doctoral studies and reflect on your strengths and challenges, the support you received from the university and the ways in which you would like to engage with the OpenEU consortium as a platform for supporting the creation of a vibrant cross-disciplinary OpenEU doctoral community

Questions breakout groups

Question 1 (~15 mins)

- What relational challenges have you encountered so far in your PhD (e.g., with supervisors, peers, scholarly community), and what strategies or support have helped you navigate them?
- *Organization suggestion - start a question round with individual answers allocating about 1 minute/person*

Question(s) 2 (~15mins)

- How could a cross-disciplinary OpenEU doctoral community support your research and well-being? What concrete activities or structures would motivate you to participate?
- *Organization suggestion - discussion round summarizing for each group debate*

2 key challenges + 2 concrete ideas for OpenEU

Summary of discussions from breakout groups

Conclusions and summary

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Gràcies Merci Obrigada Paldies Takk fyrir
Thank you Blagodarya vi Danke Efkharîsto
Gracias Gràcies Merci Obrigada Paldies
Takk fyrir Thank you Blagodarya vi Danke

