



Erasmus Cycle

Framework for a practice-based arts
3rd cycle degree, equivalent to a PhD

–Intellectual Output 2

Development of a practice-based research environment

In France, the development of the practice-led PhD is linked to the transformations of artistic higher education in recent years. In the wake of the Bologna agreements, the development of the Bachelor-Master-Doctorate system and the need for art schools to comply with the European frameworks of higher education, these schools, under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture (and not the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation as for the majority of programs in France) have profoundly transformed the structure of their educational curriculum. Although, obviously, research processes have always irrigated artistic practice and pedagogy (for example in the form of the Research and Creation Workshops –ARC-, an existing experimental pedagogical format), “research” is today at the heart of the institution’s policies. For example, research thesis is now mandatory to complete a Master’s degree, as well as research seminars and projects are compulsory in the pedagogical programs.

In this context, the community of art schools has strongly defended the singularity of research in the arts and the invention of research processes that mobilize the methods, experimental practices, discourses and forms of their fields of investigation. In the Master’s degree, in many schools, the thesis does not necessarily have to respect an academic writing format but is open to a plurality of forms. The numerous colloquiums co-organized by Ecole nationale supérieure d’arts de Paris Cergy (ENSAPC) bear the traces of these rich discussions.

Some art schools collaborate with universities for the development of practice-led doctoral programs¹ (since for now only universities are entitled to deliver doctoral degrees), in the context, for instance, of the SACRE program² and the Graduate School Humanities, Creation and Heritage³ or the RADIANT program⁴. In addition to these transversal programs with numerous institutional members, other practice-based doctoral programs in the arts have emerged⁵.

1 It should be noted that some universities departments of visual arts have authorized the defense of doctorates partly composed of artistic productions (for instance at University Paris 1 - Panthéon Sorbonne and Université Paris 8 - Vincennes Saint-Denis)

2 Cooperation in the framework of the COMUE PSL University by Conservatoire National Supérieur d’Art Dramatique, Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Métiers de l’Image et du Son - La Fémis, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and the Ecole Normale Supérieure.

3 Cooperation in the framework of the COMUE Université Paris-Seine by École nationale supérieure d’arts de Paris-Cergy, École nationale supérieure de paysage, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Versailles, Institut national du patrimoine, Université de Cergy-Pontoise. <https://www.u-cergy.fr/fr/recherche-et-valorisation/ied/eur-humanites-creation-et-patrimoine.html>

4 Cooperation in the framework of the COMUE Normandie Université by École supérieure d’arts & médias de Caen/Cherbourg, École supérieure d’art et design Le Havre-Rouen, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Normandie.

5 Such as the Doctorate of artistic creation of Le Fresnoy with the Université de Québec à Montréal and the Université de Lille, the Doctorate specialized in comics of the École européenne supérieure de l’image with the Université de Poitiers or the Doctorate in arts of Villa Arson with the Université Côte d’Azur

These doctoral programs were also created thanks to the new doctoral Decree of May 25, 2016⁶. Covering all disciplines (and not only artistic ones), it allows the doctorate to be co-supervised by an artist, a curator, etc. and the practice-based PhD to be defended before a committee also including these professionals.

Challenges in the development of practice-led arts research programs

Formal constraints. The expectations vary according to the doctoral programs: artworks (exhibitions, films, performances...), projects, or theoretical writing are required, to which are sometimes added complementary elements (for example a logbook tracing the evolution of research).

Supervision. One of the main challenges in the development of practice-led doctoral programs concerns the ability of art schools to supervise doctorates. Indeed, today in France, it is compulsory for a doctoral student to be supervised by a researcher who holds the habilitation to direct research (HDR). However, for the moment, the number of professors holding this HDR is extremely low in art schools, and professors holding a Doctorate are few. But Article 16 of the Decree of 25 May 2016 recognizes the possibility of co-supervising the doctorate by "a person from the socio-economic world recognized for his competence in the field". This allows the doctoral student to be followed, in addition to the HDR researcher mentioned above, by an artist or a professional from the art field.

Relation to educational frameworks and the arts sector

As mentioned before, given the monopoly of awarding the Doctorate by the universities, a construction of the practice-led PhD in partnership with a university and a doctoral school is for the moment imperative. In this context, the Graduate School Humanities, Creation and Heritage brings together a variety of institutions dealing with creative writing, arts, heritage, architecture, landscape etc.

Funding

Funding is of major importance in order to offer attractive working conditions and the possibility of pursuing research in a concentrated and efficient manner to the PhD candidates, to structure consistent programs and to strengthen research capacities. The association with other higher education institutions and the university opens the opportunity for arts schools to benefit from funding offered by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and the National Research Agency (Agence nationale de la Recherche - ANR), such as the Research Initiatives (Initiatives d'excellence IDEX or ISITE), the University schools for research (Ecoles universitaires de recherche - EUR) or the Excellence Laboratories (Laboratoires d'excellence - LABEX).

These frameworks are also sources for funding doctoral candidates through doctoral contracts⁷, which are regulated by the Ministry of Higher Education and correspond to a contract of employment with the university, with a minimum monthly remuneration and the opening of social benefits (insurance contributions, unemployment, etc.). However some doctorates are unpaid. Various practice-led doctoral programs receive other funding from

⁶ Decree of 25 May 2016 setting the national framework and the procedures which lead to the awarding of the national doctoral degree.

⁷ Decree of 23 April 2009 on contractual doctoral students of public higher education and research institutions

– among others – the Ministry of Culture or local authorities (regions and city councils).

Research Programme accreditation

Accreditation of doctorates is realized following the modalities and procedures of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The evaluation of the doctoral schools is carried out by the HCERES (Haut comité à l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur), the national agency responsible for evaluating all French higher education programs (including programs and diplomas that are not under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education, such as art schools). The decree of accreditation of a public higher education institution entails the authorization to issue the doctoral degree in the specialties concerned, alone or jointly. This same decree mentions, after the periodic evaluation by the HCERES, the list of doctoral schools authorized to host doctoral students for their doctoral training⁸.

Research Programme title

In France, the national diploma awarded by the State is the "Doctorat" (Doctorate)⁹. Individually, institutions may promote their programs under names such as doctorate of creation, practice-led doctorate, project-based doctorate or doctorate of research and creation, etc.

Aims of the programme

The doctorate in the arts must allow to develop a thorough research. One of the challenges in the implementation of the practice-led PhD is to help rethink the relationship between theory and practice, as well as the place of artists and their practices in the production of knowledge, theoretical statements, etc.

In certain European contexts, the doctorate is now required to teach in art schools. In France, the community of art schools agrees that the doctorate should absolutely not be a pre-requisite.

Mode and length of study

According to the legal context¹⁰, doctoral studies are generally carried out in three years in full-time equivalent devoted to research. In other cases, especially when the doctoral student has a salaried activity, the duration can be up to six years. Annual extensions may be granted on a derogation basis by the head of the institution.

Exceptionally and at the motivated request of the doctoral student, a non-breaking gap of a maximum duration of one year may occur once, by decision of the head of institution. During this period, the doctoral student temporarily suspends his training and his research work. This period is not counted in the duration of the doctorate.

Programme structure (modules, credits etc.)

The legal framework governing the doctorate implies a training obligation

⁸ Decree of 25 May 2016 setting the national framework and the procedures which lead to the awarding of the national doctoral degree.

⁹ Article L.612-7 of the Education Code

¹⁰ Decree of 25 May 2016 setting the national framework and the procedures which lead to the awarding of the national doctoral degree.

for doctoral students, in addition to their thesis. However, according to the doctoral schools, and even beyond the practice-led programs, this obligation is very differently implemented. Some doctoral practice-led programs propose, at a regular frequency (for example twice a year), transversal seminars bringing together all the doctoral students from different disciplines. Following the European framework, each year of study is assigned 60 ECTS, which leads to 180 ECTS for the doctorate.

Assessment

Doctoral programs request, according to their own modalities, that doctoral students present intermediary reports. In addition, according to the rules applicable to all doctoral students, thesis committees, involving researchers other than those who follow the doctoral student, may take place every year (they are responsible for providing an external perspective and ensuring the proper progress of the doctorate).

The thesis leads to a defense before a committee, sanctioned by the doctor's degree. According to the national framework, the authorization to support a thesis is granted by the head of institution. The work of the doctoral student is examined beforehand by at least two rapporteurs appointed by the head of institution, and who are authorized to direct research (HDR) or, under certain conditions, can be assimilated professors or personalities holding the doctoral degree. In the case of work involving professionals who do not belong to the academic world, a third rapporteur, recognized for his expertise in the field, may be appointed. Allowing for a discipline-specific view on the format and expression of the work, this point is of major importance in the context of the practice-led doctorate in the arts. The rapporteurs make known their opinion by means of written reports; on this basis, the head of institution authorizes the defense.

The number of thesis jury members is between four and eight. It is composed of at least half of personalities from outside of the enrollment institution and chosen because of their scientific or professional expertise in the field of research concerned. Its composition must allow a balanced representation of women and men. At least half of the jury must be composed of professors or equivalent staff. The members of the jury designate among them a president. The president must be a professor or of equivalent rank.

Selection of candidates

The selection is differently implemented according to the programs. All, however, according to different modalities, provide for a mode of selection involving both academic researchers, teaching at the university, and professionals and practitioners of the field of art. This parity is imperative and to be defended.

Recruitment is usually done on the basis of a research project, accompanied by a CV and a portfolio, followed if the candidate is pre-selected, by an interview.

Unlike the current practice in French universities and because of the small number of HDR researchers specialized in the arts sector (see above), applicants are not always required to have already identified their supervisors and the choice of directors may be made following admission.

Quality development and quality assurance

As mentioned above, evaluation is carried out by the HCERES (Haut comité à l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur). For the evaluation of study programs and doctoral schools, which take place every

five years, HCERES employs an external evaluation methodology including a process of self-evaluation carried out by the institution, evaluation activities carried out by experts and based on evaluation standards as well as the publication of all methodological documents and of the evaluation reports. HCERES respects the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) stating that programs must also implement quality assurance schemes, which are assessed as part of the evaluation. Evaluation standards developed by HCERES comprise objectives to be attained (references) and actions to be carried out (criteria), which enable institutions to develop their own standards.

Programs funded by the ANR (Agence nationale de la recherche) must report annually in a very precise manner on their activities (with a number of indicators to be completed).

CREATOR DOCTUS

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