INTRODUCTION

The achievement of a doctoral degree has long been considered as a way of preparing for an academic career. However over the past two decades universities have undergone significant transformations, such as the move towards new missions other than teaching and research (Enders & De Weert, 2009), the increasing globalization of the academic sphere, the application of new managerial schemes (Hazelkorn et al., 2010), as well as other changes arising from policy reforms, all of which have combined to reduce employment opportunities in the higher education sector. In fact the published data highlight the shortages of opportunities and the increasing imbalance between the demand and supply sides of the academic labour market (OECD, 2010).

For these reasons, PhD graduates have gradually arrived at a turning point: either the holders of doctorates face high level of unemployment (OECD, 2010) or they accept that they are part of a broader workforce, seeking employment in various sectors (Roach & Sauerman, 2010). In fact there is an emerging need to decouple doctoral training from the academic career path, and to consider it more as a potential passport towards multiple careers (Enders, 2002; Huisman et al., 2002).

However even as doctorates move into the broader market, little is known about the employment choices they will encounter or the changes they will make as they proceed in their careers. Most of the published studies regarding the issue focus on the labour market perspective, meaning on the supply side of the academic positions offered to PhD graduates. There has been some examination of alternative occupations, particularly the role of junior scientist in the private industrial sector, and in this case the direct relationship of the final stages of doctoral education to the individual’s employment opportunities and career paths (Mangematin, 2000).

DOCTORAL TRAINING CHANGES: PATHWAY TOWARDS MULTIPLE CAREERS

The recent economic and social changes have prompted PhD graduates to broaden their employment horizons and search for jobs in sectors other than research and
education. The achievement of a doctoral degree, so far, is no longer seen simply as an introduction to an academic career, and the changing situation is leading to careers that are less linear and predictable.

This study examines the career trajectories of PhD graduates in the social sciences and humanities (SSH), exploring the career steps and attempting to highlight the factors likely to impact on the graduate’s decisions about various aspects of employment. The current chapter analyses the careers of more than 1000 PhD graduates in 13 European countries, with the objective of identifying which elements influence the decision to change or remain in the same sector of employment, at the moment of passage between two different jobs. The broader aim is to identify those elements that are useful for describing the longer term patterns of mobility in the careers of graduates. The data examined in the chapter derive from the European Community POCARIM study.

The observations are mostly in a longitudinal dimension, as the graduates proceed in the higher education sector or move back and forth to other sectors, both in national and international contexts. A vertical dimension can also be understood, as the graduates advance in career position (Enders, 2002). The aim is to reveal the different career trajectories of SSH PhD graduates, and the factors impacting on their step by step changes in employment. The research questions are: What are the career trajectories of social sciences and humanities PhD graduates? Is it possible to identify patterns of steps in the career trajectories? What factors are likely to impact on the career steps? Is there a pattern of relationships between the first career experiences (employment decisions, periods of unemployment) and the long-run development of the career?

We expect that for SSH PhD graduates, multiple career trajectories are likely to emerge, since they can experience employment outside the academic sphere and may often move between several different sectors. We will examine potential factors impacting on the individual’s career steps and their mobility in the labour market, such as the initial characteristics of the career, the age at obtaining the doctoral degree, the individual’s gender, family composition, and their mobility during doctoral studies. Finally, we will search for differences in career trajectories and steps, including non-academic employment, relative to the characteristics of the education received within the SSH field itself (Henkel, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986, 1999).

The intention of the current work is not to examine the impact of the students’ experiences during their doctoral education on their career and employment opportunities. Rather, our intention is to focus on the different career steps and decisions beyond the education stage, illustrating different factors that are likely to impact on the moves and progress of SSH PhD graduates within the labour market.

The next section of the chapter introduces the theoretical framework for the study, serving as the grounding for the analysis. The subsequent sections present the dataset and describe the methodology used in the analysis. The final sections consist of a discussion of the estimation results and a summary of the resulting conclusions.