

ORIENTATION OF DOCTORATE AND POSTGRADUATE COURSES

Francisco Rodríguez-Martínez

University of Granada

Postgraduate courses have probably been one of the most decisive and significant aspects of the new orientation in Spanish geography. The regulatory or legal framework of such studies has changed substantially since the start of the 1980's. This has had a great influence over the development in these courses. For this reason our exposition will begin with reference to these regulatory changes which impinge upon the type, contents and objectives of these courses and, as such, to a great extent define their orientation. Afterwards we will review the postgraduate courses relevant to geography. But above all we will discuss the courses which lead to the title of Doctor, and also those which provide access to other titles and diplomas. Sources utilised were, in the first place, the biennial publications of the Council of Universities published before 1992 and relevant to courses mentioned previously. Secondly, we have used the responses to a questionnaire sent to University departments in 1995. This second source, although containing more information, lacked accuracy because of departments poor response, although the majority answered the questionnaire (96%).

1. THE SERVANTS OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Until the L.R.U., Ley Organica de Reforma Universitaria (L.R.U.) or University Reform Law was passed in 1983, the sole content and purpose of the doctoral courses (the Tercer Ciclo) in Spain was the realization of the doctoral thesis. Before the public reading and debate of their doctoral theses, doctorate students hardly had to complete any supervised studies after graduating with their bachelor degree. On completion of these first degree courses (the segundo ciclo) one would graduate with a university degree, having either passed all of the relevant courses, or via means of an additional exam consisting of the

exposition and public defense of an essay or short thesis («tesina»). Having obtained the bachelor degree, doctoral students could have presented and debated their theses with hardly any requisites other than completing some prior «Monographic courses» (generally three in number) chosen from faculties corresponding to each academic course. These courses, usually very short, were not consistent over the Spanish university as a whole and referred to excessively specific subjects, geographic or not. As a consequence these courses had no coordinated objectives. Owing to this, doctoral students wishing to improve their scientific methodology or technique in the field of their thesis, had to depend upon good fortune or capable lecturers in order to take advantage of these courses.

In short, before 1983 these doctoral courses of the Tercer Ciclo could barely contribute to an improvement in the formative level of the future doctors, whose destiny was to join the staff of Universities and the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), or Higher Council of Scientific Research, centres teaching geography (Zaragoza, Madrid, Barcelona). Within in these limitations the situation represented the perfect framework for self-teaching, mitigated only by the influence of some Professors considered «authorities» in the discipline. In balance, it is generally true that students required many more years of effort and maturity before receiving permission to proceed with the thesis.

Since the L.R.U. (1983) and above all since 1985/6, when most Universities began avail themselves of the Statute of Autonomy, the normative framework and content of postgraduate courses and studies has changed greatly. In reality the process of change, which cannot ever be considered as consolidated, is continuing within the framework of the aforementioned law. In fact, until almost five years ago geographic postgraduate courses were offered almost exclusively to doctoral students. Although at least formally on a different basis from before. However, the period of change has been too shortlived for a definitive evaluation of all its aspects.

In any case, the L.R.U. and the Statute of Autonomy have permitted the differentiation between:

- a) postgraduate courses, directed towards obtaining the Doctorate degree, whereupon the proficient researcher should attain a standard level of competence; and
- b) postgraduate courses, relevant to particular universities and orientated to various vocational specialities in relation to the regional or national labour market.

The latter lead to university diplomas and titles such as Master or «magister», expert, specialist, etc.

The structure of the majority of the courses referred to in the previous paragraph adhere to distinct regulations depending upon the aims and objectives of each course. In order to adequately understand the Geographical component relating to these courses it is as well to bear in mind the pretext of some of these regulations.

The doctorate courses are obligatory for graduates of the segundo ciclo (ie bachelor degree) before they can obtain the Doctorate qualification. These courses must last for at least a two year period. Each Doctorate programme must be proposed by one or more Department (ie in one or various related geographic subject areas) which must be responsible for the programme once agreed by the relevant governing body of the university. Each programme must define an overall orientation and contain a certain number of courses

equivalent to credits and hours. The total number of credits of the different courses must not be less than 32 (320 hours). Of these at least one credit (10 hours) must refer to research methodology or technique. As a minimum another 16 credits (160 hours) must be courses on the fundamental content of the scientific area of the doctoral programme. In this way, the rules determine more than 50% of the direction of the programme. The rest of the courses or credits can refer either to fields related to the programme, taught in other programmes, or to optional degree subjects not studied previously (a maximum of 8 credits in this last manner).

Consequently, selection and orientation of the programme requires thorough preparation beforehand and must include a high level of coordination from the teaching staff involved. This though, has rarely been the reality, as we will see later, for a diverse series of reasons both academic and economic in equal measure. Owing to this the new Doctoral Programmes have not been everything that had been expected. The fact is that several Geographic Doctoral Programmes have resulted in a high level of improvisation and a lack of coherence which has substantially reduced their value.

Nevertheless some of these problems have been tackled in a number of postgraduate courses at different universities. These courses are directed towards a demand from the geographic profession and from the labour market. Further development by university departments is untenable without a rigorous and coherent project whose objectives should be to regulate the course theory, practice as well as the selection of adequate teaching staff. Without such a project it would be impossible to match the competition of the many specialized private teaching centres. On the other hand, the costly financing of these courses, especially those of greater duration and content (Masters, generally with more than 400 taught hours), makes them untenable without recourse to external support, public or private, or to increasing the course matriculation fees. What is also required is a precise ceiling on the aims and content of these courses.

2. DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES IN GEOGRAPHY

According to the data collected in table nº 1 the majority of Spanish Universities in the last 4 years have developed Doctoral Programmes leading to the qualification of Doctorate in geography. These include either specific programs set up exclusively by geography departments, or can include some courses from other departments. Anyway, the latter would be a temporary or strategic situation (Leon, Jaen, Balearics...).

Only two universities, however, Alicante and Cordoba, have denominated their programmes using only the name of the subject matter. Cantabria adds other titles to geography (Regional Studies and Regional Planning). Many more utilise the name of an area of study or an adjective clearly identifiable with one. For example:

Human Geography: Barcelona (Autonomous University), Granada, Madrid, (Autonomous and Complutense Universities), Valencia and the U.N.E.D. (Universidad Nacional de Enseñanza a Distancia - the Spanish National Distance Learning University).

Regional Geography or Regional Geographic Analysis: Extremadura (which adds Regional Planning), Madrid (Autonomous University) and Seville.

Physical Geography: usually with a subsidiary title ie, Barcelona (climate change),

Madrid (natural landscape), La Rioja (natural and agrarian landscape), and Valencia (water and fluvial systems).

Several Universities prefer more technical or thematic programmes. Of these the more important are Alcalá de Henares (GIS and cartography) and Jaen (Rural Space). The majority of programmes, however, touch upon the application of Regional and Environmental Planning either as an integrated or a separate subject: Almeria, Barcelona, Cádiz, Granada, Balearics and La Laguna. This group can also incorporate those which use the titles «Territorial Analysis» and/or «Spatial Planning» in this respect (Salamanca, Santiago, Oviedo...). The aforementioned Institutions, except Almeria and Cadiz (which present different specialities) and those using the generic title of geography, usually offer the most comprehensive doctoral programmes.

Nervertheless, almost all of the programmes include specific themes directly related with either the Geographical areas in which they are found or with certain specialities relevant to their location. Apart from the most obvious instances, there are many more; for example arid zones (Almeria), water resources (Alicante...), borders (Salamanca), marine resources (Cádiz), tourism (Alicante, Sevilla...), Latin America (Madrid, Barcelona...), Volcanology (La Laguna)... This cannot be an comprehensive analysis as the majority of these specific themes are repeated in other universities and in some cases run alongside related themes. However some of the other examples are indicated below.

The evolution experienced in geographic research in Spain has also become more marked in courses related with methodology and technique. This is common of practically all of the programmes and in particular of the more comprehensive programmes mentioned above. In the technical field the greatest innovation is perhaps the growth in information technology (G.I.S.) and in remote sensing. Outstanding in this sense are the Madrid Universities (Alcalá, Complutense and Autonomous), Barcelona, Cantabria and Granada. Other Universities, Malaga for example, have significant research projects and equipment in such subjects, but how this kind of teaching is incorporated into their doctorate programmes is not known to us.

The growing importance of applied research is obvious in the considerable attention it is attracting in the majority of the programmes. Themes include regional policy, the various types of territorial planning, development, etc.

Without doubt the foregoing, without being exhaustive, gives an aproximate idea of the general orientation of the doctoral courses offered by our universities. Without doubt, a more detailed study of the respective programmes could have revealed other interesting observations. Besides the general content and orientation of programmes originating from geography departments we have to add the individual participation of other geographers, either university lecturers or professionals, in other doctoral programmes and postgraduate courses which we will examine in the following section. Lastly, in the face of the initial trend of the presentation of programmes by subject area (which doesn't necessarily mean more incisive or equilibrated programmes) there now seems to be a growing trend of sincretism. That is to say, despite a variety of university doctoral programmes which are unsustainable scientifically, economically and pedagogically, increasingly unitary programmes have been set up which involve different subject areas and/or departments.

Table 1

UNIVERSITIES	DENOMINATION
ALCALÁ DE HENARES (UAH) ALICANTE (UAL) ALMERÍA (UALM) BARCELONA-AUT (UAB) BARCELONA (UB)	Cartography, Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing Geography Regional Analysis and Regional Planning in Semi-Arid Zones Human Geography — Physical Geography and Environmental Change — Catalan Relations with the Exterior — Historiography of Geography and Regional Planning
CÁDIZ (UCA) CANTABRIA (UCN) CASTILLA DE LA MANCHA (UCLM) CÓRDOBA (UCO) EXTREMEDURA (UEX) GRANADA (UGRA)	Geography, Environment and Marine Resource Management Geography, Regional Studies, and Regional Planning. Regional Analysis Geography Regional Geographic Analysis and Regional Planning — Regional and Environmental Planning — Geographic Space as a Product of Human Organisation
BALEARIC ISLANDS (UIB) JAÉN (UJA) LA RIOJA (ULR) LA LAGUNA (ULL) LEÓN (ULE) MADRID-AUT (UAM)	Territory and Environment The Rural Andalusian World from a Multidisciplinary Perspective Spatial Analysis of Natural and Agrarian Landscapes Geography, Natural Environment and Regional Planning Territory and Planning in Rural and Urban Areas — Physical Analysis of Natural Landscapes — Social and Urban Space and Quality of Life — Regional Geography Research
MADRID-COM (UCM) MURCIA (UMU) OVIEDO (UOV) BASQUE COUNTRY (UPV)	Human Geography. Territory and Society Geographic Space, Regional and Environmental Planning Territorial Analysis Uses of Resources and Spatial Organisation. Geographic Perspective and Prehistory in País Vasco
SANTIAGO (UST) SEVILLE (USE)	Territorial Analysis and Spatial Organisation in Galicia — Regional Planning and Environmental Strategies — Regional Policy and Territorial Transformations
VALENCIA (UVEG)	— Water and Fluvial Systems — Geography and Society
VALLADOLID (UVA) ZARAGOZA (UZA)	Geographic Space and Regional Planning Physical Geography and Regional Planning. Conceptual Framework and Methods of Analysis
UNIV. DE EDUC. A DISTANCIA (UNED)	Human Settlements and Economic Activity

Sources: Consejo de Universidades: Programas de Doctorado 1992 y Encuesta a los Departamentos Universitarios (Noviembre-Diciembre, 1995).

3. CHARACTERISTIC DEPARTMENTAL POSTGRADUATE COURSES

As we saw in section 1, the L.R.U. and the statutes which are developed in the different universities, permit the universities to teach specialised education at postgraduate level and to issue qualifications autonomously. This has enabled university education, mainly with the support of private organisations and occasional public funding, to participate in a market well established in our country. The majority of these courses tend to facilitate the entry of

university graduates into the labour market and so it would be absurd for the universities to remain at the margin of this issue. These postgraduate courses are very diverse in character, from quite simple, highly specific short courses (between 20 and 90 hours) to those called Masters or Magister which last at least one academic year and in general include more than 400 hours of theoretic and practical tuition. Masters courses usually refer to subjects of an inter-connective nature which, although their inspiration is specific (from geography for example), require the collaboration of other disciplines.

Although development has been slow in comparison with the standard university education, several university departments have lead the implementation of several postgraduate courses. Additionally, they have contributed greatly to the support of such courses in various other institutions - not necessarily other universities.

Table 2

UNIVERSITIES	DENOMINATION
ALICANTE (UAL)	— Masters in Regional Planning
BARCELONA (UB)	— Postgraduate course in Planning and Management of Tourist Space
CADIZ (UCA)	Postgraduate course on Environmental Planning and Management
DEUSTO (UDE)	Postgraduate course on Planning and Management of Coastal Space in Latin America and Spain
GRANADA (UGR)	Masters in Environment and Regional Planning
MADRID-AUTÓNOMA (UAM)	Masters in Local Development in Rural Areas
MADRID-COMPLUTENSE (UCM)	— Special course in Automated Cadastral Cartography
OVIEDO (UOV)	— Masters in Landscape, Territory and Environmental Resources Analysis and Management
VALLADOLID (UVA)	Specialist course in Geographic Information Systems
	Masters degree in Local Development
	The Environment In Castilla-Leon

Sources: Consejo de Universidades. Estudios de postgrado. 1992. Encuesta a los Departamentos de Geografía. Diciembre, 1995.

From an analysis of table nº 2, and of other information obtained from our sources (such as the questionnaire sent to university geography departments), one can infer several deductions. Accordingly one can see that four public universities, Alicante, Granada, Madrid (Autonoma) and Oviedo, teach postgraduate courses at the highest level (Masters). These courses have been created and are managed by geographers. Without doubt other universities not included in the source of the data in table nº 2, also support prestigious specialised courses associated directly or indirectly with geography. However the ephemeral nature of these courses hinders their presentation here.

As we presumed the subject matter of these Masters degrees are similar to some of the doctoral courses, engendering both a higher level of technical specialisation and a more practical scope. In this way the Masters degree at Alicante University was orientated with emphasis on analysis of territorial tourist issues and on hydrological resources. The Masters at Madrid (Autónoma) University has already completed four courses based on analysis, planning and management of the landscape. Lastly, Oviedo and Granada Universities have developed various versions of a Masters degree in local development.