

*Finding One's Path Among Inner and Outer Boundaries – Challenges in Becoming a Researcher.* Summarizing reflections from the Doctoral Council's Pre-conference 2021.

On October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021, more than 30 doctoral students from higher education institutions in different parts of the country gathered to participate in the Doctoral Council's pre-conference during one afternoon. This year *inner and outer boundaries in becoming a researcher* were highlighted. Given the pandemic situation, the conference was held at Zoom. The pre-conference was arranged by the Doctoral Council's working group consisting of Jonas Udd, Tina Lidström, Josef Siljebo, Jeanette Koskinen, Maria Lennartsdotter, Malin Kronqvist-Håård and Alex Örtegren in collaboration with Kristine Hultberg-Ingridz and Maria Söderling from SWERA:s local organizing committee at Malmö University. The choice of the overall theme of the pre-conference reflected the overarching theme of the main conference, namely *Challenges within the Educational Field of Knowledge – Inner and Outer Boundary Work*.

After Kristine Hultberg-Ingridz and Jonas Udd had welcomed everyone, the first session *Between Inner and Outer Boundaries - Practitioner Research* began. The presenters, Kristine Hultberg-Ingridz and Maria Söderling, discussed different aspects of methodological choices in practitioner research. Various examples highlighted questions about which inner and outer boundaries are made visible through these choices. Kristine and Maria shared interesting reflections on the possibilities and challenges that may arise. At the end of the presentation, Josef Siljebo and Jeanette Koskinen, who were assigned as chairs, led an inspiring discussion with Kristine and Maria about ethical aspects of practitioner research. A great part of the discussion focused on boundaries between researchers and participants in practice-related studies. The complexity of navigating between the "gaps" created by insider and outsider roles, as well as the importance of transparency regarding this, was highlighted.

Next, Maria Lennartsdotter and Alex Örtegren took on the role of chairs during a panel discussion focusing on *Inner Boundaries – Different Paths in Postgraduate Education*. Participating panelists were Anna Jobér (Malmö University) and Alli Klapp (University of Gothenburg). The panelists meritoriously shared experiences from their own doctoral studies, which highlighted various dilemmas. They touched on, among other things, the implicit as well as the explicit socialization of doctoral students during postgraduate education, where greater transparency regarding socialization processes was emphasized as desirable. The conversation also focused on questions regarding the possibility of being able to make initiated, well-founded, and free choices of postgraduate courses, research questions, theory, method, publishing language, co-authoring, compilation thesis or monograph thesis, as well as choices of journals to publish in. The strong support structures for doctoral students were highlighted as important and, again, greater transparency regarding the socialization process that doctoral students undergo. In conclusion, the session resulted in a very interesting and much appreciated conversation.

After the panel discussion, Tina Lidström and Malin Kronqvist-Håård took over as chairs during the last session of the pre-conference on *Becoming a Researcher at a Distance – Navigating Inner and Outer Boundaries in Times of a Pandemic*. In small groups, several questions were discussed with a focus on research and conditions for doctoral students during the pandemic. A clear theme that emerged was how accessibility has changed. With reduced travelling, Zoom and other software have created new opportunities to participate in both planned conferences and spontaneous meetings. At the same time, following the restricted contact areas during the pandemic, it has become more difficult to establish and nurture both formal and informal contacts. The importance of spontaneous physical meetings and conversations should thus not be underestimated. Several doctoral students described how the world has both expanded and been reduced during the pandemic. Expanded by increasing access to certain international activities, such as seminars and symposia. At the same time, access to the international community has been reduced as some departments/institutions have turned their gaze more 'inwards' by, for example, meetings and seminars being arranged only for those who have access to an invitation. As a result, access to other research environments and higher education institutions has been partially reduced, while access to 'consume' research internationally has partly increased.

As a whole, the Doctoral Council's pre-conference touched on several important aspects of inner and outer boundaries in becoming a researcher. Inevitably, the pandemic is in the background as it is not yet over. It is difficult to assess the importance it has for doctoral students' continued conditions in the research process. The pandemic has inevitably had a great impact on several areas, such as the possibilities for data collection and the opportunities to get to know academia with all of the complex environments it entails with both silent and stated expectations. In this, the conference was an appreciated opportunity for doctoral students to meet and exchange experiences both among themselves and with senior researchers. Given the themes discussed this year, there is a good basis for continued work within SWERA's Doctoral Council together with the rest of SWERA and doctoral students from different higher education institutions during the up-coming year.

The working group for SWERA's Doctoral Council

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