

## Editorial

# Is the Actual Dissertation Procedure Pointless?

Zvonko Rumboldt\*

Department of Medicine, Unibersity of Split School of Medicine, Croatia

## Editorial

### Thesis

What's the point of a PhD thesis if nobody reads it? At best, the thesis is read by the author, the supervisor (advisor, mentor), the examiners (dissertation committee members), the author's parents, the author's roommate / spouse / fellow students..., or less than 10 people in total. What, then, is the point of writing it? Writing a complete PhD thesis is a time-consuming process, and that time could easily have gone into taking more courses, doing more research, supervising more students, and so on. Of course the PhD student has no choice but to write one, because the program typically requires it. However that still begs the question as to why the program requires it in the first place, if the thesis is so useless that so few people read it, what's the point of demanding a thesis as a prerequisite for academic advancement? Moreover: what's the point of a PhD thesis whose content already exists in published papers (particularly concerning currently fashionable "article-based dissertations" or compilations of at least 3 published papers /co/authored by the candidate, or sophisticated meta-analytical, bibliometric evaluations of esoteric topics - cf. Table 1)? Still, even if there are more readers because a thesis provides a gentle introduction to the field, isn't it more sensible to just write a monograph and leave out the thesis? The current path to PhD degree is very expensive, time consuming, and wasteful in many ways. At the end of the doctoral study and in the thesis preparation stage the student dropout rate is high due to several reasons, including socioeconomic factors, program inadequacies and student personality traits. Moreover, after successful dissertation defense the laureates (and their mentors) too often tend to close the door on the incepted research activity as it were a completed episode that stops with the faculty seal; the approved thesis should not be end in itself but a point of transition in scholarly endeavor.

### Antithesis

The statement that (virtually) nobody reads a PhD thesis is debatable and also a bit field-dependent. There are still many reasons for it to exist; it's arguably more of a "writing to learn" task anyway. Students don't produce theses for their own sake, but to learn how to do research and write it up properly in a clear, extensive, and coherent

way. Even if no single person outside the committee reads the thesis ever, it is still a good learning experience for the student. There is a lot of history around the concept of a doctoral program, requiring development of a new thesis (in the original meaning of the word), writing it down in a dissertation, and defending it in front of a group of learned scholars. The entire process of writing and defending the dissertation also has some appeal as a significant milestone event, which nicely demarks the end of the students' era and initiation, acceptance in the academic community. In many countries a PhD program is legally defined to conclude with the production of a doctoral dissertation of some kind.

### Synthesis

In the age of "article-based doctoral dissertation" or "stapler thesis" (a synopsis and a verbatim collection of previously published papers) or of fashionable, bibliometric meta-analysis of esoteric investigations, the entire affair is fairly quick and low-cost anyway. Better students rarely spent longer than 2-3 months on such "thesis writing"; so we may fabricate legions of cheap "instant doctors"! Isn't it quite an achievement on the path of intellectual productivity?! Well, in that case at least some minimal criteria of scientific literacy (e.g. orthography, grammar, style, and proper quotation of the references) should be respected.

**Table 1:** Ten examples of bibliometric/scientific integrity dissertations at MF Split since 2010.

<b>Elizabeth Wager.</b> Peer review and editorial processes for improving the quality of research reporting. MF Split, <b>2010</b> .
<b>Mirjana Huić.</b> Completeness and changes in registered data and reporting bias of randomized controlled trials in ICMJE journals after trial registration policy [in Croatian]. MF Split, <b>2013</b> .
<b>Mario Malički.</b> Reliability of scientific publications in biomedicine [in Croatian]. MF Split, <b>2015</b> .
<b>Shelly Pranić.</b> Adequacy of registration and results reporting of randomized controlled trials in Clinicaltrials.gov and publications. MF Split, <b>2015</b> .
<b>Adriana Jadranka Pavletić.</b> The importance of comprehensive medical screening of volunteers in psychiatric research [in Croatian]. MF Split, <b>2016</b> .
<b>Marina Krnić Martinić.</b> Definition of systematic reviews in the relevant literature and key clinical journal editors' attitude towards originality of systematic reviews. MF Split (under review since 2019).
<b>Mirko Gabelica.</b> Data sharing practices among authors of biomedical publications. MF Split (under review since 2019).
<b>Marija Roguljić.</b> Ethical considerations regarding publication of identifiable patient photographs in academic journals. MF Split (under review since 2020).
<b>Andrija Babić.</b> Risk of bias analysis and its use in the sensitivity assessment of Cochrane systematic reviews [in Croatian]. MF Split, <b>2021</b> .
<b>Ognjen Barčot.</b> Adequacy of risk of bias assessment in surgical vs non-surgical trials in Cochrane reviews [in Croatian]. MF Split, <b>2021</b> .

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\***Corresponding author:** Zvonko Rumboldt, Department of Medicine, Unibersity of Split School of Medicine, Split, Croatia, E-mail: zr@mefst.hr