

Łukasz Kierznowski

University of Białystok, Poland

ORCID: 0000-0001-5319-9330

lukasz.kierznowski@uwb.edu.pl

## Prerequisites for Obtaining Scientific Degrees and Titles in Poland and Cooperation with the Socio-Economic Environment

*Przesłanki uzyskiwania stopni i tytułów naukowych w Polsce  
a współpraca z otoczeniem społeczno-gospodarczym*

### ABSTRACT

Academic degrees and titles play a vital role in the way the higher education and science sector operates in Poland. However, at a time when cooperation between the academia and the socio-economic environment plays such a pivotal role, it is critical to assess whether the prerequisites for granting degrees and titles provide incentives to such cooperation, or whether research careers outside of the traditional academic realm (e.g. in companies) make them as appealing (in term of obtaining degrees) as those pursued at universities or research institutes. The purpose of the article is to determine whether the prerequisites for obtaining degrees and titles in Poland are conducive to the development of cooperation between the academic sector and the socio-economic environment. The paper further investigates whether such prerequisites make scientific work conducted in cooperation with the environment or even outside the academic sector as valuable from the point of view of the possibility of obtaining degrees and titles, or whether, on the contrary, they serve the purposes of the academic sector only. The study utilized the dogmatic-legal analysis method. It established a correlation between the prerequisites for granting academic degrees and collaboration with the socio-economic environment in the Polish legal order. The study determined that although such a correlation exists, they vary with respect to different titles and degrees.

**Keywords:** academic degrees; academic titles; socio-economic environment; implementation doctorate; academic career

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CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS: Łukasz Kierznowski, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Białystok, Faculty of Law, Mickiewicza 1, 15-213 Białystok, Poland.

## INTRODUCTION

Academic degrees and titles play a vital role in the way the higher education and science sector operates in Poland. Degrees and titles are not only a tool for distributing prestige and power. As a source of direct power and responsibilities, academic degrees and titles contribute to stratification of academic personnel, effectively shaping relations between individuals in the sector. For instance, academic rights and responsibilities include, but are not limited to: master thesis supervision, acting as a research supervisor, and a reviewer of scientific work. In the Polish legal order, academic degrees condition a wider range of availability of more senior positions in universities, research institutes or the Polish Academy of Sciences (such as the position of an assistant professor and full-time professor). Academic degrees and titles also enable scholars to apply for certain scientific grants, especially those awarded by central agencies, such as the National Science Center. Further, academic titles can positively influence appointment procedures; academics can be appointed as office holders or hold managerial positions in governing bodies in the education and science sector. Therefore, holding an academic degree or title is a fundamental determinant of academic hierarchy, influencing one's career pathway, shaping obligations and responsibilities. Academic titles also play a role in potential opportunities which are made available to scholars and researchers. For said reasons, issues pertinent to academic degrees are relevant for members of the academic sector as well as to other researchers.

However, at a time when cooperation between academia and the socio-economic environment plays such a crucial role, the question arises as to whether the rationale for awarding degrees and titles provides an incentive to establish such cooperation, or whether research careers outside academic sector institutions (e.g. in companies) make them just as attractive (in the context of obtaining academic degrees). This issue can be considered from two aspects. First, whether the cooperation with the socio-economic environment carried out by academics can allow them to obtain more degrees and titles (or to obtain this degrees and titles faster). Second, whether researchers from the socio-economic environment who cooperate with the academic sector in their work can – on par with academics themselves and on the basis of the results of their work – apply for academic degrees and titles in Poland.

The purpose of the article is to determine whether the prerequisites for granting academic degrees and titles in Poland enable development of cooperation between the academic sector and the socio-economic environment, or if such grounds make scientific work conducted in cooperation with the socio-economic environment or even outside the academic sector equally valuable considering granting academic degrees and titles, or, on the contrary, they serve the purposes of the academic sector only.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The issues discussed in this article have not yet been the subject of a direct and broader analysis in Polish or foreign literature. Naturally, the issue of cooperation with the socio-economic environment has been previously addressed in literature, and within various scientific disciplines, but not in the context of the statutorily defined prerequisites for awarding degrees as a tool for strengthening or initiating such cooperation.

As for the prerequisites for granting degrees and titles, they have been the subject of Polish dogmatic analysis. On the grounds of the current (as of 2018) legal status, publications pertinent to the issues at hand are the following: commentaries on the Polish Law on Higher Education and Science by H. Izdebski and J.M. Zieliński, Ł. Kierznowski,<sup>1</sup> as well as multi-author commentaries published under the editorship of J. Woźnicki, K.W. Baran and A. Jakubowski.<sup>2</sup> Noteworthy papers on the subject include those published by K. Ślebzak, M. Radajewski, M. Sieniuc, K. Wojtczak, D. Kała, or R. Adamus,<sup>3</sup> in which a detailed analysis of various prerequisites for granting degrees and titles was made. However, prerequisites were not analyzed in terms of their usefulness for strengthening cooperation with the socio-economic environment. This paper implements a dogmatic-legal method of analyzing Polish legal acts on granting academic degrees and titles. The work is based on English and Polish scientific sources.

<sup>1</sup> H. Izdebski, J.M. Zieliński, *Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce. Komentarz*, Warszawa 2019; Ł. Kierznowski, *Stopnie naukowe i stopnie w zakresie sztuki. Komentarz*, Warszawa 2021.

<sup>2</sup> J. Woźnicki (ed.), *Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce. Komentarz*, Warszawa 2019; K.W. Baran (ed.), *Akademickie prawo zatrudnienia. Komentarz*, Warszawa 2020; A. Jakubowski (ed.), *Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce. Komentarz*, Warszawa 2023.

<sup>3</sup> K. Ślebzak, *Przesłanki nadawania stopnia doktora, doktora habilitowanego oraz tytułu profesora a model awansów naukowych w świetle ustawy Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce*, "Nauka" 2020, no. 2; M. Radajewski, *Nadawanie stopnia doktora habilitowanego w świetle Prawa o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce*, "Studia Prawno-Ekonomiczne" 2020, vol. 114; M. Sieniuc, *Nadanie tytułu naukowego profesora. Kilka refleksji na tle regulacji zawartych w ustawie Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce*, "Białostockie Studia Prawnicze" 2020, vol. 25(4); K. Wojtczak, *Tytuł profesora w postępowaniu przed Radą Doskonałości Naukowej*, "Studia Prawa Publicznego" 2021, no. 2; D. Kała, *Szczegółowe przesłanki nadania stopnia doktora habilitowanego*, "Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny" 2022, vol. 84(3); idem, *Ogólne przesłanki nadania stopnia doktora habilitowanego*, "Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny" 2021, vol. 83(1); R. Adamus, *Wolność wyboru rodzaju działalności naukowej a przesłanki ustawowe uzyskania tytułu naukowego profesora*, "Roczniki Administracji i Prawa" 2022, vol. 22(2).

## RESEARCH AND RESULTS

### 1. Polish system of degrees and titles

In the Polish legal order, academic degrees can be awarded only by universities, research institutes, institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences and international research institutes operating in Poland – but only those of these institutions with the appropriate scientific category. In turn, the title of professor may be awarded only by the President of the Republic of Poland, but only at the request of the Council of Scientific Excellence.

The model of academic degrees and titles is a three-tiered one. According to statutory provisions included in the Law on Higher Education and Science,<sup>4</sup> two academic degrees (doctor and habilitated doctor) and the title of professor exist. Different prerequisites are required to obtain each degree/title. At the same time, these prerequisites are almost exclusively scientific (the only exception exists in degrees in the arts, for which artistic achievement is required). They are not related, e.g., to work experience in academic institutions or didactic work or even professional success outside academia. Seemingly, the nature of the achievements required for each of the degrees and titles (as well as the types of these achievements) take into account, to varying degrees, achievements resulting from cooperation with the socio-economic environment or research work carried out outside the academic sector. As a result, non-academics are also eligible to obtain titles and academic degrees in Poland.

### 2. Prerequisites for granting degrees and titles

The doctoral degree is awarded on the basis of a scientific achievement called a doctoral dissertation. According to the statutory provisions in the Polish Law on Higher Education and Science, a doctoral dissertation presents general theoretical knowledge in a discipline or disciplines and the ability to conduct scientific work independently. The Law also stipulates that the subject of the dissertation is an original solution to a scientific problem or an original solution to the application of the results of one's research in the socio-economic sphere. The dissertation can be a written work, including a scientific monograph, a collection of published and thematically related scientific articles, a project, construction, technological, implementation or artistic work, as well as an independent and isolated part of a collective work. In addition to the presentation and defense of a dissertation, the regulations also provide other prerequisites for the awarding of a doctorate – these are related to the master degree, learning outcomes and the requirement to publish

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<sup>4</sup> Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1668, as amended).

at least one scientific paper. In addition, doctoral awarding entities may establish their own additional requirements; they may also concern various forms of cooperation with the socio-economic environment.

The prerequisites necessary for obtaining a habilitated doctor degree are regulated somewhat differently, and are not based on a single achievement, but rather on a body of work consisting, potentially, of many elements. The prerequisite for the degree is the possession of a scientific achievement that represents a significant contribution to the development of a scientific discipline, including at least one scientific monograph or one series of thematically related scientific articles or one original project, construction, technological or artistic achievement. In addition, it is necessary to hold a doctoral degree, as well as to demonstrate significant scientific activity in more than one university, scientific or cultural institution, preferably a foreign institution. What is important, the definition of a scientific institution should be understood broadly – as any institution where (mainly or incidentally) scientific research is conducted, also outside the academic sector, e.g. NGOs, companies or public administration bodies.

Further, obtaining the title of professor stipulates the need for outstanding domestic or foreign scientific achievements. Another requirement is to participate in the work of research teams carrying out projects financed through domestic or foreign competitions, or to carry out scientific internships in scientific institutions, or to conduct scientific research or development work in universities or scientific institutions, including foreign ones. The third condition is the possession of a habilitated doctor degree (exceptionally, the title may be given to a person holding a doctoral degree). At the same time, the regulations provide, similarly to the regulations for the degree of a habilitated doctor, that the achievement which is the basis for granting the title of professor may be an original project, construction, technological or artistic achievement.

Regulations of the Polish Law on Higher Education and Science on obtaining the degree of habilitated doctor and the title of professor do not provide possibility for entities awarding these degrees/titles to establish their own requirements, applicable at a particular university, research institute or institute of the Polish Academy of Science. Therefore, the prerequisites specified in the Law are the only ones in the light of Polish legal order. Of course, traditions in particular scientific disciplines, which are not regulated by law, are also very important here. However, they can not be in conflict with the regulations and may not be an official basis for refusing to obtain a habilitated doctor degree or professor title.

### **3. Cooperation with the socio-economic environment in light of prerequisites for awarding doctoral degrees**

The doctoral degree exemplifies how the interconnectedness of prerequisites for degree-granting procedures and collaborations with the socio-economic environment. Many foreign legal orders consider the doctoral degree a degree most

closely associated and most adapted to collaboration with the socio-economic environment. The doctoral degree is also most commonly used outside of academia.<sup>5</sup> Doctoral students' research is considered a central element in university-industry collaboration, including in knowledge transfer.<sup>6</sup> Considering challenges relevant to educating future doctoral cohorts, some argue that the circumstances and trends currently at play induce significant consequences for doctoral careers outside of academia. For instance, the proliferation of hybrid, parallel careers for scientists, especially those with doctoral-level education, is anticipated.<sup>7</sup>

Such proliferation is reflected in many existing types of doctoral degrees or doctoral educational and training models. The literature distinguishes these types of degrees, outlining specific features and procedures for obtaining them.<sup>8</sup> Further, in some countries those procedures are already directly reflected in law. For instance, Y. Bao, B.M. Kehm and Y. Ma distinguish as many as nine different types of doctorates.<sup>9</sup> However, some authors argue that the proliferation of various doctoral models evidences that doctoral education is still in transition.<sup>10</sup> It therefore seems that those trends are most accurately depicted in the proliferation of the professional doctorate. The professional doctorate is present in many countries, e.g. the United Kingdom<sup>11</sup> or the United States,<sup>12</sup> and emphasizes the non-academic activities of the researcher, and on the other signifies the need and expectation of a degree more appropriate to the needs of business and the socio-economic environment.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For example, see L. Borrell-Damian, T. Brown, A. Dearing, J. Font, *Collaborative Doctoral Education: University-Industry Partnerships for Enhancing Knowledge Exchange*, "Higher Education Policy" 2010, vol. 23; C. Sarrico, *The Expansion of Doctoral Education and the Changing Nature and Purpose of the Doctorate*, "Higher Education" 2022, vol. 84.

<sup>6</sup> P. Santos, L. Veloso, P. Urze, *Students Matter: The Role of Doctoral Students in University-Industry Collaborations*, "Higher Education Research & Development" 2021, vol. 40(7).

<sup>7</sup> M. Urponen, *Doctoral Education for the Future – Drivers and Needs for Development*, 28.8.2019, <https://eua-cde.org/the-doctoral-debate/123:doctoraleducation-for-the-future-%E2%80%94-drivers-and-needs-for-development.html> (access: 19.8.2024).

<sup>8</sup> S. Cardoso, S. Santos, S. Diogo, D. Soares, T. Carvalho, *The Transformation of Doctoral Education: A Systematic Literature Review*, "Higher Education" 2022, vol. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Y. Bao, B.M. Kehm, Y. Ma, *From Product to Process: The Reform of Doctoral Education in Europe and China*, "Studies in Higher Education" 2018, vol. 43(3).

<sup>10</sup> H. Wildy, S. Peden, K. Chan, *The Rise of Professional Doctorates: Case Studies of the Doctorate in Education in China, Iceland and Australia*, "Studies in Higher Education" 2015, vol. 40(5).

<sup>11</sup> T. Bourner, R. Bowden, S. Laing, *Professional Doctorates in England*, "Studies in Higher Education" 2001, vol. 26(1); R. Melloe-Bourne, C. Robinson, J. Metcalfe, *Provision of Professional Doctorates in English HE Institutions*, 2016, <https://research.edgheill.ac.uk/en/publications/provision-of-professional-doctorates-in-english-he-institutions> (access: 19.8.2024).

<sup>12</sup> A. Zusman, *Changing Degrees: Creation and Growth of New Kinds of Professional Doctorates*, "Journal of Higher Education" 2017, vol. 88(1).

<sup>13</sup> For example, see M. Jones, *Contemporary Trends in Professional Doctorates*, "Studies in Higher Education" 2018, vol. 43(5); L. Fenge, *Professionals Doctorates – a Better Route for Researching Professionals?*, "Social Work Education" 2009, vol. 28(2); A. Lee, M. Brennan, B. Green,

In the Polish legal order, typologies (types) of doctorates carry a rather informal and organization-type meaning. Polish law does not introduce different types of doctorates, even if the process includes apparent connections with varying “types” of doctorates present in literature. The implementation doctorate is one of the closely related types of doctorate to the socio-economic environment. However, the implementation doctorate in Poland is not a separate degree or title, and it does not constitute a separate procedure of obtaining the degree itself. It is merely a ministerial competition, a special funding path that is based on the legal infrastructure of a doctoral school held by a university, research institute or an institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences – it is a parallel training of a doctoral student in a doctoral school and simultaneous employment in an enterprise. This model also includes a dual (academic-business) scientific supervision.<sup>14</sup>

The implementation doctorate utilizes the procedures and prerequisites for awarding of the doctoral degree and the requirements for the dissertation also apply – the subject of the dissertation may not only be an original solution to a scientific problem, as in the “classical” research doctorate, but, as indicated above, an original solution for the application of research in the economic or social sphere. Literature suggests that such procedures enable the realization of doctoral dissertations that are of an implementation/application nature.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the law further confirms such state of affairs in defining the forms of the dissertation (e.g. implementation work). However, a doctorate obtained as a result of such procedures has exactly the same status and results in identical entitlements.

Thus, in light of the fact that in the Polish legal order professional doctorates do not exist, the implementation doctorate as a program of the minister in a way plays a similar role and function. The implementation doctorate also exemplifies some similarities with the so-called industrial doctorate or engineering doctorate. For instance, the industrial/engineering doctorate is present in countries such as the United Kingdom<sup>16</sup> or Portugal.<sup>17</sup> Though some similarities between the implementation and industrial doctorates exist, the implementation doctorate is based on an educational requirement based on the same program as in the case of a regular research doctorate, and also because it is not limited to engineering sciences and industry. It is also noteworthy that even beyond the so-called implementation doctorate, the prerequisites for awarding a doctoral degree do not exclude work created

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*Re-imagining Doctoral Education: Professional Doctorates and Beyond*, “Higher Education Research & Development” 2009, vol. 28(3).

<sup>14</sup> Ł. Kierznowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 218–219.

<sup>15</sup> M. Dokowicz, [in:] *Prawo...*; K. Ślebzak, *Przesłanki...*

<sup>16</sup> For example, see H. Yang, R. Jeffrey, *Industrial Doctorate: A Case Study of Doctor of Engineering in the United Kingdom*, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see S. Cardoso, O. Tavares, C. Sin, *Can You Judge a Book by Its Covers? Industrial Doctorates in Portugal*, “Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning” 2019, vol. 9(3).

in cooperation with the socio-economic environment, or outside the academic sector in general. What is more, even without an implementation doctorate funding, there is no ban on taking up employment by doctoral students outside the academia.

Over the last 30 years, doctoral education in Poland has evolved significantly and is still undergoing significant transformations.<sup>18</sup> Yet, the model remains unstable and continues to evolve. Perhaps the importance of the doctoral degree in non-academic practice will lead to the development of new types of doctoral degrees in the Polish legal order. Of course, this may also lead to changes prerequisites for awarding of the doctoral degree and the requirements for the doctoral dissertation.

#### **4. Cooperation with the socio-economic environment in the prerequisites for obtaining the title of a habilitated doctor and the title of professor**

The issue of cooperation with the socio-economic environment is different in the case of the habilitated doctor and the title of professor. Significantly, the law does not indicate the implementation nature of scientific achievements obtained by a prospective habilitated doctor or a professor. The catalog of the types of achievements that can constitute a basis for granting this degree or title is limited to project, construction, technological or artistic achievements.

Such a legal construction of the prerequisites does not preclude a candidate from obtaining the title or degree on the basis of activities performed not directly in the academic sector, but in its environment or in cooperation with it. It is only much less emphasized, since, unlike in the case of a doctoral degree, the regulations do not explicitly point to an “implementation” achievement, as in the case of a doctoral dissertation. Moreover, in the case of the degree of habilitated doctor and the title of professor, there are no special paths or programs of the minister, similar to the implementation doctorate. Nevertheless, it is possible to earn a degree or title on the basis of achievements obtained not only in cooperation with entities outside the academic sector, but even outside academic entities in general, such as in companies or think-tank organizations. Of course, it is then necessary to meet the other (already indicated above) prerequisites, which are more academic in nature.

Subject matter literature aptly notes that in the case of degrees of habilitated doctors and the title of a professor, the catalog of scientific achievements is an open-ended one, and the project-design, construction or technological achievements are in principle a qualified form of scientific achievement. This means that scientific publications alone do not exhaust the catalog of possible achievements that are the basis for applying for a degree of a habilitated doctor and the title of professor.

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<sup>18</sup> M. Kwiek, *Doctoral Education and the Doctoral Faculty Supervision in Poland*, [in:] *The Making of Doctoral Supervisors: International Case Studies of Practice*, eds. S. Taylor, M. Kiley, K.A. Holley, London 2021.

In their work, P. Pokorny and P. Waszkiewicz assume that the achievements will be the results of application works.<sup>19</sup> Such admissibility is also indicated in other studies.<sup>20</sup> Thus, said regulation is practically similar to an implementation doctorate, without a direct reference to an implementation work or a special funding path like an implementation doctorate.

## CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the analysis, it has been determined that in the Polish legal order the interconnectedness of the prerequisites for granting academic degrees and titles with collaborative efforts with the socio-economic environment is present, but is not similar and equal with regard to all degrees. The strongest and most evident connection exists with respect to the doctoral degree – through the implementation doctorate and through the requirements of a doctoral dissertation, and the possible forms which it may take, such as the implementation work. To a lesser extent, the connection between the statutory prerequisites and cooperation with the socio-economic environment is also present in the case of the degree of a habilitated doctor and the title of a professor. Notwithstanding the nature of the connection between statutory prerequisites and sectoral collaborations – such collaborations are still permissive.

What is more, the prerequisites take into account collaborations between the academic sector and the socio-economic sphere, in both aspects considered in the paper. First, in the case of academics, their collaborative efforts with the socio-economic sector can be utilized for purposes of academic promotion. Second, research work of non-academics can potentially provide a platform to obtain academic achievements, without pursuing a full career in academia. Yet, research conclusions included in the paper ought to be scrutinized in the context of whether it is equally important for various groups of people who are involved in the collaborative processes between academics and the socio-economic environment to strive, and obtain academic degrees and titles as a result of such efforts. Obtaining academic degrees seems to be important especially for those who work directly in the academic sector, while less important for those researchers who are not interested in an academic career whatsoever. However, regulations in various areas may play an important role here, because in the Polish legal order obtaining the degree of doctor, habilitated doctor or the title of professor may also be the requirement for obtaining various professional permits.

Collaborations between academic institutions and the broadly defined socio-economic environment is a complex and multifaceted issue, which can take on a variety of forms. The issue of prerequisites for obtaining degrees and titles is only one of

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<sup>19</sup> P. Pokorny, P. Waszkiewicz, [in:] *Prawo...*, pp. 701, 706–707, 756.

<sup>20</sup> For example, see R. Adamus, *op. cit.*

many factors that can potentially influence and have an effect on the quality and intensity of the collaboration. Prerequisites for obtaining academic degrees can foster and emphasize the supra-academic nature of science. After all, it should be noted that science does not exist in a vacuum and operates outside of academia as well. It is possible that this phenomenon will intensify. Perhaps this will create the need for more explicit confirmation on non-academic scientific achievements with traditional academic degrees and titles or the creation of new types of academic degrees and titles.

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## ABSTRAKT

Stopnie i tytuły naukowe odgrywają bardzo ważną rolę w funkcjonowaniu sektora szkolnictwa wyższego i nauki. Jednakże w czasie, gdy tak istotna jest współpraca akademii z otoczeniem społeczno-gospodarczym, pojawia się pytanie, czy przesłanki nadawania stopni i tytułów naukowych stanowią zachętę do nawiązywania takiej współpracy oraz czy karierę naukową poza instytucjami sektora akademickiego (np. w przedsiębiorstwach) czynią tak samo atrakcyjną (w kontekście stopni naukowych), jak ta prowadzona w uczelniach czy instytutach badawczych. Celem artykułu jest ustalenie, czy przesłanki uzyskiwania w Polsce stopni i tytułów naukowych sprzyjają rozwijaniu współpracy sektora akademickiego z otoczeniem społeczno-gospodarczym, a także czy czynią pracę naukową prowadzoną we współpracy z otoczeniem albo wręcz poza sektorem akademickim tak samo wartościową z punktu widzenia możliwości uzyskiwania stopni i tytułów naukowych, czy może wręcz przeciwnie – służą celom wyłącznie ściśle rozumianego sektora akademickiego. W pracy wykorzystano metodę dogmatycznoprawną. W efekcie przeprowadzonych analiz ustalono, że w polskim porządku prawnym powiązanie przesłanek nadawania stopni naukowych z szeroko rozumianą współpracą z otoczeniem społeczno-gospodarczym ma miejsce, ale nie ma charakteru równomiernego w przypadku każdego z istniejących stopni i tytułów naukowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** stopnie naukowe; tytuły naukowe; otoczenie społeczno-gospodarcze; doktorat wdrożeniowy; kariera akademicka