

# Many hats, just one objective: support inclusive and responsible management

---

## About

**Hazbi Avdiji**

**Teacher, Trainer, and Consultant**

**PhD in Information Systems**

**2018**



*Hazbi Avdiji, Géopolis, UNIL. © Shervine Nafissi*

A PhD in information systems (HEC), an expert in diversity and inclusion, and a specialist in business management. Hazbi Avdiji is active on every front! Today, their professional commitments go from teaching in business schools in the Lausanne area, to consultancy and training assignments in business environments.

The common thread that runs through these activities is Hazbi's interest in issues of diversity and discrimination on the one hand, and corporate responsibility on the other. Topics which, they underline, "are close to my heart, correspond with my values and, happily, are in line with the United Nations' objectives to meet the needs of people and the planet."

## **Doctoral candidate, activist and artist**

Throughout their journey, the militant and academic directions taken by Hazbi have been marked by their questioning of identity: they define themselves today as “a class defector, from a migrant background, and queer.”

When they began their studies, Hazbi opted for a bachelor’s degree in management. The choice was motivated by their modest background and the need for an education that would ensure employment and a good income. Hazbi went on to pursue a master’s degree in information systems, at the end of which they were offered the opportunity to do a doctorate. Hazbi hesitated:

**“I knew that after a doctorate, not many doors would be open to me. I was aware that it was a competitive environment and that a professorship was far from guaranteed afterwards. And I couldn’t see how a doctorate could be worth anything elsewhere. During my internships, I had heard the rumours that it was better to have a master’s degree and five years’ experience than a master’s degree and a five-year doctorate.”**

After long discussions with their future thesis director and with close associates, Hazbi finally decided to go for it:

**“It was above all a conversation I had with someone in the company where I was doing an internship that allowed my decision. She had regretted not having done a doctorate, and as she was someone I had a lot of respect for, that helped convince me. And I haven’t regretted it!”**

Hazbi had long been active in queer associative and cultural circles, and they took the opportunity of the doctorate to make their activism known in the academic environment:

**“My studies and my militant and artistic activities were two things that I had kept very separate. I even used aliases and that kind of thing. It was only with my doctorate that I decided to talk about these activities with my thesis director and my colleagues. It was also around that time that I became a key figure for queer issues and received a certain amount of media attention. I told myself that I’d have to be honest if my colleagues chanced upon my interventions in the media. And indeed, after that, many people would come up to me to say, “great interview!”. That gave me legitimacy and allowed me to combine the two worlds, to be the same person everywhere.”**

## Creating your own freelance opportunities

After their doctorate, Hazbi started a postdoc in German-speaking Switzerland. “A little because there wasn’t anything else available, and because I really wanted to live in Zurich”, they say. But this stage didn’t last very long:

**“There weren’t enough opportunities. It’s a little bit like buying a ticket for the Euromillions lottery and planning the future with all that money. That’s what it was all about. And I didn’t want to leave Switzerland to become a professor. I had far too much to do with people here. Besides, I wasn’t clinging to the model of ‘I’ll do my PhD, then my postdoc, then my tenure-track, and hope to be a full professor by the time I’m 40’. That was just one possible path.”**

Back in Lausanne, Hazbi’s goal was to use their doctorate and their activist experience to embark on projects that are close to their heart, but this time in a paid capacity:

**“I knew several people who had a doctorate and who were working in consulting. And I thought that was something I could do if I left academia.”**

But getting started on such a project isn’t easy, and you have to start by overcoming your own fears:

**“There’s no point in asking yourself the same question over and over again: will I be able to find a job or not? There’s no point in getting anxious before the time comes. You’re better to tell yourself: now I’m going for it, and we’ll see what happens. That’s something I had learnt during my doctorate. It’s useless to make a plan that’s too precise, because you can’t anticipate everything. You have to start small, experiment, and go step by step.**

## The competencies acquired during a doctorate and their current use

### **Information literacy**

*I know where to look for information, how to verify or refute it, how to think. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis: the doctorate enables me to apply these skills very competently. When people around me are a bit confused, I can provide references and make summaries, and do it quickly. It’s very useful in the current context, with all the fake news, conspiracy theories and propaganda online.*

### **Critical thinking**

*An important skill in my current work is to understand, when tackling a subject, how it has been constructed, its history, how to deconstruct it, and how to think differently. I developed my critical thinking as much in my doctorate, which used an approach of critical thought, as I did through my activism.*

### **Pedagogical skills**

*I took courses in popularising science. That gave me the pedagogical tools that I still use, some of which have even become automatic. Putting yourself in the other person’s shoes, being aware of the vocabulary and concepts that the person has, and adapting the information to their background are things that apply in all my activities, including in-company training courses.*

**It helped me a lot to see things like that, to move forward in a week, then in a month, without projecting myself too far ahead. And spirituality and therapeutic support are also useful resources in difficult times.”**

Committed to the adventure, Hazbi landed their first consultancy contracts. But the Covid-19 epidemic brought the momentum to a sudden halt. They were temporarily back on unemployment. It was another difficult period, Hazbi recalls, but one from which they emerged, “like a phoenix rising from the ashes:”

**“After restrictions ended, there was a growing interest among companies in issues of social inclusion and exclusion. Business boomed – to the point where I had too much work, and I still do!”**

Hazbi developed their activities through a combination of their own initiative and the associative network:

**“I knocked on the doors of business schools and everyone responded positively. My experience in community work and the fact that I had a doctorate meant that I was recognised as a competent person to teach these subjects. And at the same time, I got a lot of mandates form companies through word of mouth. I knew a lot of associations, and they would refer the companies that contacted them to me.”**

## **Towards a more stable professional life**

Although Hazbi enjoys the variety, they stress that the unpredictable, short-term nature of these various commitments can weigh heavily:

**“Everything comes in waves. When there’s a dip, it’s a complete fear that I won’t have any income and that everything will come to a halt. And at other times, there’s just too much. From time to time, I have a longer-term project with companies that have a strategic goal to be more inclusive. But more often, I am mandated on a one-off basis, to resolve a situation, provide mediation or train HR staff.”**

This is why today, Hazbi wants to reduce the proportion of their independent activities so that they can take up a more stable position in their areas of expertise. Their other short-term professional objective is to refocus their activities around training in companies and business schools, but to add a third audience: schoolchildren, who are also concerned by issues of diversity and inclusion.

*Lausanne, June 28, 2023*