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1. INTRODUCTION

Twenty five years ago, in November 1988, a Conference was organized in Kassel, Germany, among scholars doing research on higher education. The group was hosted at the University of Kassel by Ulrich Teichler, then Director of the *Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs und Hochschulforschung* (International Centre for Higher Education Research - INCHER today). The Centre was among the first in Europe dedicated to higher education studies. Frans van Vught, who became the Director of the newly created Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente in the Netherlands in 1984 was also there, as well as Maurice Kogan, a British political scientist, Roberto Moscati an Italian scholar, Guy Neave a Scottish-born historian.

One of the editors of this volume, Christine Musselin, had just finished writing her PhD a few days before the Conference and was there too but did not realize at that time how important this meeting would be in the future. Convinced by the fantastic interest of such events and the rich exchanges they allowed, Ulrich Teichler, Frans van Vught, Maurice Kogan, Guy Neave and Roberto Moscati came to the same conclusion: In order to promote higher education as a research field and create a community of scholars working on higher education issues, it was necessary first of all to identify and bring together those feeling that they were members of this community and to provide them with the opportunity to meet regularly.

Altogether 50 scholars from 17 European countries met at the Conference to discuss the current state and future avenues in the field of higher education research. The name of the network which later became a formal organisation was invented on the spot: Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER).

It was clear from the beginning that CHER would have two main activities. First, it should be a place for higher education researchers to get to know each other and feel like a community. To be a member of CHER one should therefore be an academic interested in research on higher education and not a practitioner. In order to become a member support was needed from one of the CHER members already accepted into the organisation. CHER was not supposed to be an organisation to identify best practices or to promote exchanges and recipes about day to day problems, but an organisation to increase knowledge about higher education and discuss research issues. Therefore, a second major activity of CHER has been to bring together active researchers in the field of higher education at its annual Conferences. The CHER Conferences became a traditional September event – with a few exceptions, in June mostly, when the Conference was hosted in Nordic countries. Soon scholars from all over the world met at these Conferences, presented their work and exchanged ideas.

A common characteristic of CHER Conferences is that they are organized in Europe but at the same time open to active higher education researchers from all countries. Thus, Europeans are typically more strongly represented than others, but scholars from Japan, like Prof. Arimoto, from Australia like the late Grant Hartman or Simon Marginson, from South Africa like Niko Kloete, but also from the US like David Dill and Roger Geiger, or Canada like Don Fisher became regular “usual suspects” of the CHER Conferences.

What makes these Conferences special is not only their international character but also their academic though not formal atmosphere. They are a place to present recent research results, new research programmes, starting projects, discuss innovative methodologies, exchange about emerging perspectives. The rather limited size of CHER – always less than 200 people – allows for both intellectual discussions and informal interactions. The aim of CHER is not only to present well achieved research but also to create opportunities for exchange on work on progress and its improvement. At the same time, CHER functions like a traditional professional academic association and papers are required to be submitted in advance by the contributors. Proposals are selected in the form of peer review by a scientific committee about six months before the Conference.

Furthermore, CHER is not only a place for experienced scholars but also and increasingly the annual Conferences have been opened for young researchers and doctoral students. Many of the young colleagues who attended their first CHER Conference some years ago are now well established scholars and were in a way socialized and trained by their first participation in a CHER Conference. The idea has often been discussed about whether to organize specific sessions for doctoral students; we even tried once, but always came back to sessions where seniors and juniors had the same possibility to present and exchange, were judged the same way and considered as peers. This was also very important for the creation of a community of scholars sharing the same values and high standards and norms, welcoming senior as well as junior members.

It is finally important to notice that CHER Conferences have always been multi-disciplinary. The disciplinary backgrounds of higher education scholars are very diverse. While sociologists, historians, economists and political scientists form the majority, others were trained as hard scientists, took over academic responsibilities and through this arrived at higher education studies. This variety is at the same time richness and strength. While research based, the contributions presented at CHER Conferences are very rarely purely theoretical or methodological contributions: They are articulated to issues relevant to students but also to decision-makers, stakeholders, and other actors involved in higher education and research.

This is reflected by the variety, relevance, and scope of the issues which were addressed at the CHER Conferences in recent years. Some clearly aimed at looking at higher education from inside (Decision Making in Higher Education; The Institutional Dimension: Organizational Aspects in Higher Education Research; Higher Education Finance), at their missions (The Research Function in Higher Education; Higher Education Research – Achievements; Evaluation and Higher

Education Research; Governance and Management in Higher Education Institutions; Graduate Education), and their logics and their evolutions (Public Vices, Private Benefits? Assessing the Role of Markets in Higher Education; Excellence and Diversity in Higher Education; Higher Education: The Cultural Dimension; Public-Private Dynamics in Higher Education). Others focused on higher education reforms (Effects of Higher Education Reforms; Reform and Change in Higher Education; a Changing Europe: Challenges for Higher Education Research), interactions between higher education and its environment (Higher Education and Its Clients: Institutional Responses to Changes in Demand and in Environment; Higher Education and the World of Work; Higher Education in the Global Age), and comparisons between higher education systems (Systems Convergence and Institutional Diversity?; Cross-National Studies in Higher Education). Increasingly, the focus shifted towards the relationships between higher education and societal issues at large (The Roles of Higher Education and Research in the Fabric of Societies; Higher Education and Social Dynamics). Finally, some conferences developed reflexive insights (Prospects for Higher Education in the 21st Century, Research, Ideas and Policy).

With the creation of a CHER website in early 2000s and the spread of new technologies, it became more and more easy to share information. This holds true for the directory as well which is now accessible to all CHER members electronically. In addition, the papers of each conference are easily available through the website or distributed on a USB memory stick. In the beginning, CHER did not organise a regular publication of selected Conference papers but left it the local organisers of the respective Conference to undertake initiatives for publication. Thus, some papers of some of the Cher Conferences were published in special issues or edited books (cf. Appendix 2) but it is only since 2007 (20th CHER Conference in Dublin) that a contract was made with Sense Publishers to have a CHER series in which selected CHER Conference papers were published each year.

A quarter of century later, CHER is larger, more institutionalised, better known and visible (through the CHER series published by Sense), but the spirit remains the same: being welcoming but at the same time rather limited in scope to keep it friendly and rather informal. This smooth atmosphere of the CHER Conferences should nevertheless not overlook the important role of its board members and among them the more important ones, i.e. the CHER secretaries who, with the help of a secretariat are running the budget, dealing with operational issues and make the directory and the conferences possible. Frans van Vught, Peter Maassen, Jürgen Enders and Barbara M. Kehm successively plaid this role and should be deeply thanked for the crucial role they played.

CHER is and has always been an academic professional association and an ever larger family of scholars is getting together once a year to share their analyses of the transformations of higher education systems, improve their knowledge on these issues and thus provide decision-makers and higher education stakeholders with informed and solid conclusions they might be able to transform into public policies.

This small book has been written on the occasion of the 25th CHER anniversary. As a whole it presents the history of CHER from its beginnings until now. However, it also takes a look at the environment and context factors of CHER, it presents a look at CHER from outside Europe and it provides an outlook into the future. A number of issues concerning CHER's organisational development will have to be discussed in the years to come. Standing out, in particular, are two questions. First of all the development of the institutional basis for higher education researchers in Europe (and possibly beyond) because we note that the number of young researchers doing their PhD theses in the field of higher education studies is increasing on the one hand while currently a number of higher education research centres and institutes are looking instable and having an unclear future on the other hand. Second the observation that all over Europe a number of courses, study and degree programmes in higher education management and leadership have emerged, often taught by scholars who are members of the CHER community, but that these courses and programmes are clearly practice, policy and professionally oriented and even if research-based not providing research oriented training. If such courses and programmes constitute another element of the institutional basis of higher education research and researchers, the question is whether CHER should open up to new types of members. Of course, another question closely related to this one would then be how CHER is going to distinguish itself as an organisation from other European based organisations and associations which have the bringing together of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners as an explicit part of their mission. Thus organisational development of CHER seems to be clearly on the agenda in the years to come.

The contributors to this book are all members of CHER. After the introduction by Barbara M. Kehm (Secretary of CHER from Germany) and Christine Musselin (Chairperson of the Board from France), the second chapter is written by Ulrich Teichler (Germany), the initiator and one of the founding fathers of CHER. In his contribution he provides an overview of the beginnings of CHER and its development over the first decade. The third chapter, written by Barbara M. Kehm and Ulrich Teichler, focuses on an account of the organisational strategy of CHER and how it changed over the years as well an analysis of CHER membership. The fourth chapter by Barbara M. Kehm takes a look at the topics of CHER Conferences over the year, how these have changed and what this might indicate with regard to changes in the foci of research. The following chapter was written by Alberto Amaral, a former Chairperson of the CHER Board and António Magalhaes (both from Portugal). It provides an overview and discussion of one of the most important issues for CHER as an organisation: How is CHER related to higher education policy and practice but also, how does CHER distinguish itself from policy and practice. The chapter indicates that CHER is embedded in an environment which has to be taken into account when discussing vision and mission.

The sixth chapter by Don F. Westerheijden (Netherlands), a member of the current CHER Board of Governors and Anna Kozinska (Poland), a former member of CHER and no longer active in higher education research, gives an account of the

only training course CHER ever organised and carried out for young researchers in the field. The *European Higher Education Advanced Training Course* (EHEATC) as it was called, was an attempt to train and recruit promising young researchers into a field that was not a discipline and accordingly could not be studied at that time (i.e. 1992/93). This is followed by chapter reflecting the study programmes in this field which have emerged in the meantime. The authors, Peter Maassen (Norway), a former CHER Secretary, and Attila Pausits (Austria), a CHER member, rightly point out that a number of programmes and courses in the field of higher education have emerged in Europe since the 2000s but that these courses and programmes predominantly are in the field of higher education leadership and management and that purely research oriented courses and programmes only constitute a small minority. They present the view that CHER should open up to policy and practice in contrast, for example, to Teichler, Amaral and Magalhaes who tend to opt for continuing an exclusive focus on active researchers in the field when it comes to CHER membership.

The eighth chapter by Simon Marginson (Australia) presents a look a higher education research outside Europe. It provides an overview of higher education research and its development in Australia and works out some of the main similarities and differences to European developments in the field.

The last chapter is written by Pedro Nuno Teixeira (Portugal), the designated CHER Secretary from 2014 onwards. Teixeira carries out an analysis of articles in four of the most important journals in the field of higher education research in order to demonstrate what the central topics are in the field and to what extent it is international and interdisciplinary. From this analysis he does not only derive an insight into the current trends of research but also attempts to take a look into the future.

The book ends with four appendices documenting the CHER Constitution (1), the sequence of CHER Conferences including an indication where a selection of papers has been published (2), the CHER Membership Form (3), and last but not least the list of CHER Chairpersons and Secretaries with their terms of office (4). We hope that this volume, despite its particular focus on CHER, might be of interest to a wider audience than just members of CHER. We wish all those who start reading it an interesting read.