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6. THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION ADVANCED TRAINING COURSE

Rise and Fall of CHER's Collective Establishment of a Higher Education Studies Field

INTRODUCTION: HOW DID CHER RESPOND TO THE SITUATION AROUND 1990?

CHER had been established only for a few years, and its initiators were looking for options to engage in common activities. One of the needs felt in a number of the partially newly established research centres in the field, was to train a next generation of higher education researchers in the changing higher education landscape of Western Europe, where higher education institutions were becoming larger, were forced to be more autonomous due to governmental funding cuts and as a result needed more professional administration. A common training for early career researchers was one of the options on the table. But all discussions gave way for the historic events in 1989-1990, when the Iron Curtain crumbled, the Berlin Wall fell, and with it fell the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. A massive task of rapid transformation awaited societies in a large number of countries. Higher education was one of the foci of change: curricula were suddenly out-dated, ideologically out of tune (Marx and Hegel had to be replaced by Friedman and Hayek) and with the wrong foreign language (Russian had to be replaced with English). In these countries, higher education had been elite in Trow's (1974) terms and rapid expansion of the higher education system to accommodate a large amount of unmet demand further complicated the challenges for higher education institutions (Westerheijden & Sorensen, 1999). Moreover, the higher education institutions were faced with the immense challenge to enter the international playing field in which their Western European partners were beginning to find their way.

When the European Union already in 1990, responded to the new geo-political situation by instigating the Trans-European Mobility scheme for University Studies (Tempus) programme, to aid transformation in – originally, though other countries were added soon after – Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia (from 1993 as Czech and Slovak Republics), the pieces of the puzzle started to come together: here was a funding opportunity around which CHER researchers could coalesce to fulfil both a useful and desired role in the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe and establish a common training opportunity for their Western European junior researchers, and for professionalization of higher education administration and policy in East and West. Obviously, different CHER researchers had different

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priorities among this mix of aims, but it seemed that Tempus funding would be the stone to kill a lot of birds at a single throw. Frans van Vught pulled the initiative towards CHEPS, and began to coordinate the efforts from his centre; Don Westerheijden became the executive coordinator.

In April 1991, a planning meeting took place in Prague, where even the Tyn cathedral and the square Staromestske Namesti in their dirty greyness, with grass in the gutters, showed the urgent need for reform and had not yet turned into the tourist attractors that they soon would become. A number of active members of the CHER network from Western Europe met colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe; they all came together to prepare a project proposal for the Tempus programme. The coordination of the project proposal was taken up by CHEPS, at the University of Twente, by professor Frans van Vught and his team, where in particular one of the authors of this chapter became involved in writing and coordinating the proposal. The proposal was given the accurate but dull name of European Higher Education Advanced Training Course, abbreviated to EHEATC.

The proposal was successful, a grant was awarded and the course was planned for 1992-1993.

By coincidence, around the same time, early 1992, education researchers met at the University of Twente to discuss setting up a European 'Bureau of Education Research.' The higher education researchers at the University of Twente – and other CHER leaders – being deeply involved in the successful Tempus project, did not see this emerging initiative as more promising than where they were going at the time (personal communication Van Vught, 2013). Educational researchers concluded about this failed meeting: 'Apparently, there was a difference of opinion … about the value of having a European educational research association' (Lawn & Grek, 2012, p. 58). The chance to integrate education research at a European level across different sectors of the educational column never reappeared. The success of the EHEATC proposal had set CHER on the path of remaining an independent, specialised group.

WHAT WAS THE EHEATC?

Modules and Locations

The course's name 'European Higher Education Advanced Training Course' was accurate also in the sense of using Tempus buzz words 'advanced' and 'training'. The form that was given tot the EHEATC consisted of eight one-week thematic modules, each coordinated by an international tandem (sometimes a trio) of senior members of CHER, in the hometown of one of the module coordinators' higher education institution (see Table 1).

Organising modules in different places had many reasons. For one, there were educational-cultural reasons: to give participants a quick glimpse of higher education research centres and/or higher education institutions in different countries, with different languages, different (academic) structures and cultures, different levels of resources. At the same time, there were capacity-building

reasons within CHER pleading for such a model: to give different research centres' teams the opportunity to build up experience in organising international events – with the associated benefit that the burden of such work was spread over many participating centres as well.

Table 1. EHEATC modules

	Theme	Module Coordinators	Location	Date
I	Processes and structures in higher education	Maurice Kogan (Brunel University) & Ian McNay (Anglia Business School)	Chelmsford (UK)	March, 1992
II	Steering of higher education systems	Guy Neave (International Association of Universities), Frans van Vught (CHEPS) & Támas Kozma (Hungarian Institute of Educational Research)	Budapest (HU)	May, 1992
III	Economic aspects of higher education	Jean-Claude Eicher (Université de Bourgogne) & Gareth Williams (Institute of Education)	Dijon (FR)	September, 1992
IV	Higher education and work in Europe	Ulrich Teichler (Comprehensive University Kassel) & Maurice Kogan (Brunel University)	Kassel (DE)	November, 1992
V	Institutional decision-making and research	Frans van Vught (CHEPS) & Ulrich Teichler (Comprehensive University of Kassel)	Enschede (NL)	March, 1993
VI	Fields of knowledge, teaching and learning	Tony Becher (University of Sussex), Ludwig Huber (University of Bielefeld) & Helena Sebková (Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague)	Prague (CZ)	May, 1993
VII	Management of higher education institutions	Ian McNay (Anglia Business School) & Kari Hypponen (University of Turku)	Turku (FI)	August, 1993
VIII	Higher education and developments in Europe	Claudius Gellert (European University Institute) & Guy Neave (International Association of Universities)	Florence (IT)	May, 1993

Two modules took place in Central Europe. Reintegrating Central Europe in broader European events was of course a major motivation in all of Tempus, and it was also a major motivation of the initiators. In the preparatory phase, two teams from Central Europe were willing and able to take part in the organisation of modules; had more partners come forward, then more modules might have taken place in Central Europe. It was not surprising, at the time, that Hungarian and Czech higher education research teams were among the foremost: Hungary had a history of being more open to contacts with Western Europe from late communist

times already, and the (then still unified) Czechoslovak Republic was among the fastest transformers.

What was the educational model of the modules?

The themes of the eight modules were mentioned above (see Table 1). The syllabuses of each thematic module were reproduced extensively by Kehm (2000). The curricular structure was built on *capita selecta* themes that should be quasi-independent. With the exception of the first and probably the second one, which could be seen as preliminary required knowledge for all subsequent modules, there was no intention of a linear build-up of knowledge and skills from one module to the other. On the contrary, the idea among the designers was that learners ought to be able to attend selected modules, depending on their individual learning needs and desires.

Whether through long-term insight in the field, or through smart abstract name-giving – and probably a bit of both – the themes do not seem outdated, twenty years afterwards. A current advanced course on higher education might still largely have the same themes: process and structure, governance, economic aspects, labour market connections, institutional decision-making and management, higher education research, the role of the disciplines, and the European dimension. Obviously, the content would have to be updated. For instance, new public management is not new anymore and has come under strong criticism; neoliberalism perhaps even more so. Insights have developed in the roles and structures of disciplines. The labour market for higher education has expanded still further. The European dimension changed radically through the Sorbonne Declaration and the subsequent Bologna Process. Yet some themes we now think indispensable were missing: internationalisation beyond Europe has become much more important – globalisation will not go away anymore – and the impact of ICT on education has expanded as well.

In fact, ICT has become so pervasive that one might ask if the model of face-to-face, weeklong modules would be retained. Convinced as we are of the benefits of peer learning and of the rich communication in out-of-class exchanges, we do not think that online teaching ever could wholly replace face-to-face education. But even more at that historical moment in time, when people from Central Europe had hardly had a chance to travel to Western countries, and most Westerners had not travelled East of the Iron Curtain either, the model of intensive modules was a good choice.

During the weeks, teaching forms ranged from small-scale lectures – small-scale, because there were no more than about 25 to 30 participants per module – to intensive group work in different teams, sometimes made up of compatriots, sometimes deliberately mixed internationally but also mixed concerning student background (national policy-makers with institutional researchers, etc.). Teachers were not only the module coordinators but also the academic staff members of the local higher education research centre organising the module.

Who participated?

From the motivation of the course's initiators, there were two main dimensions to typify participants of the EHEATC's modules. Geographically, the East–West divide was of major importance; there were practically equal numbers of participants from both regions. From the perspective of learning goals, the division was between researchers on the one hand and policy-makers and institutional managers on the other. In Western Europe, emphasis was put on the training argument, on providing education for junior researchers. In Central and Eastern Europe, emphasis lay with training the policy-makers and institutional managers for the new, unified Europe. Nevertheless, the other cells of the table were filled as well (see Table 2). In total, there were 30 junior researchers out of the 51 participants. National decision-makers were the rarest kind of participants (4), while there were 17 (current or intended future) institutional managers, most from Central and Eastern Europe.

Participants were partly put forward by the CHER initiators of the EHEATC, partly through reactions on advertisements made in higher education newsletters and professional journals. Especially in Central and Eastern Europe, it was largely left to the initiators to find promising candidates for participation in the course: networking was expected to be the most efficient method to reach the target group in those largely unorganised times and societies.

Table 1. EHEATC participants by background

	Researchers	**Decision-makers**		**Total**
		National	Institutional	
Central/East	13	2	11	26
West	17	2	6	25
Sub-total		4	17	
Total	30	21		51

Source: EHEATC administration

The course coordinators at CHEPS collected all candidates' applications to distribute all available slots equitably. Tempus funds were deployed to enable participants from Central and Eastern Europe to attend the course events. To each module, 31 to 36 participants were admitted. On average, participants were admitted to 5.2 of the 8 modules; 24 attended 7 or even all 8 modules. Especially the Central and Eastern European participants were composed as a stable group; one of the Western European research centres, the group in Kassel, had such a large number of junior researchers, that most of them only were given the chance to participate in one module.

What happened with the participants afterwards?

In the early 1990s, thoughts of establishing alumni clubs had not taken root sufficiently to establish such a club especially for EHEATC alumni. Besides, it was

intended that CHER should function as the platform for the alumni—simultaneously assuring their integration in the higher education research community. As a consequence, detailed information on all alumni's careers and whether the EHEATC made any impact on their careers, is not available, being especially scarce for the alumni following non-research careers and who for that reason are not well-represented among the CHER membership.

Anecdotal evidence shows that a number of the junior researchers have indeed pursued careers in higher education research, and at least four of the EHEATC alumni became professors in the field (in Western Europe). More of the junior researchers achieved their Ph.D. afterwards, partly continuing a research career afterwards, partly moving out of higher education institutions.

Others fulfilled the expectation of becoming the next generation of higher education decision-makers; for instance, there were at least two university leaders (in Central and Western Europe) among the alumni, and several faculty deans (in Central and Western Europe). Also there were alumni following career paths in national (and international) higher education policy-making.

Still others pursued careers in the higher education field, partly unforeseen and unforeseeable at the time, because the development of the increasingly internationalising higher education landscape of Europe created new career possibilities.

By and large then, the EHEATC fulfilled its intended role of preparing a next generation of researchers and decision-makers in European higher education.

THE AFTERMATH

When the EHEATC ended with its internationalisation module in Florence, in 1993, hopes were high of repeating and expanding the success. Further EU money was not gained; Tempus moved on and so should successful initiatives supported once. However, other (mostly informal) searches for funding sources were not successful either.

A new higher education research centre, Cipes in Portugal, being in the same need as its somewhat older colleagues a few years before to recruit and educate a group of junior researchers – and also seeing the need for reform in the Portuguese (and other) higher education systems, championed the initiative of a second EHEATC. In cooperation with CHEPS, a second instalment was launched. Participants would have to pay full-cost fees, given the lack of large-scale institutional support. The minimum amount of students for a break-even situation was almost reached, again recruited from all over Europe, and the first module was organised in Porto in 1996. But when student numbers did not increase for subsequent modules, the initiative had to be aborted.

Cipes and CHEPS both independently and in cooperation continued pursuing the idea of Europe-wide higher education training for research and reform, leading to co-organising a summer school in 2006. This was a continuation of a series of summer schools initiated by especially Marijk van der Wende of CHEPS since

around 2000. Again these initiatives thrived briefly, were evaluated very positively by participants, but withered soon due to lack of sustained funding.

In a different guise, international cooperation for education in the higher education field revived in the Erasmus Mundus supported master programme organised by Oslo, Aveiro and Tampere universities. But that was much after the EHEATC, in the turbulent years of post-communist transformation and the Europhoria of the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, before the advent of the Bologna Process and other forms of institutionalisation of the European higher education field.

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