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9. REFLECTING ABOUT CURRENT TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH: A VIEW FROM THE JOURNALS

INTRODUCTIONⁱ

Being mainly a field of studies and not a discipline, higher education has had to develop an institutional network in order to support and nurture the community of higher education researchers. Researchers working on new fields have to develop persistent and effective networks of communication with the rest of the practitioners in the field and consolidate themselves as an intellectual community (Knorr Cetina, 1999; Becher & Trowler, 2001). There are many different people to be addressed: specialized colleagues, fellows in the various disciplines working or interested in higher education topics, students and potential new researchers, and practitioners and policy-makers. The diffusion of a new field of studies among these different types of audiences requires different approaches.

The proponents of each new contribution to the field certainly aim to get recognition for their ideas by their scientific peers. As a result they will be interested in creating a community of researchers who are specialised in the area which will be primarily responsible for advancing and developing extensions of new theoretical and empirical advances. This requires interaction in professional meetings, specialised publications, and specialised associations gathering together those focused on that topic of research (Price, 1963; Whitley, 2000). At the same time, in order to endure (or survive) a new field has to attract new young researchers and convince them of the usefulness and vitality of the field. Moreover, these people need places to teach and research in order to continue to develop and expand the field.

One of the major objectives of authors producing research work is for it to be disseminated and accepted by their academic peers. Nowadays this has been increasingly achieved via the publication of research results in specialised academic journals. An important part of this process of dissemination is through discussion at professional meetings which can provide feedback on preliminary results. The role of the dissemination of research results has been increasingly taken over by scientific journals since monographs seem to have lost ground in many disciplines. The main scientific journals in each field play a double role within the scientific communities they serve. On the one hand, they act as a mechanism of the certification of an addition to its body of accepted knowledge. On the other hand, they become an instrument through which individual scientists

compete for priority and (peer) recognition (Hargens, 1988; Whitley et al., 2010). In fact, by publishing in the main journals researchers are not only disseminating and achieving recognition, they are also promoting the development of their research agenda by stimulating further research on the topic by others (Stephan, 1996, 2012). For these reasons it becomes important, and therefore difficult, to get access to the core journals of any field of discipline.

In this chapter we will reflect on the state of the art of higher education research by primarily looking at some of the leading international journals in the field. Previous examples of this type of exercise in this field have been used to monitor trends in higher education research, to assess the link between higher education research and policy and to identify patterns of communication among leading scholars (Tight, 2007, 2008, 2012). We will see what portrait is provided by those specialized publications and analyse what insights they can provide about the composition and interests of this community of researchers. We will then reflect about what this current portrait suggests regarding the future outlook of higher education research in Europe, with a particular emphasis placed on the role of CHER in this regard.

JOURNALS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is a reasonably recent area of study. In Europe, the development of higher education research was even more recent than in the USA, mostly at the turn of the 1970s. The European research centres have not generally been linked to graduate programs and to the training of new researchers who are specialized in higher education. However in recent decades this has started to change, and several research centres have given increasing attention to post-graduate education and research training activities (see Altbach & Engberg, 2001). As a result the community of higher education researchers has expanded accordingly. One of the aspects that reflect the growth of this community has been the expansion of specialized publications (see Tight, 2010) which reflect the supply and demand forces in the market for research ideas. On the one hand the expansion of research outlets reflects the potential of supplying scientific articles by a growing community of researchers. On the other hand, the creation and consolidation of scientific publications stimulates the demand for scientific publications through professional, intellectual, and symbolic rewards.

The portrait provided by the analysis of the journals may produce interesting insights about the current patterns of research in leading international publications, even though it will certainly need to be qualified and completed. This portrait reflects the priorities of editors and authors and their interaction in the marketplace for ideas. It is influenced not only by authors' research interests and agendas, but also by their anticipation of what is publishable and how and where it is publishable. Therefore, when authors submit their articles to each of these journals it is likely that they have pondered about the interests and tastes of the editors of each journal. There is therefore an issue of self-selection. Moreover, we are only analysing those articles that have been accepted and eventually published after an

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iterative and often long process of discussion between editors, authors and referees that will mould the final result that we have access to. As a result we are only dealing with a partial portrait of the current research, mainly that part of all the submitted work that referees and editors considered particularly relevant and well crafted.

Table 1 presents a selection of some of the leading research journals in higher education. With the exception of the two oldest journals, we see that most of the others have emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, and are therefore rather close to the time of the establishment of CHER. Most of the journals are based in either North America, Australia or in Europe (especially the UK). This is due to the fact that higher education research developed early in those regions. It also reflects the fact that we are focusing on journals which are publishing in English. This option means that the portrait will also need to take into account that there are important language and cultural issues that affect the international dissemination of the results of higher education research. Not all authors will be equally motivated or equipped to present their work in a way that may be attractive to an international

Table 1. Main International Journals in Higher Education Research

Journal	Year of Foundation	Current Number of Issues per Year	Affiliation
<i>The Journal of Higher Education</i>	1930	6	AIR/Ohio State University Press/USA
<i>Higher Education Quarterly</i>	1947	4	SRHE/UK
<i>Higher Education</i>	1972	12 (two volumes of 6 issues each)	Springer/Europe
<i>Research in Higher Education</i>	1973	8	Springer/USA
<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>	1976	6	SRHE/UK
<i>The Review of Higher Education</i>	1977	4	ASHE/USA
<i>The Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management</i> (formerly the <i>Journal of Tertiary Education Management</i>)	1979	6	ATEM/ LH Martin Institute/Australia
<i>Higher Education Policy</i>	1988	4	International Association of Universities/Paris

audience. Many authors will have to present their work in a language that is not their native one, and as often happens in those situations they will be likely to express their views in a peculiar way when regarding both form and content. The old saying of “traduttore, traditore” is relevant here, even if it often happens as an unintended by-product of the linguistic and cultural translation of different realities into another language, and in a way that is considered to be relevant for a vaguely defined ‘international audience.’ Therefore there are issues of intellectual and linguistic conformity to what are considered to be international standards that are more congenial to some authors than to others.

However, and despite those caveats, this portrait is an essential part of current research in higher education. This relevance is certainly due to the fact that the rising importance of English as a main academic *lingua franca* has created incomparable advantages for the international dissemination of academic work published in English compared to when it is available in other languages. Moreover, the work published in English, and in particular in academic outlets with wide circulation, is likely to have an important effect in shaping subsequent work since it will potentially be read by a much larger number of researchers and influence their views and approaches to specific themes in higher education research. Influential articles may even create waves of interest and research that will multiply research attempts to replicate, debate, contest, or extend those original efforts, and this is far more likely to happen if those articles have been published in major academic journals with an international circulation.

Due to the purposes of this volume, we will focus on European-based and international journals which specialize in higher education research.ⁱⁱ We have therefore excluded those journals that either do not have a very strong international presence or which have a tradition of publishing national research. We have also excluded the American and Australian based journals since they tend to reflect the research agenda and style promoted in those communities of higher education researchers (see Tight, 2007). This may overlap with that of the members of CHER in some aspects but it largely corresponds to different communities than those attending the meetings of CHER (and presents some differences regarding the focus and method of research). We have also not considered other journals which are not specialized in higher education research (including education journals). This does not mean that higher education is (or even should be) only be published in its specialized journals, but that a mature specialized community of researchers will tend to privilege those research outlets in order to reach their primary audience. To a large extent, when higher education researchers publish their work in other type of journals this can be interpreted as signalling their intention to communicate with other research communities (and possibly certain types of reputational rewards which are different from those provided by the community of higher education researchers). The journals which are excluded deserve their own analysis, but the space limitations of this chapter prevent that.

As a result, in this article we have analysed articles published in the following journals: *Higher Education* (HE), *Higher Education Policy* (HEP), *Higher Education Quarterly* (HEQ), and *Studies in Higher Education* (SHE). Regarding

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the period, we have chosen those articles published in the volumes of each of these journals for the years 2010 and 2011 since we wanted to get a rather updated picture of current research in the field. In the case of *Higher Education* this has meant covering the first volume of each year since this journal publishes two volumes per year (we have excluded two volumes otherwise the sample of articles covered would be dominated by this journal, and that would bias the analysis). In the next section we will analyse that database regarding certain main aspects of their authors and themes.

MAIN TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

In order to get an overview of the authors and the content of the articles published in higher education journals we have created a database of the articles published in those two years for these four higher education journals. The database was statistically analysed in order to try to answer some basic questions regarding major characteristics of the authors and some of the major themes addressed by them in those articles. We have tried to learn who those authors were regarding the geographical distribution of their affiliation, their type of institutional affiliation, and the main themes covered in the articles. In the cases of multiple authorship we have analysed the corresponding author (otherwise the database would be biased towards those articles with multiple authors). We have then tried to combine some of those issues by trying to see discover the extent to which some of those characteristics were linked in any meaningful way. For all of these aspects we present the data separately by journal, as this information may be relevant to ascertain the extent to which there are common patterns among different journals or whether they have different profiles regarding the type of authors and themes published in recent years.ⁱⁱⁱ

A brief characterization of authors

The first aspect that we have analysed has been who the authors are that are publishing in the journals that we have selected. The two aspects covered were the institutional affiliation and the geographical location. Regarding the first aspect we have identified two major groups of affiliations – academic and non-academic ones. Although we are talking about a research field and scientific publications, it is plausible that not all of the higher education researchers are associated to a higher education or research institution. This is especially the case in view of the important policy orientation of the field. As a result, we have considered the possibility of having authors affiliated with administrative and policy units at both the systems and the institutional level. Regarding academic affiliations, we have considered their distribution across a number of fields in order to identify which disciplinary areas seem to be more involved with higher education research. This does not necessarily mean that it is the disciplinary background of those authors since they may have evolved in terms of their research and academic careers, but it

provides a good approximation to the disciplinary composition of the community of higher education researchers.

Regarding the institutional affiliation, we can observe that the link to academic and research organizations is clearly the dominant situation. Only a small group of authors are affiliated with non-academic positions, and this is the case for all of the four journals considered. This is hardly surprising, since although these units may produce some research the incentives and rewards for producing research-type publications is far stronger in academic and research positions than it is in institutional and policy-making contexts. Whereas academics and researchers may be increasingly incentivized and assessed on the basis of their number of publications (and the publication outlets in which they have placed their work), this is hardly a major issue for those working in non-academic contexts. Moreover, there may even be some deterrents to that in the latter case since there is an opportunity cost involved in choosing the type of outputs and publications produced, and these are valued differently across different professional contexts (and research papers may be more or less valued with regards policy papers or reports).

Regarding the disciplinary background we observe that the picture is less clear. In general there is a broad distribution with authors coming from various disciplines: Economics and management, Education, Humanities, Political Science, Psychology, Social Sciences, Sociology, and Health and Exact Sciences. Among these disciplinary affiliations, Schools, Departments of Education and Educational Sciences are the dominant group for all of the four journals, although far less so in the case of *Higher Education* than in the other three. This does not mean that their disciplinary background is homogeneous, as schools of education have a tradition in many countries of presenting a rather diverse disciplinary profile in terms of their academic staff (for instance, congregating sociologists and economists specialized in education), but at it least suggests that a large part of those publishing in the field are located in those schools and departments. Moreover, this may also reflect the fact that schools of education may value publications in higher education journals more than their economics and sociology counterparts, as these departments are likely to privilege publications in the journals of their disciplines.

Regarding the other major academic affiliations, it is interesting to note a large variation of disciplinary composition across the four journals. One significant result is the fact that Schools and Departments of Economics and Management hold the second place in three out of the four disciplines, with the only exception being Higher Education Policy. In this latter case Political Science Departments hold that position, and one wonders to what extent the title of the publication may have something to do with its perception as a journal which is more oriented towards policy analysis and its recognition among policy departments. The case of economics and management is also interesting, and this may reflect the growing influence and visibility of economic and management ideas in higher education policy and the regulation and organization of higher education systems and

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Table 2. Articles by Institutional Affiliation of Main Author

Institutional Managers and Org.	Government & Agencies		Economics and Management		Sociology		Political Sciences		Education		Psychology		Humanities		Health and Exact Sciences		Social Sciences		Other		Not Available			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
HE	0	0.00%	2	2.25%	14	15.73%	6	6.74%	4	4.49%	25	28.09%	7	7.87%	1	1.12%	4	4.49%	3	3.37%	1	1.12%	22	24.72%
SHE	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	15	12.82%	1	0.85%	6	5.13%	47	40.17%	8	6.84%	8	6.84%	8	6.84%	9	7.69%	5	4.27%	10	8.55%
HEP	1	1.75%	2	3.51%	4	7.02%	5	8.77%	9	15.79%	23	40.35%	0	0.00%	1	1.75%	5	8.77%	0	0.00%	2	3.51%	5	8.77%
HEQ	0	0.00%	1	2.38%	9	21.43%	0	0.00%	5	11.90%	19	45.24%	1	2.38%	1	2.38%	3	7.14%	0	0.00%	1	2.38%	2	4.76%

institutions (see Amaral et al., 2002). As a result, not only those trained in economics and management have found a more congenial audience for their views in higher education research, their contribution may also be regarded as more timely and relevant to the field. Some results that may be less expected include the very limited presence of authors originating from Schools and Departments of Sociology (especially in two of the journals – SHE and HEQ), which may be explained by the aforementioned comments made about schools of education. Other interesting results include a visible contribution from academics working in Schools associated with Exact and Health fields which may suggest a broadening of interests linked to issues of teaching and learning, but also to developments in science and technology that might justify the engagement of scholars from those disciplines in higher education research.

The following aspect that is analysed refers to the geographical distribution of the authors publishing in those four higher education journals. The results for this aspect confirm that the international coverage of the field has been expanding, though it still largely dominated by authors located in Western countries. Nevertheless, it should be noted that we are analysing the professional location of those authors and not their nationality since Western systems of research and higher education have for many decades been able to attract researchers from other parts of the world, and higher education research is no exception to that. The geographical distribution of authors again shows some differences among the journals analysed, suggesting that some of them have a more international coverage (mainly HE and HEP) and that others are still more supported by their original institutional backgrounds. Therefore SHE and HEQ present a very large proportion of authors who are based in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, which in both cases account for more than 60% of the articles published in the period analysed. By contrast, for HE and HEP those countries account for less than one-sixth of the articles published. It is interesting to note that the other major English-speaking community of higher education researchers, that of North America, present a rather symmetric position in these four journals with a much smaller presence in the more Anglo-Saxon dominated journals than in the more internationally diversified ones. In any case, the presence of researchers based in North America seems to reflect the fact that they are more likely to publish in other journals that are not included in this analysis in view of the small size of publications compared to the size of that community of researchers.

The strong presence of researchers based in English-speaking countries is not a surprising aspect in itself, but it deserves a few additional remarks. On the one hand, this reflects the fact that both the expansion of higher education as a significant social, economic, and political reality and the development of higher education research has been emerged earlier in North America and Western Europe than in other parts of the world (Trow, 2009; Palfreyman & Tapper, 2009). Moreover, in the former contexts English has steadily established itself as a major working language. On the other hand, this does not seem to be a unique feature of higher education research. Authors based in those countries are likely to have a language and scientific advantage in publishing in academic journals which are

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only publishing in English. Even if they are not native speakers their proficiency in English will generally be, other things being equal, higher than those researchers based in non-English speaking countries. They will teach and write fluently in English, and that will favour them in presenting their results. Moreover, those based in non-English speaking countries may have other opportunities to publish in national journals. Although many countries seem to be increasingly favouring publication in international journals (strongly dominated by English as a working language), these pressures may be more significant in some regions than in others. Moreover, the trend towards publication in international journals is also more consolidated in other disciplinary contexts than in social sciences and humanities, whose research design and results are more culturally and nationally embedded than those of natural and exact sciences.

Table 3. Articles by Geographical Affiliation

Journal	UK & Ireland		US & Canada		Australia and New Zealand		North Europe		Central Europe and Eastern Europe		South Europe		Asia		Africa and Middle East		Latin America	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
HE	10	9.62%	22	21.15%	8	7.69%	17	16.35%	11	10.58%	16	15.38%	16	15.38%	4	3.85%	0	0.00%
SHE	43	34.68%	6	4.84%	35	28.23%	17	13.71%	3	2.42%	6	4.84%	7	5.65%	6	4.84%	1	0.81%
HEP	5	7.04%	11	15.49%	3	4.23%	14	19.72%	16	22.54%	6	8.45%	6	8.45%	10	14.08%	0	0.00%
HEQ	15	35.71%	2	4.76%	12	28.57%	2	4.76%	0	0.00%	5	11.90%	4	9.52%	2	4.76%	0	0.00%

The geographic distribution of authors also shows that the presence of authors based in Asia, Africa and the Middle East and Latin America still represent an only small part of the total number of articles published in higher education. This is even more striking in view of the expansion of higher education in those regions (Altbach & Umakoshi, 2004; Teferra & Altbach, 2003). Therefore the potential growth of research communities in those countries has not materialized, at least in a way that may be perceptible in major research publications. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are a few exceptions to this general trend, namely the significant presence of Asian-based researchers in HE and of African-based researchers in HEP. By contrast, there is an almost total absence of articles from authors based in Latin American countries, which is even more remarkable since higher education research may be regarded as having some presence in that region which is in some ways older than it is in the other emerging regions. This may be also due to the journals chosen and to language issues which may be favouring the

publication of research results from Latin American scholars in other research outlets and in Spanish and Portuguese speaking journals. Overall, these results suggest that the production of research in the field is still largely dominated by those researchers located in the so-called Western countries, with particular relevance to Europe and North America (though the latter is less visible in these journals due to the aforementioned criteria of the selection of publications).

A brief characterization of themes

The other main aspect explored in this general characterization of the articles published in the higher education journals selected was their thematic distribution. We wanted to identify what the main themes covered in the articles were by both journal and the overall group in order to identify common trends and possible differences of agenda and interest among the four publications. The main topics identified were the following ones: systems regulation (and relationships between governments and higher education institutions), institutional issues, governance and management, quality assessment, funding and economic issues, access and equity, learning, student's satisfaction and performance and the academic profession. Overall, these themes seem to constitute almost 90% of all of the articles published in these four journals, though with some variation across the four publications.

The main topic seems to be that of students' performance and satisfaction and learning issues. This may be justified by several recent policy developments that have given an increasing prominence to those topics. Firstly, there are the changes linked to the so-called Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area that have given an increasing visibility to matters such as student-centred learning (see Amaral et al., 2009; Scott et al., 2012). Secondly, there have been the concerns with the performance of institutions, including the teaching mission (...). Thirdly, there is the issue of competences and skills developed by the higher education system and their articulation with the labour market that have emphasized issues of learning and students' satisfaction (Teichler & Schomburg, 2009). Lastly, but certainly not the least, the growing influence of marketization and managerialism (Bok, 2003; Teixeira et al., 2004) that has promoted a discourse of students as customers and has enhanced the issues of students' views and perceptions of satisfaction as important aspects in a life of higher education.

The importance of this theme is closely followed by two other important themes on the higher education research agenda of recent years. On the one hand there is the issue of quality assessment, and on the other hand that of institutional analysis, governance and management. The rise of quality issues in higher education has been significantly documented and explained in higher education research (see Schwartzman & Westerheijden, 2004; Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Rosa, 2007). The results of our analysis of the data confirm that it has kept a significant prominence in recent published research. The rise of institutional analysis and governance and management topics is also significant on several accounts. This confirms the growing importance of institutional research as an important aspect of

higher education research, following to some extent the strengthening of the role of higher education institutions in many higher education systems. Institutions have become richer and more complex topics of research due to their increasing centrality in the dynamics of higher education systems, and this seems to be reflected in research and publication patterns (Paradeise et al., 2009; Meek et al., 2010). Moreover, recent years have seen a wave of reforms in the governance and management of higher education institutions (Middlehurst & Teixeira, 2012), and this may have played an important role in explaining the research and publication interest about these topics since people are already dealing with the analysis and impact of some of those important developments.

These themes are closely followed by two other themes, which are that of systems regulation and the relationship between the government and higher education institutions and that of the academic profession. The somewhat lower visibility than expected for the former topic may be due to several reasons. On the one hand, its importance may be underestimated since some of the aspects linked to the regulation of the system may be included in the themes of funding and quality assessment which have become very important instruments of the systems regulation of higher education in recent decades. On the other hand, the lower visibility of this topic in recent research may be the counterpart of the rise of institutional analysis. In fact, recent decades have seen the move to less explicit forms of systems control and the delegation of a lot of the daily management of higher education from central governments to the higher education institutions (Neave, 2012; Amaral et al., 2002). As a result the relationship between these two levels has become less dominant to higher education research as was two or three decades ago for most higher education systems.

The theme of the academic profession and its relevance for the research agenda also seems to be linked to some of the aforementioned transformations. On the one hand, the marketization of higher education and the growing influence of managerial rationales have also had an important effect in shaping academic careers and redefining the mission and priorities of academics in many higher education contexts around the world (Musselin, 2006; Altbach et al., 2012). On the other hand, the changes in the balance of power between the state and higher education institutions have not been irrelevant to the role and influence of the academic estate (or oligarchy in the famous Burton Clarke's triangle), and this has been a topic of interest for many researchers. Moreover, recent years have seen several large research projects trying to address the evolution of academic careers, academics' performance, their levels of pay and benefits, and their participation in internal governance mechanisms which are likely to have stimulated multiplying effects in higher education research (see Altbach et al., 2012; Teichler et al., 2013).

The last major themes in higher education research that we have identified refer to issues of access and equity and funding and other economic issues in higher education. The interest of higher education research on the theme of inequality seems to have been following certain waves of interest, to a certain extent also reflecting waves of the policy visibility of issues related to inequalities in higher education and the role of higher education in reducing, enlarging or perpetuating

gender, ethnic and socio-economic inequalities (see Goastellec, 2010). The relevance of each and all of these inequalities is likely to be different across different higher education systems and the different phases of development of those systems. In the case of funding, its smaller visibility is somewhat surprising, not only because this issue has been particularly relevant in many policy debates but also because of the data presented above regarding disciplinary background. This suggests that researchers based in economics and management departments are less focused on financial and economic issues and may be contributing to other topics, which therefore suggests a greater degree of interdisciplinarity.

The relative importance of each of these themes seems to vary significantly across the journals, and a few differences are worth highlighting. For instance, it is interesting to notice the contrasting relevance of systems analysis between journals such as HEP (very high) and SHE (very low), potentially reflecting a much lower level of attention given to the system's analysis in the English-speaking context than in Continental Europe. It is also interesting to notice the dominant role of learning and students' issues for SHE, possibly reflecting both a much greater emphasis on learning and student satisfaction concerns along with the disciplinary composition of authors (which had a stronger affiliation to Schools and Departments of Education). Finally, it is interesting to note that quality issues seem to be the ones presenting a more homogeneous portrait across the four journals, pointing out a transversal nature of quality issues in multiple higher education systems.

Table 4. Articles by Themes

	Total		System Regulation/ Government and HEIs		Institutional Analysis, governance, management		Quality, evaluation, assessment		Funding and economic issues		Access, equity		Students' satisfaction, performance and evaluation		Academic profession		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Higher Education</i>	86	100	15	17.44%	19	22.09%	13	15.12%	4	4.65%	8	9.30%	23	26.74%	9	10.47%	9	10.47%
<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>	112	100	2	1.79%	7	6.25%	19	16.96%	0	0.00%	9	8.04%	39	34.82%	24	21.43%	24	21.43%
<i>Higher Education Policy</i>	52	100	20	38.46%	13	25.00%	10	19.23%	6	11.54%	3	5.77%	3	5.77%	2	3.85%	5	9.62%
<i>Higher Education Quarterly</i>	41	100	6	14.63%	11	26.83%	8	19.51%	4	9.76%	6	14.63%	4	9.76%	7	17.07%	2	4.88%
Total	291	100	43	14.78%	50	17.18%	50	17.18%	14	4.81%	26	8.93%	69	23.71%	42	14.43%	36	12.37%

In our analysis we have also explored the relative contribution made by each of the journals to each of the specific themes considered. This was considered to be an interesting way to see the extent of which some of these journals dominated the

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published discourse about a specific theme. This analysis indicates that one journal (SHE) has a dominant position when it comes to the themes of student satisfaction and performance and learning and that of the academic profession, as more than half of the articles published on those themes were published on that journal. Another journal (HEP) has a very prominent position when it comes to funding and other economic-related themes and to systems regulation. By contrast, these two journals have a very limited or even non-existent contribution to some themes, thus suggesting a certain focus on the publication agenda. The other two journals which were considered (HE and HEQ) present a more diversified publication profile, contributing to all themes and suggesting a more balanced profile. Nevertheless, these results are based on just one year of publications, and we would need data from more years to assess the extent to which that year was a representative example of the publication profile of each of these journals or whether it was particularly influenced by a certain flow of articles (though they are always to a certain degree modulated by the preferences and priorities of the journal's editorship).

Table 5. Articles by Themes

	Total		System Regulation/Government and HEIs		Institutional Analysis, governance, management		Quality, evaluation, assessment		Funding and economic issues		Access, equity		Students' satisfaction, performance and evaluation		Academic profession		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Higher Education</i>	86	29.55%	15	34.88%	19	38.00%	13	26.00%	4	28.57%	8	30.77%	23	33.33%	9	21.43%	9	25.00%
<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>	112	38.49%	2	4.65%	7	14.00%	19	38.00%	0	0.00%	9	34.62%	39	56.52%	24	57.14%	24	66.67%
<i>Higher Education Policy</i>	52	17.87%	20	46.51%	13	26.00%	10	20.00%	6	42.86%	3	11.54%	3	4.35%	2	4.76%	5	13.89%
<i>Higher Education Quarterly</i>	41	14.09%	6	13.95%	11	22.00%	8	16.00%	4	28.57%	6	23.08%	4	5.80%	7	16.67%	2	5.56%
Total	291	100.00%	43	100.00%	50	100.00%	50	100.00%	14	100.00%	26	100.00%	69	100.00%	42	100.00%	36	100.00%

The final aspect explored in this characterisation of the articles published in these four journals was the combination of two of the aspects analysed above. We opted for an analysis of the thematic distribution of the articles by geographical region of authors. By doing this we hoped to identify a particular focus of themes by authors based in a particular region and to identify possible geographical variations in the research agenda. In order to do this we combined the total set of articles and classified them by both region and by theme. The results indicate some interesting differences. Overall we can say that most regions present a rather

Table 6. Themes by Geographical Affiliation

	System Regulation/ Government and HEIs		Institutional Analysis, governance, management		Quality, evaluation, assessment		Funding and economic issues		Access, equity		Students' satisfaction, performance and evaluation		Academic profession		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
UK & Ireland	5	6.02%	9	10.84%	14	16.87%	3	3.61%	10	12.05%	16	19.28%	14	16.87%	12	14.46%
US & Canada	12	25.53%	8	17.02%	3	6.38%	2	4.26%	2	4.26%	6	12.77%	10	21.28%	4	8.51%
Australia and New Zealand	4	6.35%	4	6.35%	16	25.40%	1	1.59%	2	3.17%	15	23.81%	11	17.46%	10	15.87%
North Europe	12	21.05%	8	14.04%	10	17.54%	3	5.26%	1	1.75%	16	28.07%	4	7.02%	3	5.26%
Central Europe and Eastern Europe	9	25.71%	8	22.86%	6	17.14%	4	11.43%	2	5.71%	3	8.57%	0	0.00%	3	8.57%
South Europe	3	7.89%	11	28.95%	4	10.53%	3	7.89%	5	13.16%	9	23.68%	0	0.00%	3	7.89%
Asia	10	23.26%	8	18.60%	5	11.63%	3	6.98%	2	4.65%	7	16.28%	7	16.28%	1	2.33%
Africa and Middle East	2	8.33%	5	20.83%	4	16.67%	2	8.33%	3	12.50%	2	8.33%	1	4.17%	5	20.83%
Latin America	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	100.00%	0	0.00%

balanced distribution of articles by themes. However, certain themes seem to dominate the profile of certain regions. Among the interesting aspects to be highlighted is the fact that systems regulation and analysis seem to be quite prominent among the articles published in the year under analysis by those authors based in North America. To a large extent this may be due to a perception among these authors that the journals under analysis (and their readership) may be more interested in those themes than the American based ones. As we had seen above, this theme also seems rather relevant for most of Continental Europe (except Southern Europe), and to those authors who are based in Asia and are not very prominent authors compared to those based in most English-speaking countries. Regarding institutional analysis and organizational themes they seem to be relevant

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to almost all regions, with a particular emphasis on authors based in European, African and Middle-Eastern countries. This may reflect the strengthening of the institutional dimension and its relevance for higher education policy in those regions (later than in the Anglo-Saxon countries). Also worth mentioning is the relevance of quality issues for authors based in Australia and New Zealand, and the learning and students' issues for many authors based in Continental Europe, in the latter case reflecting the recent advances of marketization and managerialism rationales in those countries (see Teixeira et al., 2011; Regini, 2011).

CONCLUDING REMARKS: CURRENT RESEARCH TRENDS AND THEIR RELEVANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF CHER

The results presented above constitute an important though incomplete portrait of the current patterns of research in higher education. This portrait confirms the existence of important policy and institutional changes in many higher education systems, namely with the rising relevance of the institutional dimension in higher education compared to the decline of systems analysis and regulation. The publications in those journals also highlight the persistent relevance of quality assessment and academic careers as major themes of research in higher education, and the emergence of learning and students' issues as important topics on the research agenda. Another major aspect to be underlined is the persistent concentration of the research networks in the so-called Western quarters, namely Europe, Australia and New Zealand and North America, though this may change in the near future, especially with a potentially stronger contribution from Latin America and, in particular, from scholars based in Asian countries. Finally, the analysis confirms the nature of the research community of higher education scholars as being rather diverse from a disciplinary point of view.

An interesting aspect emerging from the analysis is also a certain convergence in the research agenda, despite the role of national peculiarities in research and policy trends. Although we have observed a growing standardisation and internationalisation of educational systems and educational institutions that have reduced national specificities and peculiarities in recent decades (see Meyer & Ramirez, 2000), these have not disappeared and still represent an important factor in shaping differences in the structure and content of national education systems. The national resistances cannot be restricted to a political bargain, but instead they are nurtured by deeper legal, cultural, and historical traditions that have been shaping higher education at the national and institutional levels and which may resist what is often perceived as a serious process of standardisation (see Ertl & Philips, 2006). However, several trends point towards greater policy-borrowing and transnational influences. In the case of Europe, the growing integration within the EHEA will spur these trends across national borders, especially for those institutions that have a higher degree of international integration (which are often also among the most prestigious in each country). As a result, despite national specificities one might expect a growing homogeneity in the degree of influence of policy trends and major research themes across the EHEA in the near future.

The presented data also confirm that despite its progressive institutionalization higher education research is not an autonomous discipline but rather a multidisciplinary field of research. This has been reflected in the origins and evolution of CHER as an organization of higher education researchers whose activities have remained faithful to that tradition and who have permanently developed as a multidisciplinary community. This was possible because the CHER members come from a wide variety of backgrounds, namely economics, education sciences, history, management, philosophy, political sciences, public policy and administration, and sociology. This multidisciplinary nature of CHER has meant that each researcher could benefit from the diverse backgrounds of its members and was able to contribute to the development of a kaleidoscopic view about the complex realities of higher education.

Another important issue is the international vocation of CHER and how broad its geographical ambitions should be. The analysis performed in this paper gives weight to the view that the international integration of non-Western parts of the world is still limited. According to publications in journals, the production and dissemination of research by scholars based outside Europe, North America and Australia and New Zealand still plays a minor role. As a result CHER may play an important role in helping some of those pockets of research activity to integrate and participate more actively in the international networks of higher education research. However, this alertness to a potentially growing and more geographically diverse international community of higher education researchers has to take into account the fact that the core of its membership is still in Europe. Those based in Australia, New Zealand and North America have their own regional communities and networks, and due to issues of cost and institutional linkages will generally tend to have a secondary attachment to CHER. In these cases CHER may play a more relevant role by developing a certain complementarity to the research profile and agenda of their non-European counterparts, thereby providing a forum for non-European scholars who are interested in internationally comparative and policy-oriented research.

The presented data also point out the potential and the risks of higher education studies becoming a consolidated field. The fact that several specialized journals and associations like CHER have established themselves as important outlets for the dissemination of research in higher education is certainly an important aspect in the institutionalization of the field. This is particularly relevant for younger scholars since it creates greater opportunities to disseminate their work and develop a career in higher education, including through international publications which are recognized by several of the major bibliometric indicators. Moreover, this also creates greater opportunities for the consolidation of a specific theoretical and methodological identity which may differentiate the field. However, this also poses risks from both an intellectual and a professional point of view. On the one hand, the intellectual development and renewal will benefit from a fruitful exchange with several of the disciplines that have been contributing to the study of higher education. On the other hand, the institutional opportunities for the development of those careers are limited and may encompass greater vulnerability, especially in

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times of the retrenchment of academic positions and the funding of higher education and research. This is certainly an aspect in which CHER could play an important role, notably by continuing to nurture a community of specialized researchers that has nodal points with other disciplinary contexts and through which the communication flows in both directions, bringing insights from other disciplines and being able to communicate the relevance of the results of higher education research to those disciplines.

Finally, the analysis showed that it is important that CHER strives for a balance between responsiveness to policy developments and the capacity to reflect critically about the real impact and significance of these developments. The profile displayed by the publications indicates that the patterns of research reflect major trends in systemic, institutional, and policy developments. This is hardly a surprise given the nature of the field and its objects, however these developments can be approached in different ways. A stronger emphasis on policy trends may increase its visibility among institutional managers and policy-makers, but it may also create a bias for short-termism and policy epiphenomena. Moreover, it may reduce the space for a critical reflection about the institutional and political realities of higher education. Over the last 25 years CHER has given an importance to this aim, and one hopes that it will continue to do this in the many years to come by being able to balance policy and intellectual relevance.

NOTES

- ⁱ In the collection of some of the data I have counted on excellent research assistance by Ricardo Biscaia of CIPES.
- ⁱⁱ For a study covering a broader set of journals, see Tight (2010).
- ⁱⁱⁱ For a complementary bibliometric analysis more focused on methodological issues see Tight (2007, 2012).

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