

Higher Education in International Perspective

A Survey and Bibliography

Philip G. Altbach and David H. Kelly

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with an essay by Jan Kluczynski

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Foreword

In December 1982, UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES) organized a meeting of specialists in research on higher education in the Europe Region (including in the UNESCO sense Canada, Israel and the United States). This meeting was held in Salamanca, upon the kind invitation and with the support of the Spanish authorities and the University of Salamanca. The background of the meeting was as follows.

National authorities and international bodies have increasingly felt that it was desirable that higher education be able to contribute to the solution of major regional and international problems such as the establishment of a new economic and social order, integrated development, international understanding.

In view of this, the planning, functioning and efficiency of such dynamic and constantly evolving social systems as those of higher education apparently call for a thorough study of certain problems linked with its development so as to identify them and find appropriate solutions to them. For this reason, in the various European countries, research on higher education has been organized, covering different aspects of modifications and innovations to be made in order to render it 'efficacious' in relation to the needs of modern society, as well as to ensure its own efficient functioning. Higher education research bodies were usually set up as offshoots of higher education establishments and later often became autonomous structures whose objectives now are to undertake planning and research and to make the results available to those responsible for higher education and to university circles.

But despite the efforts made and although the volume of research undertaken in this field is not negligible, it is still insufficient, and numerous aspects deserving of study have not been the subjects of appropriate research.

It therefore appeared important to study questions of joint interest in the field of higher education research, and how such research can be more efficiently developed and used in light of the needs of society and of the higher education institutions. An exchange of information trends in the planning and organization of research, and a discussion on how European co-operation in this field may be broadened, could, it seemed, stimulate such research. In organizing this meeting, it was hoped that it would be possible to identify the principal problems of joint interest and to suggest certain activities aimed at the development of research and of European co-operation in this field.

Thus, the meeting was supposed to provide a forum of debate so as to identify

relevant issues of common concern and to move more closely towards a definition of the state of the art of research on higher education. In order to facilitate reflection and give direction to the discussions, a study was prepared by Professor Philip Altbach, of the Comparative Education Department, State University of New York at Buffalo (USA), which tried to review major research trends, placing special emphasis on the channels of dissemination of available research results. Other working documents presented were a selected bibliography, a well-documented list of multi-faceted research topics and interests that were identified through a survey carried out by CEPES, and the *International Directory of Higher Education Research Institutions* published by CEPES and the International Bureau of Education in 1981.

Participants were invited to pay special attention to the following issues.

Research in the field of higher education

- ☐ the reasons which have led institutions in Member States to undertake research;
- ☐ the objectives, roles and functions of such research;
- ☐ the broad lines of research and the evaluation of their adaptation to the needs of higher educational systems as related to major world problems;
- ☐ the efficacy of research in light of the development of higher education: identification of the fields in which research seems to be insufficient, in order to stimulate it.

Trends in higher education research

- ☐ typology of research institutions, organization and structures;
- ☐ methods of working, and the main problem areas of research;
- ☐ the relevance of past or present research to the needs of institutions, authorities and society in general;
- ☐ present trends in research;
- ☐ determination of priority fields and subjects, the planning of research.

European co-operation

- ☐ analysis of the subjects, forms, ways and means of co-operation, and results already achieved;
- ☐ the need for, and the role of co-operation and the function of CEPES and other UNESCO bodies;
- ☐ possible ways and means of harmonizing research already undertaken.

Aproximately fifty participants from different countries and representatives of international organizations attended the meeting. Many of them contributed papers describing the research situation in their respective countries. The exchanges of experience and of opinions were intense and varied. Ten major topics of international interest were pinpointed which ought to lead to further action and intensified co-operation.

The discussions centered on suggestions of themes and ways and means for international co-operation in research on higher education. One idea was that the very submission of a practical problem to an international working group may help to redefine it in a conceptually more satisfactory and practically more useful way. For example, a participant suggested investigating why planning had only a negligible influence on actual practice. This question was based on experiences in France, which he briefly described. He felt that these experiences had cast doubt on the practical value of research on higher education, assuming that if plans are not put into practice, then there is no point making investigations which generate them. Some of those listening countered with experiences in which research not originally undertaken for planning purposes ended up becoming the basis of widely-adopted policies. (One of the examples was studies of social mobility which first revealed the extent of the differences in educational opportunity among different social classes.) While there was a gap between research and planning on the one hand, and practical policies on the other, due probably to the overwhelmingly cognitive and technical character of the former and the essentially political one of the latter, there was also a less obvious direct influence of research on practice through gradually changing the perception of a situation and the terms in which it is defined. It was obvious that a meaningful investigation of the relationships of research and policy requires a different approach than the usual one of trying to trace the influence of research on policy through deliberate planning. The problem has to be reconceptualized in a way to allow for influences from all directions, between research, planning and policy, and by making explicit both the motivational and cognitive elements in policy-making.

Another example was the reaction of some participants to the suggestion of investigating on an international scale the phenomenon frequently described, especially in the United States, as the 'management of decline' in higher education. Some members objected to the term, pointing out that there was no decline in their countries; others feared its insidious implications, the acceptance of decline as inevitable, rather than viewing it as a temporary challenge requiring new initiatives. It was agreed that the comparative investigation of what was originally referred to as 'management of decline' should be redefined as 'adjustment to scarcity and changing conditions'.

Finally, a third theme, on which discussion led to a change of perspective, was the improvement of academic instruction through appropriate educational research and training of academic teachers. This theme was also introduced with a note of scepticism, based on the experience of some British universities, where efforts at training academic teachers in effective teaching methods were met with indifference as long as participation in such training courses was not made into a condition for promotion and granting of tenure. In the course of the discussion, some participants produced counter-examples in which interest in improved teaching methods (although not necessarily participation in training courses) arose among members of departments in the course of research in which they and their students were the objects of investigation. In this case too,

like in the first one, something originally defined as primarily a problem of manipulating motivations was redefined in a manner involving the changing of the cognitive perception of the situation.

These experiences of the emergence of new ways of looking at and defining problems in the course of meetings made apparent a specific aspect of the potential value of international meetings and co-operation of researchers on higher education. This realization led to a discussion of strategies and procedures for planning and organizing such activities. There appeared to be a consensus that probably the best strategy for the continuation of the work begun at this meeting would be to identify groups of people working on more or less the same topics in different countries and to organize meetings for them with a view to establishing working groups on related topics. Another idea which met with approval was to invite to such meetings a few carefully selected users of the research. For example, people in charge of the production of statistics for higher education in different countries were suggested as being one of the groups which could be usefully organized for such purposes.

The meeting tried to draw up a list of topics it considered important enough to serve as an overall agenda for research on an international scale. They are as follows.

- ☐ Teaching and learning: instructional methods, study skills, curriculum, teaching technology.
- ☐ Policy, organization and planning: with special reference to government-university relationships.
 - ☐ Life-long and non-traditional forms of education.
 - ☐ Internal governance and institutional management.
 - ☐ Higher education and work.
- ☐ Adaptation of the university to scarcity of resources and changing conditions.
- ☐ Improvement of statistical information with emphasis on enhancing international comparability.
- ☐ International academic exchange with emphasis on the problems of study and training in foreign countries.
- ☐ Role and participation of women in higher education.
- ☐ Problems of research: research and teaching: research and practice; the accountability of the researcher.

It was realized that this is a very comprehensive and, perhaps over-ambitious list. The fact that the meeting could not come up with anything more limited is a reflection of the shared feeling of the participants that the present era of economic stringency, following the tremendous expansion of higher education and university research in the sixties and early seventies, requires re-examination of practically all aspects of higher education and that only a comprehensive and sustained research effort can provide the information and analysis needed to fulfil these objectives.

In view of these conclusions, the conference at Salamanca was considered as a

starting point for an intensification of exchange among specialists of higher education. Most of the contributed papers were published in issue No. 1/1983 of the Centre's quarterly journal *Higher Education in Europe*, together with an extended bibliography. But, encouraged by the strong interest shown in the topic, we sought for ways to present a more complete picture of the state-of-the-art and future perspectives of research in higher education in the Europe region, and to make this information available to a large interested public. The result of our collective endeavor is the present book.

We were fortunate to be able to combine two parts that were elaborated separately but complement each other in a fortuitous way.

The first part contains two essays commissioned by the European Centre for Higher Education, and elaborated by Professor Philip Altbach of the Comparative Education Center of the State University of New York at Buffalo, U.S.A., and the other by Professor Jan Kluczynski of the Institute of Science Policy, Technological Progress and Higher Education, in Warsaw, Poland. They analyse from a sub-regional point of view, the questions raised at the Salamanca conference and provide an excellent synthesis of the current situation in most countries of the Europe region:

The second part contains an exhaustive bibliography, elaborated by Professor Philip Altbach and Dr David Kelly of the Comparative Education Center at Buffalo, New York. It lists some 7,000 works of higher education worldwide, arranged by topic.

The European Centre for Higher Education is indebted to the authors for the thorough work they have performed. Special thanks are due to Professor Altbach for all the organizational energy he has deployed in making this endeavor possible, and to his collaborators for their technical assistance in preparing the manuscripts for publication.

We are confident that this book will be a valuable source of information and inspiration to all those whose field of interest and action is higher education, be they researchers, teachers or students, administrators or policy-makers.

We would be happy to receive reactions from our readers. It is our hope, moreover, that UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education will be able to act continuously and efficiently as a catalyst and a 'clearing house' for international exchange and co-operation in the field of higher education.

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* CEPES is a decentralized unit of UNESCO created to promote international co-operation in the development of higher education. It offers information and other

services to policy-makers, managers, researchers, university staff and students in the thirty-seven Member States (including Canada, Israel, Turkey and the United States), and stimulates communication and collaboration with them. The Centre also maintains relations with various organizations and institutions, both national and international, governmental and non-governmental, which are concerned with higher education.

A regular and important means of information and exchange is the quarterly journal *Higher Education in Europe*, published in English, French and Russian. CEPES publications include studies on specific topics, follow-up studies to meetings and periodic statistical surveys. A separate publication series is devoted to monographs on national systems of higher education.

CEPES also acts as a forum for the exchange of ideas through meetings, symposia, seminars and conferences and by undertaking studies on current problems of higher education.

Contents

Foreword, by <i>Franz Eberhard</i>	xiii
The Survey	
Perspectives on comparative higher education: a survey of research and literature, by <i>Philip G. Altbach</i>	3
Introduction	3
The emergence of a field of study	4
The research system	9
The dissemination infrastructure	21
Research trends	27
Future research and recommendations	41
Research on higher education in European Socialist countries, by <i>Jan Kluczynski</i>	55
Introduction	55
The task of education in a socialist country	55
Educational planning and educational development	56
System of research on higher education	60
Research centers	60
Conclusions	70
Targets and tasks of higher education in the future	71
The Bibliography, by <i>Philip G. Altbach and David H. Kelly</i>	
Introduction	89
History of universities and higher education	93
General (1-11)	93
Africa (12-42)	94
Asia (43-95)	96
Australia and Micronesia (96-109)	100
Europe (110-377)	101
Latin America (378-435)	118
Middle East and North Africa (435a-452)	122
North America (453-513)	124

Economics and post-secondary education	129
General (514-571)	129
Africa (572-592)	133
Asia (593-631)	134
Australia and Micronesia (632-648)	137
Europe (649-768)	138
Latin America (769-798)	146
Middle East and North Africa (799-810)	148
North America (811-929)	149
Statistical and descriptive works	158
General (930-968)	158
Africa (969-1023)	160
Asia (1024-1141)	164
Australia and Micronesia (1142-1163)	172
Europe (1164-1315)	173
Eastern Europe (1316-1366)	183
Latin America (1367-1480)	186
Middle East and North Africa (1481-1524)	194
North America (1525-1609)	197
Policy and planning	203
General (1610-1672)	203
Africa (1673-1691)	207
Asia (1692-1738)	208
Australia and Micronesia (1739-1766)	212
Europe (1767-1896)	214
Eastern Europe (1897-1930)	223
Latin America (1931-1971)	225
Middle East and North Africa (1972-1981)	228
North America (1982-2066)	229
Institutional planning and description	235
General (2067-2074)	235
Africa (2075-2090)	235
Asia (2091-2106)	237
Australia and Micronesia (2107-2115)	238
Europe (2116-2140)	239
Latin America (2141-2153)	240
Middle East and North Africa (2154-2159)	241
North America (2160-2177)	242
Academic profession	244
General (2178-2222)	244

Africa (2223-2233)	247
Asia (2234-2256)	248
Australia and Micronesia (2257-2273)	249
Europe (2274-2390)	251
Latin America (2391-2411)	258
Middle East and North Africa (2412-2415)	260
North America (2416-2502)	260
 Students	 267
General (2503-2512)	267
Africa (2513-2520)	268
Asia (2521-2534)	268
Australia and Micronesia (2535-2539)	269
Europe (2540-2577)	270
Latin America (2578-2593)	272
Middle East and North Africa (2594-2600)	274
North America (2601-2640)	274
 Activism	 278
General (2641-2662)	278
Africa (2663-2680)	279
Asia (2681-2751)	281
Australia and Micronesia (2752-2754)	285
Europe (2755-2837)	286
Latin America (2838-2885)	291
Middle East and North Africa (2886-2899)	294
North America (2900-2973)	295
 Student adjustment (Socialization and psychological problems)	 301
General (2974-2992)	301
Africa (2993-3001)	302
Asia (3002-3024)	303
Australia and Micronesia (3025-3033)	305
Europe (3034-3118)	306
Latin America (3119-3128)	311
Middle East and North Africa (3129-3139)	312
North America (3140-3243)	313
 Student attitudes	 321
General (3244-3250)	321
Africa (3251-3264)	322
Asia (3265-3291)	323
Australia and Micronesia (3292-3297)	325

Europe (3298-3326)	325
Latin America (3327-3333)	328
Middle East and North Africa (3334-3346)	328
North America (3347-3370)	329

Foreign students 332

General (3371-3386)	332
Africa (3387-3395)	333
Asia (3396-3404)	334
Australia and Micronesia (3405-3406)	334
Europe (3407-3425)	335
Latin America (3426-3432)	336
Middle East and North Africa (3433-3439)	337
North America (3440-3482)	337

Education for the professions (including teacher education) 341

General (3483-3527)	341
Africa (3528-3573)	344
Asia (3574-3626)	347
Australia and Micronesia (3627-3644)	351
Europe (3645-3812)	352
Latin America (3813-3871)	363
Middle East and North Africa (3872-3906)	368
North America (3907-3951)	370

Access and stratification 374

General (3952-3988)	374
Africa (3989-4002)	376
Asia (4003-4029)	378
Australia and Micronesia (4030-4040)	380
Europe (4041-4153)	381
Latin America (4154-4189)	388
Middle East and North Africa (4190-4193)	391
North America (4194-4244)	391

Intercultural relations and development (Institutional transfer and related issues) 395

General (4245-4295)	395
Africa (4296-4327)	398
Asia (4328-4372)	401
Australia and Micronesia (4373-4374)	404
Europe (4375-4388)	404
Latin America (4389-4458)	405

Middle East and North Africa (4459-4480)	410
North America (4481-4493)	412
University-society relations	414
General (4494-4536)	414
Africa (4537-4578)	417
Asia (4579-4627)	420
Australia and Micronesia (4628-4629)	423
Europe (4630-4769)	423
Latin America (4770-4861)	432
Middle East and North Africa (4862-4877)	438
North America (4878-4915)	439
Theories of higher education	443
General (4916-5006)	443
Africa (5007-5014)	448
Asia (5015-5027)	449
Australia and Micronesia (5028)	450
Europe (5029-5100)	450
Latin America (5101-5122)	455
Middle East and North Africa (5123-5124)	456
North America (5125-5185)	456
Reform	461
General (5186-5234)	461
Africa (5235-5246)	464
Asia (5247-5297)	465
Australia and Micronesia (5298-5305)	468
Europe (5306-5574)	469
Latin America (5575-5690)	486
Middle East and North Africa (5691-5696)	494
North America (5697-5756)	495
Research	499
General (5757-5776)	499
Africa (5777)	500
Asia (5778-5791)	501
Australia and Micronesia (5792-5795)	502
Europe (5796-5861)	502
Latin America (5862-5872)	506
Middle East and North Africa (5873-5879)	507
North America (5880-5902)	508

Law: governance and administration	510
General (5903-5951)	510
Africa (5952-5958)	513
Asia (5959-5987)	514
Australia and Micronesia (5988-6001)	516
Europe (6002-6126)	517
Latin America (6127-6164)	525
Middle East and North Africa (6165-6170)	528
North America (6171-6271)	528
Comparative studies	536
General (6272-6318)	536
Africa (6319)	539
Asia (6302)	539
Europe (6321-6323)	539
Latin America (6324)	540
North America (6325-6327)	540
Teaching and curricular developments	541
General (6328-6413)	541
Africa (6414-6434)	546
Asia (6435-6474)	548
Australia and Micronesia (6475-6487)	551
Europe (6488-6646)	552
Latin America (6647-6678)	562
Middle East and North Africa (6679-6682)	564
North America (6683-6766)	565
Education and technology	571
General (6767-6775)	571
Africa (6776-6777)	572
Asia (6778-6780)	572
Australia and Micronesia (6781-6784)	572
Europe (6785-6802)	573
Latin America (6803-6804)	574
Middle East and North Africa (6805)	574
North America (6806-6812)	575
Bibliographies	576
General (6813-6840)	576
Africa (6841)	578
Asia (6842-6853)	578

Australia and Micronesia	(6854)	579
Europe	(6855–6870)	579
Latin America	(6871–6877)	580
North America	(6878–6901)	581

The Survey