
“A snapshot of what is going on in some of these transition countries” is the brief goal statement in the introduction to this volume of contributed papers. With the rapid and radical changes the Central and Eastern European countries experienced in almost every sphere of life since 1989, such a publication would be timely for readers anywhere, interested in higher education systems and their relation to society.

The 254 page volume consists of three parts: first, there are four ‘Overall Views’ chapters dealing with developments in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe in general, next follow seven chapters on ‘case studies’, including two chapters published under the name of the OECD. Finally there is an eighteen page bibliography.

The countries covered in the “Overall Views” are different sets each time. The core consists of Hungary, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Poland (not mentioned in the Introduction) and Romania. In some comparative chapters, the Baltic states, Bulgaria, the Russian Federation or the former German Democratic Republic are added to this core, and Albania and the territory of the former Yugoslavia are mentioned once each, in passing. Availability of data, or the author’s knowledge, seems to guide the random selection of countries. The case study chapters concern the Baltic states (three separate sections in one chapter), Poland, the former GDR, the Czech and Slovak republics (together in one chapter), Hungary, and Romania.

A strong point of this volume is that comparative chapters and many case studies are written by people with extensive knowledge of the national higher education system they are describing. The choice of studies for the chapters from these authors is somewhat more puzzling. I am aware of the time that it takes to commission new articles or collect existing papers, to edit, print and publish a book. In a book published early in 1995, one cannot expect the texts to be more recent than early or middle 1994. In a ‘snapshot’ of a rapidly changing subject, one would wish that the texts are not much older than that. The inclusion of chapters written in 1992 (based on 1991 data) is
not acceptable when the names of ministers, economic or social situations, numbers and characters of higher education institutions, laws, etc. all have changed in the meantime. There are three such chapters, one is excerpted from a 1993 publication, one was written in 1992 and (slightly) revised in 1993 or 1994, one written in 1993 with a 1994 postscript. The other five chapters either are dated 1994, undated but apparently recent, or ‘forthcoming’ (the latter applies to the chapters from the OECD reports, which are still not published at the time of writing this review (summer 1995)).

What is the theme uniting the chapters? In the Introduction, Hüfner states that “[our] interest is related to the problem of what is happening to the societal sub-systems of higher education and science in those countries, in their interrelationships with the transformation processes into parliamentary democracies as well as into market economies.” (p. 5) (It should be observed that higher education is emphasised much more than science.) In the comparative part, Hufner indeed starts to give the economic context in which higher education has to survive — but the context as it was up until 1993, with rather bleak figures for GDP growth, unemployment, inflation, etc. Since about 1993–1994, though, some of the Central European economies belong to the fastest growing economies (Poland, Albania), inflation rates are going down (Czech Republic), etc. Hüfner’s conclusion that shock therapy measures will not reach their ultimate goals (pp. 17, 32), may need some revision in the light of further developments — at least compared to gradualist strategies. The arbitrary time limit is one of the problems with a snapshot. However, Hüfner’s statement that economic transformation affects all societal institutions (p. 17) is undeniably true. And a major problem remains that public expenditure cutting is seen as the main policy instrument to achieve economic stabilisation, implying severe funding problems for higher education.

Jan Sadlak of UNESCO, Paris, contributes two comparative chapters, one on the ‘legislative reform project’ of the Council of Europe, and one on the broad cultural and social context of higher education in the post-communist countries. The latter, especially, gives a number of important insights into the different histories of the higher education systems in these countries (some based on Humboldtian, others on Napoleonic traditions), and on the willingness and possibilities to reform (degree structure changes, e.g. the introduction of tiered systems with ‘bachelor’s’ and ‘master’s’ degrees, take place much more easily in these countries than in Western Europe, and with less suspicion, I guess, of the unexpected consequences). The final comparative chapter by Jana Hendrichová, then working at the Centre for Higher Education Studies in Prague, deals with ‘selected issues’ (how? why?) that are relevant for some transformation aspects: institutional autonomy, problems of economy (this is a 1992 text), funding scarcity and the problem of re-integration of the soviet
type academies of sciences with higher education institutions. She manages to treat most aspects for most of her five countries, but not all, and mostly in a rather brief and not very thorough manner. Differences of opinion among the contributors are also visible, at least in emphasis: for example, whereas Sadlak calls massive brain drain a 'remote problem', though with threatening effects in the long run (p. 58), Hendrichová sees this as an acute problem, e.g. in Russia (p. 76).

The largest part of the book is taken up by the 'case studies' that deal with the Baltic states, the Czech and Slovak republics, the former German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania. Without a common theme, or a common set of questions to guide the authors of the chapters, one cannot use the term 'case studies' without quotation marks. They are a motley collection of papers, with – continuing the snapshot metaphor – different foci, different angles of view, different depths of field, and (as mentioned above) made at different points in time. Most chapters are descriptive studies of the state of transition of national higher education systems at the times of writing. As snapshots of rapidly changing situations, though with persistent problems, these chapters are very valuable. They give accurate descriptions of the respective higher education systems (again with the proviso: as they were at the time of writing the respective chapters), of some of the changes these systems are going through and of some of the problems and issues encountered along the way.

But there is no synergy from collecting them in a single volume: the editor does not provide the reader with an overarching chapter to treat the common nature of the problems addressed in the case studies, or in which he analyses the similarities and differences of the problem situations and of the policies to tackle them. The introduction fulfils this function to only a limited extent. It is mainly an exposition of basic economic indicators and of the roles international organizations play, (or would like to play), in the transformation of higher education in Central and Eastern Europe. Further synthesis of the national experiences is left to the reader.

In contrast with the other case studies, the two chapters that consist of preprints of parts of OECD higher education review reports have only limited descriptive value (the one on Hungary more than the one on the Czech and Slovak republics). What is the purpose of including these recommendations intended to influence policy in a collection of empirical case studies? The editor does not even address this question, and the fact that these reviews have not (yet) been published makes these chapters all the more intriguing. Moreover, whereas the Czech and Slovak OECD report is accompanied by a study on Czech higher education, the Hungarian OECD chapter is the only major source of information in this book about Hungary.
The bibliography is a collection of articles that have mainly appeared in certain journals in or around the field of higher education between 1988 and 1994. Some entries are contributions to books, such as from one of the higher education encyclopedias, while some belong to the ‘grey’, unpublished, literature. Although not comprehensive – which would be a titanic ambition – the bibliography seems to be wide-ranging, covering many Central and Eastern European countries. The languages of the entries are English, with some in German; other language publications are only mentioned here and there in the notes to the separate chapters.

There are some lapses (such as ‘this year’, meaning 1992, 1993 or 1994) and typographical errors in the volume. Most of the contributors are ‘English as second language’ speakers and the idiomatic correctness of certain expressions they used may be in doubt. Yet on the whole the chapters are quite readable.

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Fundamental differences in such factors as colonial tradition, political and economic development, and indigenous educational policy have resulted in considerable variation in the structure of the higher educational systems in the East Asian region. For example, the enrolment rates for the several East Asian higher educational systems vary widely, from a high of 38 per cent in Korea to a low of 2 per cent in China.

Despite the complexity of East Asian higher education, remarkably little has been written about it, especially when compared to the literature on U.S. and European higher education. To address this gap, Albert Yee has co-ordinated a review of selected developments in East Asian Higher education through contacting key people in each of the societies and having them write what seemed important to them. Among the authors are three university presidents, several deans, and a talented array of experts and regional observers. The result is considerable diversity in focus and style.

In the introductory paper, Yee identifies several overarching themes to be considered below. He first notes the ancient intellectual traditions of China which failed to prepare China for the Western invasion; thus Chinese higher