



Preface

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Researchers, doctoral students, policy makers and university leaders from ten countries met on 16 and 17 June 2016 in Budapest at the second conference of the Central European Higher Education Cooperation (CEHEC) project to reflect on current trends and key issues in the region's higher education. The conference, entitled "***Distinctiveness of Central and Eastern European Higher Education***," was organized and co-hosted by the Center for International Higher Education Studies (CIHES) at the Corvinus University of Budapest and the Yehuda Elkana Center for Higher Education at Central European University. The aims of the CEHEC project are multiple. First, it wishes to create a forum for sharing experiences, best practices, models and for discussing challenges, progress and possibilities of academic collaboration and policy sharing in the region's higher education. Second, it aims to build a professional network that can provide support to relevant stakeholders in higher education. Last but not least, the series of conferences that emerged from this cooperation seek to provide more visibility of Central and Eastern Europe in the global higher education landscape and recreate the attractiveness the region had in the 1990s for researchers and policy makers.

Conference participants debated whether certain topics and issues are particular to the region's higher education and brought a local perspective to the major debates in contemporary higher education. Some of the invited keynote speakers represented higher education systems from outside the region and brought an external, comparative perspective to current topics in Central and Eastern Europe. Jonathan R. Cole, former provost of Columbia University and member of the CEU Board of Trustees, who opened the conference with his key note speech, discussed the future of research universities in the US and also launched his latest book "Toward a More Perfect University" at the conference.

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The five articles published in this special edition of HERJ can be considered as a thematically and geographically representative cross-section of the scholarly and professional dialogue stimulated by the 18 papers presented at the conference. Whether focusing on a specific country - Hungary, Romania, Georgia – or on a region - such as the Visegrad Four countries - these papers address problems that carry an important significance beyond the immediate location where they were researched.

The authors employed a variety of research methodologies and approaches – rooted in disciplines ranging from sociology to economics – that show the truly interdisciplinary character of higher education studies. The collection includes papers that are based on empirical studies carried out by their authors, some relying on existing broader secondary statistical data, while others used primary data collected for specific research purposes.

The issues addressed in the papers - changes in national higher education systems, social changes triggered by the massification of higher education, predictors of adult skill proficiency, models of local community colleges, and policy perspectives on student success and dropout – although analyzed and presented as part of distinct case studies, are topics of interest to many scholars or professionals concerned with the major debates in contemporary higher education.