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**Analysis of the development of the international organisation:  
Consortium of Higher Education Researchers**

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Module 1

Introduction to Higher Education Research and Development

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## **1 Introduction**

Nowadays, globalization process influences different aspects in the world and higher education area is not an exception. Higher education sphere starts working on the supra-national level and various scientists and researchers try to work together to improve its conditions and enhance beneficial outcomes. Therefore, this paper is devoted to the organization named Consortium of Higher Education Researches (CHER) that rallied researchers from different countries to build a firm bridge for collaboration in the field of higher education research.

I will try to introduce the sense, the purpose and the structure of this organization and explain what CHER is about. Also, I have analyzed participation rate of countries from the membership directories in order to figure out not only the leading countries with high participation rate, but also find out main changes in membership list through the last decade. These changes I have presented in terms of graphical scales to illustrate the results of my analysis.

Also, I present the topics that have been covered over the years during annual conferences and discuss the issues, which in my viewpoint, were the key points in the presented conferences, so that a reader could get general overview of almost each conference since 1988. Beside this, I have analyzed these themes and tried to identify the main changes happened through the years in discussed topics. Also, I tried to find out possible external factors that may cause these changes and influence the area of higher education as well. In addition, I have observed the direction of CHER research on different aspects of higher education.

The main aim of my paper is to attract readers' attention to this organization, especially young researchers and students from developing countries, who with the help of CHER can develop their perspectives regarding research on higher education. Also, these people could gain new ideas for developing their higher education systems not only on the national level, but also engage in international cooperation in this field by participating in various activities organized by CHER like annual conferences and additional training courses for researches.

## **2 Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER)**

### **2.1 Organization of CHER**

The Centre for Research on Higher Education in Europe and the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) were actively involved in comparative research and thus contributed to the formation of ‘supra-national platform of communication of higher education researchers, Consortium of Higher Education Researches (CHER).’ (Teichler, 2005, p 456).

CHER was found on November 24-26, 1988 at the meeting organized by Ulrich Teichler in Kassel, who has served as Director of the CHER Board for many years. CHER has established firm international network among academically-based researchers through the conferences, mutual projects and training courses to enhance internationalization of higher education research. Since 1988, CHER has been organizing its annual conferences where participants share their knowledge, research insights and explore new research horizons regarding development of higher education area. Also, CHER focuses on comparative research in order to strengthen the links between different countries, encourage collaboration in research projects and further improve the state and quality of research on higher education.

In its objectives CHER emphasizes:

- encouragement of interchanging ideas and viewpoints in terms of research of higher education;
- enlargement of theoretical knowledge and excellence of research in higher education area;
- organization of training courses for researchers, policy makers and managers in higher education;
- establishment of contacts with international organization that concern with the area of higher education.

CHER Constitution was established to enhance its structural organization and contains main points regarding participation scope; appointment of board of governors as well as their functions, tasks and duties; annual report and accountability; amendment of the articles of association and dissolution.

From the beginning, the CHER secretariat was located in the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), the Netherlands, until it moved to the Centre for Research on Higher Education in Europe, Kassel, in 2001. Also, CHER has cooperated with European Centre for

Higher Education/Centre Européen pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CEPES), as 'many CHER members have been longstanding CEPES collaborators.'(Harman, 1991, p. 2). Also, the researchers who have been promoting the development of CHER, except its originator Ulrich Teichler, are Ase Gornitzka, Guy Neave, David Dill, Barbara Kehm, Patrick Clancy and many others, whose contribution enables to make CHER one of the most successful membership organization in the area of higher education research. Due to these researchers, lots of publications are now available for the audience, which contain central ideas of the CHER, its annual conferences and training courses.

## **2.2 CHER Members**

First it is important to note that CHER is an international membership organization opened only to individuals. Therefore, the board of governors of CHER that consists of seven people can accept researchers and students as well, who are active in the field of higher education research. Members should participate in all events organized by CHER and attend its annual conferences. Also, members may further put forward themselves as candidates for the seat on the board. This organization is financed by member's fees as 75 - Euro per year and student-membership is 55 - Euro per year. (CHER Constitution).

CHER organization includes members not only from the developed countries, but also from the developing countries where the research on higher education is not highly developed. Hence, developing countries can get beneficial ideas about the research on this area. Of course, it is not wise to state that an 'idea' or reform that works well in one country can bring the same effects in others, but still it can serve as a good basis for the further development of higher education area in such countries. Thus, researchers from different countries tightly cooperate to enhance the power of research and present firm ideas and results on improving various aspects of higher education sphere.

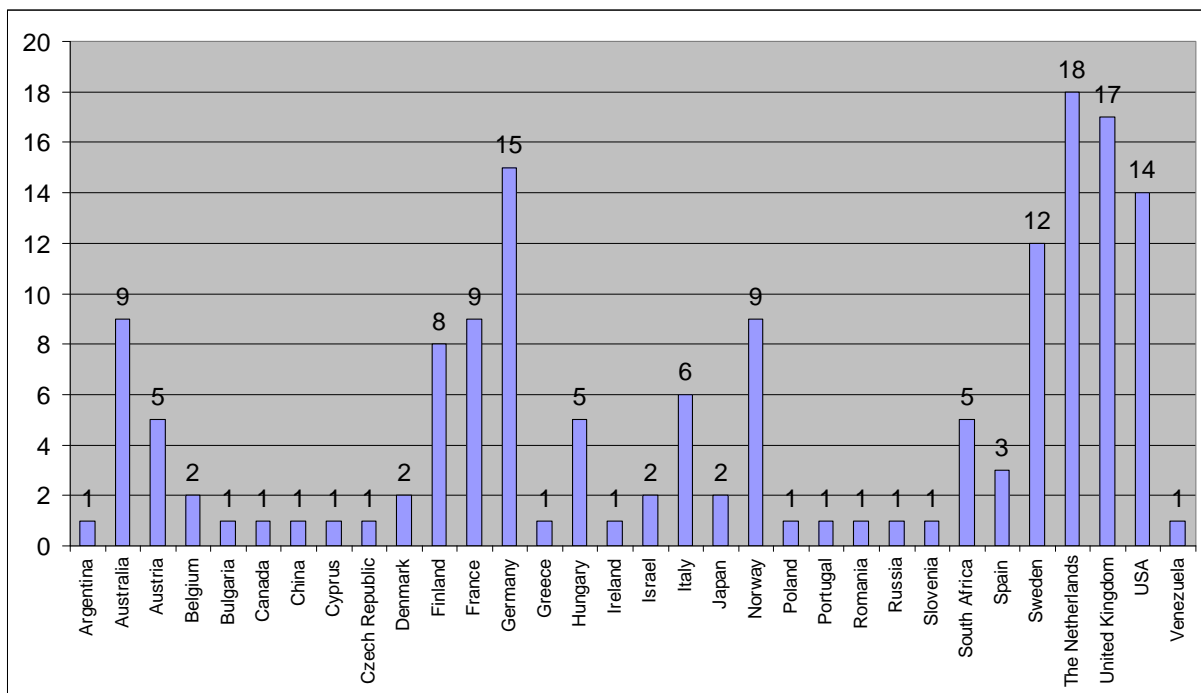
Among the CHER members you can find more researchers dealing with exploration of various aspects concerning higher education area, sociologists of higher education and economists as well. As research is the theme-base area constructing from different disciplines there is no clear border between researchers and other experts on higher education. Members usually share similar research interests for which they complete a variety of researches concerning such issues as higher education policy and research; comparative studies of higher education; management and funding in higher education; improvement of teaching and learning; organizational development; globalization and internationalization and

diversification of higher education; relationship between higher education and labour market; innovations and reforms in higher education; the Bologna process and Lisbon agenda etc.

Now it would be interesting to make the comparative analysis of the participation rate in CHER directory through the last decade.

In directory 1999-2000 were 154 members from 32 countries. The chart below shows the list of members per country.

**Chart 1. Participation of CHER members per country for 1999-2000**

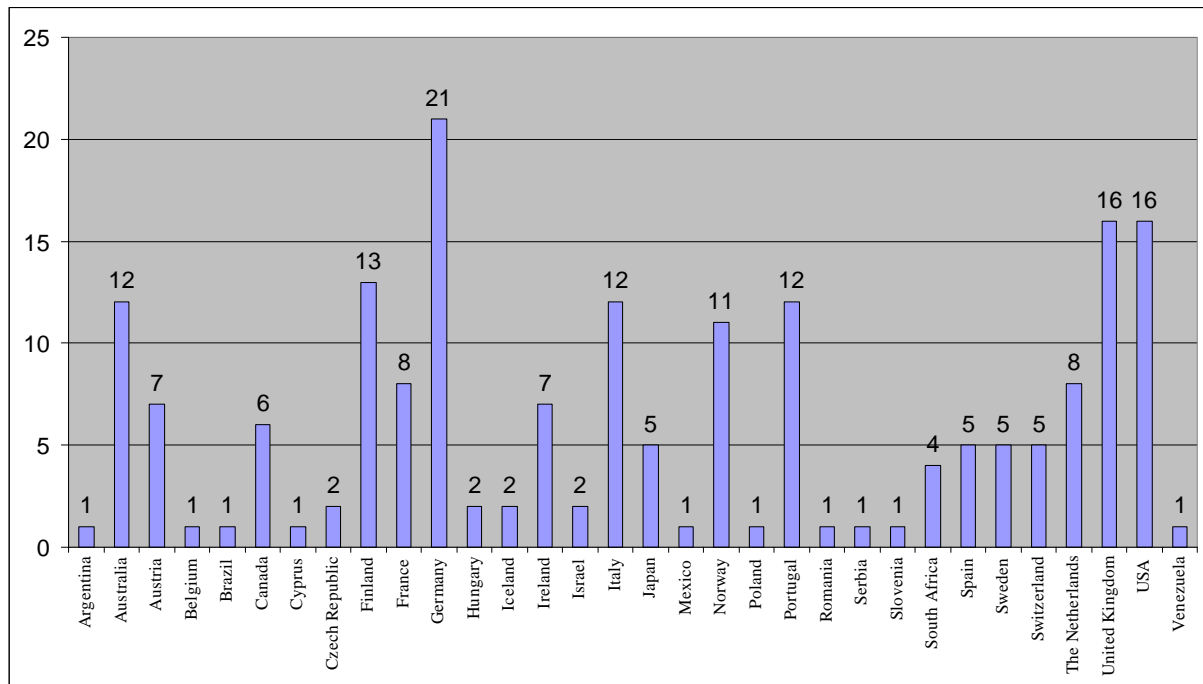


Source: CHER Directory, 2000.

It is vividly shown that the big and leading amount of participants had been from the Netherlands (18), United Kingdom (17), Germany (15) and USA (14).

In directory 2007-2008 were 191 members from 32 countries. The amount of members increased in comparison with previous 1999-2000 membership directory. Also, some changes had happened concerning substitution of countries in the participation list. For instance, there were no more members from countries like Bulgaria, China, Denmark, Greece and Russia and instead of these countries appeared the following: Brazil, Iceland, Mexico, Serbia and Switzerland; however, without the major changes in the participation rate.

**Chart 2. Participation of CHER members per country for 2007-2008**



Source: CHER Directory, 2008.

The leading country in this time was Germany with 21 members, as more researchers were actively engaged in this organization. United Kingdom with USA had equal amount of participants (16 from each country). It is necessary to emphasize that the rate participation had considerably increased (more than twice) in Portugal, Canada, Italy, and Ireland, and decreased in the Netherlands and Sweden in comparison with 1999-2000, when by that time the Netherlands were the leading country. It could probably happen for the reason that members of countries, where participation rate increased, got financial support from their governments, which organized programmes to enhance and support research projects in higher education area, like CMU-Portugal Program and Irish Aid Programme of Strategic Co-Operation arranged by governments in 2006.

Also, the themes chosen for the conferences could play here not the last role, as chosen issues for discussions could raise academic interest of participants who wanted to enlarge their knowledge and share their estimation of a particular question, or vice versa it could reduce interest of members who focused on other aspects and issues.

### 3 CHER annual conferences since 1988-2009

#### 3.1 Themes and main issues discussed in the annual conferences

Different books, journals and announcements have been published in relation to CHER Conferences; however, there are no special conference publications for 1990, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2005, as for 2008-2009 there are forthcoming volumes to be published. This section presents the themes of the annual conferences as well as brief analysis of the central issues discussed in these conferences.

1988 1<sup>st</sup> CHER conference and Foundation of CHER in Kassel, Germany;  
Conference theme: *Research on Higher Education in Europe*.

The 1<sup>st</sup> conference was mainly devoted to maintain close cross-national links between researchers in higher education area for developing of research projects autonomously from governmental programmes. Participants dealt with discussions of what had been already achieved in different aspects of higher education in order to establish the further directions and goals. Focus of various papers was also done on quantitative, structural and institutional dimensions within the sphere of higher education and some reports as well emphasized the encouragement of innovation in higher education systems for economic growth. (Van Vught, 1989). Also, issues concerning higher education relationships with the employment system and industry had been carefully analyzed by U. Teichler and L. Cerych.

1989 2<sup>nd</sup> CHER Conference in Enschede, the Netherlands;  
Conference theme: *Decision Making in Higher Education*.

The decision making environment in higher education is very complex. Therefore, this conference tried to highlight that higher education institutions need necessary and reliable information for supporting regulation, administrative, academic and research interests to enable stakeholders to facilitate the process of decision making. For instance, Van Vught examined the issue regarding the relationship between higher education research and the study of public administration for better understanding of the processes and effects of government policy-making and its relation to higher education. Also, new concepts of public administration developed theoretical models for the analysis of decision-making processes in higher education.

1990 3<sup>rd</sup> CHER Conference in Brussels, Belgium;  
Conference theme: *Challenges for Higher Education Research*.

The focus of this conference was done to get an accurate and deep understanding of research into higher education in whole Europe. 'The meeting has suggested markers for the future research agenda, and it has helped integrate the various methodological and technical

perspectives as well as the insights of participants representing West and East.’ (Neavy, 1991, p. 3). Some presentations concerned with the research methodologies and ways how theory could be tested with respect to its further formation. In addition, some works discussed difficulties in the institutions and structures and focused on the application of analysis for finding solutions to these difficulties. Ladislav Cerych (1991) has emphasized that this conference created a new stage of progress for European community of higher education researchers, as lack of equality between West and East countries was overcome during discussions.

- 1991 4<sup>th</sup> CHER Conference in Dijon, France;  
Conference theme: *Higher Education Finance*.
- 1992 5<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in London, United Kingdom;  
Conference theme: *Higher Education and the World of Work*.

Despite the big amount of reports presented during this conference the primarily focus was done to discuss the issues with regard to various relationships between higher education and work, especially the contribution of higher education to the labour market like graduate output in terms of qualifications, knowledge, skills and numbers. Also, some works focused on the development of education and labour market under the influence of technological progress. Beside this, Harald Schomburg and Ulrich Teichler presented Kassel Graduate Survey that focused on the ‘investigation of the impact of study programmes and study conditions on the professional success of graduates.’ (Schomburg & Teichler, 1993, p. 37). These researchers have also made deep analysis of employment results of graduates in terms of field of study, duration of job search and employment rate.

- 1993 6<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Stockholm, Sweden;  
Conference theme: *Graduate Education*.
- 1994 7<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Enschede, the Netherlands;  
Conference theme: *Cross-National Studies in Higher Education*.
- 1995 8<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Rome, Italy; Conference theme: *Cross-National Studies in Higher Education: The State of the Art in the Disciplines*.

The main idea of this conference was devoted to comparative research itself, its limits and potentials. Also, participants focused on comparative studies of higher education systems and innovative organizations. Despite the point that many comparative projects showed dissatisfied results for the reason that researchers are overloaded with huge amount of facts and usually base more on description approach as well as have language barriers, they continue to work in this area in order to improve higher education research. Ulrich Teichler

has emphasized that comparative studies on higher education are ‘indispensable for understanding a reality shaped by common international trends, reforms based on comparative observation, growing trans-national activities and partial supra-national integration in higher education.’ (Teichler, 1996, p. 431). Also, such ideas as transition from elite to mass higher education, changing relationship between governments and universities, new ways of knowledge organizing have also been discussed during the meeting.

1996 9<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Turku, Finland; Conference theme: *Governance and Management in Higher Education Institutions.*

1997 10<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Alicante, Spain; Conference theme: *Evaluation and Higher Education Research.*

1998 11<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Kassel, Germany; Conference theme: *Higher Education Research - Achievements, Conditions and New Challenges.*

During this conference various reports dealt with the issues regarding comparative research of higher education, theoretical base of higher education research itself, as well as actual changes and cases of modernization in the sphere of higher education. Before the beginning of the third millennium, scholars wanted to estimate the achievements, conditions and new challenges of the research area. Also, researches evaluated the results of research projects on higher education to estimate the progress and further direction. For instance, Ase Gornitzka (1999) proposed the topic concerning organizational change in higher education institutions and its relationship with government and its policy. Changes in higher education systems had also found its reflection on the issue regarding research of academic professions, as well as raised a new flow of discussions of the relationship between higher education and work. (Teichler, 1999). Beside this, some reports also explored the issue regarding promotion of students learning (Terenzini, 1999) and improvement the quality of teaching (Dill, 1999).

1999 12<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Oslo, Norway; Conference theme: *The Research Function in Higher Education.*

2000 13<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Lancaster, United Kingdom; Conference theme: *The Institutional Dimension: Organizational Aspects in Higher Education Research.*

2001 14<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Dijon, France; Conference theme: *Higher Education and Its Clients: Institutional Responses to Changes in Demand and in Environment.*

The main focus of this conference laid on discussions of students’ population, as they act as clients and universities try to be more competitive on education market to attract more

students. Some reports made comparative analysis of changes in higher education systems concerning structure, purpose and institutional activities for the sake of students' needs and their life-long learning. (Jonbloed, Schuetze and Slowey, 2002). Also, several papers analyzed students and undergraduates in fact of term-time employment as well as performance of gradulators and PhD holders on the labour market. Beside this, some participants dealt with the issue like research function of higher education institutions where knowledge production was an important point for developing economic, industry and research innovation (as discussed by Fisher, Grosjean, Bleiklie and Byrkjeflot, 2002).

2002 15<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Vienna, Austria; Conference theme: *Higher Education in the Global Age*.

During the last decade internationalization has become recognized as an area of research that would probably enhance the relationship between higher education research and research on the internationalization of higher education. New ideas of international research, Europeanization (most notably throughout the Bologna process), global university networks, influence of globalization regarding higher education area in terms of arrangement and financing took place during this annual conference. Several reports, which dealt with the topic concerning the Bologna process, this time, emphasized not only convergence of higher education but also showed diversification of higher education systems (Amaral & Magalhaes, 2004). Also, appearance of more supra national exchange programs in higher education increased the idea of students and staff mobility.

2003 16<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Porto, Portugal; Conference theme: *Reform and Change in Higher Education: Renewed expectations and improved performance?*

The main issue of this annual conference was based on changes done in higher education. Different papers presented topics regarding government reforms for policy development, its implementation and impacts in different countries. The essential point here was that policy and change processes should be seen from multi-level perspective containing a variety of actors. (Gornitzka, 2007). Also, some researchers presented a critical appreciation of the work by Cerych and Sabatier (1986) on the subject of 'Great expectations and mixed performance: the implementation of higher education reforms in Europe' and examined considerable changes in higher education since this publication. (Gornitzka, 2007, p. xv)

2004 17<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Enschede, The Netherlands; Conference theme: *Public-Private Dynamics in Higher Education: Expectations, Developments and Outcomes.*

According to Jürgen Enders and Ben Jongbloed, who published book with collection of articles from this conference, the main idea of this meeting reflects ‘the changing relationships and boundaries between the public and private spheres of higher education and research; in other words, the public-private dynamics in this sector.’ (Enders & Jongbloed, 2007, p. 9). The main topics that were discussed dealt with public and private dynamics, providers, funding and public sector reforms in higher education across different countries. For instance, some elements from private sector, as private funding and investment to the research area, were introduced into public sphere of higher education. Also, Simon Marginson has stated in his paper that ‘I suggest that higher education is intrinsically neither public nor private. It can go either way: it can be predominantly private or predominantly public in what it does, or it can achieve an (unstable) balance between them.’ (Marginson, 2004, p 4). Hence, the public and private goods also were analyzed in this conference, as the perception of higher education and research as pure public goods, for the reason that they deal with knowledge production, has changed due to the fact that private providers want to expose research products to market and public providers want to charge fees for the access to knowledge.

2005 18<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Jyväskylä, Finland; Conference theme: *Higher Education: The Cultural Dimension - Innovative Cultures, Norms and Values.*

2006 19<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Kassel, Germany; Conference theme: *Systems Convergence and Institutional Diversity?*

This conference touched the issue concerning university rankings and their influence, as it is relatively new phenomenon in higher education area. Nowadays, due to globalization in labour market there is high competition among higher education institutions at national or international level in the sense of competence, quality and excellence, as it is very necessary for the universities’ prestige to remain at the top of the list. (Dill, 2006). Due to Berghoff S, (2006) reputation here plays an important role for choosing university, as it serves as vital pointer in many rankings. However, Marginson S. (2006) has emphasized that rankings should not only focus on the reputation of institutions but also define institutional goals and contain clear facts about its outputs and performance. Therefore, appropriately selected methods and indicators for university rankings are very important. (Kehm & Stensaker, 2009). In addition, many reports have dealt with central issues regarding changes in European higher education systems and institutions in terms of reforms of degree structures and their

mutual recognition; the blurring of boundaries of university and non university sectors and the relationships between universities under the Bologna's influence.

2007 20<sup>th</sup> CHER conference in Dublin, Ireland; Conference theme: *The Research Mission of the University*.

The main topics discussed during this conference were devoted to the development and conceptualization of the research mission of the university in the new global context, for the reason that academic research can contribute to economic growth of the country. Patrick Clancy, in his recently published book concerning this conference, has stated that 'The university research mission is now perceived to be a primary engine of economic development and national policies therefore seek to strengthen academic research and doctoral education, while improving the channels linking university research and industrial innovation.' (Patrick, 2009, p 6). Hence, governments increased investment programmes in research to reinforce research productivity and made new national policies and reforms to enhance knowledge transfer activities of the universities and improve quality of doctoral education. Beside this, the author has emphasized that the progress of research policy in the European Union (EU) has led to the establishment of European Research Area (ERA) to improve European competitiveness in the research area in order to overcome technological gap with other countries like USA and Japan. Different members from various countries have also presented reports regarding the impacts and results of new policies on the research mission of universities.

2008 21<sup>st</sup> CHER conference in Pavia, Italy; Conference theme: *Excellence and Diversity in Higher Education. Meanings, Goals, and Instruments*.

The term of excellence is very popular nowadays and has a variety of meanings. The overall idea of this conference belonged to achieving excellence in higher education realm in terms of teaching, learning and research in order to encourage competitive capacity and promote institution development. CHER always makes announcement or proposal prior to the annual conference. Thus, the CHER conference in 2008 aimed to reveal the core of excellence itself in higher education; its contribution to economic and technological development and ways of development excellence in mass higher education. This meeting also touched the issue concerning diversity and excellence development in higher education at its different levels. The idea of diversification appeared in terms of ways and criteria for choosing strategies to achieve excellence and the further consequences. Therefore, different members have made proposals concerning various issues of excellence investigation in higher education.

2009 22<sup>nd</sup> CHER conference in Porto, Portugal; Conference theme: *Public Vices, Private Benefits? Assessing the Role of Markets in Higher Education.*

Nowadays, there is a growing role of markets in higher education and discussions concerned with the advantages of private impact over public ones and privatization forms in the sphere of higher education. Therefore, according to the CHER announcement for 22<sup>nd</sup> conference, some topics have dealt with issues concerning the role of markets and its types in higher education area and the implications of market forces for institutions' changes. (CHER announcement, 2009, p 4). However, for higher education the critical issue is that both market and government regulations play an important role in many higher education systems and it is not appropriate to put them in controversy. Of course, the factors that stimulate good financing and universities' competitiveness in the international level are very important nowadays because of challenging environment, thus discussions concerning private and public aspects of higher education still continue.

### **3.2 Changes of the themes of annual conferences over the years**

At the very beginning CHER has focused on the development of research on higher education area. Research in this area drew attention to the discussions about the knowledge society, new methods of management and steering as well as increasing internationalisation of higher education. However, preliminary reports mainly dealt with functions and missions of research itself, discussed problems of research methodology and proposed different ways to evaluate research results. Also, these reports concentrated on the approaches to achieve excellence and overcome challenges in the research area as far as possible. After a decade since the appearance of CHER, the conference in 1998 was devoted to the analysis of achievements and conditions of higher education research.

CHER has united researchers who presented ideas for improving various aspects of the sphere of higher education, as research on higher education aims mainly to improve the quality of higher education. Also, research on this area is primarily defined by the object of its analysis. Therefore, various researches that were done usually focused on the improvement of education policy, the organisation and management of higher education institutions and supporting financial side of higher education area. The point that pleased is that researchers did not forget the sense of education itself and pay attention to improving the quality of teaching for enhancement students' learning process and work on increasing the quality of doctoral education in order to strength the future of academics.

Information and technology progress as well as economics and labour markets have influence on higher education sphere. Therefore, some topics within several conferences were repeated during different period of time especially those that raised public debates concerning issues under the influence of revolution in technological communication and the process of globalization. Due to Ann Morey (2004), these are usually the major forces that make changes in higher education. It seems that higher education area is partly observed as one of the factors for increasing economic power of the country. Governments create different programs to develop and finance their high education in terms of research and innovation in order to enhance 'knowledge production' and be more competitive with presented results in the global market. Also in terms of internationalization and Europeanization, higher education institutions try to cooperate with various supra-national organizations and work on the improvement of their education systems and organization aspects as well. Universities try to earn 'bonuses' for being in the top of university ranking in order to attract international students and get more financial support. This financial support gained from governments and through fees paid by international students or through other investments from organizations that are interested in higher education research enable to increase innovations in higher education systems and support long term comparative research projects on higher education.

As CHER focuses on comparative research, many reports presented during annual conferences have observed the ways of implementation of education policies and reforms in various countries in comparative view. This enable to find out how particular reforms worked in different higher education systems and which consequences they brought in comparative analysis with other countries. All researches were empirically-based and tried to enhance our understanding of various education systems and institutions as well as view comparative reviews and significantly reflective case studies.

After the appearance and implementation of the Bologna process in 1999 to promote higher education area, the following annual conferences presented many topics regarding this issue. Participants presented reports about the influence of the Bologna process as well as its pre and post period in different countries. Various researchers presented papers where they have analyzed the convergence of higher education systems in terms of mutual recognition of credits, degrees and the blurring of boundaries of university and non-university sectors, as well as emphasized the existence of diversification in some higher education systems.

Beside this, many reports throughout conferences were devoted to discussions of the relationship between higher education area and labour market, as role of market has increased during the last decades. Researchers have concentrated on the idea that research in the area of higher education and employment system should be based on expectations of changing conditions in the future. They have also focused on the issues of over education and preparation of students directly to the labour market as well as evaluated gradulators' employment results.

#### **4 Conclusion**

I have found CHER to be the leading organization for establishing multinational feasibility analysis of research on higher education area. This organization has also made great contribution to facilitate and improve the research area itself. Nowadays, many publications based on the CHER annual conferences are available, which contain research-based articles on the theory and practice of higher education. CHER brings together a wide range of expertise for an international study that enable to view particular topic from different sides. Thus, growing cooperation of researchers across various countries and increased collaboration in comparative projects vividly improved the quality and expansion of research on higher education in recent years. All presented researches were designed to lead to critical insights into the area of higher education. All topics that have been analyzes during CHER conferences have significant input for many countries far beyond the European Union (EU), especially for developing countries where higher education area is still constructing and the area of research is unstable.

CHER researchers have a concern in the present and future of higher education area and take into consideration external factors that influence higher education in order to modernize this domain according to internationalization and technological progress. I suppose that future works will further base on policy and practice on higher education research, relationships with employment system, globalization and other new reforms organized for improving and unifying education area worldwide as the Bologna process.

I hope that CHER will continue its work and increase the amount of higher education researchers and professionals as well as expand knowledge and quality production in higher education.

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