

Jürgen Enders
Director of CHEPS

The Transformation of the University in Europe
Opening the 25th anniversary conference of CHEPS

Powerpoint 1 Welcome

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Rector Magnificus, Dear Dean, Dear colleagues and friends of CHEPS,

The Center for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente is celebrating its 25th anniversary. Since the mid 1980s, CHEPS has made numerous contributions to both Dutch and international higher education research and policy-making and is one of the world's largest and most well-known centers of its kind. We celebrate this milestone with this conference addressing: The reform of higher education and research in Europe.

I would like to welcome you all on the behalf of CHEPS to our lustrum conference to celebrate this event. It is great to see so many friends of CHEPS being around to share their expertise and inspiration with us during this day. It is a great pleasure for us to welcome you at the University of Twente and to our School of Management and Governance. This year, our University is celebrating its 50th anniversary with a number of events and our School has organized this week as a special lustrum week – only a few weeks after the opening of our new building here in the heart of our Campus. I think our CHEPS conference is thus very well placed right in the middle of our university to celebrate what we have achieved, to show that we keep on being ambitious, and to discuss what the challenges are that certainly lie ahead of the universities in Europe and the European universities. And these challenges should certainly not only be of relevance to higher education research, policy making, and management. If European universities use their full potential they will be a major driver of economic development and social welfare within Europe – and also beyond. Talking about the theme on our anniversary conference is likely to fill the whole day – what I could easily do as some of you know – given the far-reaching changes that have been put on the political agenda of European higher education and research. The general political, economic and social conditions under which our universities and other higher education providers operate have been altered and are ongoing to change. The consequences of the major recent financial crises for Europe's political economies and from thereon for higher education are a recent and – in some countries - dramatic example. The organization of the primary processes in teaching, research and knowledge dissemination, the governance and funding of higher education and research are on the agenda as well as the role of different arenas, actors and modes in coordinating higher education systems. These issues are by no means European only, universities all over the world experience important changes in their environment and rising expectations as regards their contribution to regional,

national and – hopefully sometimes - international innovation. Efforts aiming at European integration have, however, like in other policy fields, added an important additional element – or rather another layer that cuts across Europe and the issues mentioned above.

Higher education has thus become a real-life laboratory for the study of political reform, of stability and change that has provided CHEPS with a magnitude of opportunities and challenges to the study of higher education.

To me, there is no doubt that European higher education is going through a transformation – and we are just in the midst of it.

At CHEPS, we have put this transformation of higher education and research in the knowledge society central to our research program. We can be proud to say that this program has been evaluated very favorably and plays an important role in our contribution to our Institute of Innovation and Governance Studies where we develop close collaborations with our colleagues from other departments in our university.

Powerpoint Research program

The broader theme is subdivided into four research clusters:

1) the reformulation of the cultural and economic role of higher education in society:

The Transformation of the social contract

2) the dynamic modes of governing higher education and research: *The Transformation of coordination,*

3) the changing patterns of stratification and networking in higher education and with other stakeholders: *The Transformation of the organisational field,* and

4) the developments inside the higher education organisations: *The Transformation of the professional organisation.*

In essence it is the evolutionary processes, the attempts for reform contributing to these transformations and their effects on the functioning of higher education that are the objects of our studies and activities.

The program represents our continuous academic ambitions and our striving to contribute to relevant knowledge. It builds on two and half decades of commitment to the study of higher education.

When we look back at the founding days of CHEPS, a major concern was about the changing relationships between higher education and the state.

Powerpoint Leviathan

The Dutch government was a European front runner in changing its philosophy for public sectors including its higher education system. Concepts and instruments were developed that spread across Europe and nowadays belong to the widely used standard inventory of national and European policy-making.

What emerged over time can truly be called a changing belief system in the role and functioning of higher education and research in our societies.

Powerpoint man with arrows

It goes together with a policy narrative

- that advocates change from central governmental planning and regulation towards state supervision;
- that advocates self-regulation in quasi-market competition as well as organizational self-steering;
- that advocates university autonomy as an enabler for the strategic actorhood of universities and accountability as a new form of transparency and control;
- that advocates the diversification of missions and functions of higher education providers as a response to massification; and
- that advocates the growing need for responsive higher education and research as a driver of regional development and innovation in Europe.

From its early days until today CHEPS has studied the changing talk, decision and action of higher education reform in national, cross-national and European perspectives. The shift from input control to output control, the rise of the evaluative state and of conditional autonomy, of quality assurance and performance-based funding, the university in the stakeholder society, the multi-level and multi-actor dynamics of Europeanisation and European integration, the organizational transformation of the university are some of the key concepts and research lines with which CHEPS has made substantial contributions to its field of study influencing the thinking of peers as well as the practice of decision-makers.

And the work of CHEPS always had a critical mind for the tensions, dilemmas and contradictions that unavoidably go along with such big reform projects.

An early example concerns the relationship between autonomy and accountability or the Janus head of reforms:

Powerpoint Janus

Janus - a figure from ancient Roman mythology, a god who is always shown with two faces, one looking backwards and one looking forward.

In fact, what appears to be the two sides of the same coin seem to me an example for what has developed into a serious struggle for higher education reform.

Powerpoint gladiators

This struggle is going on for quite a number of principle issues of the European modernization agenda.

One issue concerns the role of the nation-state that has certainly been changing but by no means diminishing. New control technologies and mechanisms of intervention have been developed, maintaining and sometimes even strengthening central control has actually been a major issue for quite some countries across Europe.

Powerpoint shadow

What we have experienced is certainly not the hollowing out of the state. We have seen attempts to off-load the state in terms of legitimacy as well as in terms of efficiency – one consequence of that is that universities are nowadays struggling with problems that were traditionally expected to be solved by political powers. And what we have seen is the rise of a competition state that puts the university into an important position in the global struggle for economic growth and social welfare.

And European integration has created a constitutional problem as regards policies promoting market efficiencies and policies promoting social welfare. This also affects the position of the university. European rules of economic integration and competition become more and more important for national political economies including their universities. In contrast, efforts to adopt European social policies are much more difficult to establish due to the diversity of national welfare states. Normative aspirations, institutional structures, and abilities to pay for social services – such as higher education – differ enormously. In response, "Open Methods of Coordination" are applied among other areas in higher education policies. It leaves effective policy choices at the national level, but tries to establish coercion by building common objectives and common indicators and through comparative evaluations of national policy performance. Such policies of 'naming, faming, and blaming' have their impact on national policies but cannot overcome the constitutional problem. It seems thus critical to establish genuine European policies for universities that equally pay attention to the their economic and social role and allow to accommodate the diversity of national systems.

A sketch of some findings of our recent EU-reform studies might provide further examples for the struggle of reform across and within Europe:

Powerpoint 3-EU projects

A first point concerns the autonomy of the university.

Certainly, many governments have provided their higher education institutions with further autonomy and decision-making powers. Substantial areas such as institutional autonomy in funding decisions have seen major changes. In other crucial areas – e.g. human resource management – institutional autonomy is, however, still very much limited, certainly an obstacle in times of global competition for bright minds. Moreover, sometimes governments have taken accountability much more serious than autonomy – leading to the development of evaluation and auditing machineries that provide a new straight jacket for institutions.

I sometimes wonder if this has actually put universities into a problematic limbo status of being semi-autonomous actors with growing responsibility but limited strategic actorhood.

Looking at funding, we have seen interesting developments to move away from the path-dependent mechanisms of the past towards more evidence-based ways of funding. Lump sum funding and performance-based funding provide examples for the increasing use of new instruments. Europe is, however, still far away from a level of funding that major global competitors enjoy. And revenue diversification including private contributions to higher education is still a major obstacle across Europe. It remains thus unclear how high political ambitions can be achieved without tapping into new financial sources and without taking financial risks.

The Bologna process has certainly been a most astonishing political success story of inter-governmental governance. The architecture of Bologna has grown over time as well as the geographical outreach of the Bologna member states. Many reforms have been inspired if not driven by Bologna but the process has been much more busy with structures and processes than with the substance of goal achievements. It also appears that Bologna turned out to be a case of regulatory capture: nation-states interpreting, translating and implementing it according to national problem analyses and political preferences. In consequence, political and organizational success has overshadowed questions as regards the actual effects of the process for European integration and performance.

When we move on to the issue of diversity, we see a growing understanding of the benefits of division of work and specialization for mass higher education. In real life, systemic differentiation and institutional profiling in Europe are, however, overshadowed by national beliefs and institutional settings. And the international academic arms race for world-class excellence is fuelled by global rankings that provide a narrow understanding of excellence and stimulate isomorphistic behavior of governments and institutions.

In this context, concern for the wider purposes of higher education seems to have few effective champions. This risks reducing the diversity, adaptability and resilience of the higher education system as a whole; something of central concern for public policy and the governance of higher education and research.

Powerpoint rankings

Alternative systems of classification and ranking which CHEPS researchers are developing and testing together with international partners are thus not only an interesting academic puzzle but also a much needed political intervention.

And we have not yet talked about the consequences of the recent financial crises for state budgets and economic growth and related consequences for higher education.

Powerpoint Profs

Fortunately, budget cuts are not popular all over Europe. It is actually an interesting question why some European countries have a reflex to respond to the crises by budget cuts while others invest into education and research. Unfortunately, it seems that the Netherlands might belong to the first group. This has led to another struggle and a historically unique procession of men in black demonstrating against budget cuts on Dutch streets.

In sum, higher education reform sometimes reminds us of famous pictures of MC Escher such as this one that he called “relativity”.

Powerpoint Escher

A typical case of wicked political problems.

What seems to be needed is a magical machinery such as the one in Hogwarts – the college of Harry Potter – that gets wicked staircases straight.

It is CHEPS ongoing ambition to contribute to this task of understanding what works in theory and what works in practice.

Powerpoint book

CHEPS has thus put a book together for this special event.

All contributors to this book are working at CHEPS, and bring their extensive knowledge of the deep-seated reforms and changes to the field of higher education and research over the last 25 years. The chapters are each devoted to a detailed policy analysis deeply rooted in CHEPS’ quarter-century program of theoretical and empirical research.

Some contributions cover key themes of concern since CHEPS’ early years, including state-university relationships, quality assurance and funding. Other contributions cover more contemporary higher education policy issues, including European reform initiatives (innovation, the Bologna Process, doctoral training and the Erasmus programme) and debates around higher education institutions’ evolving functions, including the university’s third mission and the research function of universities of applied sciences.

Powerpoint Centrality

What unifies all chapters is their recognition that policy success is dependent on smart implementation grounded in a comprehensive understanding of highly complex policy processes. The book as a whole offers analyses of how policy processes are implemented through co-ordinated institutional and stakeholder interventions. And we seek to enhance academic and policy-maker understanding of Europe’s evolving higher education system as it emerges as a central cornerstone of the contemporary knowledge society.