
23RD CESE CONFERENCE: CHANGES IN EDUCATION AND EDUCATION POLICY IN EUROPE AND IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Athens, 6th – 11th July, 2008

The Comparative Education Society in Europe – CESE - ranks among the oldest scientific societies dealing with comparative education (CE) in the world. It was founded in 1961.

The establishment of CESE was initiated by renowned experts such as Josef Katz, Edmund King, Franz Hilker, Bohdan Suchodolski and others. Two comparativists, in particular, had a major impact on the concept and focus of the society – Joseph Lauwers, the first professor of comparative education at London University, and Samuel Robinson, director of the UNESCO Institute for Education in Hamburg. In 1969 the 4th CESE conference was held in Prague on the initiative of the comparative education section of the Czechoslovak Pedagogical Society. The organisation committee was chaired by František Singule. This conference constituted the first major opportunity for the meeting of experts in comparative education from the Eastern and Western blocs since the setting up of CESE, but, at the same time, it was also the “swan song” of Czech comparative education following the Prague Spring. Cooperation was re-established and Czech CE was revitalised as late as the 1990s.

On 6 – 11 July 2008 Athens hosted the 23rd CESE conference entitled “**Changing Landscapes, Topographies and Scenarios: Educational policies, Schooling Systems, and Higher Education. The World in Europe – Europe in the World.**” The conference was attended by over 300 experts from 35 countries representing all five continents. The host institution was the University of Athens (UA). The conference was organised by the *Centre of Comparative Education, International Education Policy and Communication at the Education Faculty of the University of Athens (CCE)*. The conference was opened by the vice-rector of UA, professor **O. Karakostas**. In his address he stressed the importance of education for human emancipation and the role of the University of Athens, the oldest university in the Balkans, for the encounter between Eastern and Western erudition and culture. Professor **R. Cowen**, president of CESE, spoke on the tasks of comparative education in the current world of globalisation, and emphasised its key importance for the understanding and interpretation of changes taking place at educational institutions and for the workings of education systems. Professor **D. Mattheou**, chairman of the preparatory committee and head of CCE, welcomed the participants on behalf of the organisers and presented information about the activities and plans of his organisation.

The conference agenda was divided into **7 sessions**: 1. Access to Education. 2. Knowledge. 3. Learning and Teaching. 4. Quality: Accreditation and Assessment. 5. Re-definitions of Space. 6. Old and New Solidarities. 7. Young Researchers. Moreover, **2 parallel symposia** were organised: 1. Views from the North on Education: Practice,

Policy and Method. 2. Comparative Education at Universities Worldwide.

The **General Meeting of CESE** was also part of the conference. In his report the outgoing president of CESE, professor R. Cowen, emphasised the need for creating networks in the area of comparative education that stretch beyond European borders, and the need for an exchange of information about activities (conferences, projects) in periods between conferences that are held once in 2 years. The call for **strengthening interdisciplinary links with expert networks in other fields** received a positive response. The General Meeting approved nominations for the new committee. Professor **Miguel Pereyra** of Granada University (Spain) was appointed President.

The plenary and other sessions and symposia at the conference were beneficial both in terms of theory and methodology. They provided important information about developments within the discipline, ongoing research and development projects, the situation in countries with an advanced scheme of comparative research into education that are well known and monitored, and the situation in countries and regions where the field is gradually developing. The main contribution can be seen in the priority focus of the conference sessions on the effects of globalisation on education, and changes in education systems - particularly in schooling and higher education.

Plenary papers were focused on key topics. Professor **A. Kazamias**, renowned American comparativist of Greek origin considered to be a leading scholar in his field, delivered an engrossing presentation entitled "*The Owl of Minerva, Pedagogical Eros and Other Comparative Mysteries*" where he focused on education from historical and comparative perspectives with numerous references to ancient philosophy. He raised many pressing issues related to erudition and education for the 21st century in the knowledge society in the context of emerging cosmopolitanism. He adopted a critical position particularly on the current overrating of the instrumental function of education, stressing its economic effectiveness and undervaluing its ethical, cultural and aesthetic functions.

In her plenary address *Are Universities Nowadays Actors and Promoters of Economic Development?* French sociologist **Ch. Mousselin** raised the key question of where the development of higher education is heading with an increasing emphasis on commercialisation of the products of research and teaching, toughening competition and differentiation of institutions. She sought answers through analysing results of comparative empirical research at universities in 3 countries (France, Germany, USA). She pointed to different mechanisms and differences in the quality and prestige of the universities that affect their development. She came to the conclusion that higher education institutions act as market players, but economic profit is not the only criterion of their operations (quasi-market).

Professor **U. Eichler** from Kassel University spoke on the topic of "*Internationalisation and Europeanisation of Higher Education in Europe: Where Do We Stand and Where Do We Move?*" He dealt with institutional changes, the funding of curricula, academic careers and the management of higher education institutions. His attention was centred on an analysis of the objectives and implications of the

Bologna process. The speaker warned about risks, particularly the risk of curricular convergence and the international stratification of higher education institutions. At the same time, he highlighted the importance of potential advantages and opportunities generated by the mobility and heterogeneity of students, and the contrast between various research and teaching paradigms that enrich knowledge. He also pointed to the phenomenon of euro-socialisation, as well as changes in the perception of academic freedoms and the strengthening of links between the academic community and society in the context of universities providing a service to society.

The final plenary presentation, which was devoted to professor Lauwerys, was delivered by leading world-known comparativist **A. Welch** of the University of Sydney. His presentation, which concerned one of the most widely discussed topics of current pedagogy, was entitled "*National State, Diaspora and Comparative Education: The Place of Place in Comparative Education*". He drew attention to the limitations of the traditional approach where the nation state is seen as the comparative unit (and international organisations carry out their analyses on the same basis). However, current research in comparative education increasingly places emphasis on other units (classes, schools, regions...) and groups within which "*international neural knowledge networks*" are created. New intellectual diasporas emerge that are not restricted to a particular location. They are the consequence of international mobility, intellectual migration and intercultural transmission and work also thanks to modern communication media. The author delivered an excellent theoretical analysis of the meaning and importance of the terms "*intellectual diaspora*" and "*circulation of knowledge*" accompanied by a number of examples from the international university environment.

The findings from the session **Re-definitions of Space**, in which the author of this report took part, relate to social, cultural, national and political aspects of education, changes in the topography of education policy, and the focus of research projects and teaching in view of international mobility. Many case studies documented changes in the location of education and the diversity of links between formal and non-formal education in local communities and groups outside communities. Moreover, the session brought a lot of specific information about changes in the European education area and the implications of the Lisbon and Bologna processes for educational institutions, schools and universities.

The symposium *Comparative Education at Universities Worldwide* chaired by professor C. Wolhuter saw the presentation of papers from 12 countries (among these, unfortunately, the Czech Republic was the only country from Central and Eastern Europe – the paper was delivered by the author of this report). A new international publication (of the same title as the symposium) was also presented as part of the symposium. It contains 47 chapters concerned with the state of affairs and development of comparative education at universities in all continents. There is enormous interest in educational research in the Czech Republic. In this context we cannot but highlight the need for publications issued in English.

The 24th CESE conference will take place in 2010 (in the 2nd half of August) at

Uppsala University (Sweden). Its central theme will be **Knowledge and Education for the Knowledge Society**, the key issues being *What is Knowledge? What Knowledge for Whom? How to differentiate Information x Knowledge x Competences?*

As these questions represent the fundamental issues widely discussed and explored in a number of empirical research studies, we warmly recommend that Czech experts should attend the conference. (For detailed information see the CESE website: <http://www.cese-europe.org/index.html>)

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