

Field of Higher Education Research, Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece)

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Synonyms:

“Greece”, “Italy”, “Portugal”, “Spain”, “Europe”, “European Research Area”

Definition:

Study of higher education

Introduction

This entry is dedicated to the analysis of the Field of Higher Education Research (FHER) in four countries composing the sub-region of Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Greece). While there are specific entries dedicated to each country in question in this encyclopaedia describing the national policies in detail, this entry focuses on FHER as an object and its respective disciplinary community. The entry is organised in the following way. The first section offers a general overview of the context of the sub-region in the wider European and globalised higher education landscape. As research production can be taken as a significant indication of the scope of the field, FHER is analysed through the publications patterns. This section is split between publications *about* these countries from one side, and publications *by* scholars academically based in these countries on the other side. Finally, the last section provides an exposition of the most relevant recent and current issues for the field.

General characteristics of Higher Education in Southern Europe: an apparently declining sub-region

One may argue that in the Southern sub-region of Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece), higher education as a whole is in decline. While the merits of rankings in assessing the quality and status of higher education may be debatable, the state of funding and operating conditions for higher education institutions may be indicative of the fact that none of the countries host universities in the top-100 of global rankings. Comparing with other Western European countries, for instance the first 15 countries to join the European Union, Southern European institutions declined in their positions on global ranking lists in recent years. Table 1 shows the first year of release of ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities) data (2003 year), the first one in offering rankings of universities globally, with the last one available (2017 year). Summing the number of HEIs in the first 200 positions, in 2003 year these four countries counted six HEIs compared with 66 from the other Western countries of the European Union (Southern Europe plus France, UK, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Finland, Austria). By 2017, the number of Southern European higher education institutions on the list had halved to 3; whilst overall the

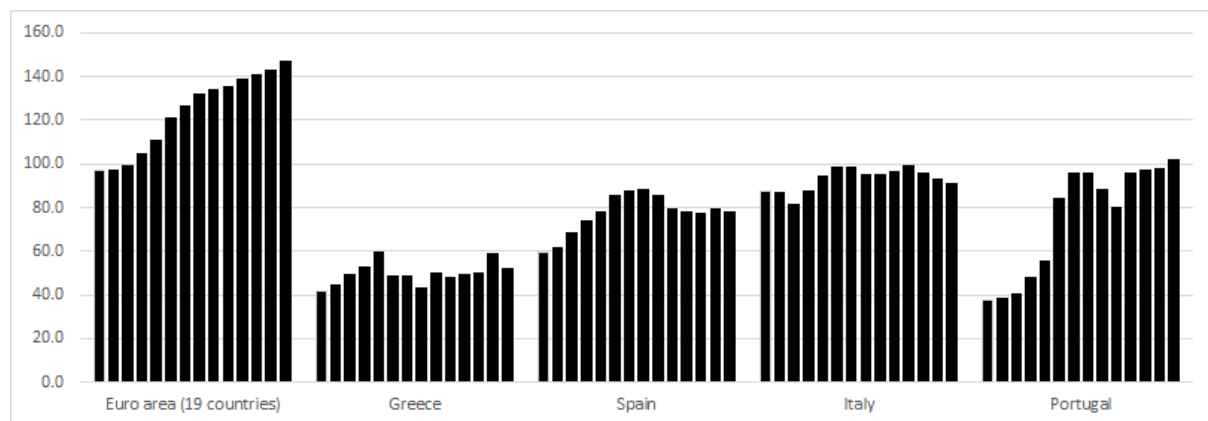
EU15 increased from 66 to 72. Institutions from Southern Europe also disappeared from among the top-100 institutions. In Southern Europe, only Portugal made some progress on the list, while the other countries saw a decline. Although it is widely discussed that rankings are made up of incomplete information, it is also clear that nowadays they impose terms of comparison (Hazelkorn 2015). Rankings have also triggered a game that institutions find hard not to play (Espeland & Sauder 2007). These four countries, then, are among those that suffer from the game of global competition. While the ranking list positions offer one side element of the picture, further evidence is offered by the relative shortage of public funding, on figure 1.

Table 1. Number of Higher Education institutions by range of global ranking and by nation or region. First and last year available.

	2003						2017					
	IT	ES	PT	GR	Southern Europe	EU15	IT	ES	PT	GR	Southern Europe	EU15
0-100	1	0	0	0	1	26	0	0	0	0	0	28
101-150	1	0	0	0	1	19	0	0	0	0	0	20
151-200	3	1	0	0	4	21	2	0	1	0	3	24
0-200	5	1	0	0	6	66	2	0	1	0	3	72
201-300	7	2	0	1	10	44	5	3	0	0	8	37
301-400	5	1	1	0	7	40	5	4	1	1	11	32
401-500	6	9	0	1	16	40	4	4	3	2	13	36

Source: own elaboration on ARWU data

Figure 1. Total intramural R&D expenditure (GERD) per inhabitant (Euro) in the sector of Higher Education, time series (2003-2016).



Source: Eurostat

The field of higher education research in Southern Europe has mostly developed along similar lines as the rest of the European countries, focusing on analysing the higher education reforms and their impacts (Bleiklie et al 2017; Magalhães et al 2016; Reale & Marini 2017; Seeber et al. 2015).

Although drivers of change are common in the European Research Area, funding patterns are clearly

an undermining pattern for the optimal development of higher education systems in these countries.

Publication patterns

This section provides some insights about publications patterns in the field, although it must be noted that figures from different sources are not necessarily altogether comparable.

Publications about Southern European Countries

In terms of publications, FHER in Southern Europe has demonstrated to be an increasing location of attention for the field. In particular, as the Table 2 shows, some of the most prestigious journals entirely dedicated to higher education have hosted a considerable amount of papers about these four countries.

Table 2. Number of publications about each specific country by six different specialised journals in the field of higher education

	Higher Education	Higher Education Policy	Studies in Higher Education	Research in Higher Education	Higher Education Research and Development	Tertiary Education and Management	Total
Italy	250	134	129	16	26	68	623
Spain	246	122	104	17	25	77	591
Portugal	145	104	66	8	9	59	391
Greece	109	60	48	6	8	14	245
Total	750	420	347	47	68	218	1850

Source: publishers' websites

Table 3 displays a detail of the growth of the attention on this sub-region by time, with Greece being the only one in having not a remarkable increase in the number of articles published. Portugal is overrepresented in comparison especially to Italy and Spain (see italic values on Table 3). Also the rate of increase of publications treating geographical contexts tells that Portugal has increased in attention (+495%), whilst studies about Greece or Italy much less (see Table 3).

Table 3. Number of publications about specific countries in "Higher Education" and "Higher Education Policy", time series grouped in decades and normalisation per thousand personnel in all disciplines (italic)

	<1990	1991-2000	2001-2010	>2010	>2010/ <1990 (%)	Total	<i>1991-2000</i>	<i>2001-2010</i>	<i>>2010</i>
Italy	67	94	92	131	195.5%	384	<i>55.0</i>	<i>35.0</i>	<i>38.1</i>
Spain	53	87	101	127	239.6%	368	<i>45.2</i>	<i>28.9</i>	<i>30.2</i>
Portugal	24	48	58	119	495.8%	249	<i>115.5</i>	<i>112.4</i>	<i>145.9</i>
Greece	34	49	38	48	141.2%	169	<i>95.2</i>	<i>50.6</i>	<i>59.2</i>
Total	178	278	289	425	238.8%	1170	n.a	n.a	n.a

Source: publishers' websites; Eurostat for normalisation of production by total number persons with tertiary education (ISCED) and employed in science and technology (articles per thousands)

A more comprehensive way to look at publications in the FHER is to search within the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) repository. From this large database – entailing not only journal articles, but also other scientific outputs, and letting disentangle by “education level” and “location” (i.e. context of the analysis) – it is possible to observe that publications about these specific countries are not covered equally, if size of country is taken into account (Table 4 – italic values for normalised measures). Portugal is more often analysed, whereas Italy is remarkably less often so. According to this source, there is no time series pattern – publications about these countries increased basically at the same rate, with the notable exception of Greece (Table 4).

Table 4. Location (country of analysis) of publications at higher education level from ERIC repository. All possible scientific output. Normalisation by number of population (italic).

	Portugal	Spain	Greece	Italy
Since 2017	24	62	13	29
Since 2014 (last 5 years)	99	221	48	90
Since 2009 (last 10 years)	185	439	126	177
Since 1999 (last 20 years)	221	529	179	225
Percentage of publications in the last 5 years over the total published in the last 20 years	44.8%	41.8%	26.8%	40.0%
Number of articles (last 20 year) per inhabitants (millions)	21.5	12.4	16.6	3.9
Number of articles (last 20 year) per enrolled in tertiary education (10.000)	6.3	2.7	2.6	1.2

Source: own elaboration from <https://eric.ed.gov>; Eurostat for the average of population from 1990 up to 2017 and average of enrolled in tertiary education (2013-2017).

Publications by scholars based in Southern European countries

Another essential way to look at the FHER in a specific region is to analyse the marginal contribution of scholars by affiliation. This statistic is of increasing interest because of the more consuetudinary multi-partner projects that generate primary data in more countries at the same time. These studies might be funded by EU Framework Programmes, other supra-national funders, or based on self-organised partnerships – an example over all being Bleiklie et al. (2017). At the same time, the increase of mobility of scholars favoured within the European space since the very early stages of scholars’ careers incentivises to disentangle one’s nationality and the context of study. The possibility to use English as lingua franca, for interviewing people in higher education or to study documents in open repositories, conveys more opportunities to investigate more countries at the same time without necessarily having affiliations on those countries under observation.

Table 5, to this regard, analyses the publications in several indexed journals specialised in the FHER extrapolating those with Italian, Spanish, Greek or Portuguese affiliations Table 5 also indicates the percentage of co-authored publications with at least one of the other 27 countries of the European Union, showing an appreciable presence for Portuguese affiliated scholars, and a relatively poor one for scholars active in the field with Greek affiliation.

Table 5. Bibliometrical statistics by authors' affiliations (institutions) summarised by countries. (Journals: Higher Education, Higher Education Policy*, Research in Higher Education, Higher Education Research & Development**, Studies in Higher Education)

	Number of different institutions with at least one publication	Total publications	Total citations	% of articles with citations	Average citations per article	% of co-authored publications with another EU country(28 Members)
Italy	23	58	497	77.59	8.57	16.67
Spain	41	140	1009	74.29	7.21	11.48
Portugal	14	90	631	77.78	7.01	21.58
Greece	6	7	16	57.14	2.29	7.14

* Since 2010 year; ** since 2008 year. Others are from 1980.

Source: InCites – Web of Science. Own elaboration

Dominant themes of recent and current research

FHER in Southern Europe has developed a consistent stream of research for the community. Some relevant recent and current topics are here briefly discussed.

One of the most overarching change in the field is the reforms in the respective national systems. These reforms have tended to shape these countries' higher education from positional autonomy towards more consistent institutional autonomy (Capano et al. 2016; Neave 2012; Cruz-Castro, Sanz-Menéndez 2015; Neave & Amaral 2013). Several topics stem from this general change. For instance, the role of agencies in driving changes needs recurrent updates, such as those for Quality Assurance (Rosa & Sarrico 2013; Jiménez Contreras et al. 2003; Turri 2014), especially where agencies' rationales are still unfulfilled (Capano et al. 2016; Stamelos & Kavasakalis 2011). The periodical search for the best driver of policy change is also relevant (Capano, 2017). The different ways countries may develop formulae to fund the respective systems is as well critical and essential to understand the recent trajectories, as all these countries face hard situations – see Zmas (2015) for the consequences of the most draconian measures; see Capano and Pritoni (2018) for a wider European comparative analysis. This interplay between legacy and changes have given valuable insight for the community – meaning the scholars in the field, but desirably policy makers also – about the effectiveness of policies and the presence of some possible unintended consequences.

In terms of staff working in higher education institutions, the main emergent problem is to guarantee at least the reproduction of the current number of personnel, trying to tackle aging (Papadimitriou 2015, Marini 2017). As the scholars have already discussed, these “externally driven” labour markets (Musselin 2005) will continue to need assessment regarding the way inbreeding works (Tavares et al. 2017). Recruitment procedures and promotions via competitions are also often occasions of allegations of irregularities, nepotism, malign inbreeding, or parochialism (Abramo et al. 2017; Marini 2017; Zinovyeva & Bagues 2015; Mora 2015). Gender and the respective possible discrimination also is a theme that has captured attention (Marini & Meschitti 2018) and let suggest that the issue is not totally overcome. Mobility is another popular topic, which is linked also to the

opportunities of freedom of movement at European level (Branco Sousa et al. 2016). Scholars have traced the extent to which mobility of PhD holders can boost productivity (Horta & Santos 2016) or let gain advantages (Groves et al. 2018). Mobility can be also an exit from the national higher education system as such (Marini 2018; Reale et al. 2018).

Within the side of students and supplied learning, the globalisation of higher education has already put into the scene the alternative providers (Teixeira et al. 2012). Far from being only a matter of private institutions, stronger countries are entering the “market” of higher education in these countries, as already has happened in Greece for about 10 years via an amend of its Constitution. Some contributions have already fostered insight about the learning experience in these contexts in the post-2008 crisis period (Cattaneo et al. 2018). Employability is another issue that the FHER in these countries have started to develop. The phenomenon of “neither working, nor studying” young cohort is particularly important and some contributions have faced the quest of employability (Sin et al. 2016). The years of the crisis (2008 onwards), certainly left outcomes still to be entirely investigated (Cattaneo et al. 2017).

Cross-references

Field of Higher Education Research, Europe

Higher Education Systems and Institutions: Western Countries

Public Funding, Europe

Role of the European Union in the Field of Higher Education Research

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