

# 1. Preface

Jon File

In 1999 the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) was asked by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to offer a series of workshops on higher education policy questions for a selected group of higher education decision-makers from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. Thus began what turned out to be an intense multi-level and multi-year dialogue between the four countries themselves and with Western European researchers on the higher education challenges they face. In a second phase (2001/2) national workshops were held in each of the four countries designed to take the discussions deeper into each system. In addition, a candidate from each country started work on a PhD at CHEPS. In parallel CHEPS had the opportunity to arrange three workshops for a wider group of 10 (then) pre-accession countries. In 2004 and 2005 a further workshop series was organised for participants from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and Slovenia.

The intended impact of these programmes over the past seven years has been the creation of a strong multi-country network with a deepened exposure to comparative higher education perspectives. Yet we have been asked frequently to consider ways to make the workshop materials and insights more widely available. Our first reactions were cautious - we have developed very interactive methods of working: building higher education systems with Lego; simulating the development of a strategic plan and budget for Fictioncity Metropolitan University; and intense multi-country discussions of topical policy issues are all difficult to replicate outside a workshop context. On reflection we thought self and group reflection on key policy issues across European higher education might be stimulated by a careful combination of selected presentations, readings, case studies and exercises into a “resource book”.

This book is the result. It is clearly experimental but we hope it will prove useful to those interested in and working with ongoing policy development and reform processes across Europe. The book is also available via the CHEPS web-site and we would welcome your feedback. Clearly, a book of this nature would not be possible without

contributions from many people. Our particular thanks go to Linda Beijlsmit, Director of Bureau CROSS, for her ongoing belief in the value of the workshop series; to all of the workshop participants - especially those in the most recent seven country series who helped knock our materials into this shape; and to the CHEPS team members who are the authors of the presentations and readings included in this resource book.

*Jon File is Executive Director: CHEPS and was the workshop leader for the various workshop series noted above. The authors of the other chapters, presentations, readings and exercises are all CHEPS staff members.*