
That Other Europe: The Conceptualization of Central and Eastern Europe in (Higher) Education Research from 1990 to 2000

Monika Orechova

Abstract: This paper endeavours to interrogate the early conceptualization of the notion of Central and Eastern Europe in the field of (higher) education by analysing the academic scholarship in (higher) education research from 1990 to 2000. The results of this analysis elucidate the emergence of Central and Eastern Europe as a research unit in the field of (higher) education. Central and Eastern Europe emerges as a conceptual cluster comprised of Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Europe. A preliminary quantitative analysis of frequency of use of particular concept and country distribution showed that different terms were used interchangeably and the same countries were referred to as belonging to different regions. Close reading of the articles in the research corpus revealed that the regional cluster was conceptualized as a post-communist space which was unified by its unwillingly shared past or via the role it can play vis-à-vis the rest of Europe, or “the West”.

Keywords: Central and Eastern Europe; conceptual history; regional concepts; higher education; academic discourse

Introduction

A cursory glance over education scholarship over the past 30 years, reveals a peculiar distinction. Out of 1,749 articles available in the ERIC (Education Resource Information Center) database with the word “Europe” in the title, published between 1990 and 2020, 562 articles bear some variation on the label “Central and Eastern Europe” in the title. Curiously, “Western Europe” appears in 71 articles, most of them (37) dating back to the period from 1990 to 2000. This means that the former is used almost 8 times as often as the latter. While on the surface it may seem merely a geographical distinction, the precise countries and their groups which are referred to as such in publications differ greatly. Moreover, very little such grouping is observed for other parts of Europe.

Whenever the title of an article refers to “Europe”, it is reasonable to expect that the research presented comes from the western part of the continent. However, if it comes from the central or eastern part (geographically speaking), “Europe” is preceded by a qualifier. There can be practical reasons for this practice, for example, in light of international publishing requirements, it is now used by scholars based in the region as

it helps to expand readership and improve one's chances of publication. This is especially so where research carried out in the smaller countries of the region is concerned. Yet, it can also lead to epistemically lumping together vastly different countries with different social contexts, histories and approaches to education (Dakowska, 2017). Moreover, it also posits Central and Eastern Europe as an "other" inside of Europe wherein (Western) Europe is considered the norm. Thus, Central and Eastern Europe remains relevant to the extent that it strives to reach that norm as it was expected to do during the transition period (Cerych, 1995).

In this article we therefore focus on the development of the concept of Central and Eastern Europe in (higher) education research published internationally between 1990 and 2000. This was the time when the concept of Central and Eastern Europe entered (or re-entered) the discourse after the countries formerly occupied by Soviet Russia regained independence and the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, their autonomy. (Higher) education refers to the fact that the majority of data sources pertain to the sub-area of higher education. However, articles which discuss other topics are also included.¹ The research database for quantitative analysis and the corpus for conceptual analysis is comprised of articles published in journals indexed in the Scopus database in the given period which refer to Central and/or Eastern Europe in the title. In total, it includes 66 data entries and 56 articles, respectively. In the analysis, we look at the quantitative aspect by calculating the distribution and frequency of the countries referred to as Central and Eastern Europe. In the qualitative (conceptual) part of the study we look at how the region is defined and what other conceptual notions are used when talking about it. A detailed description of the research design is provided in the Methodology section.

Theoretical framework

Central to our analysis is the notion of concept as "a concentrate of several substantial meanings" (Koselleck, 2004, p. 85) from the study of Conceptual History (*Begriffsgeschichte*) which can be placed in the broader paradigm of social constructivism (Ifversen, 2011). Conceptual History is primarily concerned with conceptual change which is reflected in the shifts of the multitude of meanings that are contained in a concept. These shifts are only available if language in use is considered. What differentiates a concept from a word is, therefore, its ability to get involved in action that stems from a certain situation or context (Ifversen, 2011). Regional or spatial concepts, such as Central and Eastern Europe, are not often studied, as Conceptual History is more con-

1 Out of 56 articles in the research corpus, 31 were on Higher Education and Research, 7 on Business Education and Management, 7 discussed General Education and 3, Early Childhood Education. Another 8 articles tackled different topics, e.g., Literacy, English Language Training or Chemistry Education.

cerned with temporality rather than space. However, Conceptual History is particularly useful for such studies as it encourages the questioning of the “naturalness” of regional concepts and brings the historical (and, therefore, social) aspects of their formation to the fore (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017).

Study of concepts

In this article, we analyse the development of the concept of Central and Eastern Europe in the academic community of education researchers from 1990 to 2000. Herein, we follow the understanding of concept that originated in the field of Conceptual History. The primary difference between a word and a concept is the number of meanings it encompasses; however, a word may also carry different meanings in different contexts. The fundamental semantic difference emerges when not only the quantitative but also a qualitative dimension of these meanings is considered. A word can only mean one thing in a given context, that is, its meaning can change with the context but one word will still refer to a single meaning in that particular context. A concept, on the other hand, is a *concentrate* of meanings. As Reinhard Koselleck put it, “A word presents potentialities for meaning; a concept unites within itself a plenitude of meaning” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 85). In other words, while we can use words (semiotic signifiers) to *refer* to phenomena (referents), we can only use concepts to *describe* a historical reality and historical experience which is condensed in the concept: “a word becomes a concept only when the entirety of meaning and experience within a sociopolitical context within which and for which a word is used can be condensed into one word” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 85).

A helpful semantic explanation is provided by Jan Ifversen who differentiates between the representational and referential aspect of conceptual meaning. The former pertains to the relation between the word and the concept and the latter, to the relation between the concept and the object. The representational aspect denotes how concepts are expressed in words and how their meanings are structured (Ifversen, 2011). The referential aspect is important in as much as it provides information on the role a chosen concept plays in a given context. As opposed to the linguistic point of view, where reference needs to be studied within language, in Conceptual History, this reference pertains to an extra-linguistic context. A conceptual historian is primarily interested in what possibilities and constraints are enforced by the context upon the language use, that is, what choices are available to social actors who choose to bring the concept into use (Ifversen, 2011). The two aspects of conceptual meaning are crucial to the analysis, as they complement each other in the sense that concepts are expressed via particular words. However their expression is limited by what is available, in other words, thinkable in a given situation.

Reinhardt Koselleck introduced the notions of *space of experience* and *horizon of expectation* as metahistorical categories indicative of the temporality of history. Space of experience connects the present to the past and horizon of expectation, the present to the future (Koselleck, 2004). In studying concepts, the space of experience can be understood as a complete context, the totality of all available (past) experiences related to the concept (Ifversen, 2011). The horizon of expectation, on the other hand, refers to (future) possible experiences that can potentially happen in relation to the concept (Koselleck, 2004).

According to Koselleck, after the 19th century, the balance between experience and expectation in political and social concepts fundamentally shifted. Prior to the Enlightenment, these concepts primarily served to collect experiences. In modern times, however, new concepts such as, liberalism or socialism, did not have a space of experience to refer to as they were meant to open up a new future. This led to concepts being built on expectations rather than experience as “the lower their content in terms of experience, the greater were the expectations they created” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 129). In this way, political and social concepts no longer record given facts but rather “become factors in the formation of consciousness and the control of behavior” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 129).

In the light of this, the concept of Central and Eastern Europe can be viewed as a political concept which has an impact on the socially constructed reality. It is also a regional, or a spatial concept, which has certain peculiarities that will be discussed in the following section.

Regional concepts

Transnational Conceptual History, to which the study of regional concepts belongs, is a relatively new development in a field traditionally organised around national borders (Marjanen, 2017). Transnational Conceptual History is especially beneficial to the analysis of regional concepts that transcend national borders. It is not only because some spatial concepts refer to units larger than a nation state but also because their conceptualization occurs not only inside the region but also outside of it. These internal and external regionalizations interact in intricate ways and there is rarely a winner in these interactions, however, they are both important to the development of the concept (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017).

Generally, geography is often considered the main source of regional definitions. In discussing spatial or regional concepts within the approach of Conceptual History, we maintain that regional concepts contain also non-geographical meanings (Ifversen, 2002). Indeed, three groups of constitutive elements that are used to construct regions can be analytically discerned: “physical and anthropogeographic conditions framing regions as ‘natural formations’; structures, institutions and mentalities resulting from his-

tory/legacies/culture, which describe regions as cultural-historical spaces; and (geo) political designs and alignments, which frame regions as political concepts” (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017, p. 224).

The complexity of regional concepts is also underscored by our conception of space. The users of concepts tend to “naturalize” them as they consider “natural” space in opposition to artificial historical time. Thus, the historicity of these concepts remains hidden. If space is also perceived as a product of human perception and agency, it opens up the possibility to question the various underlying assumptions about the “natural” formation of spatial concepts (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017). Conceptual History in this case allows us to shine a light on a historical formation of physical, cultural and political space that is contained within a regional concept.

Concepts in academic discourse

In terms of methodological procedures, Conceptual History entails investigation of texts in which the concept has been conceptualized (Koselleck, 2002). Academic discourse is a particularly rich resource when investigating regional concepts, as academic circles and expert communities are considered some of the main sources of their conceptualization together with policy makers, international organizations and the media (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017).

A tendency observed in academic discourse with regard to regional concepts is that different fields can have different conceptualizations of the same region. Moreover, the political dimension in scholarly conceptualizations of regional concepts is two-fold: on the one hand, there is a level of inherent politics in different kinds of scholarly concepts; on the other, academics tend to legitimize public or political discourses on regional concepts in their scholarly work (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017). Academic communities of higher education or education scholars in general may not be directly (and consciously) involved in conceptualization of the regional concepts, yet they elaborate on an existing conceptualization and potentially legitimize political discourses on regional concepts by referring to those concepts in their work.

The concept of Central and Eastern Europe

Another trait of regional concepts is that they often occur not individually, but form complex clusters of concepts (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017). A case in point is the Concept of Central and Eastern Europe which forms a cluster together with the concepts of Eastern Europe and Central Europe (it could also be placed in a larger cluster including other European regional concepts, for instance). Depending on the scope of analysis, each of these could create their own cluster, as does Central Europe in an example given by Mishkova and Trencsényi (2017) wherein throughout history the conceptual

cluster of Central Europe includes *Mitteleuropa*, *Zwischeneuropa*, East Central Europe, the Masarykian “New Europe”, and the “Other Europe”. They also include Central Europe among “the most paradigmatic and salient European examples of the conceptualization of ‘historical regions’” (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017, p. 213).

It is important to note that there is an asymmetry in the regional concepts of Europe, as they are formed throughout different historical conditions by different actors with different purposes. The original conceptions, for instance, of Central Europe and Eastern Europe were of external origin (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017). Moreover, it is argued that place and asymmetric relations between concepts are extremely significant for everyday understanding of European history as ideas of Europe are incorporated differently to the national history narratives across Europe (Marjanen, 2017).

These asymmetric relations are well-illustrated in the historical formation of the concept of Eastern Europe. In his seminal work *Inventing Eastern Europe* Larry Wolff (1994) discusses the construction of Eastern Europe during the Enlightenment as “a geographical domain and a philosophical idea at once” (Wolff, 1994, pp. 358–359). According to Wolff, geographical notions were imbued with cultural significance and the emerging concept of “civilization” became the primary measure. Due to this, the invention of Eastern Europe occurred simultaneously with the invention of Western Europe, as it was also the vantage point from which the invention was conducted and the two emerged as complementary concepts capable of defining each other.

Moreover, in the binary between civilization and barbarism, Eastern Europe occupied the subordinate position relative to the “civilized” West. Wolff calls the invention of Eastern Europe “an intellectual project of demi-Orientalization” (Wolff, 1994, p. 7) wherein Eastern Europe is simultaneously included and excluded, “Europe but not Europe” (Wolff, 1994, p. 7). Even though Eastern Europe was not fully the Other as was the Orient, it was placed in an ambiguous space associated with backwardness and the need for development (Wolff, 1994). This placement also serves, in contemporary discourses, to foster the positioning of the West as the normative category. As Manuela Boatcă notes, “the label of ‘Europe’ always includes both Western Europe and its white populations, but Eastern Europe needs to be specifically mentioned in order to be included in the term” (Boatcă, 2017, p. 471).

Spatial or regional concepts are often considered merely a geographical distinction, especially in fields such as education. However, concepts are not neutral, neither regional concepts in general nor the concept of Central and Eastern Europe in particular. In our analysis we aim to investigate the concept of Central and Eastern Europe in the education research from 1990 to 2000 in order to elucidate upon its space of experience and horizon of expectation and the implications it may carry.

Research Design

This study investigates the early formation of the concept in the international academic discourse of education research of the 1990s. In the following section we will briefly explain the research design of the study and the procedures of data collection, selection and analysis.

Data sources

The ERIC database was used to confirm the initial hypothesis of the fact that Central and Eastern Europe is used more often in education research than Western Europe. However, the research corpus for this study was built on the articles indexed in the Scopus database. Scopus is better equipped for the kind of analysis we set out to do because it provides a higher number of articles, allows simultaneous search for different terms and exports the findings in a CVS file whereas in ERIC the exporting must be done manually.

Data collection

The main drawback of the Scopus database is that it does not have a separate subject area of Education, therefore an additional manual selection was carried out in order to compile the research corpus. We asked the database to provide all the articles where the terms *Central and Eastern Europe*, *Central Europe* or *Eastern Europe* were used in the titles published between 1990 and 2000 in the subject areas of Social Sciences, Business, Management and Accounting and Multidisciplinary.² The decision to include Business, Management and Accounting as well as Multidisciplinary was made in order to expand the scope of the corpus and based on the assumption that articles on Business Education (which were popular given the economic changes in the region at the time), for example, could be indexed in that subject area. In total, this query yielded 1,891 entries in the database, 1,768 of which were published in English.

Data selection and collection

There were three rounds of data selection. During the first selection procedure, the article titles were read to determine if they potentially discuss education, or not. At the end of this selection round, the corpus consisted of 426 articles. In many cases, the titles were rather ambiguous, for example, *'Modernising' Eastern Europe: Theoretical prob-*

² The following search query was formulated: (TITLE (central AND eastern AND europe) OR TITLE (central AND europe) OR TITLE (eastern AND europe) OR TITLE (central AND eastern AND european) OR TITLE (central AND european) OR TITLE (eastern AND european)) AND PUBYEAR > 1989 AND PUBYEAR < 2001 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "MULT")).

lems and political dilemmas (Müller, 1992) and not sufficient to determine whether the article should be included in the research database.

The second selection round, therefore, included close reading of the article abstracts and, in some cases, the articles themselves (when abstracts were unavailable) in order to decide upon their inclusion in the database. In this round, we also removed white papers and articles produced by supranational organisations, for example, the OECD, as the aim of the study is to analyse academic discourse. Due to this reasoning, interviews with scientists or opinion pieces by academics were not excluded from the database. Thus, a preliminary research database of 117 article entries was compiled.

The third selection round overlapped with data collection. In order to conduct analysis, full text of the article was necessary. Since a substantial number of publications were printed between 1990 and 2000 and then subsequently put online at a later date, the availability of articles is not guaranteed. In order to yield the largest amount of data, different strategies were employed to construct the database for quantitative analysis and compile the corpus for conceptual analysis.

Database construction and corpus compilation

If the full text of the article was available, it was downloaded and included in the research corpus. If it was not available, the abstract was analysed to determine whether it provides enough information to be included in the quantitative database. The main question of the quantitative database was whether the countries referred to as Central and/or Eastern Europe are named in the abstract, or not. If this data was presented in the abstract, the article was included in the quantitative database, but not the research corpus for conceptual analysis. During this process a spreadsheet was also created where the quantitative data on the articles was noted: what countries are discussed in the article and the academic affiliation of the author. The final database consisted of 66 articles and the research corpus included 56 articles.

Quantitative analysis

Given the comparatively small number of entries, MS Excel was used to collect and analyse data. This part of the study is primarily concerned with the following frequencies:

- 1) how often the different variations of the concept are used,
- 2) how often specific countries are referred to as Central and Eastern Europe,
- 3) how often specific countries are referred to as Eastern Europe,
- 4) how often specific countries are referred to as Central Europe.

Conceptual analysis

The articles in the corpus were read closely in order to elaborate upon 1) the descriptions the authors provided for the chosen concept and the grounds they provided for their choice and 2) other concepts or discourses that were invoked when talking about Central and Eastern Europe. The quantitative study provides indications of specific patterns of concept use that can then be analysed in more depth in conjunction with the conceptual part. For example, as the frequency and distribution data revealed no clear pattern of concept use, the qualitative study (conceptual analysis) expanded on the descriptions authors used in order to explain the possible reasons for one or another concept in the conceptual cluster.

Results and Discussion

There are several structural layers to our concept under analysis. While it is comprised of the words Central, Eastern and Europe, these are combined in different ways, making it a conceptual cluster of Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Europe. This section begins with a quantitative data analysis that demonstrates the variation of concepts used in the research corpus and discusses the patterns unveiled by the frequency rates of countries referred to as part of a particular regional concept. This is then followed by a deeper look into the definition of the concept as well as the notions that are used around the concept.

Quantitative data analysis: concepts and words

The quantitative data is analysed, first and foremost, to elaborate on the representational aspect of the meaning, that is, on the relation between the concept and the word(s) used to express it. Given the limited sample size, these results are only considered in conjunction with the conceptual analysis and treated as an entry point rather than a separate study.

Term frequency

The data shows that aside from *Central and Eastern Europe*, there are several other terms that authors use to refer to the region (Figure 1). The most frequent term is *East-*

ern Europe which is mentioned 28 times,³ closely followed by *Central and Eastern Europe*, mentioned 24 times. The less prominent ones are *Central Europe* (10) and *East Central Europe* (5). The terms *Middle Eastern Europe* (together with *Central and Eastern Europe*) and *East Central Asia* were also used (the latter referred to “27 new countries in 6 years” and used Russia, Hungary and Bosnia and Herzegovina as examples). As they were only used once each, they were deemed irrelevant and excluded from further analysis.

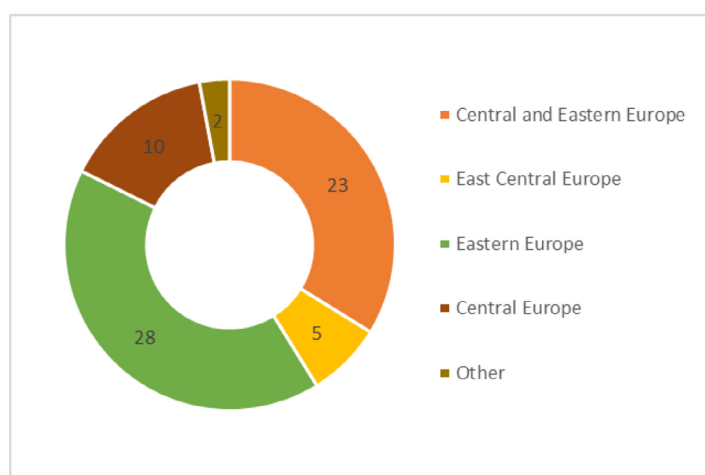


Figure 1. Frequency of concept use in articles from 1990 to 2000

Even though the time period is relatively short, an interesting pattern of use was observed in the first and second half of the decade (Figure 2).

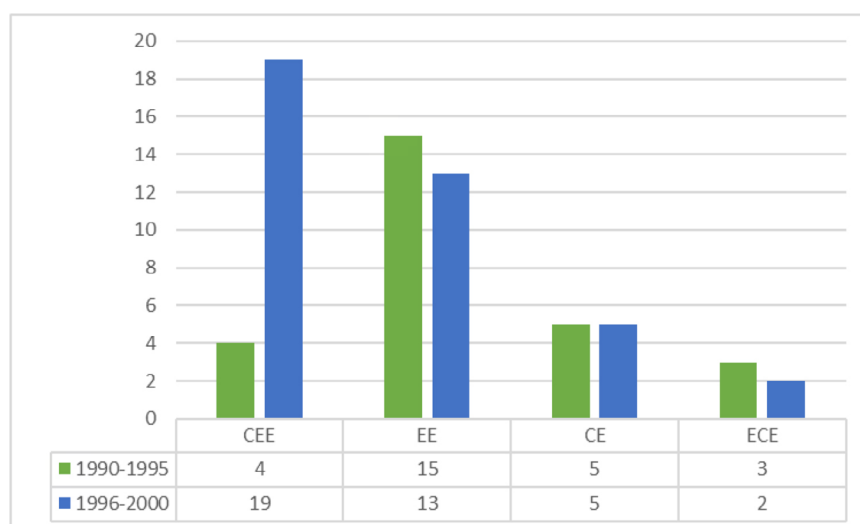


Figure 2. Frequency of concept use in time periods of 1990–1995 and 1996–2000

³ 2 articles use more than one term, therefore, the number of mentions does not coincide with the number of articles.

The most prolific term – *Eastern Europe* (EE) – was used almost equally throughout the period and so was *Central Europe* (CE). Even though *East Central Europe* (ECE) is observed in both periods, it is last used in 1996 which limits its use to the beginning of the decade. The opposite is observed in the case of *Central and Eastern Europe* (CEE) which is mentioned only 4 times in the first half of the decade and becomes the dominant term only after 1995.

Country distribution

The second part of the quantitative analysis bridges the representational and referential aspects and looks at what countries are named when the authors use a specific term to refer to the region. In some cases, the articles present research conducted in the countries, sometimes only the region is mentioned and examples from several countries are used to illustrate specific points. For the purposes of this analysis, all countries mentioned in the article were included as data points connected to the regional term the authors use. The data is presented in charts and in word clouds to provide better visualisation of the results.

The countries that are mentioned in the majority of articles that use CEE or ECE⁴ are Poland and Hungary, followed by the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Estonia⁵ (Figure 3). Lithuania, Russia (including USSR prior to dissolution) and Latvia are also mentioned 11, 11 and 10 times, correspondingly.

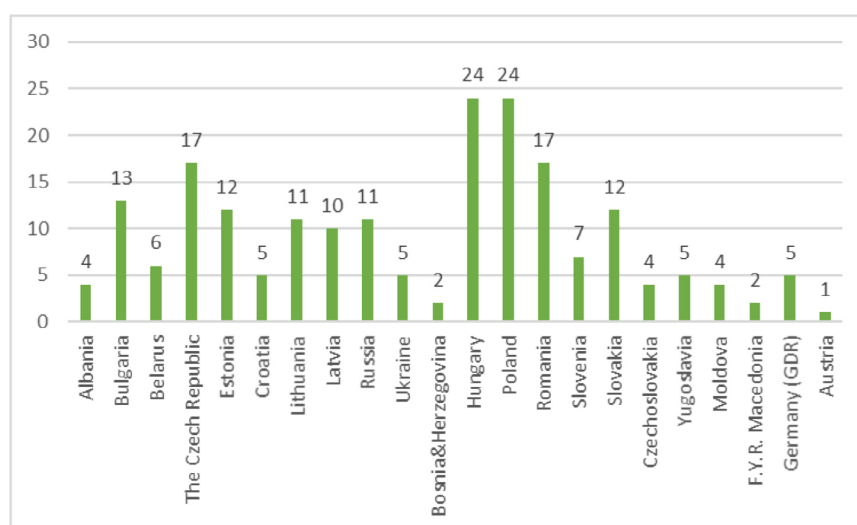


Figure 3. Frequency of country mentions for “Central and Eastern Europe” and “East-Central Europe”

- 4 Given the very small number of articles in the database that used ECE, they were analysed together with CEE when analysing frequencies of the countries mentioned.
- 5 The country names are indicated in the same way they were used in articles except where they need to be expanded for clarity, e.g., F.Y.R. Macedonia was originally referred to as FYROM.

A similar picture emerges when the term *Eastern Europe* is considered (Figure 4). Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic are the leaders, however, the distribution pattern is different in terms of how many authors choose to refer to them which could be a consequence of the lower average number of countries that EE is used to refer to. The comparatively high number of mentions for Russia (compared to the Baltic states and other formerly occupied countries) and Czechoslovakia (especially compared to the Slovak Republic) can be related to the relatively high term frequency in the period from 1990 to 1995. It took at least until the second half of 1991 for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to fully establish their independence from the Soviet Union that the three had proclaimed in 1990 and Czechoslovakia separated into the Czech Republic and Slovakia only in 1993.

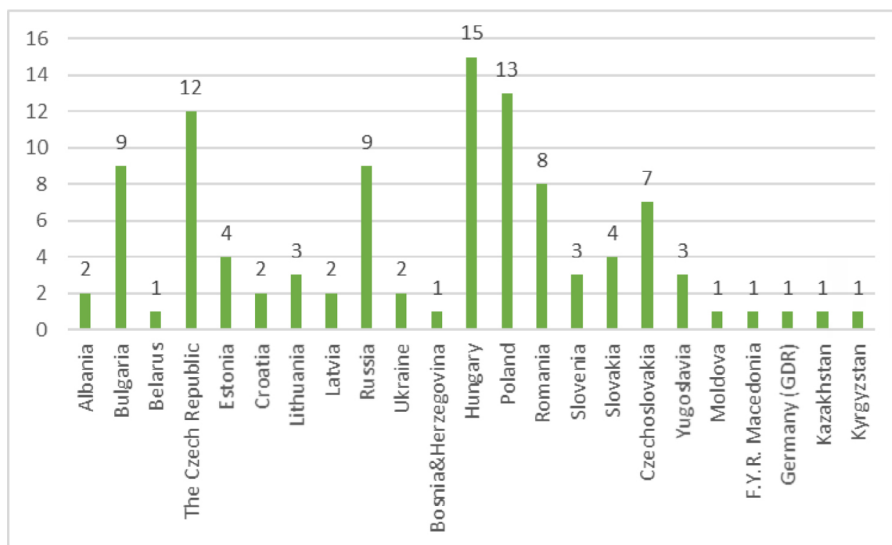


Figure 4. Frequency of country mentions for concept "Eastern Europe"

The small number of mentions of *Central Europe* limits the accuracy of frequency comparisons. However, the tendencies remain similar as can be observed in the word clouds below (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Word clouds based on country frequency rates for concepts "Eastern Europe" (left) and "Central Europe" (right)

Overall, the patterns of country distribution show that the terms *Central and Eastern Europe*, *Central Europe* and *Eastern Europe* are used quite interchangeably and without much reflection as virtually the same countries are mentioned as belonging to any region.

The relative frequency of mentions (Figure 6), for example, for Poland is 11.94% in CEE, 12.38% in EE, and 13.72% in CE. Given the different numerical frequencies, such small differences in relative frequency show that no relation between the regional term that is used in the article and the countries mentioned is observed. Similar patterns can be observed for other countries as well.

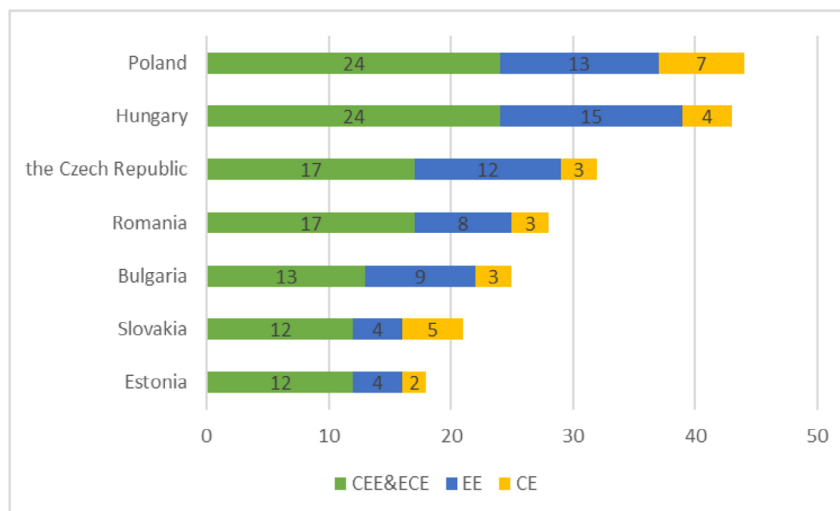


Figure 6. Concept distribution for most frequently mentioned countries

Even though *Eastern Europe* and *Central and Eastern Europe* are used a similar number of times, the former is used almost equally throughout the two halves of the decade, whereas *Central and Eastern Europe* is mostly used after 1995. Nonetheless, the concepts are generally used interchangeably, and the same countries are referenced

using different concepts. The results of the conceptual analysis that build upon these results are discussed in the following section.

Conceptual analysis: concepts and objects

This part of the research pertains to the referential aspect of conceptual meaning, that is, the relation between concepts and the objects that they refer to. We will further discuss the various forms of definitions of the region (or absence of such) in the articles of the research corpus and the notions or concepts that are invoked in connection with the regional concept. In doing this, we aim to elaborate on the space of experience and the horizon of expectation for the conceptual cluster of Central and Eastern Europe.

Definitions and differences

Close reading of the articles in the research corpus showed that in most cases authors chose not to define the concept in use and only a small number discussed the concept in more depth. The definitions ranged from elusive to very elaborate. On the brief side of the spectrum the countries were listed matter-of-factly with occasional references to their historical position. Consider, for example, “the term Eastern Europe includes all former socialist countries in Eastern and Central Europe, also East Germany (till 1990 German Democratic Republic) and all countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU)” (Havemann, 1996) or “countries belonging to 16 either ‘old’ or ‘new’ Central and Eastern European countries (the Warsaw Treaty countries, the former Soviet republics, the countries belonging to former Yugoslavia)” (Piwowarski, 1998).

At the opposite end lie the elaborate definitions with their own typology and distinctions such as the one referred to by Ladyslav Cerych (1999). According to this definition, the Central and Eastern European countries can be divided into the Visegrad group (Hungary, Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Slovenia and Croatia), South-eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and the former Yugoslav republics other than Slovenia and Croatia), the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) and the former Soviet Republics (the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova). The reasoning provided for such distribution is based on shared historical past, a common religion and the perceived similar development of the education systems of the countries.

Historical reasons were also cited as the basis for the choice of a particular region of inquiry. For example, P. Szebenyi (1992) provides the following explanation for choosing *East Central Europe* to refer to Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary:

Treating these countries as a separate region is justified for a number of different reasons. The word 'East' in that expression comes from the widespread practice collectively designating the former Soviet Bloc countries as "East European" countries. The word "Central" points to the fact that this region, in a geographical sense, is much closer to Western Europe than to Eastern Europe. In reality, however, it means much more than the geographical location of that region. The history of East Central Europe, as a relatively homogeneous region, reaches back into the distant past. (Szebenyi, 1992, p. 19)

The same historical basis, however, is used to point out that the region is not as homogeneous as it may seem (Gilstrap, 2000; Heyneman, 2000). The perceived homogeneity is considered a persistent misconception by authors from the region (Enyedi & Medgyes, 1998; Sandi, 1992). Indeed, a number of authors claim that significant differences among the countries (or their educational systems) already existed (Cerych, 1999; Sadlak, 1991) or are becoming apparent (Kozłowski et al., 1999; Tomusk, 1998). Geographical reasoning is rejected by Peter Bogucki who claims that geographically close countries may have very little in common due to historical or cultural circumstances and calls *Eastern Europe* an "artificial entity" (Bogucki, 1993, p. 146). Jan Sadlak provides an interesting explanation for his choice of *Central and Eastern Europe* over *Eastern Europe*:

Europe itself sometimes being called a *géométrie variable*, implies difficulty in making precise and unbiased regional divisions. Therefore, in order to counterbalance an arbitrary bipolar geopolitical division of Europe into "Western" and "Eastern", it is now argued that the term "Eastern and Central Europe" better reflects the cultural and economic diversity of this part of Europe. (Sادلak, 1991, p. 412)

This further confirms that there is a lack of clear or uniform understanding of the concept of Central and/or Eastern Europe in the scholarship of the last decade of the 20th century as illustrated by the quantitative analysis.

What do we talk about when we talk about Central and Eastern Europe?

Certain common patterns emerge when we look at what is being said about the region in question. Two conceptual notions related to the region emerged in close reading of the articles. Broadly speaking, the first conceptual notion of Post-Communist/Post-Soviet, was related to the space of experience, that is, what the authors perceived to be observable at the moment of writing. The second, modern Europe/the West, was related to the horizon of expectation, what the authors considered to be possible futures for the region.

Post-Communist / Post-Soviet

The vast majority of articles mentioned the, at that time, recent communist past of the countries in the region. Given the selected time period, the usage of terms such as "post-communist", "East(ern) Bloc" or "former Soviet states" is not surprising. As some

country names were still in flux (especially in the first half of the decade), we can understand the usage of a more familiar term. However, this was the only form of description among the analysed articles, and it was used both to describe individual countries, as well as to argue for their analysis as a unit.

Sometimes it was also used together with the regional concept specifically as grounds for this. For example, this is an explanation given in an article *The Stalled Revolution: Business Education in Eastern Europe*:

Ordinarily, “the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe” is too broad an area to make meaningful generalizations about. But because business education has been based on the same communist system [...] To an outsider, the schools look very much alike and the people in them behave in very similar ways. There are differences, of course, but the striking observation is how much the institutions have in common. (Bennet, 1996, p. 25)

In response to potential criticisms of homogenization, the author builds the argument of unification upon the communist system. In the light of complex regional definitions and differences among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, their unwillingly-shared communist past became the unifying force in constructing it as an area for education research, regardless of whether it is called Eastern or Central European. Notably, even when a regional concept is used, it is used together with the reference to the “former” status, for example, “Ever since the change of system in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989, the European Union has committed itself to the renewal of the higher education system in the former East bloc countries” (Wuttig, 1998, p. 89). This prevalence of “post” and “former”-mediated concepts points to a delineated space of (recent) experience and orients the concept to its past. It can also be interpreted as a newer version of the backwardness trope if we accept Zarycki’s argument that once the Soviet Union lost its symbolic capital, the communist past of the region was used as an explanation for its underdevelopment (Zarycki, 2014). While conceptually Post-Communist/Post-Soviet points to the available experiential context, it also carries an assumption that this is something that the region *was* and it is the second conceptual pair that alludes to what the region *shall be*.

Modern Europe / the West

The soft form of this conceptualization is revealed via the notion of “knowledge transfer”. When either the present or the future is considered, the notion of the transfer of Western knowledge to the newly available area is quite persistent, for instance, “Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union form the next frontier for Western educators” (Fogel, 1990). It is invoked when considering education reforms in the region which need more “Western” experts (Pachociński, 1997) or when discussing the development of science which needs more “Western” researchers (Lollar, 1990). Some, however, question the unilateral knowledge transfer in education policy: “tendency has

been to promote 'Western' courses and structures – an approach internally far too diverse to have meaning from a Western perspective; to issue 'internationally recognised' degrees and qualifications – although the source of world-wide recognition remains deliberately unspecified" (Tomusk, 1998). An interesting reflection is provided by Monica Lee on her experience of providing an action-learning course for university faculty:

We come along as "Western experts" and say "we believe that this is what you will need in the future". The fellows say, "we need something that will help us now – we know the constraints we are under". We reply, "we understand how you feel, but [...] – we are trying to remedy our mistakes and don't want to see you repeat them". They reply "we are not children. Stop patronising us – we can see your mistakes, but our situation is not the same as yours and we reserve the right to make and learn from our own mistakes". (Lee, 1995, p. 226)

This touches upon the direction of the knowledge transfer when the experts come with their own convictions of what needs to be learnt and encounter opposition and demands for agency from the recipients of this transfer. It should be noted here that "knowledge transfer" is related to the transition period when the countries of the region were expected to "catch up with the West", a narrative that persisted to this day, especially in the field of higher education (Dakowska, 2015, p. 138).

This notion taken to the extreme is conceptualized via the notions of "modern" or "greater" Europe towards which the Central and Eastern European countries are expected to move: "We hope that this region will move forward-in the direction of modern Europe-but it cannot be entirely excluded that it could move backwards" (Szebenyi, 1992, p. 30). Crucial here are the directional concepts "forward" and "backward" and the explicit statement that "modern Europe" is forward, that is, the space of progress. If we consider this as an expectation, Central and Eastern Europe then is conceptualized as something that needs to become more like "the West", that is, the norm. Central and Eastern Europe is once again placed on the spectrum of civilization and found to be lesser than the Europe it is measured against.

Conclusions

In this study, we aimed to analyse the concept of Central and Eastern Europe in the academic scholarship of (higher) education research in the period from 1990 to 2000. Our research has shown that the conceptual cluster in the field consisted of the concepts *Central and Eastern Europe*, *Eastern Europe* and *Central Europe*. The analysis of frequency of use data has demonstrated that the aforementioned concepts were used interchangeably and there were no clearly discernible patterns for which countries were referred to as belonging to a particular region. Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, for instance, were referred to in all regions with very similar relative frequency.

Analysis of article texts confirmed the lack of uniformity and conceptual clarity. Most authors did not provide any definition of the concept they used. In looking at the surrounding concepts, the space of experience for the conceptual cluster of Central and Eastern Europe was delineated via its former status as post-Soviet or post-Communist which can be understood also as a reaffirmation of the “Eastness” and “backwardness” of the region. The horizon of expectation flows directly from this conceptualization as the countries of CEE are expected to move towards Europe, thus, implying that the region is not quite Europe yet.

The implications of such conceptualization are far-reaching. To this day, Central European academics are underrepresented both in Western publications and Western faculties (Kalmar, 2023). In arguably the most international subject area of education research – higher education internationalisation – contributions from Eastern Europe remain very low in number (Bedenlier et al., 2018). The aforementioned conceptualization of Central and Eastern Europe among members of specific research communities can influence the ways and the extent to which those fields of research are accessible to researchers and scholarship from the region. If the education systems of the “post-Soviet” were only to be developed in the “Western” image in order to bring them to “modern Europe”, they would be of little interest to the European education research community. In a similar way to the reduction of Eastern European agency in the construction of its own definition (Wolff, 1994), such conceptualisation in the area of education research significantly reduces the relevance of Central and Eastern Europe to the field of education.

Moreover, as Ukrainian historian Olesya Khromeychuk (2022) notes, knowledge is also a matter of security. If a country or an entire region is missing from the mental maps our students form in their classrooms, “its existence on the actual map of the world will continue to be at risk” (Khromeychuk, 2022, p. 29). In discussing the events of the mid-20th century, Wolff asserted that “Eastern Europe could only be surrendered because it had long ago been imagined, discovered, claimed, and set apart” (Wolff, 1994, p. 143). While it may be an uncomfortable conclusion to draw, our research has shown that usage of regional concepts is not neutral, even in fields not directly responsible for the development of such concepts. This also means that in our academic work, we bear responsibility for the world we construct via the words and the concepts we choose.

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Ta druga Europa. Konceptualizacja Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej w pracach naukowych o szkolnictwie (wyższym) od 1990 do 2000 roku

Abstrakt: Niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę zbadania wczesnych konceptualizacji Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej w badaniach nad szkolnictwem (wyższym) poprzez analizę prac naukowych powstałych w ramach tych badań między 1990 a 2000 rokiem. Wyniki analizy rzucają światło na moment narodzin Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej jako obszaru zainteresowania w badaniach nad szkolnictwem (wyższym). „Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia” jawi się jako klaster pojęciowy złożony z określeń „Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia”, „Europa Wschodnia” i „Europa Środkowa”. Wstępna analiza ilościowa częstotliwości występowania tych trzech pojęć i związanych z nimi krajów wskazuje na to, że w omawianym okresie były one używane zamiennie, a różnica w preferowanej nazwie regionu nie przekładała się na stały dobór krajów z nią kojarzonych. Pogłębiona lektura artykułów w korpusie badawczym pokazuje, że klaster regionalny kryjący się pod tymi pojęciami był konceptualizowany albo przez pryzmat postkomunizmu – jako przestrzeń naznaczona niechcianą wspólną przeszłością, albo poprzez rolę, jaką odgrywał względem reszty Europy czy też „Zachodu”.

Słowa kluczowe: Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia; historia pojęć; pojęcia regionów; szkolnictwo wyższe; dyskurs akademicki



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Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

Author: Monika Orechova, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7986-3612>

Correspondence: monika.orechova@fsf.vu.lt

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