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**Trends in participation, community development and thematic profile
(2000 to 2004)**

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Conference on HRD research and practice across Europe **Trends in participation, community development and thematic profile** The first five years in retrospect (2000 to 2004)

Contribution to the final session of the sixth international conference on HRD research and practice across Europe, held at Leeds Metropolitan University, 25-27 May 2005

Sabine Manning, Research Forum WIFO Berlin

At the close of this conference, I would like to present a brief review of the five preceding events. European conferences on research and practice in HRD have been held since 2000. Let us look at some trends in participation and thematic profile during this period. These are initial results of a study I have been doing in collaboration with the University Forum for HRD and CEDEFOP.

Three questions will be addressed, concerning trends in participation, community development and thematic profile.

(1)

How has participation in the conference developed?

Is it still UK based or has it acquired international diversity?

Note: This section has been updated to include latest statistics from the Leeds conference 2005 (Figures 1a/ 1b).

Figure 1a: Number of participants by region

You can see the rise in the total number of participants (from about 30 to 250), starting with researchers from the UK and other European countries at the first conference (Kingston 2000) and, from the next conference (Twente 2001) onwards, continuing with a growing third strand of participants from outside Europe, especially the US. The present conference in Leeds is marked by a strong UK attendance. Altogether there has been an increase in all three regional strands over the period, adding to the international diversity of participation.

[Figure 1b](#): Participants from new EU countries

To what extent are the new EU countries from Middle and Eastern Europe involved in the HRD conferences? There has been a clear rise, even if in modest proportions (under ten per cent of all European participants). Mostly these are researchers from Poland, Romania and Hungary. More participants from the new EU countries would be welcome!

(2)

How has the community of conference participants developed?

Is this community getting bigger or stronger? Is it expanding or re-enforcing its structure? Does participation extend or intensify relations within the community?

On the one hand, there has been expansion, as you have seen in the first figure on total participation. A better indicator of straightforward expansion is the number of participants who just attended one single conference in the period concerned.

[Figure 2a](#): 'Once only' participants

The proportion of these 'once-only' participants is fairly substantial (around 50%), showing a rising trend (which is of course partly due to the nature of this indicator: especially some of the more recent new participants may turn up again at future events).

Particularly interesting is the proportion of 'once-only' participants from the host countries, an indicator of the local attraction of conferences. While this proportion was fairly big at the conferences in the UK and the Netherlands (between two and three thirds of the 'once-only' participants), it was much smaller at the conferences in France and Ireland (about one fifth). I shall leave the further interpretation of these phenomena to you!

On the other hand, there are participants who return to successive conferences, thereby re-enforcing the community. Among them is a small group of about 30 persons who attended at least three out of five conferences.

[Figure 2b](#): Frequent participants and board members

In this figure you can see this core group of frequent participants in the middle column. Also visible, in the other two columns, is the major context of their attendance. About two thirds of the frequent participants (middle column) are board members of the related professional organisations: the University Forum of HRD (left column) and the Academy of HRD (right column). It is of course not surprising that these representatives are most active in attending the conferences - nearly all members of the UFHRD Board and a about a quarter of the AHRD Board are frequent participants. The remaining section of the core group includes other members of these associations and several researchers involved in European activities and partnerships. This interrelation between network membership and conference participation is essential for community building.

(3) How has the thematic profile of conference papers developed?

Is there an HRD focus or a broad spectrum? Is the thematic approach national or transnational?

[Figure 3a](#): Thematic fields of papers

This figure presents three fairly equally spread thematic strands (viewed from bottom to top):

- HRD specific themes, like for instance 'HRD at the cross-roads';
- HRD related broader themes, including learning in organisations, competence development in organisations, knowledge management;
- other themes, like learning in the workplace, which are mostly shared with vocational education and training (VET).

[Figure 3b](#): Thematic fields of papers by region

You can find the same spread of themes (in fairly equal proportions) if you compare papers on the UK, other European countries and non-European countries, throughout the five conferences. This outcome is quite surprising, if you consider the different role and profile of HRD vis-à-vis VET research in these regions. A possible reason for the similarity between presentations by region is the distinctive thematic profile of the conferences, with major themes being put forward for the calls for proposals and the conference programmes.

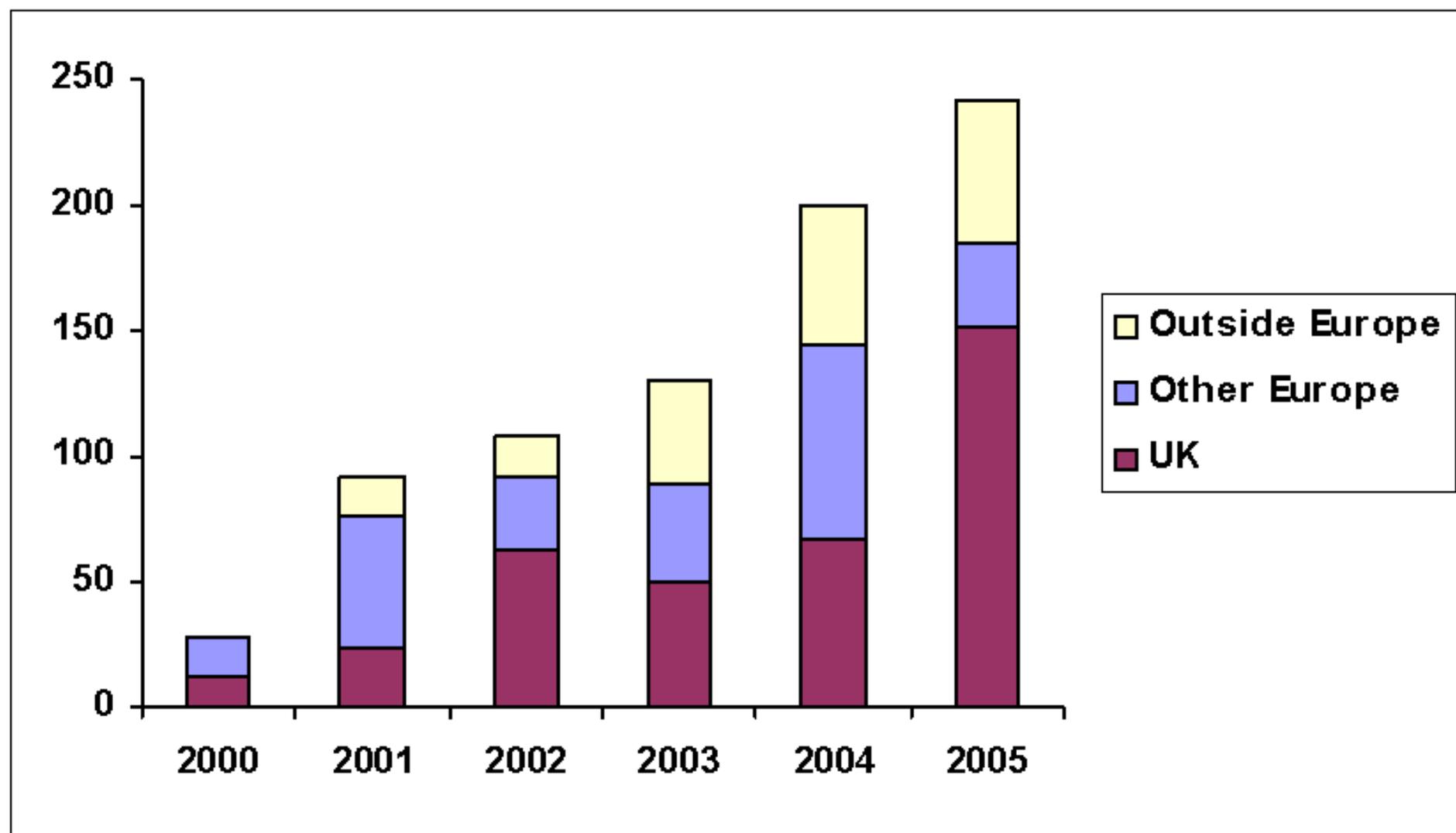
[Figure 3c](#): Major themes of papers by descriptor

Now you can look more closely at themes addressed by the papers presented at any of the five conferences. This time they are analysed by descriptors, which means selected key words (see list of [descriptors](#)). The major thematic aspects turning up, apart from HRD in the specific sense, are: learning, enterprise/ organisation, worker/ personnel, work/ career. Clearly, most of these aspects are shared with VET research.

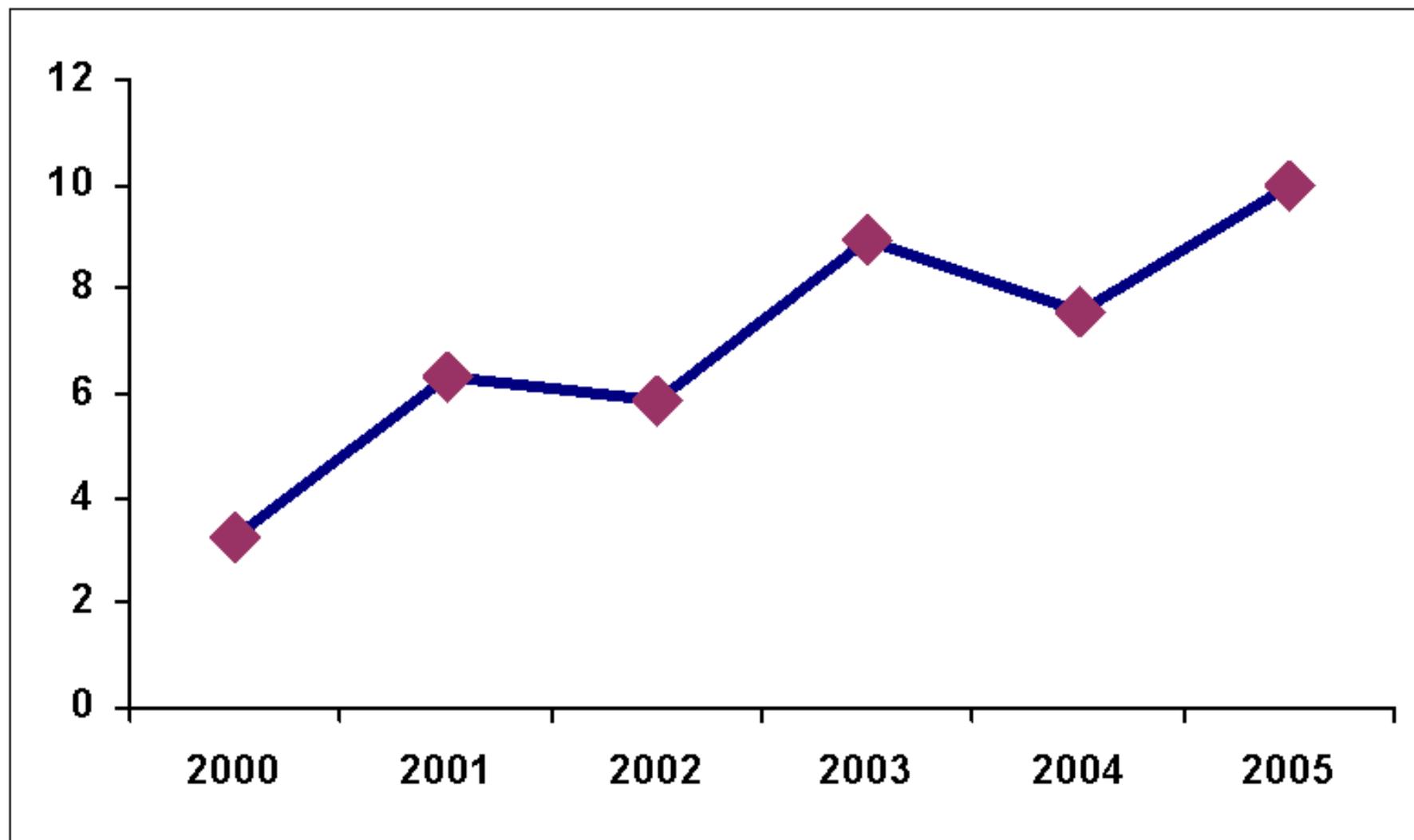
[Figure 3d](#): Transnational presentations and teams

The final point of this thematic review is transnationality, referring to the coverage of two or more countries in a presentation. Two indicators are presented: on the left, the proportion of papers with transnational themes - 5% of all papers; on the right, the proportion of conference participants who have been involved in any transnational presentation - 17% of all participants. I think you agree that there is still room for growth in this respect!

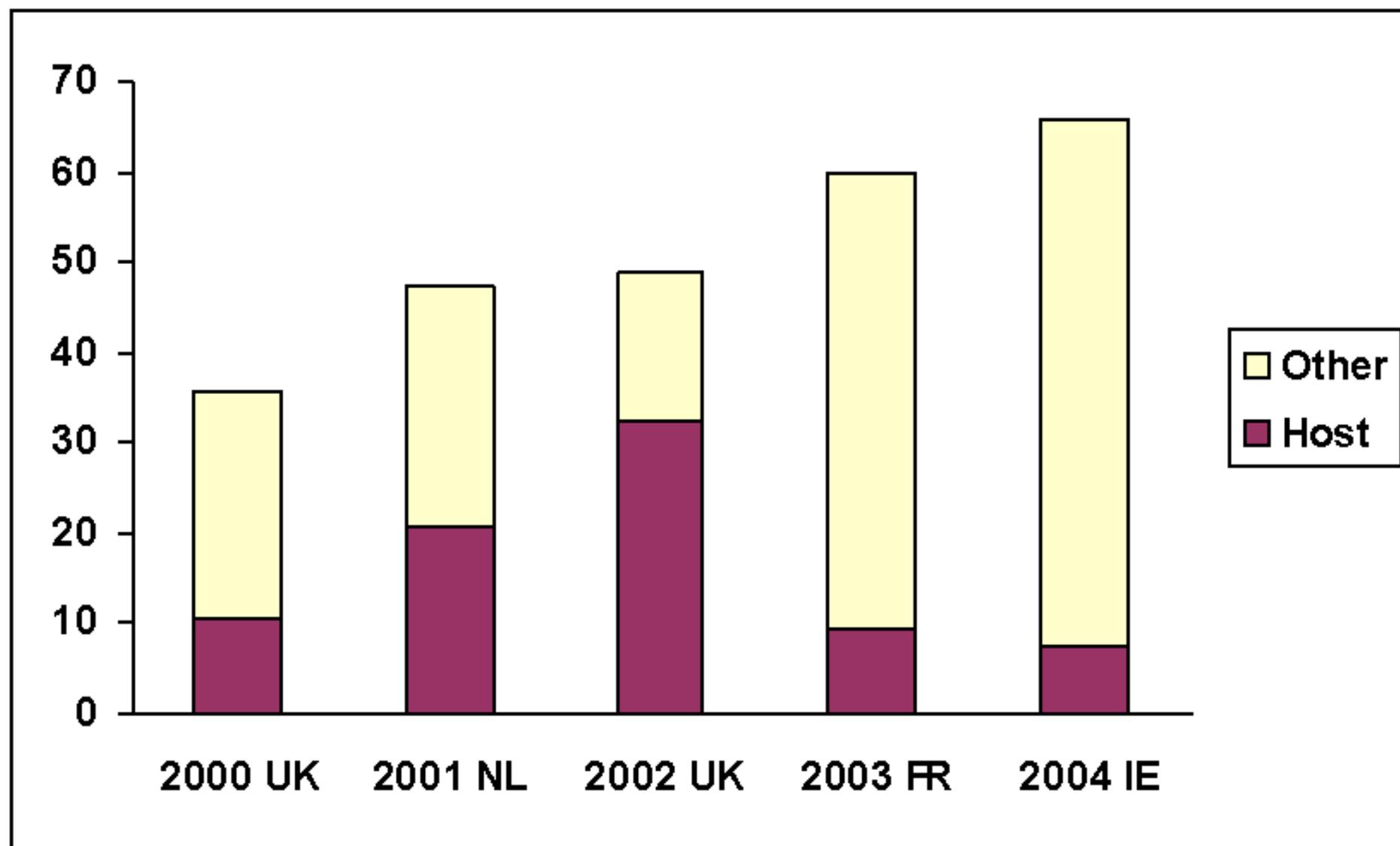
Number of participants by region



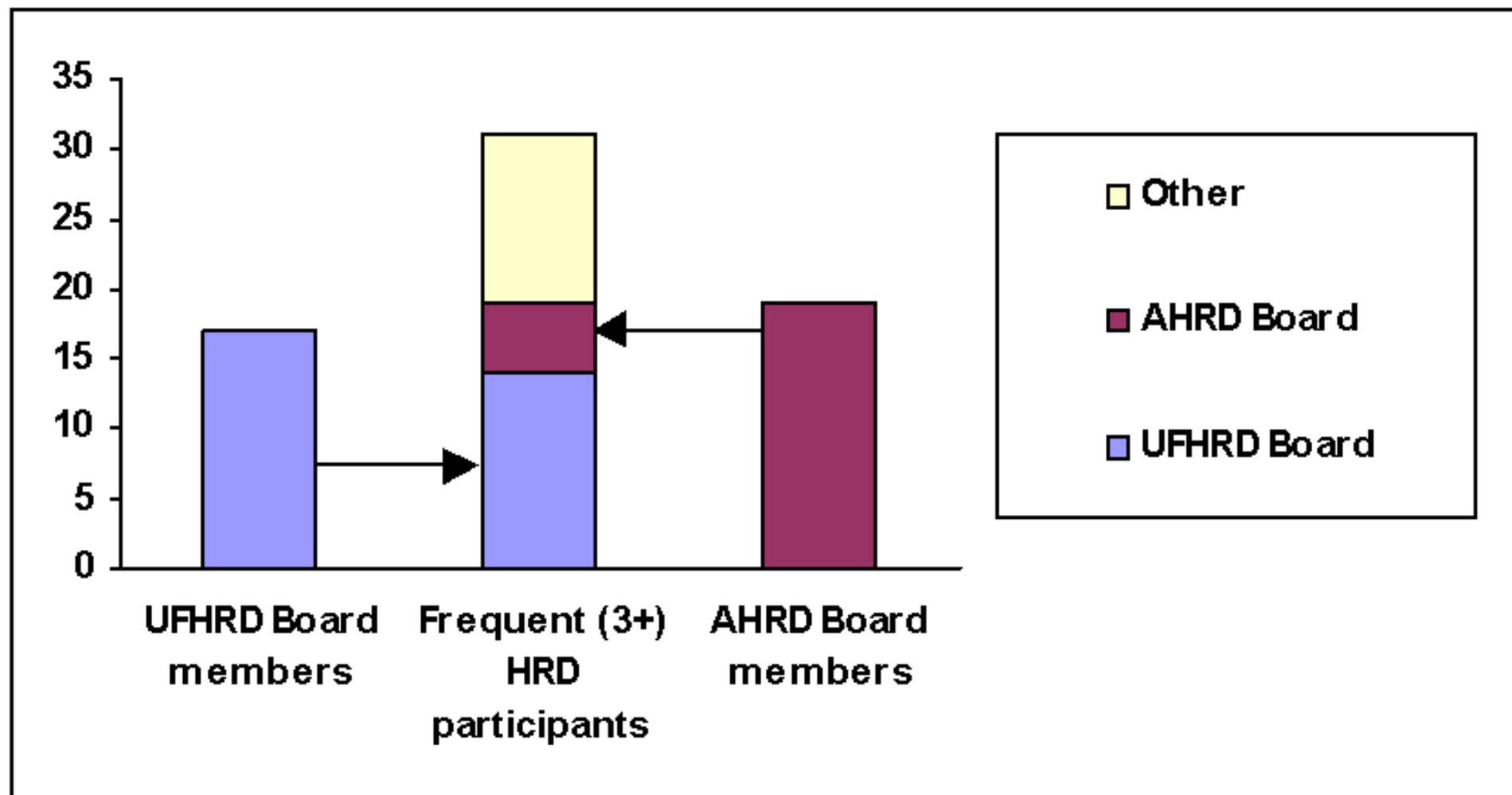
Participants from new EU countries



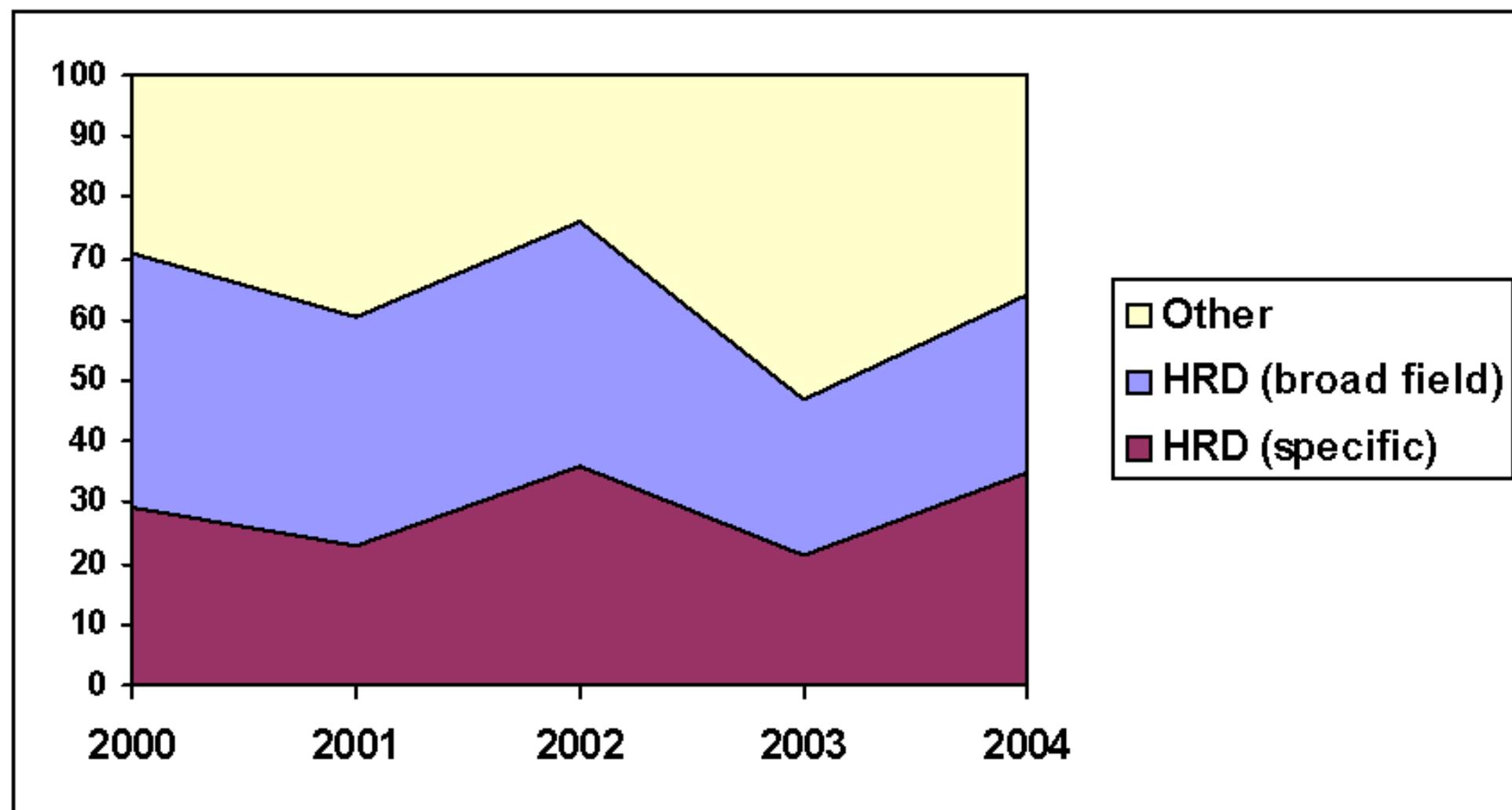
'Once only' participants (%)



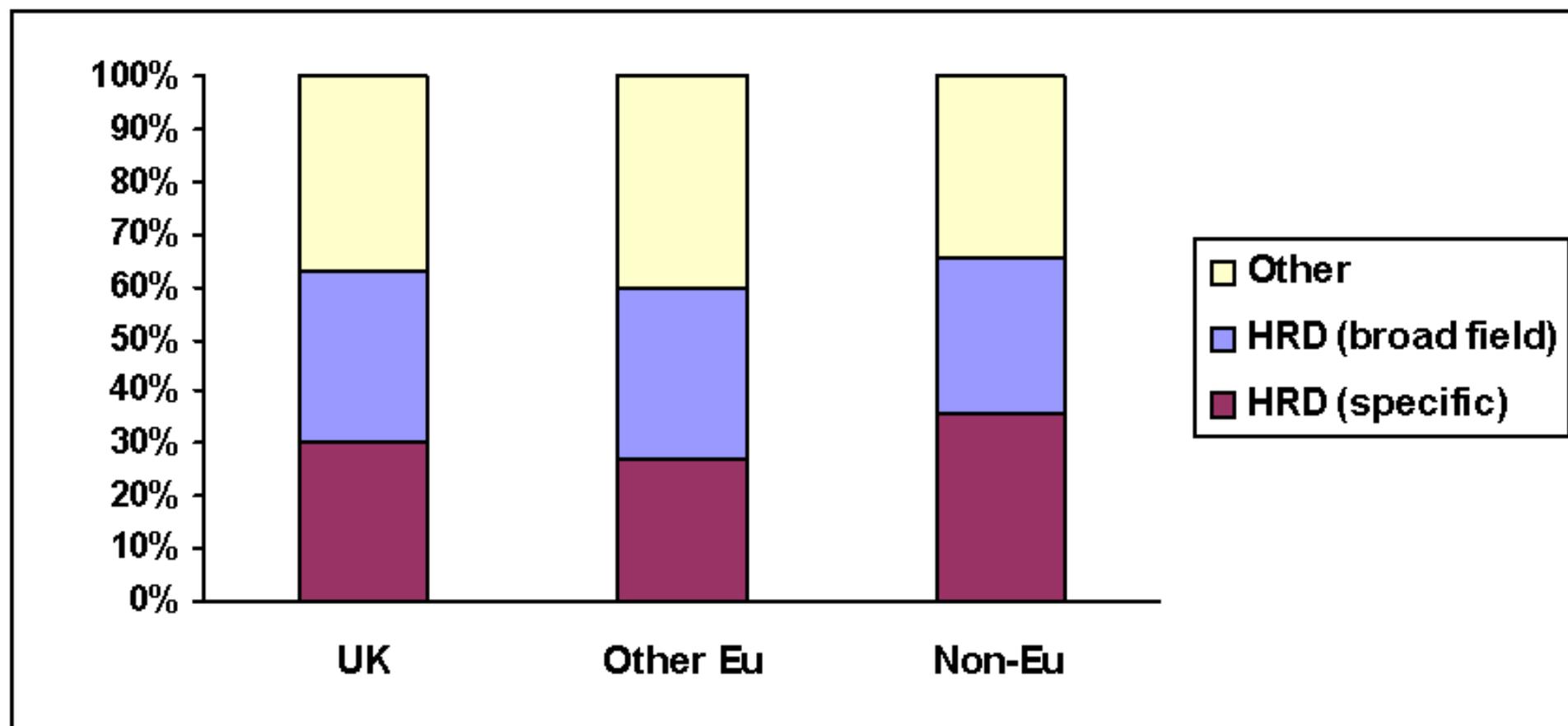
Frequent participants and board members



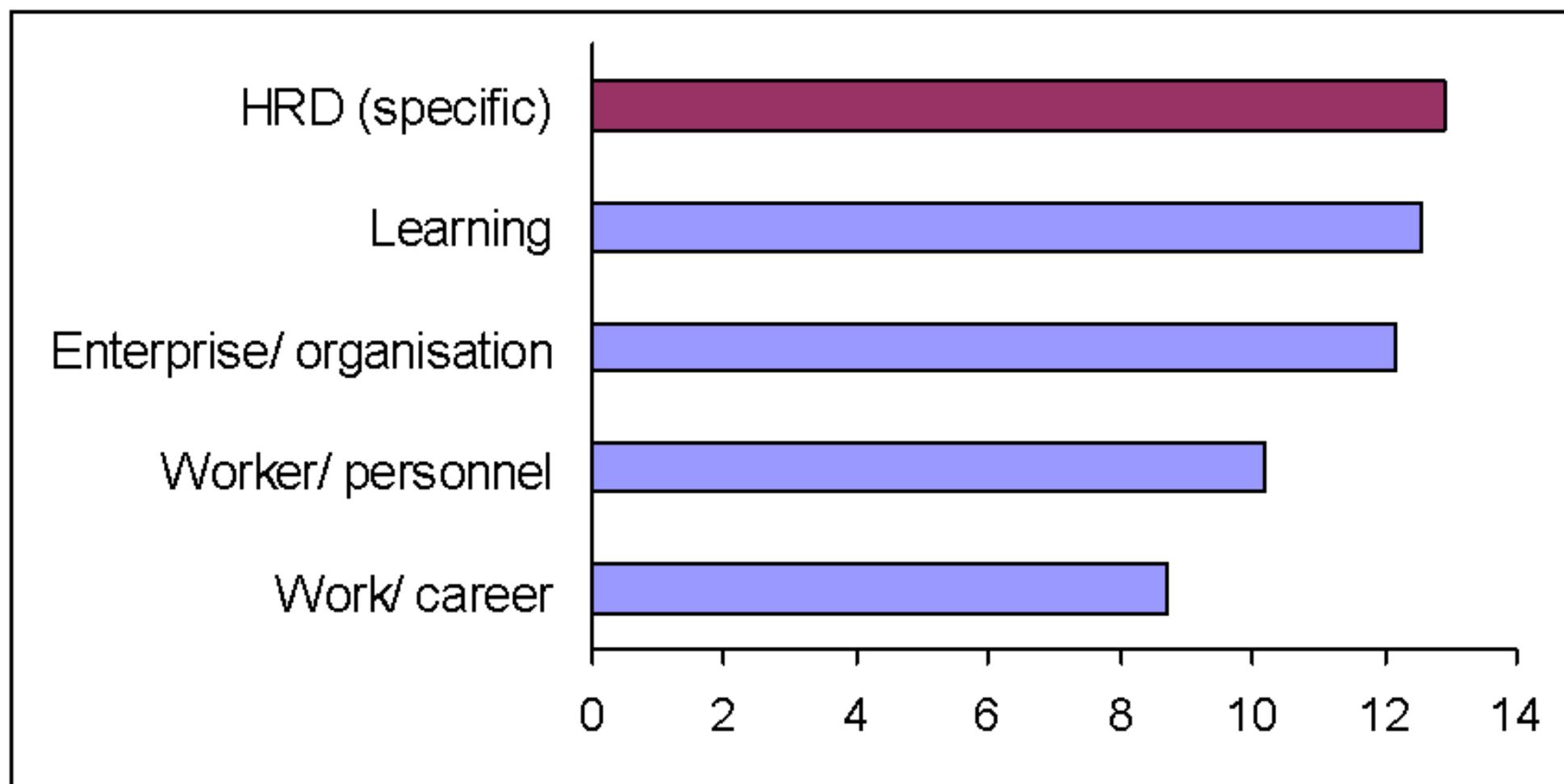
Thematic fields of papers (%)



Thematic fields of papers by region (%)



Major themes of papers by descriptor (%)



Transnational presentations and teams

