

## European research communities in VET and HRD

### Comparative analysis of two annual conferences - based on indicators related to participation and thematic profile

- European Educational Research Conference/ Vocational Education and Training Network (**ECER**)
- International Conference on HRD Research and Practice Across Europe (**HRD conference**)

Period under investigation: 2000 to 2004, including five annual events of each conference

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### Highlights

Trends in participation point to the predominant function of ECER and the HRD conference to facilitate dissemination and extend contacts, while the potential for building or strengthening conferences communities seems to be less pronounced. Both ECER and the HRD conference show similar patterns of attendance:

- Three out of four participating persons turned up only once in five years. Most of these attended events which took place in particularly attractive environments. It certainly is not speculative to detect a significant factor of tourism in this participation rate - which after all is an agreed part of conference management.
- One out of eight persons attended three or more annual events of the conference concerned. These frequent participants can be regarded as the core group of a conference community. The size of this group is fairly small, but its effect on the conference concerned is substantial, since there is a close linkage between frequent participation and involvement in research networks and project partnerships.

Only a few persons attended events of both ECER and the HRD conference: They account for a tenth of the total number of individual European participants at each conference. This proportion of parallel participation is remarkably small, if the close links existing between the two research fields are considered.

The UK and the Netherlands may be regarded as the European pillars of participation in the two conferences. However, with regard to parallel participation in ECER and the HRD conference, the Dutch researchers are in the lead, while the UK researchers are only modestly represented. Consequently, the UK participants are the strongest force - by sheer quantity - in the divided conference communities.

There is a remarkable similarity between presentations at the two conferences, according to the distribution of thematic descriptors. This outcome contrasts with the low degree of linkage between the two conference communities. Transnational presenters and sessions play a greater part at ECER than at the HRD conference. A major reason for this difference can be found in the specific context of European project partnerships and networks in which many ECER participants are involved.

The mailing lists operating for the two conferences have mainly the effect of maintaining the community of previous participants while contributing little to attracting newcomers.