Higher Education in Portugal 1974–2009
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A Nation, a Generation
Preface

CIPES was established in 1998. From the outset, its mission is to engage in scholarly research, advance critical thought and forward informed understanding about the vital issues of policy that higher education faces both nationally and internationally. CIPES was initially set up as a research centre of the Foundation of Portuguese Universities (FUP). In 2006, it became a private association founded by the Universities of Aveiro and Porto.

Under the leadership of its founding Director, our colleague Alberto Amaral, CIPES set itself the task to become a centre of reference for higher education research in Portugal and abroad. At the national level, CIPES’ aim is to strengthen and to spur on public debate on issues in higher education and to remedy a situation made no better by the relative paucity of policy studies of any kind in Portugal.

After its initial period of growth, CIPES consolidated its research team into becoming one of the largest research centres specialised in the domain of higher education. From the first, CIPES placed major weight upon having a visible and tangible international presence. Central to this strategy has been CIPES’ participation as Founding Associate in the European Consortium for Higher Education Data Development and Analysis (HEDDA) together with similar centres and groups from the UK, Finland, Norway, France, the Netherlands, Germany and the Czech Republic. CIPES has also been highly active in EUREDOCS – the European Network of Doctoral Students in Higher Education. EUREDOCS has likewise played a key role in bringing together cutting edge research to focus on the various aspects of higher education policy in Europe and the European Union. CIPES was also a member of the EU PRIME Network of Excellence.

These international partnerships are essential in laying down a solid basis for our work. And for this we are grateful indeed to our colleagues and fellow research centres in Europe and beyond.

To some, higher education is not an autonomous discipline. It is rather a field of research to which many disciplines contribute. CIPES’ work is fully within this perspective. It has both benefited from and profited by being a multidisciplinary community.
CIPES’ researchers hail from very different disciplinary backgrounds: engineering, economics, management, sociology, philosophy, psychology, education sciences, history and geography. Each of its research projects draws strength from the diverse backgrounds of its members. Not only is the sum greater than the individual and disciplinary parts, the same feature protects and prevents the domain of higher education from that stultifying form of intellectual and institutional isolation that can only undermine its scientific, scholarly and public standing.

The volume Higher Education in Portugal 1974–2009: a Nation, a Generation is a good example, as well as being a synthesis, of what CIPES has been able to achieve over some 15 exciting and intensive years of exploring the Portuguese higher education system. The chapters in this book are the outcome of many years reflecting on the major changes the Portuguese system has been through over the past few decades. The impact they have had on the institutional fabric of higher education is carefully weighed up. The chapters also reflect the way this intellectual venture has been embedded in a multidisciplinary approach, which is clearly echoed across their conceptual, methodological and analytical foundations.

Another hallmark of CIPES’ ‘work style’ is its collaborative nature. As the only research centre in Portugal specialised in higher education research, CIPES takes as part of its mission to engage in a sustained dialogue with other institutions concerned with the study of higher education–related topics. It is then not surprising in the least that this volume was drawn up together with Portuguese scholars unaffiliated to CIPES but well-known for their commitment to a long-term view on the political, economic, societal and cultural transformation Portugal has been through.

Another further characteristic of CIPES’ ‘style’ also clearly reflected in this volume is its resolutely comparative approach. From the first, CIPES set out to engage in a dialogue with the international community of scholars working in higher education, both to integrate the Portuguese experience as well as to highlight marked differences in shaping the Portuguese higher education system. This volume firmly places the last three decades of Portugal’s higher education development against broader international trends. In this way, CIPES has sought to ensure that its account of higher education in Portugal is complemented by a firm grasp of the wider international developments that shape higher education within the Nation as they do beyond it.

In the course of the past four decades, Portuguese higher education has undergone deep and complex changes. These changes entailed elements that drew the system closer to its European counterparts. At the same time they revealed certain peculiar features of the Portuguese system that demand a thorough grasp of the country’s history and the way this latter shaped its political, economic, social and cultural fabric. Higher education in Portugal is a fertile ground for developing a research agenda that is both substantial and challenging. This volume, I would suggest, not only bears witness to how much has been achieved over a relatively short period, it also hints at the promise of further and no less exciting journeys around higher education in the future.

Pedro Teixeira
Director, CIPES
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List of Contributors

Alberto Amaral  A3ES, Praça de Avaladade 6-5 Frente, 1700-036 Lisbon, Portugal, alberto.amaral@a3es.pt

Teresa Carvalho Departamento de Ciências Sociais, Políticas e do Território, University of Aveiro, CIPES Rua Primeiro de Dezembro 399, 4450-228 Matosinhos, Portugal, teresa.carvalho@csjp.ua.pt

Luisa Cerdeira Rectorate, University of Lisbon, Alameda da Universidade, 1600 Lisbon, Portugal, lcerdeira@reitoria.ul.pt

Ana Nunes de Almeida Instituto de Ciências Sociais, University of Lisbon, Av Prof. Aníbal de Bettancourt 9, 1600-189 Lisbon, Portugal, ana.nunes.almeida@ics.ul.pt

Madalena Fonseca A3ES, Praça de Avaladade 6–5 Frente, 1700-36 Lisbon, Portugal, madalena.fonseca@a3es.pt

Maria Eduarda Gonçalves Departamento de Economia Política, ISTCE Lisbon, Av das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisbon, Portugal, maria.eduarda.goncalves@iscte.pt

Manuel Heitor Centro de Estudos em Inovação, Tecnologia e Políticas de Desenvolvimento, IN+, Instituto Superior Técnico, Technical University of Lisbon, Portugal, mheitor@ist.utl.pt

Hugo Horta Centro de Estudos em Inovação, Tecnologia e Políticas de Desenvolvimento, IN+, Instituto Superior Técnico, Technical University of Lisbon, Portugal, hugo.horta@dem.ist.utl.pt

Pedro Lains Instituto de Ciências Sociais, University of Lisbon, Av Aníbal de Bettancourt 9, 1600-189 Lisbon, Portugal, pedro.lains@ics.ul.pt

Licídio C. Lima Departamento de Ciências Sociais da Educação, University of Minho, Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057 Braga, Portugal, llima@ie.uminho.pt

Maria de Lourdes Machado CIPES, Rua Primeiro de Dezembro 399, 4450-227 Matosinhos, Portugal, lmachado@cipes.up.pt
António M. Magalhães  CIPES, University of Porto, Rua Dr Manuel Pereira da Silva, 4200-392 Porto, Portugal, antonio@cipes.up.pt

Guy Neave  CIPES, 31, square St Germain, 78100 St Germain en Laye, France, guy.r.neave@gmail.com

Álvaro Santos Pereira  School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, 515W Hastings Street, V6B 1M1 Vancouver, Canada, apereira@sfu.ca

José Madureira Pinto  Instituto de Sociologia, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, Via Panoramica s/n, 4150-584 Porto, Portugal

Maria J. Rosa  Departamento de Economia, Gestão e Engenharia Industrial, University of Aveiro, Campus Universitário de Santiago, 3810-193 Aveiro, Portugal, mjrosa@ua.pt

Rui Santiago  Departamento de Ciências Sociais, Políticas e Jurídica, University of Aveiro, Campus Universitário de Santiago, 3810-193 Aveiro, Portugal, rui.santiago@ua.pt

Cláudia S. Sarrico  ISEG, Universidade Tecnica de Lisboa, Rua Miguel Lupe 20, 1249-078 Lisbon, Portugal, cssarrico@iseg.ulisboa.pt

José Manuel Sobral  Instituto de Ciências Sociais, University of Lisbon, Av Prof Anibal de Bettencourt, 1600 Lisbon, Portugal, jose.sobral@ics.ul.pt

Pedro N. Teixeira  CIPES, University of Porto, Rua Primeiro de Dezembro 399, 4450-227 Matosinhos, Portugal, Pedro@cipes.up.pt

Luis Reis Torgal  Centro de Estudos Interdisciplinares do Século XX da, Universidade de Coimbra, Rua Filipe Simões, 33, 3000-186 Coimbra, Portugal, lrtorgal@netcabo.pt

Amélia Veiga  A3ES, CIPES, Rua Primeiro de Dezembro 399, 4450-227 Matosinhos, Portugal, aveiga@cipes.up.pt

Maria Manuel Vieira  Instituto de Ciências Sociais, University of Lisbon, Av Prof. Aníbal de Bettencourt 9, 1600-189 Lisbon, Portugal, mmfonseca@ics.ul.pt
About the Editors

Guy Neave is Scientific Director of CIPES (Portugal) and Professor Emeritus of the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, Twente University, The Netherlands. An historian by training, he has written extensively on higher education and comparative Higher Education Policy in Western Europe. He was the Professor of Comparative Education at the London University Institute of Education from 1985 to 1990 and served as Editor in Chief with Burton R Clark for the Encyclopedia of Higher Education (4 vols 1992) was Founder Editor of Higher Education Policy (Palgrave Macmillan) In 1998, he was elected Foreign Associate of the National Academy of Education of the USA. His principle interests lie in the area of government/university relationships, the post war history of universities in Europe and European Integration. He holds a doctorate from UC London in French political history and lives in the Far West of the Paris basin.

Alberto Amaral is professor at the University of Porto and president of the Portuguese Quality Agency. He has been the chairman of the Board of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers, is a life member of International Association of University Presidents, and member of the OECD-based programme Institutional Management in Higher Education. He is editor and co-editor of several books, including Governing Higher Education: National Perspectives on Institutional Governance (2002), The Higher Education Managerial Revolution? (2003), Markets in Higher Education: Rhetoric or Reality? (2004), Reform and Change in Higher Education (2005), From Governance to Identity (2008) and Essays in Supportive Peer Review (2008).
About the Authors

Álvaro Santos Pereira is currently Minister of Economic Affairs in Portugal and was an associate professor at the School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada. He has published three books on the Portuguese economy, including Portugal’s Moment of Truth: How to overcome the national crisis (2011), Lisbon; The Fear of Failure: History and Economic Policy in Portugal (2009), Lisbon: Esfera dos Livros; and The Myths of the Portuguese Economy (2007), Lisbon: Guerra e Paz Editores.

His most recent publications in English include papers in the Journal of Economic History, the Journal of International Development, the European Review of Economic History and Historical Social Research.

His current research centres are on the evolution of macroeconomic variables in Portugal, the economic legacy of the Portuguese empire in Africa and prices and wages in Portugal since 1500; he has also published on the economic impact of tuberculosis since the late nineteenth century.

Teresa Carvalho is Professor at the University of Aveiro and Senior Researcher at CIPES. Her main research interests are institutional governance and management, the academic profession and gender in higher education. Recent publications include articles in: Higher Education, Higher Education Quarterly, European Journal of Education, Higher Education Policy, Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, Journal of Management Research, Higher Education and Management and Equal Opportunities International. She is also co-editor of The Changing Dynamics of Higher Education Middle Management (Springer, 2010).

Cláudia S. Sarrico is associate professor at the School of Economics and Management, Technical University of Lisbon and researcher at the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies of Portugal. Her main research interests are in public management, in particular issues of performance management and governance in education and higher education. She has published in management, public management and higher education studies journals. She is Europe Regional Editor of the International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management. She is a member of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers.
Ana Nunes de Almeida is a Sociologist and Research Professor in the Instituto de Ciências Sociais, University of Lisbon (Portugal). She was born in Lisbon in 1957. She holds a Licence en Sociologie (Faculté des Sciences Économiques et Sociales, Geneva, Switzerland), PhD in Sociology (ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon). She is a Pro-Rector at the University of Lisbon and coordinator of the Observatory of Students’ Trajectories. Her research domains include: school and family, children and the Internet, youth and social inequalities. Her latest publications include: História da Vida Privada em Portugal (Ed.), Lisboa: Círculo dos Leitores, 2011; Para uma sociologia da infância, Lisboa: ICS, 2010.

Madalena Fonseca is a Geographer, Assistant Professor at the Universidade do Porto and researcher at the Centre for Research on Higher Education Policies (CIPES). At present, she is Secretary General of the Portuguese Agency for Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education (A3ES) in Lisbon. She has been Consultant in planning, regional development and evaluation of European projects since 1994. She was a Guest Researcher at the University of Bayreuth, Guest Professor at the Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany and Visiting Professor at the Universities of Maputo (Mozambique), Complutense de Madrid (Spain), Frankfurt-Main and Regensburg (Germany).

As Member of the Regional Studies Association, she has published on industrial relocation and regional upgrading. Her recent publications (since 2008) include reports and research on the Portuguese higher education network.

Maria Eduarda Gonçalves, LL.M., Harvard Law School, Doctorat d’État en Droit (University of Nice), is Full Professor of Law at the Higher Institute of Business and Labour Sciences Lisbon University Institute (IUL) and at the Faculty of Law of the New University of Lisbon. A member of the Centre for the Study of Socio-economic Change and the Territory, her research interests include European law and policy, information technology law, risk regulation and the relationship between policy-making and scientific expertise. Participant in several multidisciplinary research projects sponsored by FCT/Portugal or the European Commission, she has published widely in both Portuguese and international journals in these fields. She is co-author of Taking European Knowledge Society Seriously? (2007), the report by the EC Expert Group on Science and Governance.

Manuel Heitor was until June 2011 the Secretary of State for Science, Technology and Higher Education. He was founding director of the Center for Innovation, Technology and Policy Research at the Instituto Superior Técnico (IST), the engineering school of the Technical University of Lisbon. After earning his PhD at Imperial College, London in 1985 and post-doctorate study the year following at the University of California San Diego, he took post as Professor at IST, becoming its Deputy-President from 1993 to 1998. Heitor is Research Fellow of the Innovation, Creativity and Capital (IC2) Institute at the University of Texas at Austin. Amongst his books are Combusting Flow Diagnostic and Unsteady Combustion. From 1996 to 2005, he chaired the Organizing Committee for the International Conferences on ‘Technology Policy and Innovation’. He sits on the editorial boards of several journals, including
Technological Forecasting and Social Change and the International Journal of Technology, Policy and Management.

His research includes publications on technology management, the development of engineering and innovation policies and engineering design. He represented Portugal on the OECD project ‘Steering and Funding of Public Research’ and on the ‘Futures Programme’. In 2003 he coordinated a national exhibition on ‘Engineering in Portugal in the twentieth century’, for which the Society for the History of Technology, SHOT conferred its Dibner Award. Cofounder in 2002 of ‘Globelics – the global network for the economics of learning, innovation, and competence-building systems’, Heitor is member of the Science and Technology Council of the ‘International Risk Governance Council’, IRGC.

Hugo Horta currently at the Centre for Innovation, Technology and Policy Research at the Instituto Superior Técnico (IST) at the Technical University of Lisbon. After completing his PhD in Management and Industrial Engineering at the Instituto Superior Técnico (IST), in 2007, he embarked on postdoc research into academic inbreeding in Portugal and Japan, an enquiry involving the Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, ISCTE, Portugal and the Center for the Advancement of Higher Education (CAHE), Tohoku University, Japan. His publications focus on higher education diversity, scientific policies and funding, comparative scientific national structures, scientific productivity, internationalisation of higher education and academic mobility and have appeared in such international journals as Management Science, Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Science and Public Policy, Higher Education, Higher Education Policy, Studies in Social Science and Asia Pacific Education Review. He is on the editorial boards of the Mexican Journal of Research in Education and Asian Pacific Education Review. He is national delegate to the European Research Area Steering Committee on Human Resources and Mobility.

José Madureira Pinto is Professor (Retired) at the Social Sciences Department of the Faculty of Economics in the University of Porto (Portugal) and Researcher at the Institute of Sociology in the Faculty of Arts at the same university. His current interests include the sociology of education and cultural practices, the sociology of classes and social recomposition, the analysis of the social foundations of economy, as well as the methodology of the social sciences. He has published and edited several books and dozens of articles and book chapters on these topics, some of which were based on prolonged research in the field.

Pedro Lains is a research professor in Economic History at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon and a visiting professor at the Faculty of Economics, Catholic University. His most recent publications in English are Paying for the Liberal State. The Rise of Public Finances in Nineteenth Century Europe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 (Co-edited with J. L. Cardoso); Agriculture and Economic Development in Europe since 1870, London: Routledge, 2009 (Co-edited with V. Pinilla); “The Portuguese economy in the Irish mirror, 1960–2002”, Open Economies Review, 19 (5), 2008: 667–683; “The power of peripheral governments. Coping with the 1891 financial crisis in Portugal”, Historical
Licínio C. Lima was born in 1957 in Porto, Portugal. He is Full Professor of Sociology of Education and Educational Administration at the Department of Social Sciences of Education, Institute of Education of the University of Minho, Campus de Gualtar, Braga, Portugal. He has been the Director of the Research Centre for Education and Psychology (1994–1997), Head of the Unit for Adult Education (1984–2004), Head of Department (1998–2004), and Director of the PhD in Education at the University of Minho. Lima has been Guest Professor in various European and Brazilian universities. He is an author of many academic works published in 13 countries and 6 languages, including 30 books.

Luisa Cerdeira received her PhD in Educational Sciences, Specialty Policies and Organisation of the Educational System from the University of Lisbon and Master’s Degree in Education, specialising in School Administration from the University of Évora and a Licenciatura in Economics from the Lisbon Technical University (Portugal). She is Pro-Rector at the University of Lisbon and Professor of the Institute of Education, University of Lisbon. Currently, she is external consultant to the World Bank in higher education financing. In recognition of her work, she was elected member of the HUMANE Executive Committee (Heads of University Management & Administration Network in Europe) and member of the Executive Secretariat of RAUI (Iberian-American Network of University Administrators).

Maria de Lourdes Machado holds a Licenciatura in Economics from the University of Porto, Post-Graduate Studies in Administration and a PhD, both from the University of Minho (Portugal). She was Head of Administration at the Polytechnic Institute in Bragança (Portugal). She is a Senior Research Associate at the Center for Research on Higher Education Policies (CIPES), Portugal. Her areas of research include management, strategic planning and gender studies. She is the author of books on higher education legislation, strategic management, gender studies, non-university sector and other publications in European and American journals such as European Journal of Education, Higher Education Policy, Planning for Higher Education and Tertiary Education and Management.

António M. Magalhães is associate professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences at the University of Porto, Portugal, and a senior researcher at CIPES (Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies), Portugal. He researches in the areas of regulatory mechanisms in education and the relationship between state and higher education, higher education governance and its theories and methods of policy analysis. On these topics he has published widely in both national and international journals and publications.

Maria J. Rosa is assistant professor in the Department of Economics, Management and Industrial Engineering at the University of Aveiro and a researcher at CIPES. Her research topics are quality management and quality assessment in higher

Rui Santiago is a professor at the University of Aveiro and a senior researcher at CIPES. His main research interests are institutional governance and management and the academic profession. His recent publications include articles in Higher Education Quarterly, Higher Education, Higher Education Policy and European Journal of Higher Education. He is also co-editor of Non-University Higher Education in Europe (Springer, 2008) and of The Changing Dynamics of Higher Education Middle Management (Springer, 2010).

Jose Manuel Sobral, a historian and anthropologist, is Senior Research Fellow at the Instituto de Ciencias Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal, where he also teaches on the Graduate Programme in Anthropology. He has researched and published on family and kinship, power and politics, social structure, epidemics, social memory, the history of anthropology and, more recently, on food and cuisine and nationalism, ethnicity and racism. Among his recent works are Trajectos: O Passado e O Presente na Vida de uma Freguesia Rural (Imprensa de Ciencias Sociais, 1999) and as editor and contributor, A Pandemia Esquecida: Olhares Comparados sobre a Pneumonica (1918–19) (with Maria Luisa Lima et al., Imprensa de Ciencias Sociais, 2009), Identidade Nacional, Inclusão e Exclusão Social (with Jorge Vala, Imprensa de Ciencias Sociais, 2010).

Pedro N. Teixeira is Associate Professor at the Department of Economics (University of Porto) and Director of CIPES (Centre of Research on Higher Education Policy). His research interests focus on the economics of higher education, notably on markets and privatisation, and the development of human capital as a research programme. He is the author of Jacob Mincer – A Founding Father of Modern Labour Economics (Oxford UP, 2007). He has co-edited two volumes: Markets in Higher Education – Reality or Rhetoric? (Kluwer, 2004) and Cost-Sharing and Accessibility in Higher Education – A Fairer Deal? (Springer, 2006).

Luis Reis Torgal is Professor Emeritus of Contemporary History, Faculty of Arts at Coimbra University and Director of Research at the Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of the Twentieth Century at the same university. He has published extensively on Education and on the University in particular from both a historical and critical perspective. He is currently preparing a collection of studies entitled ‘What University?’.

Amélia Veiga is researcher at the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) and has been researcher at Centre for Research in Higher
Education Policies (CIPES) since obtaining a master degree. She holds a PhD from the University of Porto, Portugal. Her main research interests lie in comparative studies in higher education, in particular European integration and governance and the institutionalisation of a European dimension in education viewed from the perspective of policy implementation.