The field of comparative education is arguably more closely related to globalisation than most other fields of academic enquiry. Comparative education is naturally concerned with cross-national analyses, and the field encourages its participants to be outward-looking. At the same time, the field responds to globalisation. Cross-national forces of change are reflected in dominant paradigms, methodological approaches, and foci of study.

In order to provide a context for subsequent discussion, this chapter begins by considering some of the meanings of globalisation. The chapter then turns to the nature of the field of comparative education, noting dimensions of evolution over the decades and centuries. Moving to relatively recent times, the chapter focuses on the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), which was created in 1970 and currently has 30 constituent societies. As its name suggests, the WCCES is a global body – with all the positive features and tensions that that implies. The chapter notes the some characteristics of the global field of comparative education, while also commenting on distinctive features in some countries and regions. Some specific domains in which globalisation have changed the agenda in which comparativists can and should work, are highlighted.
observed, stretch “from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual”. Elsewhere, Held & McGrew (2000) have noted that globalisation:

- has been variously conceived as action at a distance (whereby the actions of social agents in one locale can come to have significant consequences for ‘distant others’);
- time-space compression (referring to the way in which instantaneous electronic communication erodes the constraints of distance and time on social organization and interaction); accelerating interdependence (understood as the intensification of emmeshment among national economies and societies such that events in one country impact directly on others); a shrinking world (the erosion of borders and geographical barriers to socio-economic activity); and, among other concepts, global integration, the reordering of interregional power relations, consciousness of the global condition and the intensification of inter-regional interconnectiveness (Held & McGrew, 2000, p. 3).

All these dimensions have impact on the field of comparative education as well as on other fields of endeavour. Nevertheless, interpretations of the precise nature of dynamics depend strongly on the perspectives of the observers. Held et al., (1999) distinguished between three broad schools of thought on globalisation:

- The hyperglobalists define contemporary globalisation as a new era in which peoples everywhere are subjected to the disciplines of the global marketplace. Emphasising economic forces, this view argues that globalisation is bringing about ‘denationalisation’ of economies through the establishment of transnational networks of production, trade and finance. In this ‘borderless’ economy, national governments are “relegated to little more than transmission belts for global capital or, ultimately, simple intermediate institutions sandwiched between increasingly powerful local, regional and global mechanisms of governance” (Held et al., 1999, p. 3).

- The sceptics, by contrast, maintain that contemporary levels of economic interdependence are not historically unprecedented. The 19th century era of the classical Gold Standard, they note, was also a period of economic integration. The sceptics consider the hyperglobalist thesis to be fundamentally flawed and politically naïve since it underestimates the enduring power of national governments to regulate international economic activity. The sceptics recognise the economic power of regionalisation in the world economy, but assert that by comparison with the age of world empires the international economy has become considerably less global in its geographical embrace.

- The transformationists, like the hyperglobalists, consider globalisation to be a central driving force behind the rapid social, political and economic changes that are reshaping societies. However, they are less certain of the direction in which trends are leading and about the kind of world order which it might prefigure. For transformationalists, the existence of a single global system is not taken as evidence of global convergence or of the arrival of a single world society. Rather, they argue, “globalisation is associated with new patterns of global stratification in which some states, societies and communities are becoming increasingly enmeshed in the global order while others are becoming increasingly marginalised” (Held et al., 1999, pp. 7-8). The new patterns require reformulation of vocabulary from North/South and First/Third World,