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## **Comparison on the country studies of the public good role of higher education: Summary and transpositional analysis**

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### ***[title slide]***

I will now summarise the results of the comparison between the eight country studies, and draw out the transpositional analysis that combines the countries, with the objective of developing a generic overview of the public good role of higher education. As you may recall from the opening paper, a transpositional comparison does not normalise one party to the comparison as a template for examining the other, as in the older traditions of comparative education. Rather, the transpositional method defines the different elements of the comparison in parallel, and then integrates them to the extent possible.

### **[National studies of higher education and public good 1]**

All eight countries use a concept of 'public' that signifies the government or state sector. Further in all eight countries university personnel – and where tested, government personnel - harbour ideas of a universalising 'public good' which is a condition of general beneficence or welfare, or something akin to it, and includes both individuals and their collective relations with each other, though in the Anglophone jurisdictions of Canada and England the general public good notion is not part of official policy on higher education. This universalising 'public good' is often associated with government policies and responsibilities and in that respect takes a largely top-down form. This contrasts with the notion of 'common good' which is a factor in five of the eight countries and plays a stronger role in China and Poland than elsewhere. The common good is understood as more bottom-up in conception and implementation than public good. In Finland, where the public realm is seen as both top-down and grass roots based, the two conceptions are merged.

In association with these broad terms, there are further understandings of large-scale public relationships, varying by country, implied in notions of common citizenship, social inclusion, shared communications and critical public culture. Both the universalising public good and the common good are also in effect discursive containers for multiple practices of public and common goods in higher education. It was agreed by all that higher education makes a host of heterogeneous contributions to the public and/or common good

Across the eight countries, with the exception of certain interviewees in Poland, there is clear commitment to the role of higher education in facilitating equitable access to social opportunity and mobility, expanding to include people from disadvantaged backgrounds; though in England there is some scepticism about the capacity of the sector to foster social mobility. In six of the eight countries the interviews show that higher education is seen to contribute to enlightened individual graduates who develop society, and in Canada, Chile, England and Finland interviewees mentioned not just skills and knowledge but also critically minded, creative, reflexive graduates. 'Our graduates are a public good', as one interviewee put it. There was an understanding across the study that the effects of higher education in the lives of individuals aggregate to a collective social effect larger than the sum of the parts.

### **[National studies of higher education and public good 2]**

Interviewees were largely unanimous in rejecting economic notions that understand higher education in the terms of methodological individualism and the Samuelson formula in which private and public goods are zero-sum in relation to each other; that is, the more higher education is 'private' the less it can be 'public' and vice versa. In response to a specific interview question on this they strongly asserted that higher education has both private and public outcomes at the same time. Nevertheless, the Samuelson economic formula is so potent in policy cultures that there were traces of it in interviews everywhere except Finland, especially among the economically trained.

The configuration of state/institution relations in creating public or common goods was closely nested in individual national histories and political cultures. There were differences in the respective responsibilities of universities and the state, the form of regulated institutional autonomy, the public/private split in funding, and the extent of neoliberal transformation. The only shared element was this national nestedness. In France, Finland and Chile, understandings of the state/university relation and the public and common responsibilities of higher education was reproduced by deeply felt shared national narratives: the Republican model in France, the *sivistys* tradition in Finland (which has some convergence with the *Bildung* idea in Germany), and the emancipatory, modernising and nation-building role conceived for higher education in Latin America, including Chile. The social responsibility and connectedness of higher education is especially strongly emphasised in both Finland and Chile. However, all three of these national narratives were being partly undermined by neoliberal policies: the introduction of international student fees in Finland against the will of most of the higher education sector; international student fees, enhanced institutional stratification, weakened access and research competition in France; and a thoroughgoing structural marketisation in Chile undone only partly by left of centre governments.

**[Summary of public good role across the eight higher education systems]**

In most of the countries there are limited notions of the role of higher education in generating global common good(s). This dimension was often discussed vaguely and/or seen in methodologically nationalist terms, so that global relations are seen simply as an outgrowth of national activity across borders. There is universal agreement about the importance of cross-border research activity. Some emphasise open science, though in France and England a few interviewees qualified this, discussing research in terms of commercialisation. Other global outcomes are mentioned in particular countries, such as collaboration on ecology (this received less emphasis overall than might have be expected), and international student mobility. Some

interviewees in Canada and England question whether commercial international education constitutes a public or common good.

The standout countries in relation to discussion of global public and common good were China and Japan. In China the notion of *tianxia weigong* refers to goods that benefit everyone and require everyone's concerted contributions. Global public good(s) are seen as being for all people worldwide, and are associated with 'a community of shared future for mankind. Interviewees in China also criticised global power imbalances. In Japan interviewees emphasised the contribution of national culture to the world as a whole.

### **[Outcome of the transpositional analysis]**

The outcome of the transpositional analysis can be summed up as follows:

In all countries in this study, higher education contributes to the public good of national societies, under the auspices of the state. In most countries it is seen also to contribute to the common good of societies and communities. It generates multiple public goods, of which the contributions to equitable social opportunity and to collective knowledge through research and student learning are part of all systems. It also contributes to global common good through research. The public good role of higher education is not fully comprehended in state policies in all countries. Samuelson's economic notion of a zero-sum dualism of public and private goods in higher education is highly misleading. Private and public goods in higher education are interdependent, and Samuelson's notion permits only a narrow range of public goods in higher education. It is a formula for maximising capital accumulation by minimising public goods. However, that formula closely shapes higher education policy and funding in some countries and has varied policy traction in all systems. A generic worldwide understanding of public good in higher education is possible only if the public/private dualism in economics is set aside.