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Abstract of the keynote lecture:

## Current Trends in Higher Education: Norden in a Global Perspective

Higher education is still regarded as a public good in most countries of the world, although its contribution to socio-economic development has increasingly been questioned. Current trends posit that university level education becomes cheaper, more efficient, more competitive and responsive to economic and social needs. This discussion makes it expedient to pay greater attention to social and economic accountability in relation to the achieved results.

Against such a diagnosis of debates on the utility and role of university in society, the lecture will address the interdependency between changes taking place in higher education and the social development that conditions them and provides them with legitimacy. The current transformation in the Nordic countries, characterized by a renegotiation of the social contract and change of the welfare state model, is a case in point as it includes public policy reforms affecting the whole higher education sector.

The lecture will discuss examples of organizational and institutional changes resulting from public policy reforms in the domain of higher education. It will demonstrate how national discourses in the Nordic countries about the optimal relationship between the higher education sector and society have emerged. It will also show how new social and organizational models temporally and ideologically condition the on-going changes and reforms.

The current trends and reform endeavours in Nordic higher education will therefore be presented with regard to three variables: 1) the changing perception of the nation state as a competition state, 2) reconfiguring the Humboldtian ideal of scientific enquiry so that it matches the postulates of economic efficiency, and 3) the ability of applying hybrid steering mechanisms for institutions operating in higher education.

### **Key words:**

Scandinavia, Nordic region, comparative educational research, higher education reforms, public policy reforms