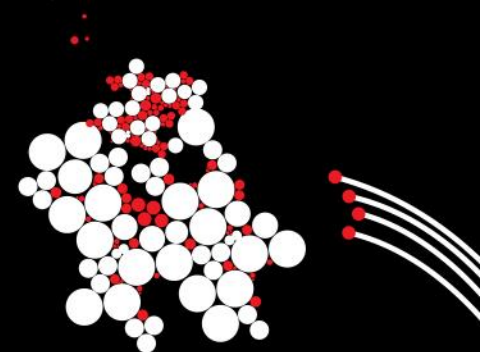


UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

# THE RELEVANTCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE

CONCEPTUALISATION & POLICY APPROACHES



Presentatie bij het VLIR seminar:  
De impact van universiteiten  
in Vlaanderen

20 december 2017

Hans Vossensteyn  
CHEPS



# HANS VOSSSENSTEYN

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- Director of **CHEPS**, Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente, the Netherlands
- Professor / programme leader at MBA Higher Education and Science Management, University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück, Germany
- Partner in the Erasmus Mundus programme:



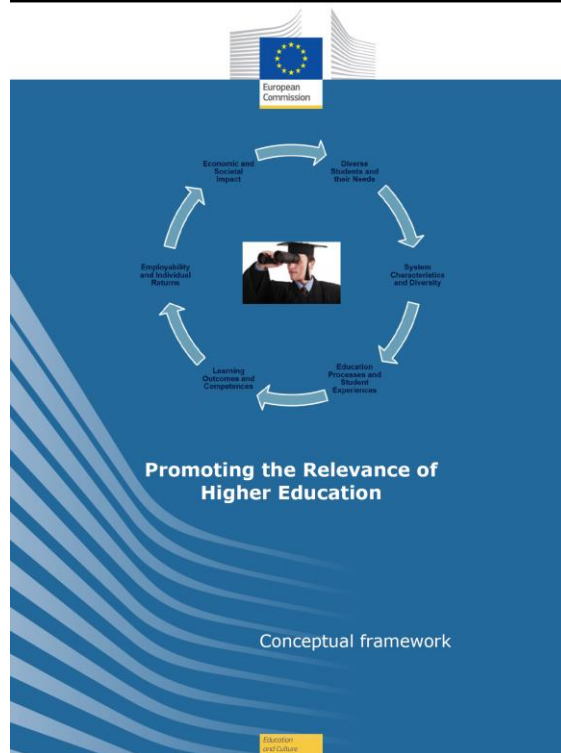
# OUTLINE

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- The study: “*Promoting the relevance of higher education in Europe*”
- The concept of the “relevance of higher education”
- Policy levers to promote the relevance of higher education
  - Typology
  - Interesting international examples
- Measuring the relevance of higher education
  - Indicators
  - Analytic and diagnostic tool
  - Relevance wheel chart

# HIGHER EDUCATION RELEVANCE

HEREL



## Promoting the Relevance of Higher Education: Trends, Approaches and Policy levers

*Main Report  
prepared by:*



Hans Vossensteyn  
Renze Kolster  
Frans Kaiser  
Jon File

Jeroen Huisman  
Marco Seeber  
Martina Vukasovic

Kai Muehleck  
Christoph Gwosc

# OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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- Objective of the HEREL project:
  - To provide a comprehensive analysis of the relevance of higher education (teaching) and how this is promoted in various countries in Europe
  
- Onderzoeksvragen:
  - How is HE relevance defined in different member states?
  - Which policy levers do member states use to promote HE relevance?
  - Which national relevance policies appear to be effective and good practice examples?
  - Which indicators are informative in assessing HE systems relevance?
  - How can an analytic and diagnostic tool help to make a systematic assessment of the relevance of HE systems?

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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- Literature review on definitions, dimensions and aspects of HE relevance
- Country fiches with broad overview of policy instruments (17 countries)
- Selection of 8 case study countries: Canada (Ontario), the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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- Case study selection criteria:
  - a relatively high number of country-specific policies for HE relevance;
  - already applied relevance policies for a number of years;
  - a well-documented record of past and present higher education policies;
  - a mix of countries in terms of addressing all three dimensions of relevance (personal development, sustainable employment and active citizenship);
  - a balance in size and regional distribution of European countries;
  - one non-European country that appears active and successful in promoting HE relevance.

# CONCEPT OF HE RELEVANCE

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- Higher education is relevant when it contributes to personal development, sustainable employment and active citizenship
  - **Personal development:** individual growth at the psychological, cognitive, social and moral levels
  - **Sustainable employment:** providing students with the knowledge and skills to secure and sustain suitable employment
  - **Active citizenship:** the development of (inter)cultural skills, a sense of citizenship, and political literacy and participation



# RELEVANCE FOR WHOM?

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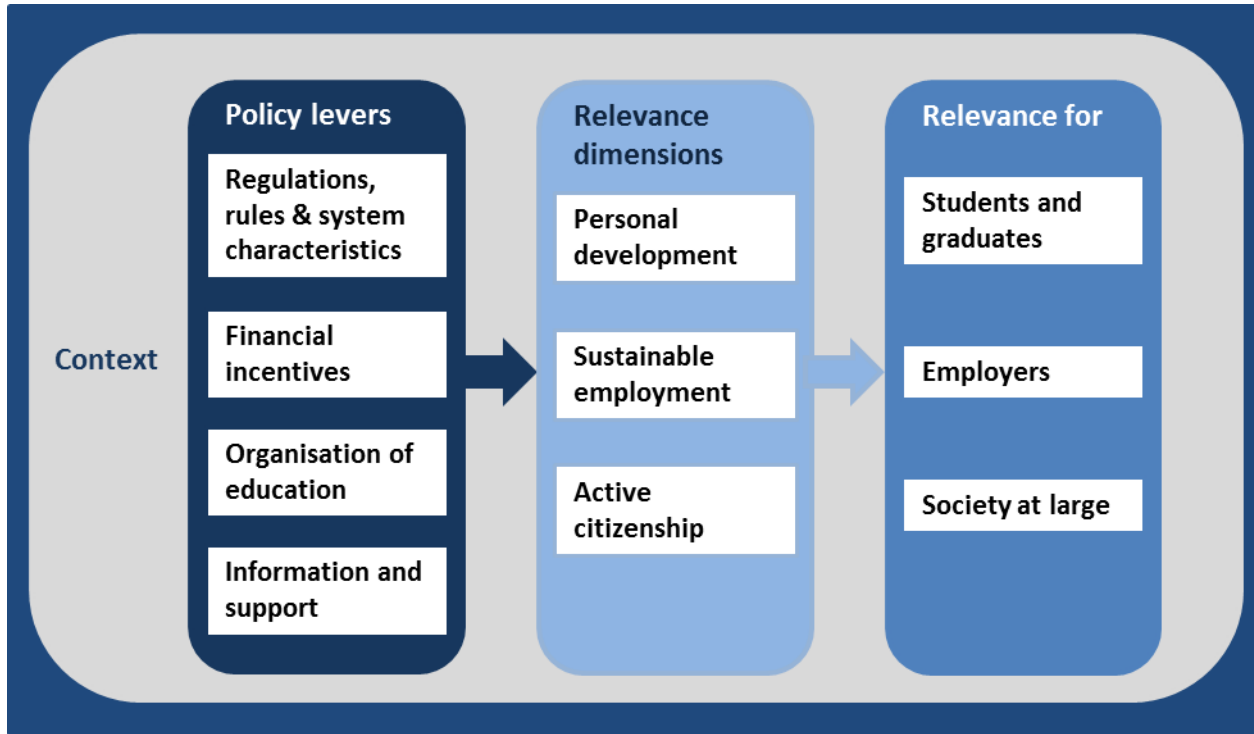
- Higher education can be relevant to various stakeholders
  - Students and graduates
  - Employers
  - Society at large

# POLICY LEVERS TO PROMOTE RELEVANCE

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- Regulation
  - Funding
- } “hard” or “strong” tools
- 
- Organisation
  - Information
- } “weak(er)” or “soft” tools

# ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK



# MAIN POLICY LEVERS: REGULATION

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- Regulated learning outcomes
- Quality assurance & accreditation
- Regulated study places & quotas
- Functions of sectors of HEIs
- Stimulated student engagement

# MAIN POLICY LEVERS: FUNDING

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- Relevance indicators in funding formula
- Large strategic budgets (conditions)
- Funds for special initiatives
- Incentives in student financial support
- Funds for specific target groups
- Performance agreements

# MAIN POLICY LEVERS: ORGANISATION

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- Student counselling and career guidance
- New types of degrees/programs
- Centres of expertise in innovation
- Access for specific target groups

# MAIN POLICY LEVERS: INFORMATION

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- Student satisfaction / engagement surveys
- Graduate / employer surveys
- Promotion of particular disciplines
- Student choice portals

# INTERESTING EXAMPLE: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Personal development in terms of “Bildung” in the Netherlands

A **renewed emphasis on personal development** emerges in the policy discourse. Various stakeholders as well as the national strategic plan for higher education (MinOCW, 2015) indicate that the strong focus on employability and skills for the future labour market – 21<sup>st</sup> century skills – should be balanced with **attention for academic development and critical thinking skills of students**. As such the term “**Bildung**” is reintroduced in the policy debate. Various stakeholders try to move public policy away from neoliberal thinking in terms of efficiency, outputs and performance and **revert to traditional values of educating critical, analytical and self-conscious individuals that can act as responsible citizens in a sustainable society**.



# INTERESTING EXAMPLE: SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

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## **Accreditation label for exceptional performance in employability in Spain**

Recently, upon the request of the Catalan government, the regional accreditation agency has launched a new *Acredita* procedure **assessing programmes in terms of their efforts and results regarding employability and internationalisation**. If both efforts (“enablers”) and results are outstanding, the programmes receives **a special label** (around 10% of the programmes).

# INTERESTING EXAMPLE: SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

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## **The Springboard initiative in Ireland**

As part of the Government's Jobs Initiative and part of the **Action Plan for Education 2016-2019**, the Springboard initiative was launched in 2011. The Springboard initiative **provides part-time places in higher education to unemployed who would benefit from re-skilling or up-skilling in areas of identified skills need**. Therefore, the initiative provides access to higher education for specific target groups with a focus on sustainable employment.

# INTERESTING EXAMPLE: ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

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## Curriculum changes supporting active citizenship in France

In 2015, a national plan for improving the student life on campuses has been presented (MESR, 2015). Several actions focus specifically on active citizenship dimension of relevance, including **(1) recognition of skills acquired through student associations or elected student governance structures, (2) flexibility when it comes to workload and examination modalities or (3) allowing for a study break** for up to one year for personal or professional experiences outside of the university environment.

# POLICY LEVERS: SOME CONCLUSIONS

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- A wide variety of policy levers used
- Most address sustainable employment
- Personal development & active citizenship often assumed implicitly
- Regulation and funding most known among stakeholders
- Limited monitoring of policy implementation and effectiveness

# INDICATORS ON RELEVANCE

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- A wealth of indicators (for each dimension)
- However, many are limited for active use due to:
  - No periodic measuring
  - Used in one country only
  - Definitions differ between countries and institutions
  - Causal relations difficult to prove

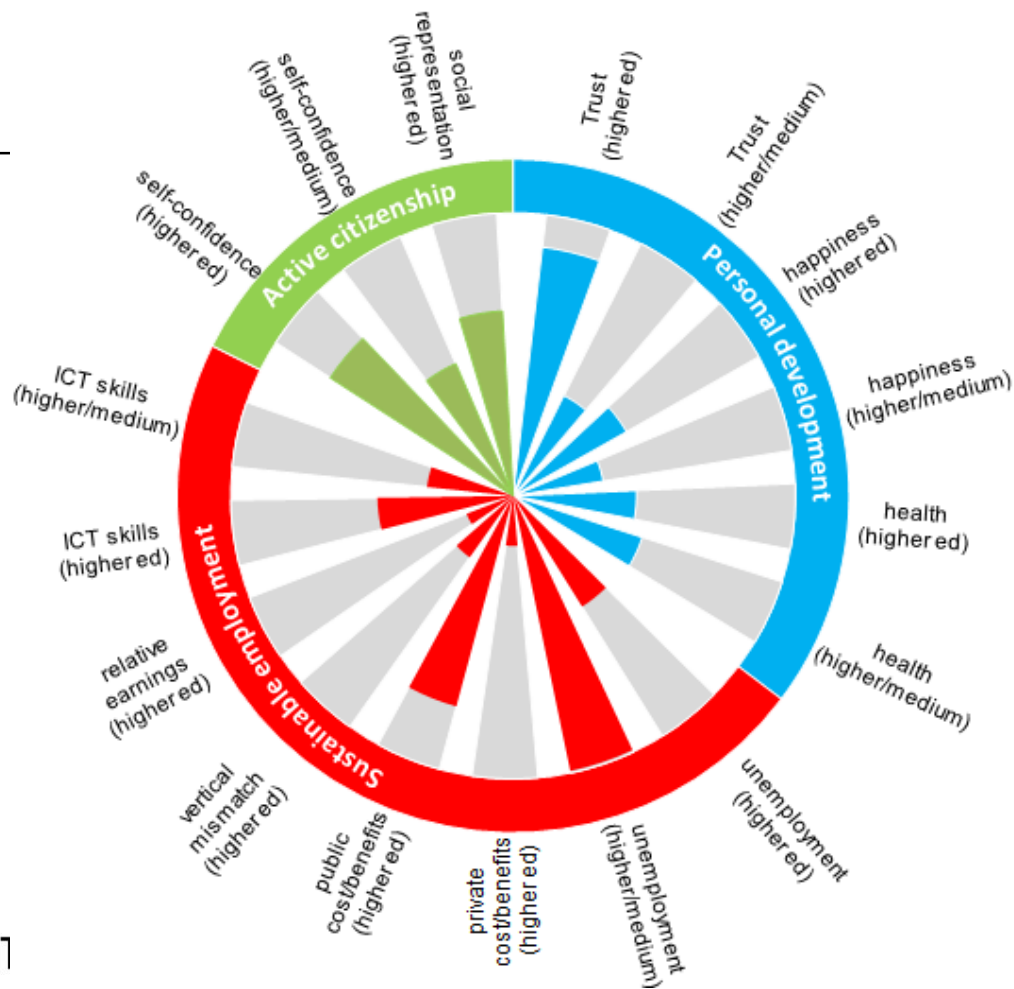
# ANALYTIC AND DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

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- Few system characteristics: first time entry, attainment, expenditure on (higher) education
- Policy levers applied (see before)
- Indicators showing outcomes of relevance (see “wheel chart”)

# WHEEL CHART

## Denmark



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION !

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## QUESTIONS / DISCUSSION

### Contact information:

Prof. dr. Hans (J.J.) Vossensteyn, University of Twente

Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS)

PO Box 217, 7500 AE ENSCHEDE, The Netherlands

tel: +31 - (0)53 489 3809

e-: [j.j.vossensteyn@utwente.nl](mailto:j.j.vossensteyn@utwente.nl)

inet: [www.utwente.nl/cheps](http://www.utwente.nl/cheps)