A POST-TALK SUMMARY · NIBS ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026 · IBA, KOLDING · MAY 2026

“Democracy, climate change and the world — none of my business, is it?”

If you watched the opening video, you watched Copenhagen disappear. That was the point.

These are the four trends already rewriting what business is. You do not get to sit this out.

1 DEMOCRACY

The far right is no longer a fringe story. It is the story — in the US, across Europe, in every election cycle that trades knowledge for fear. Fear lives where knowledge does not. Knowledge is the institutional product of higher education. Not an opinion but a job description.

2 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Autonomous agents already operate without direct human control. The scenarios inside the labs describe a race between two major AGIs — one US, one China — that can escalate up to nuclear conflict. The values baked into these systems reflect the geographies of the labs that built them, not the world that lives with them. We need to change that.

3 CLIMATE

The sentence heard most often on climate: "I am a small cog in a wheel. I do not matter." Scale that excuse across eight billion people and you have the problem. Higher education is the institution best placed to teach the global mindset the problem actually requires.

4 AGEING SOCIETIES

European populations are getting smaller and older. The internationalisation models built in the 1990s — young students, short mobility, growth assumption — do not survive that demographic reality or serve society. Older learners. Reverse mobility. Lifelong internationalisation. These are not add-ons but the core.

Four storms. Converging. Higher education can contribute to all of them — if it changes what internationalisation is for.

PART TWO · WHAT INTERNATIONALISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IS ACTUALLY FOR

IHES *Internationalisation in Higher Education for Society*

These are the four global trends. We will not solve them.

But we can contribute to solutions — if higher education stops treating internationalisation as prestige and starts treating it as infrastructure for society.

IHES reframes internationalisation as a social-purpose instrument, not a league-table device — with real effect sizes, real impact data, real methodology. Not strategy-document vibes.

PRINCIPLE ONE

1

Do not talk about internationalisation.
Talk about their problems.

The fastest way to lose your colleagues' attention is to start with your own framework. Start with their problem. A biology department does not need a strategy — it needs to know how a visiting researcher from Seoul sharpens their work. In their terms.

PRINCIPLE TWO

2

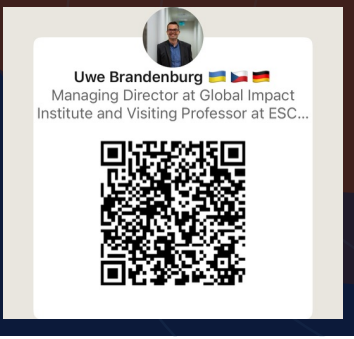
The Tom Sawyer Principle.
Delegate ownership. Do not police.

Aunt Polly told Tom to paint the fence. He made it look like the best thing anyone had ever been allowed to do — sold each of the next boys on a turn. Ten minutes of work, fence painted three times, a pile of boys' toys. Universities work the same way.

TWO THINGS BEFORE YOU LEAVE

1. **Leave your comfort zone.** None of the four storms stops at your discipline, department, or campus. Neither should your response.

2. **Find your Tom Sawyer friends.** You do not need everyone — just the first three or four who will paint the fence and sell the idea to the rest.



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