



## CHES lecture

Thursday, 10 April 2025  
5.15 pm – 7:00 p.m.  
followed by a reception.  
Collegium Helveticum  
Sternwarte  
Schmelzbergstrasse 25  
8092 Zürich

## Prof. Dr. Christine Musselin

CNRS research director, Sciences Po, Paris

## More competition and new cooperations in higher education:

The French case and implications for Switzerland

Moderation

## Prof. Dr. Mike S. Schäfer

CHES, Universität Zürich

**Competition and cooperation are key characteristics of higher education systems – and especially in Switzerland due to the system’s limited size and strong federal structure. Gaining insights into the experiences and challenges of other higher education systems can shed light on pressing issues in governance and policy. Christine Musselin’s CHES lecture contributes to this discussion.**

In France, higher education institutions have experienced numerous reforms, with performance becoming an explicit goal since 2005. As a result, various forms of competition have emerged. National competitive calls were introduced in the late 2000s under the supervision of the French Prime Minister, leading to a concentration of material, human, and symbolic resources in a select group of high-profile universities. Additionally, new categories of institutions have been established, notably Initiative d’Excellence (Idex) and Initiative Science-Innovation-Territoires-Économie (I-Sites). Because many of these competitive calls targeted institutional applications, university presidential teams increasingly took on the role of project writers and competitors.

However, competition also necessitates and fosters cooperation, as it creates new institutional categories and strengthens collaborative relationships among universities within the same category. For instance, Idex universities have formed a network called UDICE.

This talk explores the conditions necessary for fostering cooperation within a competitive framework. It also challenges the illusion of institutional actorhood on which the competitive model is based, highlighting how competitive schemes can, paradoxically, hinder universities from becoming strategic actors.

Finally, it will discuss whether the conclusions raised on the French case can be extended to the Swiss higher education system.

**Christine Musselin** is former Dean for Research at Sciences Po and a member of the Centre de Sociologie des Organisations, a Sciences Po and CNRS research unit in Paris, France. She leads comparative studies on university governance, public policies in higher education and research, state-universities relationships and academic labor markets, and has published several monographs on these topics. Her recent publications include “La longue marche des universités françaises” (2022, 2nd ed., Presses de Sciences Po), “University Governance in Meso and Macro Perspectives” (2021, Annual Review of Sociology), “New forms of competition in higher education” (2018, Socio-Economic Review), and “La grande course des universités” (2017, Presses de Sciences Po).

Das CHES will die Selbstreflexion der Hochschulen und der Wissenschaften stärken und die Herausforderungen thematisieren, welche durch die veränderten gesellschaftlichen Erwartungen von den zunehmend autonomen Hochschulen bewältigt werden müssen.