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### **Beyond Public-Private Dichotomy. Non-dualistic approach to study higher education**

Dualisms can be dangerous. They limit our ability to see and learn, simplify the picture of complex systems, making it impossible to perceive phenomena that do not fit easily within the given field. Most of all, they impede the realization of progressive changes. Their limited usefulness is particularly noticed during the investigation of what extends between the two ideological poles they create (Marginson 2007). Supported by various dualisms, the assumptions adopted in many fields of science hinder productive confrontation with the non-dual socio-economic and political reality (Dow 1990). Higher education research is bounded by all-pervasive power of dualisms – they are rarely questioned despite their proneness to critique and thus distort the research design and unable the clear understanding of complex higher education reality (Macfarlane 2015).

The most relevant categorical dualism organizing the major part of debates concerning contemporary transformations of higher education – the public/private distinction - is not different in this respect. A symptom of the problem is that the limitations of this conceptual pair often surface as the blurring or hybridization of these orders (Guzman-Valenzuela 2016) - their permanent fuzziness (Macfarlane 2015). This partially results from surrender of the sector to the market logic (Berman 2012), audit culture (Shore & Wright 2015), global, national and institutional competition for status (Reitz 2017), privatization or neoliberal reforms of the public sector (Olssen & Peters 2005).

Some scholars point out that the boundaries between these higher education orders are still clearly defined, and we can even observe the ongoing processes of de-privatization (see Kwiek 2016). Others have put much effort into complicating this binary picture (Marginson 2016). Marginson presented a framework for analysis by synthesizing the economic and political approach to public/private distinction in higher education. It allows for observing both changes and the current predicament of higher education systems. It is composed by four different Quadrants (organized along the axis of market/non-market goods vs. state/non-state goods). Activities from Quadrant 1 of his framework (sphere of production of non-market, non-state goods), however of crucial importance, remain underexplored and seems to constitute the reverse side of the impossibility of capitalist markets in higher education (Marginson 2013). The situation is paradoxical, as most of the constitutive activities of the higher education realm lay within this space beyond direct market/state coordination (Macfarlane 2017) and could be called the commons. Thus, in the end, the framework seems to allow us to grasp the contemporary hybridity of public-private and express a plea for re-publicization of higher education. Albeit Marginson emphasized that the concepts like common-pool goods have potential application in higher education (2016: 85), his attention, similarly to much of the attention of the field itself, is focused solely on the public/private distinction.

This study employs political ontology reflection and looks at the current debates within higher education research field to present the extent of the constitutive role of ideas in the determination of political outcomes (Hay 2006). Every political position with regard to

higher education and related, concrete activities are based on particular ontological decisions, and every ontology entails certain political consequences. Political ontology is thus a representation of the ontological (basic ontic and ontological guidelines, that reflects the core features of being and the modes of existence), which sets the framework for the functioning of actors and political institutions. Taken-for-granted status of this ontological decisions creates a problem with most of mainstream higher education research, that share the limits of liberal political ontology.

Limiting to a simple opposition between the public and the private is the most problematic when thinking about the future of the university. This paper assumes that the interlink between the public and the common creates a certain starting point for conceiving any viable alternatives to the current neoliberal status quo in higher education. Much has been written on destructive relations between the private and the public in higher education (Oliveira 2012). However, still little attention has been paid to the commons and the state in higher education, the public support and a bottom-up organisation of knowledge production within the university, or public infrastructure and a commons-based everyday reality of teaching, learning and knowing (Winn 2015). Lack of conceptual clarity severely contributes to this situation.

This research aims to fill this gap and clarify the various concepts of the common in higher education, as well as to map its' relations with the widely discussed concept of the public. The common is the most neglected aspect of the higher education and this has major consequences for the shape and the course of contemporary global and national politics of and within the higher education sector. This research opens a space for further operationalization of the concept of the common in empirical research, as well as for the reinterpretation of existing data and debates within higher education research. The paper offers an analytical non-dualistic framework (private/public/common) for understanding the dynamics within *glonacal* higher education. However, its main focus is placed on the pair of the public/common.

Based on extensive literature review the paper provides systematization and categorization of the use of the concepts of the common, the common goods and the common good *vis-à-vis* the concepts of the public, the public goods, the public good in higher education. The differences are further discussed with reference to concrete examples from higher education reality (at the levels of funding, governance, property relations, benefits from the higher education understood through the concept of the common).

Three different approaches to the public/common distinction has been identified in the literature on higher education: a) the common as indistinguishable from the public (eg Marginson 2016; Hazelkorn, Gibson 2017); b) the common as the productive supplementation of the public (eg Peters 2009, 2013); c) the common against and/or beyond the public (eg Roggero 2011; Neary & Winn 2016). Subsequently, three alternative political strategies for the alternative higher education has been drawn from these approaches: a) traditional social democracy; b) liberal progressivism; c) anti-capitalism of commoners and cooperatives. All these divisions will be broadened, deepen and revisited during the research stay.

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