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Global public and common goods in higher education (0283)

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Public good(s)

It is widely agreed that higher education contributes to the relational or public dimension of society, producing benefits not captured as private goods confined to individuals, but there is little clarity on what this means. The imputed private benefits of higher education, such as augmented earnings and employment rates associated with learning or degrees, are more readily counted and understood. *Public goods*, especially collective goods without plausible shadow prices, are a frontier problem in social science (Marginson, 2007, 2011, 2018).

In 'The pure theory of public expenditure' (1954) Paul Samuelson naturalises the public/private goods distinction. His 'public goods' cannot be produced on a profit-making basis in economic markets because of non-rivalry and/or non-excludability (e.g. curiosity-driven research). This identifies goods subject to market failure and dependent on government and philanthropic funding. The idea has been extended to the global level. Global public goods are 'goods with a significant element of non-rivalry and/or non-excludability and broadly available across populations on a global scale. They affect more than one group of countries' (Kaul et al., 1999, pp. 2-3). Global public goods in higher education include cross-border flows of knowledge and people, especially in research. However, whether a good is public or not often depends on how it is produced and distributed (e.g. student places in higher education can be either public or private goods). The review of public goods in higher education by McMahon (2009) confirms that economic externalities are partly assumption-driven and policy sensitive. Samuelson's definition does not fully comprehend either politically-defined goods, or collective goods.

In contrast, John Dewey (1927) defines social transactions as 'public' when they have relational consequences for persons other than those directly engaged, and become matters of politics and government. For Samuelson, public/private divide is a distinction between non-market and market production. For Dewey, the primary public/private distinction is between state political matters, and matters outside the state. The state/non-state distinction is the main definition in public discussion, while Samuelson's economic distinction is the main influence in education policy. Each definition throws some light on 'public' in higher education but neither is sufficient in itself. Marginson (2018) reconciles the definitions by placing them on two axes, creating four differing political economies of higher education: (1) non state and non market, (2) state and non-market ('public' in both senses), (3) state and market, (4) non state and market ('private' in both senses).

A third and distinct approach is the idea of the public as a large inclusive communicative space crossing over the non-market/ market and state/non-state boundaries. Habermas (1989) identifies a 'public sphere' between civil society and the state. His example is the salons, coffee houses and broadsheets of late seventeenth century London that together constituted public opinion and provided critical reflexivity for the government of the day. Calhoun (1992) and Pusser (2006) model the university as an incubator of social criticism. There is also the more diffuse notion of 'public opinion'; and the platform capitalist global publics of Google and Facebook, which are much larger than the national public sphere.

Common good(s)

Not all public goods are universally desirable – it is always necessary to ask the question ‘whose public good?’ – and some are desired by few. The war effort of an aggressive state is a public good in both the Samuelson and Dewey senses, but not a common good. *Common goods* are one kind of collective public good. These are institutions, programmes and actions that contribute to human community, embracing social solidarity, equality, human rights, democratic self-determination, social and geographic mobility (freedom of movement), or shared knowledge and conversation (UNESCO, 2015; Locatelli 2018). All of these can be advanced by higher education and/or research, though this is not guaranteed.

Deneulin and Townsend (2007) note that ‘shared action is intrinsic, as well as instrumental, to the good itself... its benefits come in the course of that shared action. Goods of that kind are... inherently common in their “production” and in their benefits.’ Common goods are normative but not immaterial. Like public goods, some common goods (e.g. equal social access to elite universities, science papers) are subject to indicator-based measurement.

For Deneulin and Townsend, ‘*global common good*’ is ‘participation of all persons in a diverse and differentiated, yet solidaristic and collaborative, world society’ (p. 29). The global research system is an open network in which cross-border collaboration exceeds the competitive interests of nation-states. The proportion of science papers with international co-authors rose from 16.7 to 21.7 per cent between 2006 and 2016 (NSB, 2018). The global science system is often more stable than the individual national science systems and increasingly drives their development (Wagner, Park and Leydesdorff, 2015).

The CGHE research

CGHE’s research finds that higher education in China is better described in terms of common good(s), than public good(s) because it is developing within a collective culture with shared values intrinsic to China (Tian and Liu, 2018). Different societies/cultures have distinctive notions of public and common goods (e.g. the various policy assumptions about tuition fees). Notions of ‘public’, ‘social’ and ‘common’, and the language and practices of relations between government, society, family and higher education, are nested in different political cultures. Core ideas of social responsibility and its locus, university autonomy and academic freedom also vary. No single tradition has all the answers, or measures.

The CGHE project is conducting comparative research on concepts, practices and measures of ‘public’ in contrasting higher education systems: UK, France, Finland, China, Japan, USA; with parallel research in Chile and Poland. The research will isolate similarities/differences among the national cases and use the comparative data to develop a *generic framework* for defining, observing, monitoring and where possible measuring public and common goods in higher education. Once the generic framework is devised, the next stage is compilation of standardised data. The distinctive approach of this inquiry is that it seeks to assemble a theoretical framework for research on the public/common good in higher education not solely from the literature, but partly through grounded theory-based empirical research.

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