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The public/private divide in higher education : a global revision

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Abstract

Our common understandings of the public/private distinction in higher education are drawn from neo-classical economics and/or statist political philosophy. However, the development of competition and markets at the national level, and the new potentials for private and public goods created by globalisation in higher education, have exposed weaknesses in the traditional notions of public/private. For example, (1) the statist notion that higher education is always/already a public good blinds us to its role in producing scarce positional private goods, even in free systems; (2) because there is no global state, both statist and neo-liberals model the global higher education environment simply as a trading environment without grasping the potential for global public goods in education ? goods that are subject to non-rivalry or non-excludability, and broadly available across populations, on a global scale. Yet higher education in one nation has the potential to create positive and negative externalities in another; and all higher education systems and institutions can benefit from collective systems e.g. that facilitate cross-border recognition and mobility. The paper sets out to revise public/private in higher education. Rather than defining public/private in terms of legal

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ownership, it focuses on the social character of the goods. It argues that public/private goods are not always zero sum and under certain conditions provide conditions of possibility for each other. It proposes (a) units in national government that focus specifically on cross-border effects; (b) global policy spaces ? taking in state agencies, individual universities, NGOs and commercial agents ? to consider the augmentation, distribution of and payment for global public goods. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Marginson, Simon, E-Mail: simon.marginson@education.monash.edu.au