

# CGHE Webinar Series

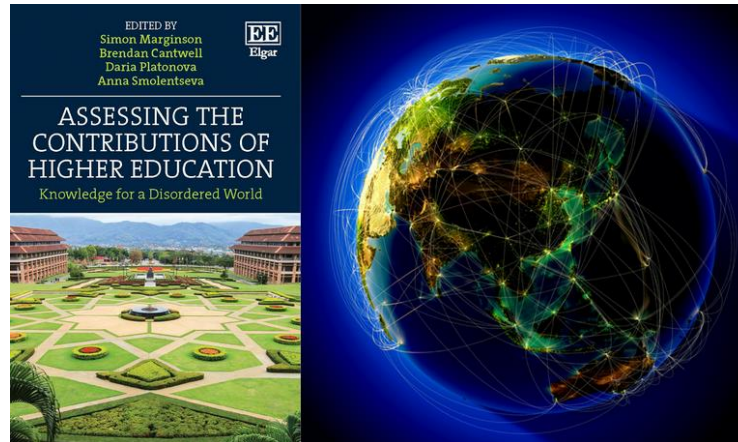
## The contributions of higher education 3: Global ecology and the common good

21 March 2023

“UNESCO’s common good idea of higher education and democracy”

(Chapter 10)

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# Introducing Chapter 10

- Higher education produces and provides conditions for the production of a broad range of social, economic, cultural and political outcomes
- Social science struggles to theorise and observe this complex empirical terrain.
- The public/private distinction was not designed to explain higher education

# Massification, stratification and privatisation

- The massification of higher education has put pressures on public finances.
- Many states have responded by
  - (a) engineering a partial shift of costs from government to households or
  - (b) privatising institutional provision.
- Unless egalitarian government policies are in place, the hierarchical structure of educational provision and the social hierarchy tend to reinforce and reproduce each other.
- High participation systems of higher education increasingly come to resemble society as a whole (Marginson, 2018).

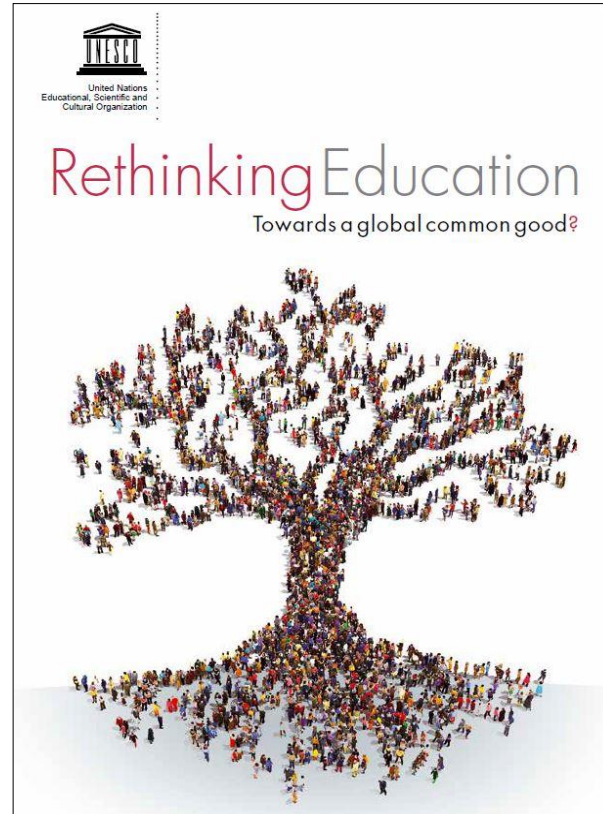
# UNESCO and higher education as a public good

- UNESCO's concerns and priorities for the higher education sector: commodification (WTO-GATS); ensuring public responsibility; quality and inclusion
- The public good to be delivered through policy oversight not a government funding monopoly  
(UNESCO policy documents and communiqués between 1998 and 2009)

# Rethinking Education

Towards a global  
common good?

(UNESCO, 2015)



# Public goods vs common goods

- Common goods **exceed the more instrumental concept of public goods**. Unlike public goods, which can be enjoyed as individual goods, common goods require forms of collectivity and *shared governance* both in their production and enjoyment (Taylor, 1995);
- Common goods are **grounded in the cultural and social dimensions of community** and identified for their contribution to the general interest (Deneulin & Townsend, 2007);
- The concept of common goods at the micro level is related to the macro-level idea of *the* common good, 'understood in terms of social solidarity, social relations based on universal human rights and equality of respect' (Marginson, 2016).

# The UNESCO's framework: political implications

- Larger role for civil society
- A continuing role for the state in regulating access and quality in the private sector

... A balancing act but with an inherent ambiguity

- It may be more difficult to guarantee equality in this framework than in one based on state provision. State willingness to regulate non-government sectors varies from country to country.
- This framework offers a new basis for social responsibility among private actors and a grass roots system for monitoring their embeddedness in shared projects.

# Common goods' approach and the role of the State in different contexts

- This framework transcends the problems inherent in the zero-sum public good framework.
- Its flexibility enables collective values to be pursued in a range of different societies with varying approaches to the role of the State.
- It is more consistent with the organization of higher education institutions in not highly marketised societies (such as China).
- The idea of the 'common good' based on active communities, resonates with the traditional collectivism and shared communal values of Chinese society (Marginson & Yang, 2022).



# The concept of higher education as a common good

- Strengthens **participatory and deliberative processes** (Locatelli, 2019).
- Emphasises the **intrinsic and societal value** of higher education institutions while calling into question the utilitarian model of higher education as an individual socio-economic investment.
- Favours a **humanistic approach** and highlights the purpose of higher education institutions, that is, to extend human understanding through the three functions of *teaching, research* and *community engagement*.
  - Quest for knowledge: shared endeavour and responsibility
  - Pursuit of learning as a co-operative enterprise (Oakeshott, 1989)
- Fosters the diversity of worldviews and knowledge systems.

Thank you for your attention