

# Knowledge Societies, Higher Education and Political Cleavages: Paradoxes in Search of Explanations

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Politics, populism and  
paradoxes...

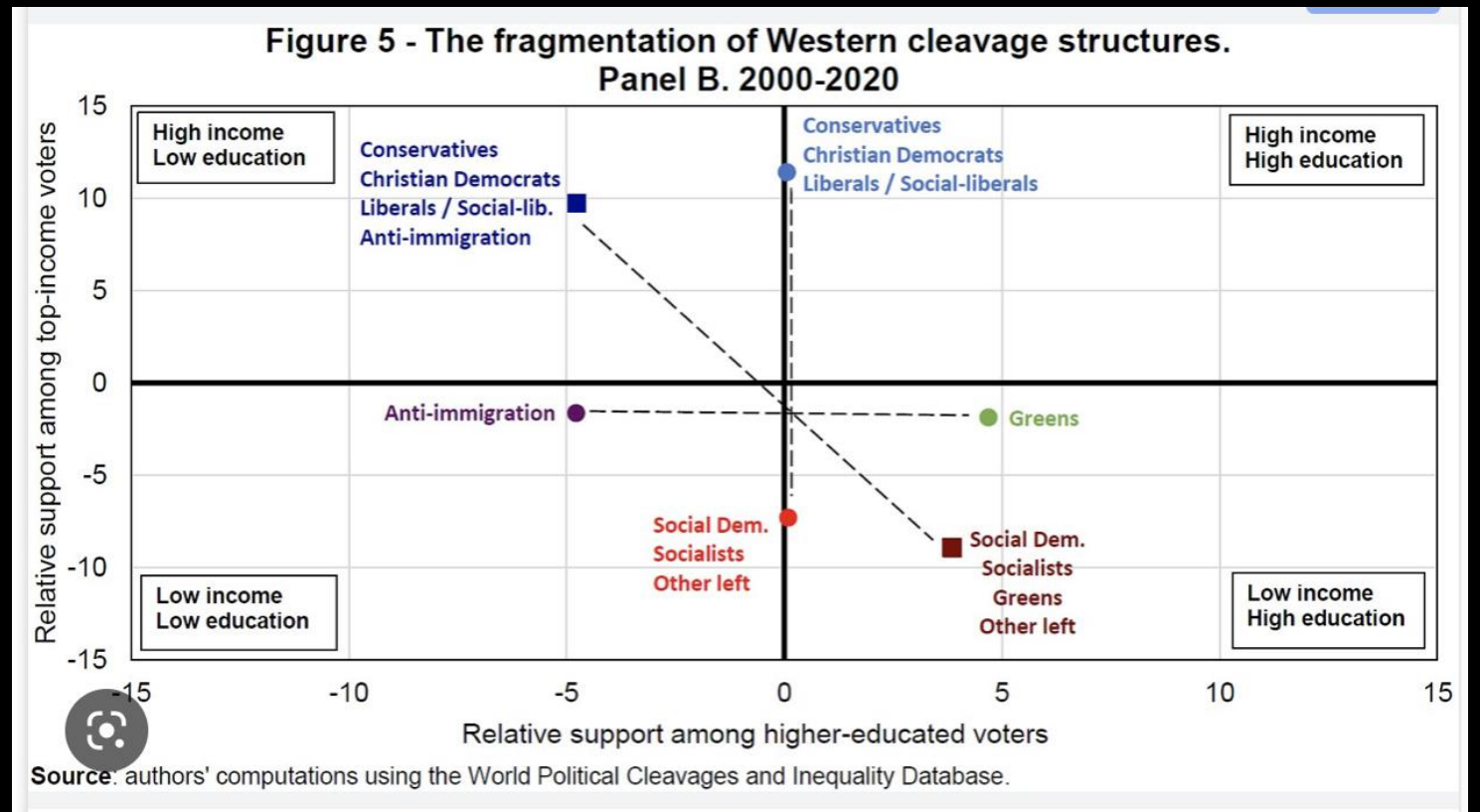
# Educational cleavages...(Bovens & Wille 2017)

Tell us what your highest diploma is, and we will tell you who you are and what you do. If you are a university graduate, you will watch public television, such as BBC or Canvas, and read 'quality' papers, such as *The Guardian*, *Die Zeit*, or *Libération*. You will do your utmost to get your children into a public school in the UK, a Gymnasium in Germany and the Netherlands, or one of the Grandes écoles in France. You will spend your holidays in an apartment in Tuscany, on a *camping écologique* in the south of France, or walking a coastal path in Britain. You will live in a university town, a green pre-war suburb, or in the nineteenth-century, gentrified parts of the inner cities, such as Prenslauer Berg in Berlin, De Pijp in Amsterdam, or Notting Hill in London. You will be moderately in favour of the European Union, worry about climate change, the state of higher education, and xenophobia, and vote for a Green or social liberal party.

On the other hand, if your educational career ended after junior high school or primary vocational training, the chances are that you will watch commercial television, such as *SBS*, *VTM*, or *ITV*, and read tabloid papers—if you read any newspaper at all—such as *The Sun* in England, *Bild* in Germany, or *BT* in Denmark. Your children will attend a local state school in the UK, a large *ROC* in the Netherlands, or a *lycée professionnel* in France. You will spend your holidays in a caravan at a local campground, make day trips to the seaside, or you will board a charter flight to a holiday resort in Spain or Turkey. You will live in former industrial areas and manufacturing towns, in the post-war satellite cities, such as Marzahn in Berlin, Lelystad in the Netherlands, or Slough in England, or, in the twentieth century, outskirts of the major cities. You will be sceptical about the EU, worry about crime and immigration, and vote for a nationalist party, or perhaps not at all.

# Piketty – level of education (credential) key to cleavage

## Brahmin Left/Merchant Right



# Kitschelt and Rehm (2022)

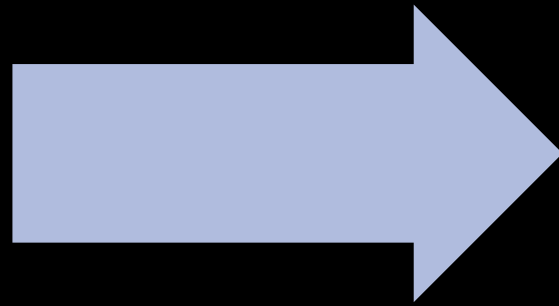
- Use education and income as the two key variables – INCOME (progressive versus conservative dimension to economics) and EDUCATION (libertarian versus authoritarian dimension to politics) to analyze the realignment process in countries transitioning from industrial to knowledge societies.
- High education low-income voters moved to the left and low-education high income the bedrock of right parties.
- The old core groups – low-income low-education and high-education high-income have become the two cross pressured voter groups.

# Oesch (2006; 2016)

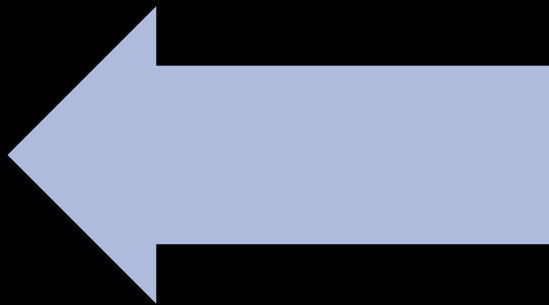
- Old social class frameworks for analysis are not useful as tends to reflect the occupational system typical of high industrialization.
- Over past 30 years seen growth of the services sector, rising female employment and expansion in welfare state.
- This has given rise to shifts in the employment structure.
- The salaried middle classes are now more differentiated(not a monolithic block) who experience different work logics.
- 'Interpersonal work logic' (versus technical or organizational) in employees assumed to be employed by the state (care, education, health) linked to left voting.

# Questions...

Is the rise in levels of higher education across different societies a consequence of the transition to a knowledge society, in turn transforming values, political alliances, and voting behaviour?




Do left-right shifts in voting patterns represent a realignment, and new cleavage, along education lines And if so, what are the implications of this?





And, if level of higher education is a key variable in voting left...

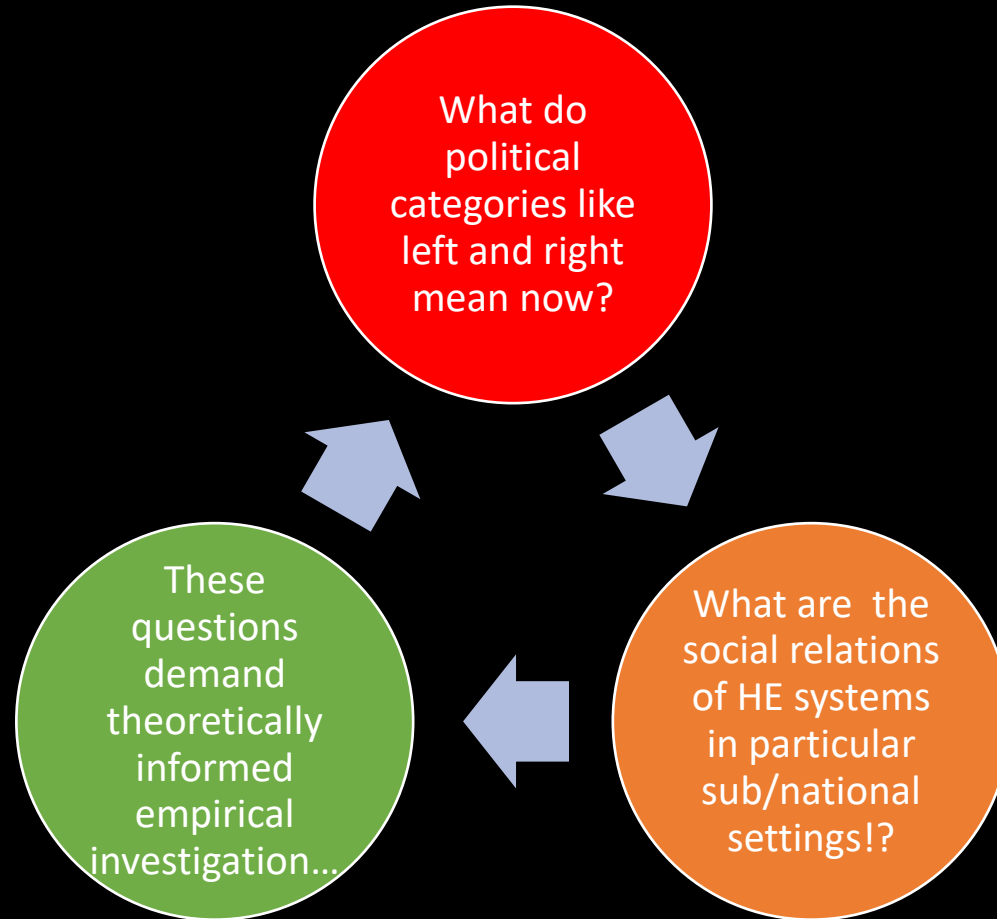


Would the promotion of greater access to higher education be a means of stimulating a shift to a left political agenda?

# Problematizing these accounts...

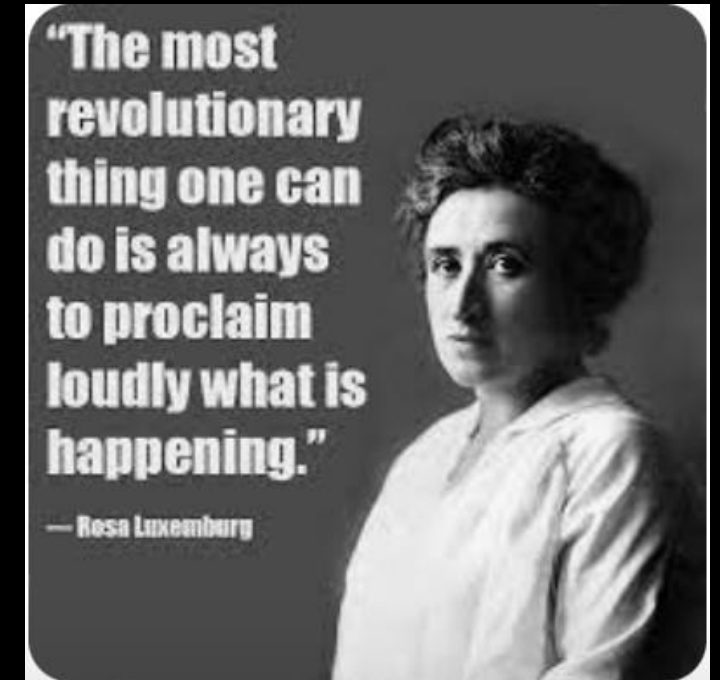
1. These are a teleological, cosmopolitan, views of the knowledge society as an inevitable shift from industrialisation to a new mode of production (Kitschelt and Rehm 2021).
2. Second, the work logic tied to the rise of people-to people occupations (Oesch 2006) are assumed to be part of the state and presumed to engender a left politics. In market societies, many of these occupations are part of the privatised social policy sector.
3. Third, higher education is black boxed and placed beyond ideology. Mijs (2021) shows that in highly unequal societies, neoliberal meritocracy is used as justification for success.
4. Fourth, treating higher education as a 'variable' (the holder of a higher education qualifications, or not), along with income, makes invisible the dynamics Luxemburg (1951) points to in *The Accumulation of Capital*: capitalism is dependent on expanding into new spheres of social life whose dynamics include *commodification* (education as consumption), *differentiation* (stratification/value/worth), *imperialism* (international markets/brain drain), *precarity* (zero hours contracts/indebtedness), and *militarism* (securitisation/policing of free speech/knowledge espionage).

# More questions? A different account....



# The Accumulation of Capital - Luxemburg

- The accumulation of capital, as an historical process, depends on non-capitalist social strata and forms of organization.
- Imperialism and use of force
- The ongoing realization of the surplus value (profit) depends on outside consumers.
- *Internal* and *external* markets – the internal market is the capitalist market; the external market is the non-capitalist social environment which absorbs the products of capitalism and provides producer goods and labour power for capitalist production
- Dialectical conflict – assimilates the conditions that can ensure its own existence.



# HE in England – the making of a market society (Leys 2003)

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## Success as a Knowledge Economy:

Excellence, Social Mobility  
Choice



Department  
for Business



‘Knowledge’ society or knowledge economy  
(or education services)?



# Headline facts and figures - 2020

Summary

[Table](#)

Total revenue of education related exports and transnational education (TNE) activity in 2020 (in billions)

**£25.6**

Up from £25.4 billion in 2019

Share of the value of total education related exports and transnational education activity accounted for by Higher Education in 2020

**76.3%**

An increase of 6.3ppts from 2019

Percentage increase in total education related exports and TNE activity from 2019 to 2020

**0.8%**

A decrease of 7.0 ppts from 2018 to 2019

Total UK revenue from education related exports and transnational education (TNE) activity was estimated to be **£25.6 billion in 2020, an increase of 0.8% since 2019** in current prices. Since 2010, estimated UK revenue from education related exports and TNE activity has risen by 61.2% in current prices.

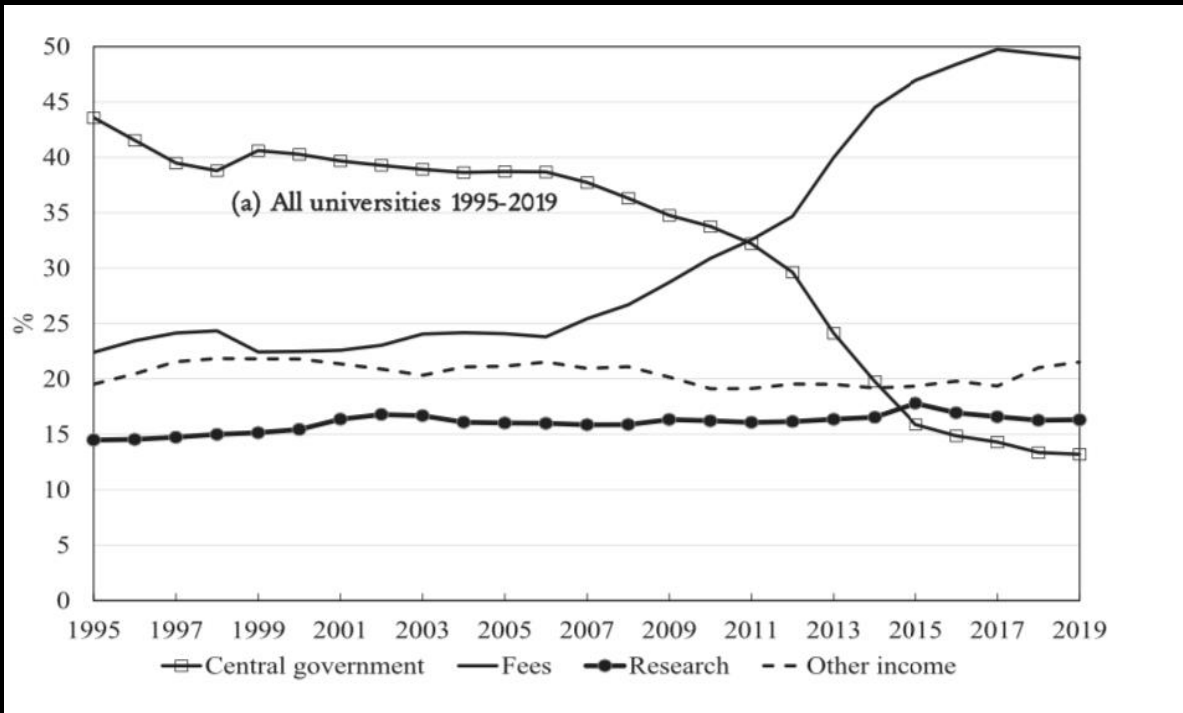
Total UK education related exports were estimated to be £23.3 billion in 2020 and have increased by 57.5% in current prices since 2010. UK TNE activity was estimated to be £2.3 billion in 2020 and has grown by 112.9% in current prices since 2010, albeit from a lower base.



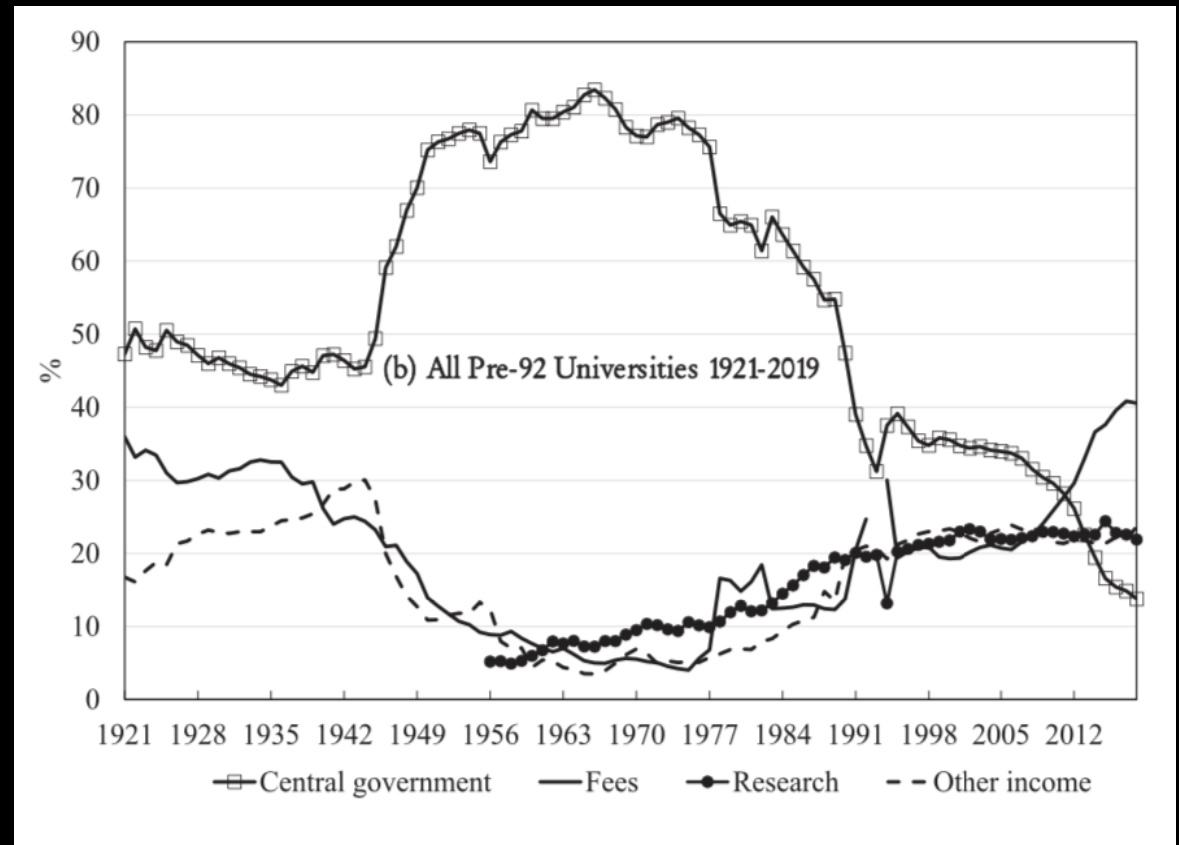
As Balibar (2019) notes....

“...theorists of human capital (such as Gary Becker) introduce *credit* as an essential investment to broaden the range of possibilities for individuals without a patrimony, which is presented as a democratic corrective.

Democracy then goes along with mass indebtedness, which is not just an ideological masquerade but an effective instrument to include a growing number of people in the process of valorization through training”



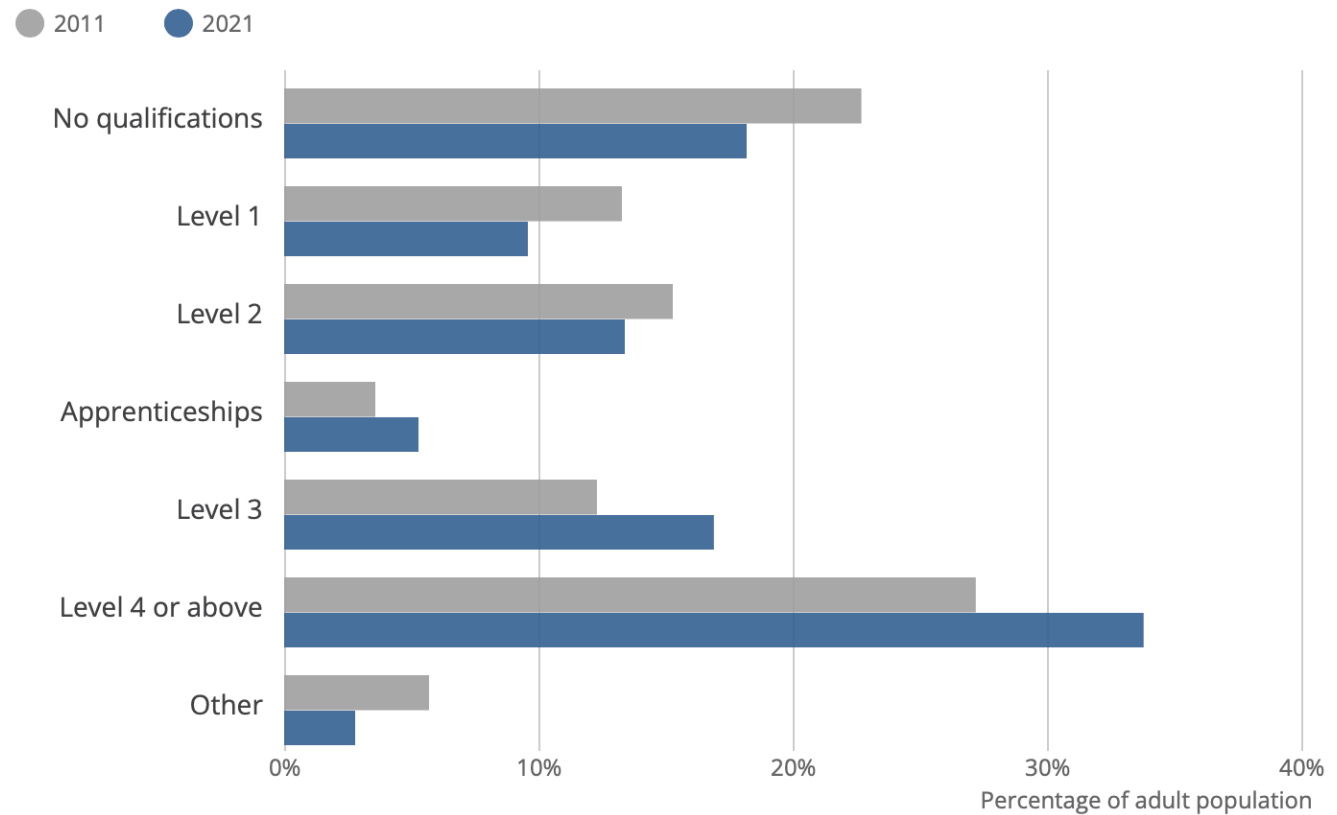
Source: Vincent Carpentier (2021) Three stories of institutional differentiation: resource, mission and social inequalities in higher education, Policy Reviews in Higher Education, 5:2, 197-241, DOI: 10.1080/23322969.2021.1896376



2021 Census  
Results on Levels  
of Education ( ONS,  
2023)

**Figure 2: In 2021, the most common highest level of qualification was at Level 4 or above across England and Wales**

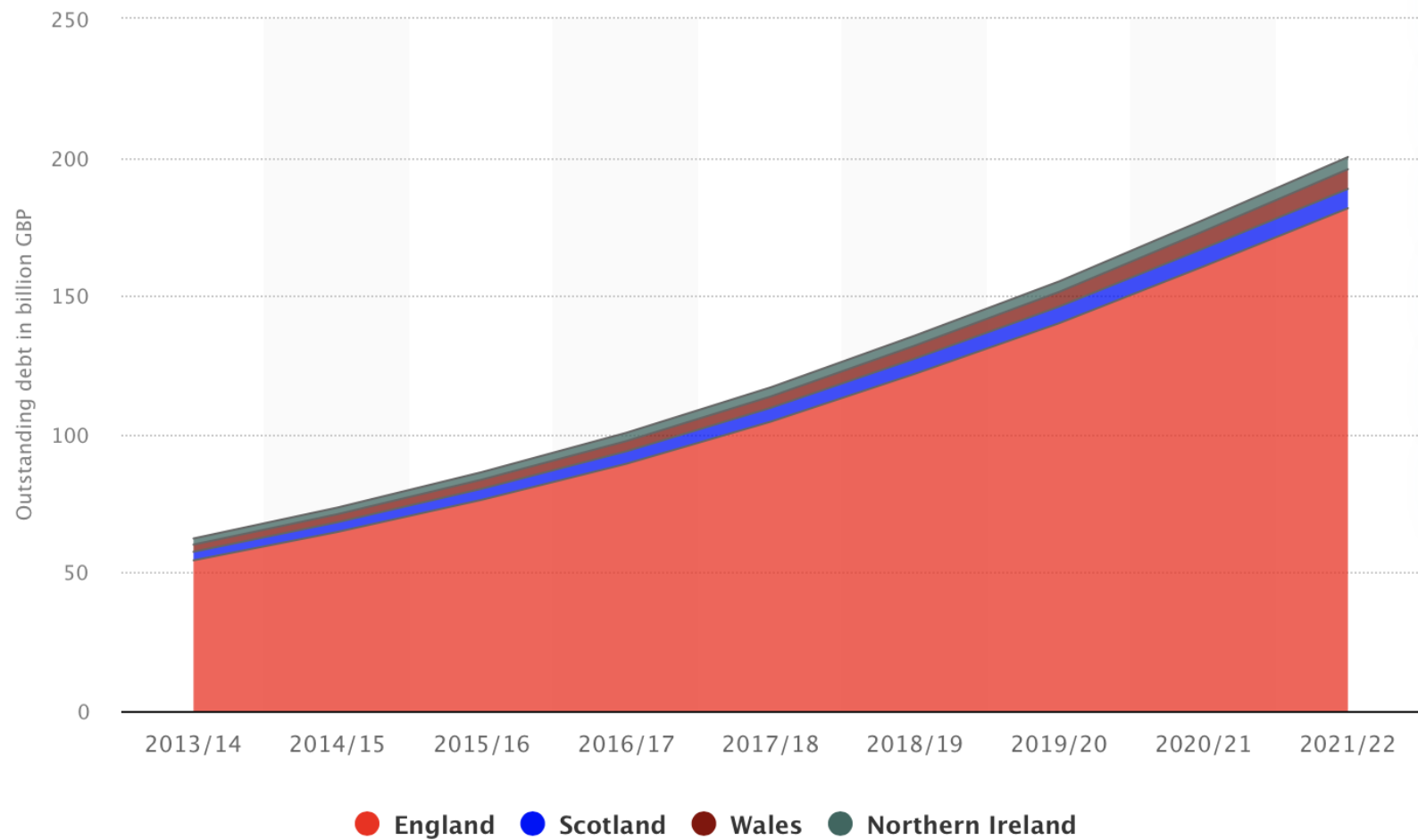
**Highest level of qualification, usual residents aged 16 years and over, 2011 and 2021, England and Wales**



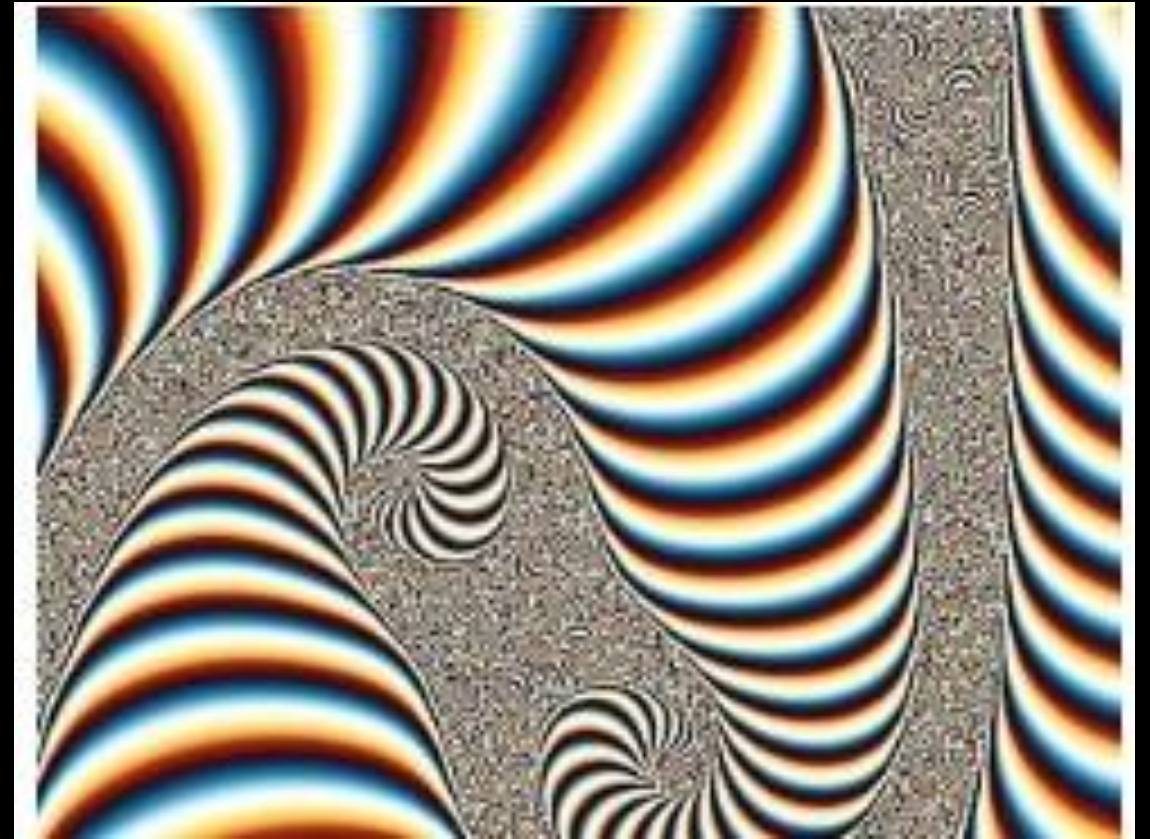
Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

# Outstanding debt of student loans in the United Kingdom country

(in billion GBP)



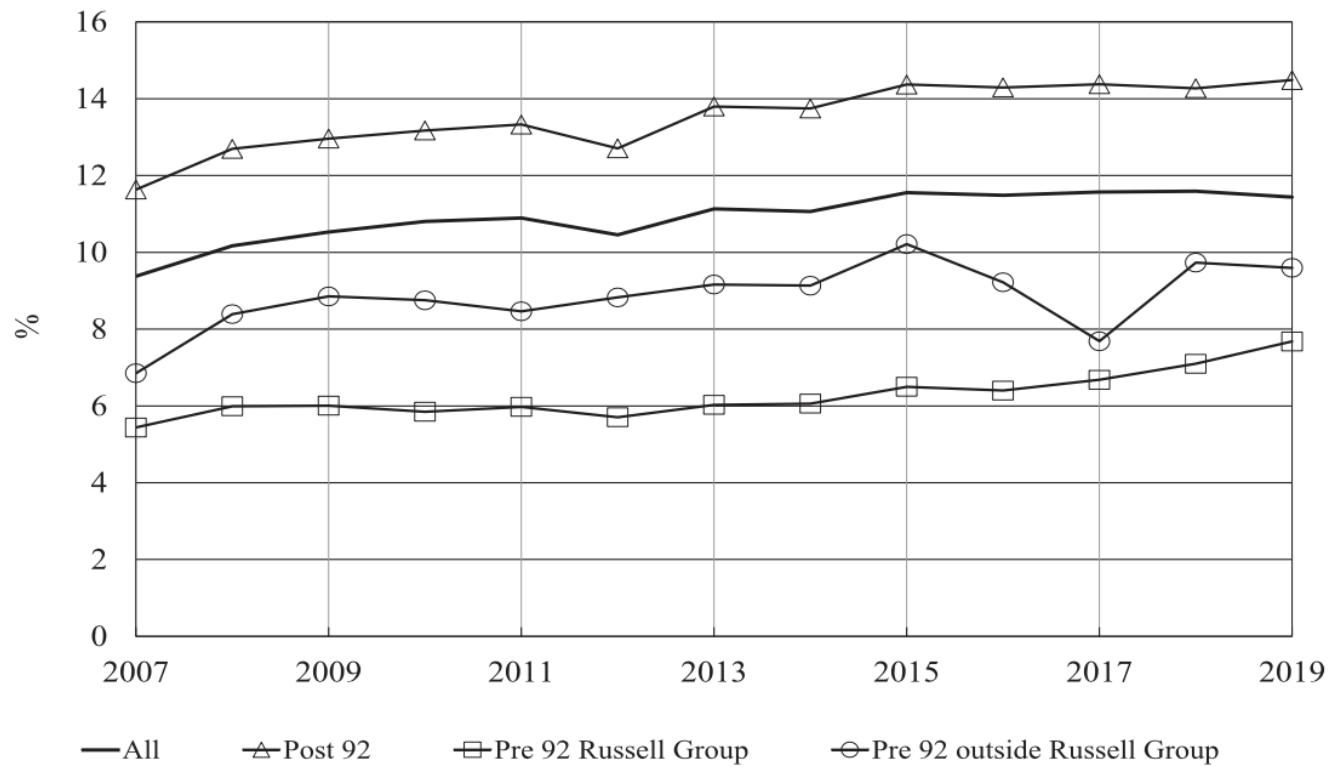
'vertical vision's  
cognitive and affective (competition) economy  
(Robertson 2022)



# The optimistic cruelty of Hayek's market society...Ibled 2022



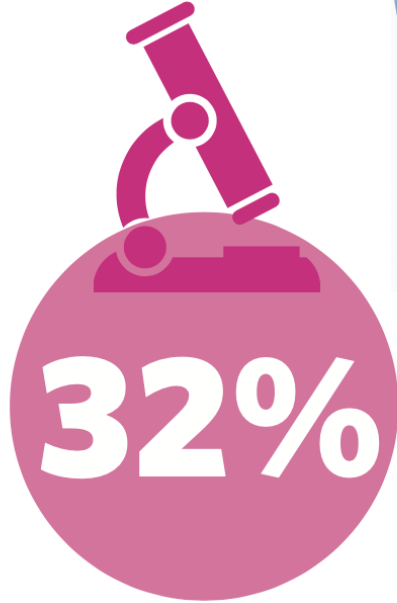
Vincent Carpentier (2021) Three stories of institutional differentiation: resource, mission and social inequalities in higher education, *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, 5:2, 197-241, DOI: 10.1080/23322969.2021.1896376



**Figure 19.** Percentages of young full-time first degree entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR) by type of Institutions, 2007–2019. Sources: HESAd (2003–current).

# The academic job family 2007/8 - 2019/20

The increase in the number of academic staff on **research-only contracts** over the last 12 years



70%

The increase in the number of **teaching-only contracts** in the last 12 years



The increase in the number of **teaching & research contracts** in the last 12 years

9%





**CPNI**

Centre for the Protection  
of National Infrastructure

# TRUSTED RESEARCH

GUIDANCE FOR SENIOR LEADERS

## Trusted Research

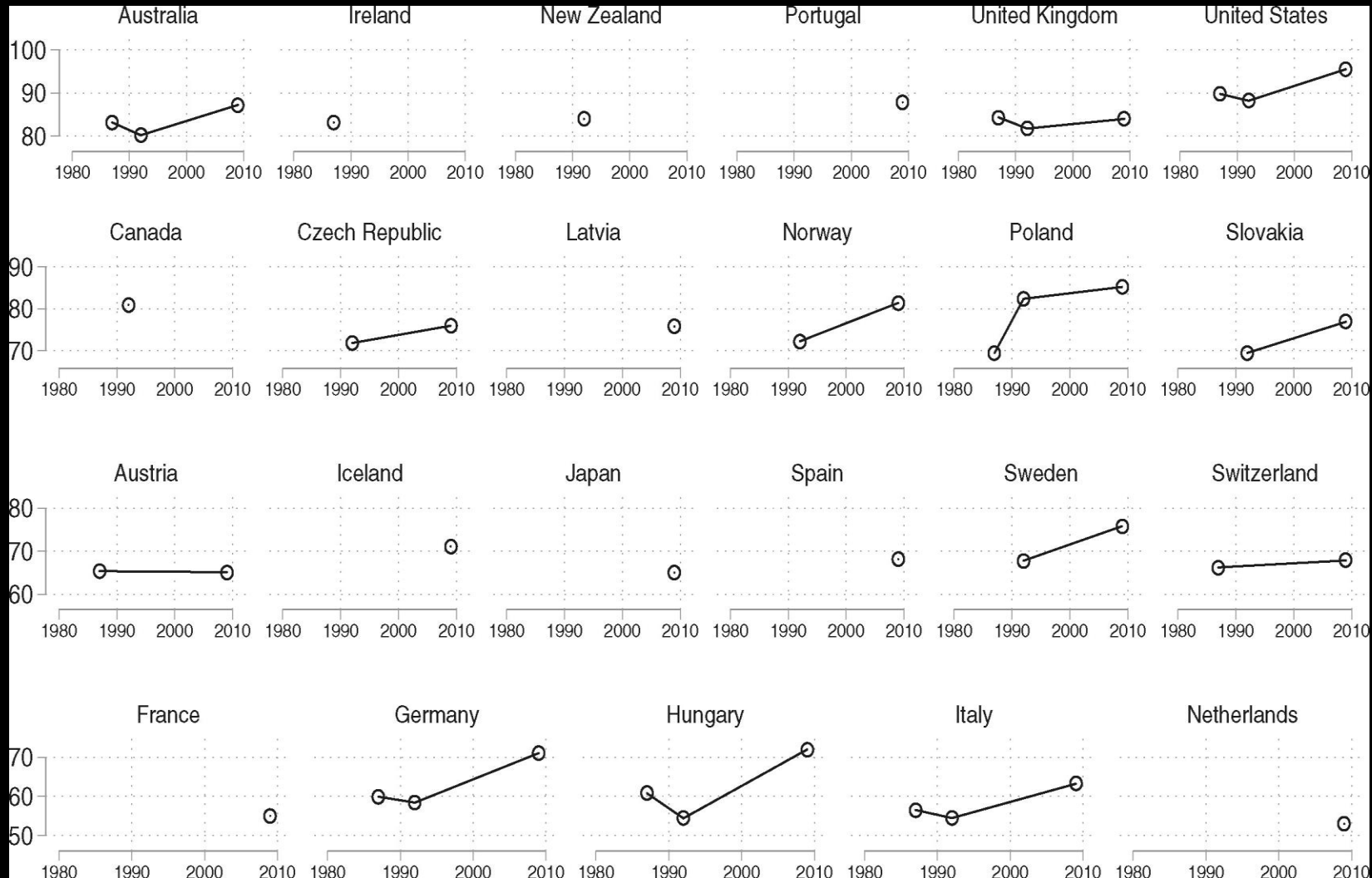
### Checklist: Evaluating research proposals

Answering the following questions may help you evaluate new research proposals.

#### About new partners

- Why does a partner want to work with you?
- What are they expecting in return for their financial support or involvement?
- Is the organisation associated with a country which may be viewed as hostile to the UK or one which has different democratic and ethical values from our own?
- Has due diligence into the partner identified any involvement in research on behalf of the military or police with links to a hostile state?
- Set within the context of any information gained from due diligence, could your research be misused or have unintended applications which would be negative?
- Are there any legal, regulatory or university policy constraints on undertaking your research with this partner?
- Having considered the answers to the above questions, are there potential reputational or ethical risks to you or the university?
- Does the decision about this research need to be escalated within your department?

**Figure 1** Belief in meritocracy across countries over time.  
 Note. Indicated on the vertical axis is the approximate ...



Explanatory Categories	Modalities of Privatising			
	'in'	'of'	'over'	'through'
<b>Definitions</b>	Bringing the discipline of the market into universities	Ownership of once state-owned institutions and activities	Ownership remains with the capitalist, various kinds of asset-based rentiership	Ongoing interiorisation of competitive (private) individual at the heart of the market society
<b>Relationship to capital</b>	Mimetic of profit-driven capital'; discipline the "socially necessary labour time"	HE now a services sector as part of the wider economy	Finance and venture capital; platform capitalism	Homo-economicus; entrepreneur; competition
<b>Forms</b>	New Public Management	Outsourcing of key functions; transfer of ownership	Asset forms include IP, financing, fee for service, publishing, Pension Funds	Human capital contracts Peer-to-peer lending Entrepreneurship programmes Global rankings
<b>Key concepts</b>	Performance indicators, efficiency, outputs, competition Primitive accumulation	Unbundling, outsourcing to access spheres that generate greater surplus value	Rents, service agreements, devices of obligation, brokers – innovations in services	Valorisation Competition Domination Total subsumption Human capital Self as (economic) property
<b>Indicative Authors</b>	Hood 1991 Deem 1998	Ball and Youdell 2007 Ball 2007 Komljenovic and Robertson 2016	Christophers 2019 Birch and Muniesa 2020 Komljenovic 2021 Tellman 2022 Gabor 2021	Friedman 1982 Angebauer 2019 Salmon 2020 Davies 2018 Ibled 2022 Balibar 2019
<b>Paradigmatic Order</b>	<b>Washington Consensus</b>		<b>Wall Street Consensus</b>	

Table 1: Conceptualising Modalities of Privatising of HE and Relationship to Capitalism

**Table 2.** Market as a Means versus Market as the End.

	Market as a Means	Market as the End
Mode of acquisition	Direct acquisition from the environment	Acquisition from others
Form of exchange	Exchange oriented toward obtaining goods for particular uses	Generalized exchange by using money (any convention that represents a unidimensional quantity)
Wealth	Heterogeneous assemblage of tools	Homogeneous mass measured in money
Economic activity	Oriented toward concrete, limited ends	Oriented toward a limitless end
Valuation	Incommensurable values arising from distinct domains	Collective presupposition of a uniform standard of value

# Conclusions

- HE needs to be analysed in the context of C21<sup>st</sup> capitalism and its accumulation strategies – from primitive to new (fictitious commodity) markets;
- Globally competitive knowledge economy strategies set the stage for core country's accumulation strategies (imperialism/cognitive empire) to expand internally and externally (globally) into new spheres
- Inside-outside, frontstage/backstage, dynamics are central to the analysis.
- Balibar (2019) describes this as 'absolute capitalism', requiring 'total subsumption' - ongoing commodification in relation to production (capacities to labour), consumption (credit/indebtedness), and self-making.
- New commodities like education – produce means for the productive sector (reproduction) as well as the subjects themselves (Balibar 2019) where individuals not just exploited but transformed into neoliberal meritocratic entrepreneurs (Mijs 2019)
- How to unmaking this process? For Luxemburg it involves spontaneous and organized politics tied to, but going beyond, imagination, involving the masses, strategies like strikes, and connecting the political with the economic.

thankyou

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