

University of Chile, 16 May 2017

The public role of higher education: A critical review and a new idea

Simon Marginson

Professor of International Higher Education, UCL Institute of
Education, University College London, UK

Director, ESRC/HEFCE Centre for Global Higher Education

Three questions about public good

1. Is the public/private line a distinction between
 - non-market or market forms of education (economic distinction),
 - state or non-state controlled education (political distinction)?
2. What are 'public goods' in higher education? How are they defined, observed, measured and improved?
3. Is there a common understanding of public/private in higher education across the world?

Economic definition of public/private—based on market vs. non-market production

Samuelson (1954)



Public goods are non-rivalrous and/or non excludable. They are under-produced or unproduced in economic markets. All other goods are private goods

Economic public goods: non-rivalrous and non-excludable

- Goods are non-rivalrous when consumed by any number of people without being depleted, e.g. knowledge of a mathematical theorem, sustains use value everywhere, globally, indefinitely, on the basis of free access
- Goods are non-excludable when benefits cannot be confined to individuals, e.g. clean air regulation, defence
- Private goods are neither non-rivalrous nor non-excludable. They can be produced, sold and bought as individualised commodities in economic markets. *This public/private distinction is between non-market production and market production*
- Research is primarily a public good. Teaching/student places can be either public or private; depends on policy

Political definition of public and private—state vs. non-state

- “The line between public and private is to be drawn on the basis of the extent and scope of the consequences of acts which are so important as to need control, whether by inhibition or by promotion... The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions”

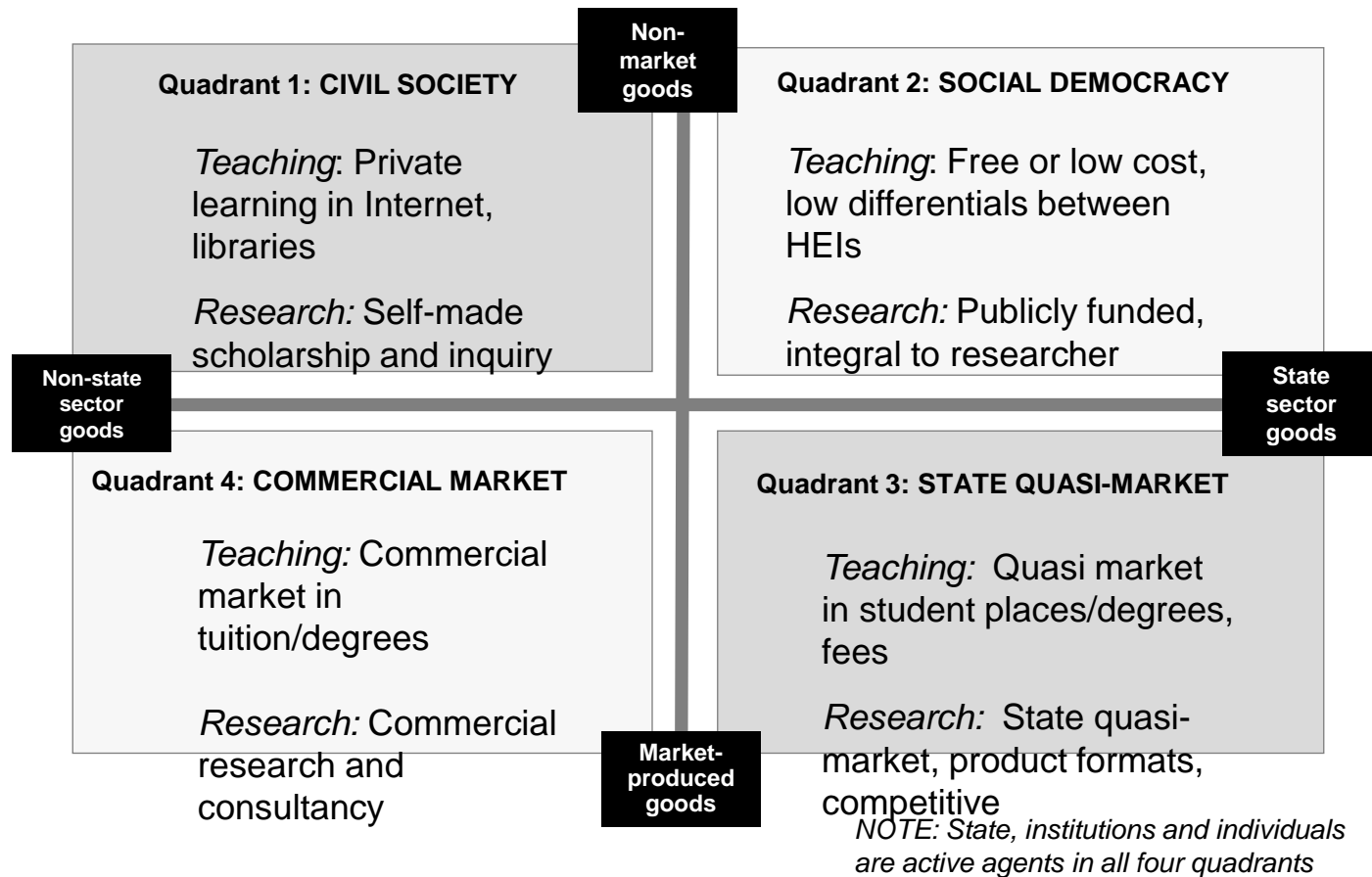
~ John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 1927, pp. 15-16

- Matters with ‘consequences’ for others include market transactions, organisation of education systems, etc
- *This public/private distinction is between state-controlled and non-state controlled production*

Putting the two definitions together

- The economic distinction is non-market vs market
- The political distinction is state vs non state
- For Paul Samuelson higher education is public, unless it can be produced in a market outside the state. For John Dewey public or private is decided by states and/or democratic communities
- The economic and political definitions each have virtues, but also gaps, and each is ambiguous
- Putting them together creates four unambiguous categories (four political economies) that can be used to explain higher education and research

Public and private goods: four political economies of education



Global public goods

- ‘Global public goods are goods that have a significant element of non-rivalry and/or non-excludability and made broadly available across populations on a global scale. They affect more than one group of countries, are broadly available within countries, and are inter-generational; that is, they meet needs in the present generation without jeopardizing future generations.’

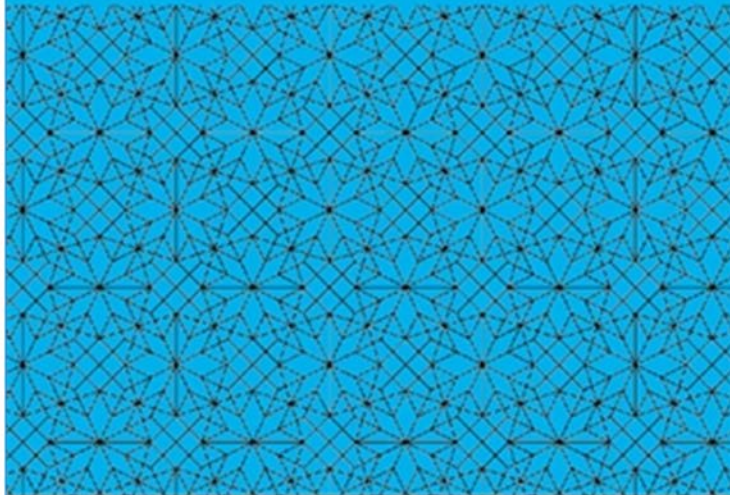
~ Inge Kaul, I. Grunberg and Marc Stern (Eds.), *Global Public Goods: International cooperation in the 21st century*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 2–3

Common goods

- A particular kind of political public good. Collective and relational goods, goods that provide for social solidarity, equity, democratic self-determination, and social and geographic mobility in populations
- The provision of higher education on the basis of equal social opportunity and maximum social mobility is one such common good

HIGHER EDUCATION
AND THE
COMMON GOOD

SIMON MARGINSON



 MUP | ACADEMIC

Published 19 December 2016,
Melbourne University Publishing
<https://www.mup.com.au/items/199659>