

Optimal conditions to teach for the public good in higher education as a field of studies and research

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1. From an economic perspective: What are public and private goods?

Public goods: Non-rivalrous and non-excludable

Private goods: Rivalrous and excludable

Common goods: Rivalrous and non-excludable

Club goods: Excludable and non-rivalrous

	Excludable	Non-excludable
Rivalrous	<i>Private goods</i> (food, clothing, cars, personal electronics)	<i>Common goods</i> (fish, stocks, timber, coal, national health service)
Non-rivalrous	<i>Club goods</i> (cinemas, private parks, satellite TV)	<i>Public goods</i> (free TV, air, national defense)

Public and private goods (in terms of subtractability and excludability)

Public goods are characterized by very low levels of subtractability and excludability. Low subtractability implies that a good is available to all consumers at the same time, and consumption by one consumer does not use up or reduce the supply available for another consumer. Low excludability implies that if a good is provided to a consumer in a defined region, then other consumers in that region cannot be easily excluded from consuming the same good. An example of a pure public good is national security, which is available to all citizens of a country simultaneously. Public goods are generally provided under public ownership, although several can be provided, through contract and regulation, under private ownership. If only one third of an institution's budget is provided for by a national government, is the institution really a 'public' institution?

Private goods are characterized by high levels of subtractability and excludability. Subtractability means that one person's consumption of the good reduces the quantity available to others. Excludability means that the producer can restrict use of the product to those consumers who are willing to pay for it, while excluding those who do not meet this or other criteria. Private goods can be produced under private ownership or under public ownership. Except under special circumstances, for example, production in conditions of natural monopoly and where the government lacks the capacity to regulate, production of private goods increasingly is undertaken under private ownership (Source: Asian Development Bank http://www.adb.org/documents/guidelines/Eco_Analysis/glossary.asp. Retrieved: 5 November 2010)

2. Higher education as a public good

- Higher education as non-compulsory education. Age-group participation in SA currently around 15% (Melck 2009)
- Higher education as a paid-for 'service' to society and the role of post-apartheid politics (Hall 2010)
- Higher education as knowledge transfer and production (Lategan 2009)
- Higher education as a driver for socio-economic and scientific development (Castells 2009)
- Higher education as a contributor to public goods (Waghid 2009).

3. Higher education studies and research

- Postgraduate courses and programmes that assist students/lecturers/researchers/administrators to understand higher education at a systems level and to work in and contribute to higher education at institutional and other levels of practice and research.
- Involve a number of main approaches, thematic domains and sub-fields of study and research (see Bitzer & Wilkinson 2009).

4. How can we teach in HE studies to optimally contribute to (the) public good(s)?

- By understanding the complex relationship between HE and society and to assist students of HE towards some understanding in this regard.
- By assisting academic staff to incorporate community-related strategies and pedagogies in their teaching and research. Importantly, these should be reciprocal relationships that benefit both society and HE, both students and communities.
- To direct assignments and research projects to explore HE as a public good and in particular to explore HE as a public good in a developing country such as SA. Also, to understand how HE and institutions can optimally contribute to the international good.

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