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The political economy of public-private good of open, distance, higher education institutions in South Africa

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The thrust of this article is on the issues of who pays, who should pay and who benefits from open distance higher education in the current context of global competition, on the one hand, and the widening of participation, social equity and redress, on the other, in South Africa. The discussions emphasise the public-private good dichotomy, as well as social and private returns and how open and distance higher education promotes social equity and efficiency. The article explores the extent to which open distance higher education promotes the widening access for previously disadvantaged groups and improvement of social and economic equities.

Die politieke ekonomie van die publieke-privaat bate van hoër oop-afstandsonderrig-instansies in Suid-Afrika

Die kern van hierdie artikel is die kwessie van wie betaal, wie moet betaal en wie voordeel trek uit toeganklike afstandsonderrig in die huidige konteks van globale kompetisie aan die een kant, en die verbreding van samewerking, sosiale ekwiteite en regstelling in Suid-Afrika aan die ander kant. Die basis van bespreking is die openbare-private bate-tweedeling, asook die sosiale en private omset en die vraag hoe toeganklike en afstandsonderrig in hoër onderwys sosiale ekwiteit en effektiwiteit bevorder. Die artikel ondersoek die mate waarin afstandsonderwys meer toeganklik vir agtergeblewe studente gemaak kan word en die verbetering van sosiale en ekonomiese ekwiteite.

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The issues of who pays, who should pay and who benefits from public higher education delivered by means of open distance higher education within the public-private good debate tend to be dominated by traditional economic models of human capital that sometimes underplay social historical and cultural discourses.[1] Consequently, policies on equity, the public-private good of higher education, the social and private good of education, as well as education as investment or consumption are often analysed in terms of the discourses of quantitative economic models that prioritise efficiency, cost-effectiveness and predictions (Cohn & Geske 1990, Psacharoupoulos & Patrinos 2004).

Critics of quantitative traditional approaches to analysing costs and benefits, as well as the public and private good argue that these policies need to be tempered with notions of the indivisibility of costs and benefits and the corresponding private-public good dimensions of higher education (Blaug 1972, Ramphela 2000: 39, The World Bank 2002). This article examines the subject of who pays, who should pay and who benefits from higher education services provided through the open and distance mode of delivery in South Africa using the University of South Africa as an example. The discourses of whether this type of education is an investment or a consumption, how open distance higher education is a public and private good, and how open and distance higher education promotes equity and efficiency are used to frame the discussions in this article. The following key aspects are explored: the discourses on equity and the social justice of open and distance higher education; complementarity between the public-private good of higher education; the indivisibilities between the social and private returns, and the extent to which higher education, provided by means of open and distance learning, can promote democracy through its 'neighborhoods'/'externalities'.

The key features of the mission) that make the University of South Africa (Unisa)distinct from institutions that offer contact tuition can be summarised as follows. First, the Department of

1 *Cf* Bourdieu 1984: 119 & 2007: 48, Cohn & Geske 1990, Keswell & Poswell 2004, Ziderman & Albrecht 1995: 35.

Education has declared Unisa as a comprehensive dedicated distance education that uses open distance higher education to achieve its vision. Secondly, as the leading institution providing open and distance higher education nationally, on the African continent, and internationally, Unisa intents to provide cross-border provision developed by the national Department of Education; maintain an ongoing, responsive interaction with current and emerging national and international imperatives and developments with relevance to quality ODL provision, as well as promote and advance social justice with an emphasis on redress, equity and empowerment of the previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa such as blacks, women, people with disabilities, the rural and urban poor and adults who have missed out on opportunities to access higher education. Despite these distinctive features of this institution as an open and distance higher education, however, the admission to academic programmes is matriculation as in the case of contact institution. Admission requirements at Unisa are still more restrictive when compared with those of Britain's Open University where students can enter the mainstream through the recognition of prior learning (Unisa 2008).

1. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

The discussions in this article emphasise the discursive paradigm (Zahrai 2009) of global competition and corresponding efficiency and cost-effectiveness, the seeming permeation of ethos, values and business (Deem 2001), in general, and in higher education in South Africa, in particular, as well as Bourdieu's (1984) notions of cultural and social capital, Foucault's (1970) episteme, and Lyotard's (1984) postmodernism. The latter refers to a period characterising the end of grand narratives or metanarratives of modernism. Postmodernism therefore resonates with Foucauldian episteme in that they both refer to approaches that transcend the tenets of modernism that assume that there is only one way of viewing reality. Accordingly, the postmodernist approach seeks to understand not in terms of pre-established rules but

taking cognisance of the multiplicity of reality and therefore diverse interpretation of phenomena. These chosen frameworks depart from the common practices that focus exclusively on the classical models of the economics of education characterised by quantitative procedures and the calculation of costs, benefits and returns purely from an economic perspective. These frameworks allow for robust discussions on the impacts of cultural, social, class and philosophical imperatives of the public-private good of open and distance higher education. While Foucault's frame provides a platform to explore power relations of open distance higher education and its public-private good dimensions, Lyotard's helps, through his notion of perfomativity, to clarify the profit motif of open distance higher education.

Bourdieu's (1984) notions of cultural and social capital are useful for framing discussions on the public-private dimensions of higher education, as well as the social and private benefits of open distance higher education. The term "cultural capital" refers to non-financial social assets, be they educational or intellectual, which might promote social mobility beyond economic means (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977 & 1979). Cultural capital is not transmissible instantaneously such as a gift or bequest; rather, it is acquired over time as it impresses itself upon one's *habitus* (character and way of thinking) which, in turn, becomes more attentive to or primed to receive similar influences (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Social capital, on the other hand, refers to the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing "a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships" of mutual acquaintance and recognition or to membership of a group which provides each of its members with the backing of collective own capital (Bourdieu 1984: 119). In opposition to Marxist analysis, Bourdieu criticises the primacy given to the economic factors and stresses that the capacity of social actors to actively impose and engage their cultural productions and symbolic systems plays an essential role in the reproduction of social structures of domination.

Bourdieu warns about the hidden dominance of cultural capital in early years encompassing family background and socio-economic context, by stating that "differences in cultural capital mark the differences between the classes" (Bourdieu 1984: 277 & 2007). Accordingly, cultural capital, social capital and economic capital are to a large extent shaped by social origin, though acquired cumulatively over time. It is thus necessary that "one has to take account of all the characteristics of social conditions which are (statistically) associated from earliest childhood with the possession of high or low income and which tend to shape tastes adjusted to these conditions" (Bourdieu 1984: 177 & 2007). The genealogical kinship relation, as part of the social capital, is the product of the network of relationships of investment strategies, individual or collective, conscious or unconscious, aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term.

Echoing Bourdieu's thesis, Finlay (1987: 336-7) argues that the discourses of distance education are often underpinned by the implicit determinism of economics, politics, technology and social issues, and this has direct bearing on the discourses of the public-private good. This is understandable because, given the social construction of distance education decision-making, such discussions and the resulting decisions tend to be characterised by reaffirmations of the status quo. Conversely, Finlay (1987: 336-7) argues that the analysis of these discourses should rather reveal the dominance of economic, political, social and technologically determined decisions over educationally determined decisions in the development and implementation of distance education policy.

2. Competing private and public good of distance education

The debate about who pays or should pay and who benefits from higher education provided through distance education, and discussions about the private or public good of this type of

education are more complex and problematic than educational services provided by means of contact education.

Notions of public and private good are slippery and relative because whether a service is classified as a public good depends on the policy in question, since the public good in a democracy is merely the democratically negotiated social class of its citizens, developed and modified in civil society (Jonathan 1997: 59-67). Thus, the concept of 'public good' is often peppered with references to notions of public interest and social progress, social well-being and national interest (Jonathan 2002: 91).

According to economic theory, a good service is public if it is non-trivial and non-excludable (Samuelson 1954). Non-rivalry consumption implies that my consumption of a good does not prevent others from consuming it. Non-excludable implies that it is too difficult, if not impossible, to limit access to a certain good. Private goods do not satisfy the stringent conditions of public goodness. The key elements of public good are the intrinsic nature of the given good, the public goods it produces, the social purpose it serves, and the initiation of markets or what is widely known as market failures in the production of such goods.

Unlike pure public goods, such as defence and clean air, higher education is neither non-exclusive nor exclusive. It is generally agreed that the benefits include a more informed electorate, a population better able to take care of itself and a labour force better equipped to contribute to economic progress that extends beyond the student (Breneman & Nelson 1981).

Higher education helps to promote democracy and therefore increases public participation in a knowledge-based society (Ramphela 2000: 39, Psacharoupoulos 2004: 76). It is generally acknowledged that these externalities may have been underestimated in empirical studies, thus creating, in effect, artificially low social rates of return. Educated people are well positioned to be economic and social entrepreneurs and, consequently, have a far-reaching impact on the economic and

social well-being of their communities (Ramphela 2000: 39, The World Bank 2002: xxi, 76-7).

Knowledge, as the central product of universities, may thus serve as a classic example of a non-rivalled good. Higher education sits uneasily between public and private good requirements (Johnstone 2003, Nyborg 2003, Tilak 2009). If consumption is interpreted as the consumption of benefits from education and not as the consumption of a good *per se*, education satisfies both essential features; the spread of benefits from an educated person cannot be restricted to a small population, nor is the quantum of benefits received by some affected by the levels of benefits (Breneman & Nelson 1981, Enders & Jongbloed 2007, Tilak 2009). It is within this context that Adam Smith, the harbinger of the private-public dimensions of education, argues for the public funding of education because of its individual, private and many public and social benefits (social, political, cultural and demographic). The social benefits flow across borders, making higher education an international public good (Naert 2004).

However, some critics have raised a contrasting view relating to the excludability of higher education (*cf*, for example, Barr 2004, Enders & Jongbloed 2007). Enders & Jongbloed (2007), for example, mention that scientific knowledge may be eroded in publications in a language that is only accessible to a limited community of scholars in the field who have previously invested in the capacities needed to understand this language. Similarly, access to taught knowledge is certainly restricted because, given that student places are often limited, my consumption prevents that of others, including financial barriers and higher tuition fees, from access to elite universities. Accordingly, it is argued that universities provide services that are not public goods, as some exclude students participating and benefiting from these services, as argued earlier (Barr 2004).

In addition, stricter entry requirements may prevent certain prospective students from entering higher education. If places at higher education institutions are limited, it may be considered to be a private good, but for the majority of courses, students do take

modules without excluding others. If students' entry requirements are met, they can obviously take the course offered and in this respect, then, education is a public good. However, high tuition fees may also exclude some students from entering university and, in this sense, higher education can be regarded as a private good (Ntshoe *et al* 2008).

The discussion above reveals that private good services confer personal privileges on people who possess them (private rate of returns) (Kwong 2000: 7). Therefore, a university degree is a private good that benefits an individual, rather than a public good (Altbach 2004: 82). Viewed from this perspective, the resurgence of the private good funding of higher education could be attributed to the general reluctance of governments to spend public funds on tertiary education, while at the same time, demand for access to university and for skilled personnel remains high (Altbach 2004: 82). In this article public good refers to resources allocated by the government, the assumption being that the public directly or indirectly benefits from students who have been through higher education. Private good, on the other hand, refers to resources which, when allocated to one group of students, may exclude other groups or the general public. Open distance higher education can be regarded as a 'quasi-public good' because it has elements of both private and public good and because of the difficulty of distinguishing public, private benefits, and costs (the private and social rate of returns) (Blaug 1972: 107 & 1985). Jongbloed (2004: 92) argues that government intervention is often called for in the case of purely public goods because the market will under-provide such goods, as well as in cases of the provision of quasi-public goods that are characterised by significant externalities.

The debate also includes the question about who benefits most from education – the individual or society. If it were possible to calculate what percentage of the benefits of education accrue to individuals, it would be justifiable to claim that the individual should pay for most of his/her education. This argument would especially be relevant as far as higher education is concerned.

What complicates the issues further is that higher education has direct benefits for the individual in the form of higher earnings, but also indirect benefits in the form of more study and job opportunities. In addition, an educated person is more adaptable to changing technology and can live a fuller life. The direct social benefits are the higher tax income received by the state as a result of the higher income of educated individuals. Indirect social benefits include the intergeneration benefits received by the children of educated parents and the higher value that they attach to education. The positive influence of educated people on their neighbours or colleagues at work is known as a positive spillover (or neighbourhood) effect (Blaug 1972: 107 & 1985). Spillover benefits or neighbourhood effects are those benefits that are not obvious but more implicit; for example, how families, communities and society in general benefit from students who have acquired their qualifications and contribute to society. The discussion above underscores the intricacies of distinguishing between the private and social costs and benefits of higher education and the problem of ignoring the indivisibilities and measurements of private and public costs and the benefits of higher education. Thus, the calculation of what percentage of the benefits of higher education accrues to individuals (private good) and what percentage accrues to the government (public good) remains inconclusive despite existing research on the subject (Blaug 1972: 105-14).

Given the indivisibilities of the private and public good of higher education, a common belief exists that because public higher education institutions receive public subsidies and tax benefits as non-profit enterprises, they should be funded publicly and therefore promote government's goals for higher education (Massy 2004: 23). The policy strategy underpinning the principle that the beneficiaries of higher education should share in paying its cost is cost-sharing or recovery which rests on the assumption that higher education yields both social and personal benefits to individual students, their families, employers and society at large, and that these costs should therefore be shared by all beneficiaries

(Blaug 1972, Shen & Ziderman 2009). Alternatively, students are provided with loans that serve as a mechanism for cost-recovery based on the belief that the returns and benefits of higher education accrue directly or indirectly to individual students and their families and society at large through positive externalities (World Bank 2002: xxi, 76), "spillover" and "neighbourhood" effects (Blaug 1972: 105-14, 203).

One of the harbingers of this perspective is Blaug (1972) who introduced terms such as "externalities", "spillover" or "neighbourhood" effects of higher education to address the limitations of traditional techniques of calculating costs, benefits as well as private and public good dimensions of education.

The "externalities" of higher education are relevant, since graduates are better able to articulate and advance issues of social justice and meaningfully participate in the process of strengthening a democracy. The criticism of rate-of-return analysis studies done in the past is that many of these studies underestimate the indirect benefits of education. Accordingly, an attempt to rigidly distinguish between the social and private returns of primary and higher education is simplistic, in that it does not sufficiently incorporate the indivisibility of the social and private returns of education at all levels.

Similarly, the complementary nature of the private and public good characteristics of higher education, provided by means of the open and distance mode of delivery, should inform government policy on the funding of this sector. Following Levy's observation concerning the changing source of funding, it would appear that other commonly known distinctions between public and private higher education, including government control and management, functioning and mission, accountability and funding, are becoming increasingly blurred in the current environment of corporate managerialism and entrepreneurship (Levy 1986: 170-81).

3. Equity and redress and the public-private dimensions of open distance higher education

According to the Education Ministry, four factors have influenced the rapid expansion of distance education provision and access across the higher education system: changes in information and communications technology, which facilitate the development of new and different modes of delivery; the need for greater cost-efficiency has been made possible by distance education and resource-based learning that enable institutions to increase enrolment without increasing staff levels and associated physical infrastructure; increased competition from private higher education providers, both local and international, and the claim by the White Paper that distance and resource-based learning have a crucial role to play in promoting the expansion of access, diversifying the body of learners, and enhancing quality in the context of resource constraints (DoE 1997: 2.57). The Ministry welcomes developments in distance education, regarding such developments as indications of the growth of responsiveness of institutions to changes in both learning and teaching technology.

Although the White Paper prioritises equity, equality and social development, the primary intention behind this document appears to be what Habermas (1976) calls "technical rationality", what Lyotard (1984) refers to as "performativity" criteria, and what Skidelsky (1995) terms the "New Right". Rather prioritising equity and social development imperatives, these seem to have been subsumed in the discourse of market, including technical efficiency. The discourses of technical rationality, performativity and the New Right clearly serve the interests of the dominant discourse of performativity that privileges cost-effectiveness and cost-saving. Following the discussions above, it could be argued that open distance higher education should be funded as more of a public than a private good because of the social benefits that flow from this type of provision.

In the light of Foucault's discourse on higher education as a site of power struggle and Lyotard's postmodernism, it is prudent

to acknowledge both the restrictive and compelling nature of the discourses in distance education and to recognise that the various endorsements or rejections of positions contained in the discourses on distance education relate to the larger social context.

In terms of performativity criteria, the majority of educational offerings in open distance higher education, although divided into modules, semesters, units of credit and exchanged for tuition, are fictitious commodities in that they are not created by the educator strictly with this purpose in mind (Breneman & Nelson 1981). Drawing from these authors, open distance higher education, in the context of neo-liberalism and marketisation, could be interpreted in a more classical and restricted sense to mean something expressly created for market exchange. Therefore, commodification of open and distance higher education refers to the deliberate transformation of the educational process into commodity form, for the purpose of commercial transaction.

Tijnman (1996: 40) also warned against the threat of commodification phenomena when he argued that distance education is increasingly becoming "part and parcel of the commodity market, bought and sold under conditions of [...] and profitability". Tijnman's reservations about higher education provided by means of open and distance mode should be viewed especially in the context of increasing cross-border higher education through this mode.

Wain (2000: 44) endorses the above sentiments and argues that increasing commercialisation implies removing the involvement of people in society as political citizens of nation states towards involving them as consumption units in a corporate world, as the public sphere becomes eroded and is replaced by a mass consumer society founded on an acceptable level of comfort, pleasure and control, in which people participate as members of a market economy, rather than as citizens. Wain (2000: 44) also warns that the notion of open learning fits the logic of the market insofar as it represents learning as something that can be packaged, marketed and sold, stating that the learner in the role of consumer is someone who can buy into his/her own learning.

Some of the implications of commodification and comercialisation of open distance higher education, the discussions of public-private good, follow. First, it can be stated that distance education yields private benefits, assuming that students of distance education have progressive attitudes, believe in innovation and development, strive for personal success, and are active and upwardly mobile (Peters 2007). Secondly, education has ceased to be a cultural and societal good and has become a private good to be sold according to the requirements of the market (Peter 2007: 59). Accordingly, distance learning institutions have become 'providers of services' with distance education students as 'consumers'. Similarly, education and pedagogical goals lose their original significance as the needs of the economy take precedence, as market solutions have become the rule (Moore & Kearsley 2005).

In terms of Bourdieu's cultural and social capital, student loans and user charges in the form of the National Student Financial Scheme (NSFAS) in South Africa also seem to favour students from advantaged backgrounds. Although the NSFAS loans are available to all students, including those studying through distance education in South Africa, this scheme, in many respects, tends to reinforce historical inequities based on race, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. Historical inequities tend to be reinforced because such inequities are often created at a very early age because of the close relationship between the quality of primary education, the socio-economic background and access to higher education (Johnstone 2004: 39, 43). Accordingly, the majority of students who lack the necessary cultural and social capital (Bourdieu's terms) are black students from poor family backgrounds who may not even get the opportunity to enter higher education where they could have benefited from student loans. Ziderman & Albrecht (1995: 35) articulate this challenge:

> In most higher education systems, the poor are denied access, not because of user charges, but because of poor access to earlier educa-

> tion opportunities, social attitudes to further education, and the overall private costs of higher education.

Drawing from Jonathan (2002) therefore, NSFAS for students studying by means of open distance higher education could be considered a public good insofar as it serves the public interest and social progress, social well-being and national interest.

However, because NSFAS was introduced to expressly assist needy students, it can also be construed as a private good that serves the interests of the market because students are expected to repay their loans.

4. Public and private good of open distance higher education

Commercialisation motivated by global competition and the increasing demand for the beneficiaries of higher education to contribute to its provision is germane to the funding of open distance higher education as a public or private good. The author assumes in this regard that many students, in particular the younger ones, do their studies through open distance higher education because of reasons other than their own. Located within the context of an unequal economic power relationship, it is difficult to support the widespread belief that students or their families ought to pay for tertiary education provided by means of open distance higher education, because they benefit from it directly by improved income or through "spillover" benefits. In light of Foucault's discourse on higher education as a site of power struggle and Lyotard's postmodernism, it is prudent to acknowledge both the restrictive and compelling nature of the discourses in distance education and to recognise that the various endorsements or rejections of positions contained in the discourses on distance education relate to the larger social context.

It could thus be argued that open distance higher education should be funded as more of a public than a private good because of the social benefits that flow from this type of provision.

5. Discussion

Key considerations in the debate on who pays and who benefits from open and distance higher education are the unintended, unspoken and hidden effects of policies underpinning this mode, and the indivisibility and overlaps between the public and private good dimensions of higher education.

Drawing from the discussions, it can be argued that, although Blaug (1972: 107) was writing about higher education provided by residential universities, his view that higher education is more of a "quasi-public good", because of the indivisible public and private benefits and costs to it (the private and social rate of returns), also applies to higher education provided through the open and distance mode. Blaug's conceptual framework is sufficiently robust in that it focuses on all aspects of public private good, social and private returns, and more importantly, the frame goes a long way to resolve epistemological nuances between public and private good dimensions of open and distance higher education. Given the general agreement about the presence of both the social and private benefit of higher education, it appears that there is an argument for the public funding of open distance higher education.[2]

Flowing from the discussions, it is plausible to argue that while commercialisation has become the dominant discourse in higher education in general, open distance higher education is more susceptible to commercialisation than higher education provided through the contact mode. Commercialisation encompasses the franchising of modules, programmes and study guides to institutions both inside and outside South Africa. However, it can be argued that commercialisation of the offering of open distance higher education through cross-border provision can be interpreted as an international public good, as such offerings benefit societies in both providing for and receiving countries rather than individuals (*cf* Naert 2004).

2 *Cf* Altbach 2004, Barr 2004, Blaug 1972, Enders & Jongbloed 2007, Johnstone 2004, Jonathan 1997.

Wain (2000: 43) made a pertinent observation that distance education is the logic of the market insofar as it represents learning as something that can be packaged, marketed and sold, while learners are considered consumers who can purchase their own learning. Open and distance learning is more susceptible to commoditisation and commercialisation than learning at a residential university. The learning materials are often packaged in the form of modules and semesters, and sold to students who are regarded as clients, often across borders of countries. The cross-border supply of these services is induced by an increasing trend towards globalisation and internationalisation, where clearly, in seeking the student market, universities from powerful and affluent economies sell their services to those in developing countries or to rural areas in a specific country. This expansion of market space by universities is clearly induced by the decline of government funding of higher education as a response to 'massification' and the burgeoning permeation of the values and ethos of business into higher education.[3]

Viewed from a political and economic perspective, however, open distance higher education seems plausible to argue that an increasing trend of a shift from governments, as the financiers of higher education, towards citizens, individual students, their families and the private sector. Accordingly, higher education provided through the distance mode seems to be a convenient response to the crises of the burgeoning social demand for higher education and the corresponding governments' unwillingness or their inability to fulfil their obligation to provide this service as expected.

The following issues are deduced from the discussions. First, open distance higher education is clearly regarded as a cost-saving strategy in terms of infrastructure development and other forms of student support, even though this cost-saving is often at the expense of quality for students. Secondly, because students who are studying through open and distance education

3 *Cf* Moore & Kearley 2005, Peters 2007, Tijnman 1996, Shen & Ziderman 2009.

are usually employed, or their studies paid for by their parents and families seems to be a good reason that this type of education should be funded more as a public than a private good. Thirdly, the government funding support, including bursaries for living accommodation for open distance higher education students, is very limited and often non-existent compared to those who are in contact institutions.

In light of the discussions above, it can be argued that access for those living on low incomes and where students are expected to meet the full costs of a course does indeed restrict access to higher education rather than broadening it, in particular for those who are studying through the open and distance mode. Rumble's (2006: 89) stance on this point echoes Bourdieu's when he contends that social and cultural conditions are (statistically) associated from earliest childhood with the possession of high or low income and tend to shape tastes adjusted to these conditions. Accordingly, access to and the widening participation in higher education in South Africa through state-subsidised tuition fees and student loans is the field in which struggles over these cultural and social meanings take place and where, more often than not, high-status cultural capital is translated into high-status credentials, such as academic degrees from elite institutions.[4]

6. Conclusion

The issues of who pays, who should pay, who benefits and who should benefit from open and distance higher education need to be understood within the context of competing political, economic, social and educational priorities. Accordingly, the article argued that discussions on open distance higher education should take necessary account of the complementarity between the public and private good of open distance higher education. However, these should be viewed in the particular context. Indivisibility should be considered because, unlike in economics, certain costs and

4 *Cf* Bourdieu 1984, Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, Johnstone 2003 & 2004, Ziderman & Albrecht 1995.

benefits and the public-private good of higher education provided by means of distance education cannot be measured, even with the most sophisticated mathematical calculations. This is even more complicated in countries that prioritise issues of social justice, equity and widening of participation particularly for those communities that were excluded from the system for political reasons.

Similarly, the article argued that ignoring complementarity and the indivisibilities of the public and private good dimensions of higher education cause distortions on how open and distance higher education could be considered an investment or consumption, and how higher education can serve the public and private good. The author therefore supports the view that higher education, in general, satisfies both the essential features: the spread of benefits from an educated citizen cannot be restricted to a small population, and the quantum of benefits received by some is affected by the levels of benefits.

Drawing from the discussions, the article argued that the public-private dimensions of open distance higher education should ideally be viewed in the light of Ruth's assertion that public good in a democracy is merely the democratically negotiated social class of its citizens, developed and modified in civil society (*cf* Jonathan 1997: 59-67).

Drawing from Bourdieu's cultural and social capital forms, the article argued that despite the rhetoric of widening participation in higher education through open distance higher education, the fact is that students who are studying through this mode continue to display cultural and social deficits that make success remote for them. Thus, historical inequities of race, socio-economic status, and ethnicity can be reinforced by providing higher education services through the open and distance mode since the majority of students studying through distance education come from underprivileged communities and cannot afford the high tuition fees charged at residential and historically privileged universities. Thus, in terms of the public good dimension, the consumption of higher education by students in residential universities prevents others (those studying through distance education) from accessing

finance for the higher tuition fees charged at the so-called 'elite' universities.

The social benefits are especially pronounced in open distance higher education where the majority of students are working and often do not qualify for bursaries enjoyed by students in residential universities. In addition, students studying through distance education pay for their tuition fees, buy their own books, and do not qualify for accommodation subsidy from government even though they continue to contribute to economic growth and development through labour and expertise. Given this scenario therefore, a good case can be made for the equitable funding of students who are studying through open distance higher education and those studying at residential universities.

The article argues therefore that the following factors be taken into account when discussing issues of who pays and who benefits from higher education provided through open and distance mode in South Africa. First, the profile of students in institutions offering higher education through distance learning suggests that, increasingly, younger students are enrolling at these institutions because they are not able to get placement at residential universities, due to financial problems, or due to the fact that they do not satisfy the entrance requirements for residential universities. Secondly, student places are often limited to the extent that consumption by students from elite high schools prevents those from poor schools from gaining entrance to prestigious and elite universities. Thirdly, in South Africa, students from poor families often cannot afford the high tuition fees charged by historically privileged universities. These students often do not have a choice but to study through open and distance mode. Finally, open distance higher education is preferred because it enhances the idea of partnership funding which, in a way, absolves governments from funding higher education for their citizens.

In conclusion, although it is difficult to draw a neat distinction between public good and private good dimensions of higher education in general, the social good and public good of open and distance higher education appear to be stronger. Therefore a case

can be made for more government contribution to the provision of this type of delivery. This conclusion is based on the assertion that students who study through open and distance mode in higher education have progressive attitudes, believe in innovation and development, strive for personal success, and are active and upwardly mobile, making this type of education a social good that requires government support. Although the "spillover benefits" equally apply to higher education provided at residential universities in general, students, families and the private sector seem to be contributing more to the costs of their studies even though it is the general public that seems to benefit. The notion of "spillover benefits" is crucial especially in countries that are in the process of deepening and consolidating democracy, development and addressing issues of equity and social justice.

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