Higher education and the public good: precarious potential?

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Concerns about, and critiques of neo liberal policy regimes in higher education have heightened the search for alternative normative and organisational models, many of which have coalesced around the necessity to re imagine and defend the public missions of higher education. This has given the notion of the public good greater resonance as an alternative or supplementary frame of reference in debates on higher education and social change. This article identifies some frequently raised issues in the analytical literature on the public good in order to indicate the range of conceptual and operational challenges at stake. It is argued that the ideological constraints and practical difficulties in moving towards a public good regime make the potential and prospects of the notion uncertain and almost precarious in constituting a new foundational basis for considering the social value of higher education. Nevertheless, resisting or mediating public 'bads' and increasing or joining up a variety of public good interventions remain as necessary and valuable tasks in the face of contending social purposes of higher education.

n his book, *The uses of the university* (1963), Clark Kerr pointed to the fact that the university, in its contemporary form as a multiversity, has a variety of purposes ascribed to it which may well be in contention with one another. He characterised the contest among the purposes as follows:

> These several competing visions of true purpose, each relating to a different layer of history, a different web of forces, cause much of the malaise in the university communities of today. The univer sity is so many things to so many different people that it must, of necessity, be partially at war with itself (Kerr 1995: 7).

The clamour of contending purposes is no less insistent at present. In many higher education systems, the notions of the knowledge society and knowledge economy, despite differences in the social presumptions and change agendas underpinning these two notions, are central to the current framing of internally and externally defined goals and purposes of higher education. As a result, higher education institutions are attempting to respond simultaneously to the entrepreneurial demands of the knowledge economy and the broader 'social good' aspirations of the knowledge society (Sorlin and Vessuri 2007). The debate on higher education and the public good is a reflection of competing expectations from contemporary higher education, re-posing questions about the ideological and practical implications of the changing 'social compact' between higher education and society.

Concerns and conceptions about the public purposes and social uses of the university are neither a contemporary preoccupation, nor a phenomenon specific to societies in either the global north or the global south. The professional training responsibility of medieval universities (in medicine, law and theology), the democratising rationale of the land-grant universities in the US (Morrill Act, 1862), the notion of the 'developmental university' in post-independence African countries (Coleman 1984), and expectations that universities in the Middle East will contribute to democratising the state and society as part of a strong civil society movement (Mojab 2000) are examples, in different ages and societies, of proposals and projects to forge a connection between higher education and social purposes.[1] Such examples presume some underpinning notion of societal good. However, in an era of globalisation and internationalisation, considering the social purposes and public value of higher education has been shaped by the impact of some recurring trends: externally driven regulatory formulas for efficiency and accountability as the public purse shrinks even further; stakeholder pressures for changes in traditional modes of governance, knowledge production and skills development; demands for partnerships that are more responsive to knowledge economy and innovation discourses, and the growing global power of the competitive reputational economy (Hazelkorn 2011) as research assessment and ranking systems become more compelling. The meanings and possibilities of the public good in higher education are bound to reflect the pushes and pulls of these prevailing trends.

The dominance of knowledge economy notions is evident in many higher education policy frameworks and debates (Shattock 2009, Wilson 2012). At the same time, numerous critiques of overly economistic framings of higher education

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1   Morrill Act (1862) United States Statutes. <http://www.loc.gov>

have yielded counter-proposals for revalorising public-good objectives in the ethos and work of higher education institutions (Hind 2010, Bailey & Freedman 2011). The public-good discourse in higher education is now enjoying greater visibility and attention in both analytical literatures and the policy domain. The analytical literature on the subject is on the increase, with a growing number of books and articles elaborating on the conceptual, normative and policy dimensions of the issue.[2] Expressing a commitment to the public good in higher education is now common in the policy world in a variety of national, regional and international settings.[3] There are also several instances of structured policy, advocacy and research initiatives intended to increase understandings of, and information about higher education and the public good.[4] The current economic and social crises in neo-liberal policy regimes in higher education have heightened the search for alternative normative and organisational models, many of which have coalesced around the necessity to re-imagine, strengthen and defend the public missions of higher education as part of a larger restoration of public values and public interest in institutional life. This has given the notion of the public good greater resonance as an alternative or supplementary frame of reference in debates on necessary transformations within higher education and the role of higher education in social change.

Many analyses of the public good take, as their starting point, critiques of 'public bads' in higher education (Kaul 2001: 268, Marginson 2007: 324).

2   See, for example, Jonathan 2001, Newman & Couturier 2002, Weber & Bergan 2005, Calhoun 2006, Docherty 2011, Nixon 2011, Rhoten & Calhoun 2011, Leibowitz 2012.

3   See, for example, espousals of the importance of the connection between higher education and the 'public good' in the policy documents and declarations of UNESCO, and, in particular, the 2009 Communiqué from the World Congress on Higher Education, declaring higher education to be a public good and deserving of support from the public purse as well as a contributor to the public good (<www.unesco.org>); the 2001 Prague Communiqué in the Bologna Process where ministers supported the idea that 'higher education should be considered a public good and ... a public responsibility' (<www.ehea.info>); the Association of African Universities 2004 Accra Declaration on GATS and the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Africa (www.aau.org) expressing the commitment to higher education as a 'public mandate'; even the World Bank, in the report of its Task Force on Higher Education and Society: Peril and Promise, is putting public interest back into higher education (Post et al. 2004); the 2009 call of the Higher Education Funding Council for England for micro studies demonstrating the public benefits of UK universities.(<www.hefce.ac.uk>)

4   See, for example, in the US, the National Forum on Higher Education and the Public Good at the University of Michigan (<www.soe.umich.edu>) and the New York based Social Science Research Council project, the Public Sphere Forum (<http://publicsphere.ssrc.org>); in the UK, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) project on the Public Engagement of Universities (<www.hefce.ac.uk>).

Currently, these are often presumed to be the negative consequences of neo-liberal imperatives in the form of corporatisation, privatisation, commercialisation, individual consumer choice arguments, and economic reductionism (Kezar et al. 2005: 24). The literature on public good has moved somewhat beyond rhetorical declarations and normative defences to important conceptual clarifications and elaborations of 'publicness', 'publics' and 'public goods' and, to a smaller extent, to identification of areas, targets and projects for public-good transformations, reflections on what publicness in the disciplines means,[5] and attempts to document public-good initiatives and approaches in higher education. It is also clearly recognised that the pursuit of public-good possibilities in higher education should not be confined to community engagement, but should also be viewed as an integral part of the teaching and research functions of higher education (Jonathan 2001, Chambers & Gopaul 2008: 78-82).

The growing analytical literature is valuable in providing much-needed clarifications of the conceptual and theoretical foundations of public-good approaches, marking out key constitutive elements of the notion of the public good, capturing explorations of public-good possibilities in teaching,[6] research and third-function activities, and providing examples of contextualisation and localisation of public-good notions (Sall et al. 2003, Leibowitz 2012). However, a critic like Dill is dismissive of recent analyses of the public good in higher education as being "largely rhetorical and qualitative rather than being empirical"[7] (Dill 2011: 3). Dill's critique is not entirely unwarranted. Sustained attention to concrete practices aimed at institutionalising the public good, especially at the level of system and institutional design, and engagement with the public good as a field of 'strategic planning' or of empirical research has been less substantial than expected.[8] This raises pragmatic questions about the range of institutional and behavioural changes that are needed in order to concretise the public good.

In this article, I first identify some frequently raised issues in the analytical literature on the public good in order to indicate the range of conceptual and operational challenges that are at stake in pursuing the public good. I then examine questions about the possible co-existence or non-commensurability of public-good goals and neo-liberal imperatives in the current contest of

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5   See, for example, essays on the SSRC Public Sphere Forum website (<http://publicsphere.ssrc.org>).
6   See, for example, Walker (2012) on developing public good capabilities in professional education and training.
7   In this regard, Dill (2011:1 3) exempts the work of economists.
8   In relation to strategic planning for the public good, it may be possible to draw on other literatures and approaches to planning besides the New Public Management framing of planning. See, for example, Friedmann (1987) on the notion of radical or oppositional planning.

purposes. The article argues that the ideological constraints and translational difficulties in moving towards an overarching public-good regime make the potential and prospects of the notion uncertain, ambiguous and almost precarious in constituting a new foundational basis for considering the value of higher education to the needs of social change. Nevertheless, resisting or mediating public 'bads' and increasing or joining up a variety of public-good interventions remain as necessary and valuable tasks in negotiating a path across the contending purposes of higher education.

1.   On conceptions and dimensions of the public good

Concerns about the public good can be understood within the context of two opposing discourses on the purposes and value(s) of contemporary higher education. Despite many well-founded critiques thereof, the still dominant discourse, especially in the policy world, is associated with what is familiarly described as a neo-liberal paradigm of higher education – the idea of higher education as an essential part of the 'knowledge economy', a producer of knowledge and skills for economic competitiveness, and a facilitator of private interests. The association of higher education and the public good, despite a growing presence in research and policy, is still part of a secondary debate. This latter discourse presumes that higher education contributes to achieving broader public purposes which encompass, but are not reducible to narrowly framed economic goals and private interests. A strong version of this position is that contemporary higher education is to be viewed not only in its entrepreneurial role in a knowledge economy, but in its civic role as a facilitator of a 'knowledge democracy' – a contributor to "the quality of democratic life and democratic processes" (Biesta 2007: 468). Despite their differing ideological nuances, both these discourses presume that higher education can and ought to contribute to 'societal good'. They are both grounded in the view that higher education institutions are socially accountable institutions and, therefore, have to deliver social benefits through their core functions.[9] The two discourses have, however, very different associated assumptions and expectations about the roles of states and markets in higher education, the purposes and accountabilities of higher education, the weight of public and private goals and interests in producing social benefits, and the responsibilities of citizenship in addressing individual and societal obligations.

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9   In contrast, for example, to a position articulated by Fish (2008) who argues against the idea that universities and academics have social obligations of any kind which must be given effect through the core functions of higher education.

The analytical literature shows that the connection between higher education and the public good is being articulated, to a large extent, along two main motifs, namely higher education itself *as* a public good, and higher education *for* the public good. Included in the debates are re-assertions of the importance of the public missions and public responsibilities of higher education; concerns about the imbalances in the weight given to public and private interests in policy and practice; the democratic and civic roles of public higher education, and higher education as a constituent part of the public sphere. There are also associated debates about social justice and the need for structural transformations in higher education. It appears that, analytically, the frontiers of the theme are still being marked out and the jurisdictions and possibilities of the notion are being articulated more fully and concretely. In such debates, however, the idea of higher education institutions (and of academe) as social critic is a far less emphasised theme.

From the point of view of defining or conceptualising the public good, persuasive arguments remind us that there is no single or fixed formula for stipulating the content of the public good, especially in abstraction from specific socio-political struggles. The notion requires ongoing contextualisation, negotiation and trade-offs. For Calhoun (1998: 20), the public good is not a given, self-evident notion. He argues that there is a "continuous reshaping of the identity of any public (and of communities within it) as well as of the goods which different actors pursue". His much-quoted phrases "Which public?" and "Whose good?'' (Calhoun 1998: 20) are now nearly part of the 'common sense' about the public good. It reminds us that both 'public' and 'good' are fuzzy and shifting notions, neither unitary nor homogeneous, and contextually shaped and contested even within the same contexts. Analysts have argued that there are many publics rather than *a* public; that publics are not simply 'out there', but are constituted, enacted, summoned, and called into existence, and that they could be overlapping in interest, time bound and contingent (Mahony et al. 2010, Benington & Moore 2011: 30). To this increasing layering of complexity in the notion of 'public', one can add analyses which make the point that publics are not self-evidently progressive and cannot be presumed automatically to have emancipatory interests in contradistinction to private constituencies. There are publics, for instance, which value a consumer approach to higher education (Rhoades 1987). Arguments have also cautioned against understanding the public good as no more than an aggregation of private goods (Marginson 2007: 301, Calhoun 2009).

These kinds of conceptual ambiguities extend to how higher education is understood in its public-good dimensions. Debate on higher education itself *as* a public good often focuses on the responsibility of the state for the resourcing of higher education and on the state's regulatory and oversight role, even where state funding is not substantial. In this regard, analysts have pointed to

incongruities in the notion of the public university as a state-funded and non-profit institution since, increasingly, higher education resourcing tends to come from both public and private sources, and entrepreneurialism characterises the approach of both public and private institutions (Dill 2005: 4).[10] Given the difficulties in distinguishing cleanly between public and private higher education, analysts such as Dill & Calhoun (2011) argue that it is better to focus on the public accountability of all higher education institutions, irrespective of public or private funding.

Another crucial debate in this outline of public-good complexity focuses on the difficulties of viewing higher education as a pure public good in light of the fact that higher education avails a mix of both private and public benefits. Individuals benefit by means of acquiring credentials, increased employment and income possibilities, and social mobility. However, society also benefits from a more educated workforce and citizenry, a larger tax base, and less dependency on government welfare support (IHEP 1998). Analysts have also reminded us that higher education has the potential to reproduce as much as to undercut inequalities, by simultaneously operating exclusionary and inclusionary mechanisms (Jonathan 2001, Marginson 2007). In relation to the latter, the literature points to trends towards massification and impressive growth in student participation rates which have resulted in increasing both private and public benefits, but not without a dark side, namely increasing differentiation and stratification in higher education according to student socio-economic profile and quality (Altbach 2000, Shavit et al. 2003, Brennan & Naidoo 2007).

Attempts to elaborate on the key dimensions of the public good have often encompassed normative concerns about shifts in what is valued in and about higher education in the current conjuncture. The regulatory emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness in the face of large-scale public expenditure cuts is argued to have downgraded the intrinsic or non-monetary value of education in favour of the economically instrumental and the commodifiable. This normative shift is viewed as a threat to higher education as a general source of public benefits. Hence, the many critiques of the absolutisation of the economic purposes of higher education (labour market and employability imperatives in teaching, and industry imperatives in research). In response, a range of counter-proposals seek to valorise the non-economic purposes of higher education which are perceived to hold greater possibilities for public-good outcomes. Such proposals argue that higher education should afford transformatory intellectual and cultural

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10   Already in 1963, Kerr (1995: 1) had maintained that the modern American university was "a new type of institution ... not really private and ... not really public".

experiences for students as well as opportunities for personal development (Barnett 1994); ensure that there are spaces for the pursuit of knowledge which is not narrowly instrumental (Burawoy 2011); promote public discourse (Calhoun 2011: 13); contribute to the building of critical and civic capabilities for democratic citizenship (Bergan 2005, Chambers & Gopaul 2008), and provide a far-seeing intellectually imaginative leadership role not only in being responsive to what citizens aspire to presently, but also in providing "resources for deepening and modifying those aspirations as circumstances change" (Jonathan 2001: 79).

The above-mentioned concern about changing values in higher education draws attention both to normative orientations, which undermine or constrain the public good, and to the normative principles and values which are thought to be constitutive of the public good. The values focus raises two sets of questions which are important for the purposes of both analysis and practice. One question pertains to the necessity to translate normative public-good commitments into structural and operational changes: What kinds of ethical practices, both institutional and individual, follow from normative commitments to the public good in higher education? What, in fact, constitutes a public-good praxis? The second question relates to whether the notion of the public good simply functions as a meta-level umbrella term for a variety of associated values such as social justice, inclusivity, fairness, and so on, or whether it adds a distinctive 'public' dimension to the kinds of values indicated above.

Lastly, some analysts have highlighted the role and importance of the dialogic, the deliberative and the interactive in processes of identifying and working towards the public good as opposed to market coercion or *statist fiat*. This dialogic dimension in reaching consensus on and operationalising the public good is part of larger debates on deliberative democracy and the role of rational-critical debate among citizens in negotiating agreements on social choices and actions (Habermas 2006, Bohman 2000). Central to this debate are claims about the university (more often in aspiration than historically realised) as a discursive platform *par excellence*, a place for "reasoned discourse'' (Calhoun 1993: 2-3) and a crucial component and guardian of the public sphere.[11] Critical questions posed to Habermas's notion of the bourgeois public sphere (Calhoun 1993) are also pertinent in assessing claims about the university as a bulwark of the public sphere: Who can participate? Who is still excluded from participating in 'rational-critical debate' in this public sphere space? Despite the growth and diversity in student and staff numbers, and many more instances of higher education-external partner collaborations, the extent of rational-critical debate on public-

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11   Delanty 2001, Jackson & Vale 2009: 24, Burawoy 2011, Docherty 2011: 3.

good questions within higher education institutions themselves and between institutions and external communities (beyond contractual considerations) appears to be patchy and uneven.

The issues surveyed briefly earlier straddle conceptual expositions and clarifications of the public-good, normative bottom-line principles, structural and behavioural conditionalities, modalities and strategies for action (including identification of sites of potential transformation), and cautionary insights about the public good and its limits as much as imaginative possibilities for its realisation. This intends to convey a sense of the emerging contours of the public-good analytical landscape and signal the range and complexity of the dimensions that have to be considered in invoking and acting on the public good in higher education. However, while acknowledging cautionary insights about the contextual and contested nature of the public good, there are risks of paralysis or continuing inertia in overstating considerations of public-good contingency and complexity. What the above insights do enjoin are close political and empirical analyses of 'publics' and 'goods', especially the particular kind of good that higher education is or facilitates and for whom, in particular contexts of public-good struggle. The above debates are valuable in providing a concrete set of reference points for undertaking focused contextual analyses of public-bad impacts and public-good possibilities. On the basis of such analyses, an appropriate set of approaches and tasks could be fashioned in seeking to move beyond normative proclamations and symbolic commitments to the public good in higher education.

2.   The public good: alternative or supplement?

Changes to make higher education more responsive to the knowledge economy have necessitated the introduction of new policies, institutional structures, resourcing strategies, achievement indicators, staff expertise profiles and external partnerships. The attempt to institutionalise the public good in higher education would equally require concomitant changes to policies, structures, funding models, evaluative systems, and so on, which could then serve as concrete platforms for the effective realisation of public-good aspirations and goals. One would have to consider the nature of national and institutional systems if designed, steered and evaluated from the perspective of advancing the public good.

The move from the idea of the public good as normative ideal to policy platform and concrete change mechanism in higher education requires attention to the strategic and operational dimensions of the public good. In making this move, it is difficult to avoid the question as to whether the public-good postulate is to be viewed as an ideological alternative to current economically over-determined conceptions of higher education or as a supplementary internal policy strand and

strategic pathway which is under-addressed in the current knowledge society framing. What, for instance, is the role and status of a notion such as the public good within a network of organising concepts which are currently hegemonic such as knowledge economy, innovation, entrepreneurialism, world-class excellence, and so on? As indicated earlier, the diversity of social expectations of higher education and the contradictory pulls of multiple social demands have increased in the context of current knowledge society discourses. Is the public good one goal and policy plank among others within the higher education system, in a 'marketplace of ideas' and narratives about change, alongside economic competitiveness, educating for employability, advancing individual interests, and increasing consumer choice? Or does the public good trump all other values and approaches and, in fact, constitute the foundational narrative and platform from which the "structural transformation" (Calhoun 2006b) of higher education could be launched?

Different sides of this question have been argued. Crouch (2011) proceeds from the view that the public values conflict is not simply between state and market, and maintains that all three realms of state, market and values attempt to relate and balance public and private interests. "Public and private should be used as end points on a continuum, not as alternatives" (Crouch 2011: 73). Calhoun (2011:3) reminds us that "[p]ublic and private purposes are not always divided by a neat line". Kezar et al. (2005: 26) speak of the need "to create a new vision for higher education that respects a balance between market forces and the public good. Newman & Couturier (2002: 2) argue that the market should be steered to "benefit society and serve the greater public good". In some higher education systems, it is evident that there are policy initiatives which seek to juggle economic-competitiveness priorities and public-good commitments within a knowledge economy framework.[12] Given the proliferation of socially oriented goals for, and demands on higher education and the resulting struggle to hold together a mix of often contending social, intellectual and economic development agendas, it is unsurprising that the management of "complexity" (Barnett 2000) becomes a compelling contemporary imperative rather than framing the issue of higher education transformation as a matter of stark choices between public and private goods. Hence the attractiveness of the argument that the public good in relation to higher education may be better viewed as a notion

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12   See, for example, funding provided by the Higher Education Funding Council in the UK to incentivise innovation as well as public engagement, but with significant differences in allocations. <www. hefce.ac.uk>. See also some of the debates on the role of universities within the context of the "Europe of knowledge" in the special issue on the public role of the university in *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 26(5): 395 404.

that requires thinking beyond the distinctions of states and markets, public and private, individual and societal, and transformation and reproduction, towards a position that seeks a greater balance between and among these elements.

However, some analysts are sceptical about the possibilities of achieving public-good objectives in a sustained and widespread way within the current knowledge economy regime, viewing neo-liberalism in higher education as the "antithesis of public good" (Chambers & Gopaul 2008: 61). Docherty (2011: 11), for instance, perceives the university as being central to "ideas of freedom and justice" and the extending of democracy, and opposes the idea that the public sphere (of which the university is a key institution) is a marketplace of ideas of all kinds. Part of the concern about the co-existence of the public-good strand within the dominant neo-liberal organisational model of higher education is the danger that it might be reduced to a bounded pacificatory discourse, with limited potential to challenge the status quo or form the basis for real alternative practices.

Views about the irreconcilability of public- and private-good logics in structuring change in higher education are also premised on the way in which neo-liberal regimes characterise the contemporary state. Sivanandan (2013:1) argues, for instance, that the "market state is antithetical to the good society". This implies that public-good transformations of higher education is a corollary of a larger project of state and societal transformation. A variant of this view can be noted in the position that there are distinct limits and conditionalities to the contribution of higher education to the public good if higher education transformation is viewed as a political project separate from, or unrelated to social reform of policy, structural arrangements and practices in other social sectors. Jonathan (2001: 86) puts it well: "Just what higher education can contribute to the public good depends on how we order that practice: whether it will deliver what it might depends on how we order supporting social practices".

The absence in many countries of feasible alternative political projects to radically transform the neo-liberal 'market state' into a 'public-good state' begs the question as to whether public-good initiatives in higher education must by and large await larger state and global economic regime transformations as a condition for their sustained success. What are the possibilities for such initiatives to be inserted (bottom up and appropriately contextualised and negotiated) into the current conjuncture in order to begin to shift the balances from the privatising missions of higher education to more publicly oriented ones? The tactical re-ordering of higher education to position it to contribute more substantially to the public good could, in fact, be viewed as a constituent part of a multilayered struggle to make public values and public-good goals prevail as part of larger processes of social transformation. This could involve the development of a new

mix of policy priorities, re-thinking funding allocations, re-orienting curriculum, pedagogy and research priorities, forging new or additional external partnerships, re-defining graduate competencies, and re-designing evaluation systems and impact indicators. Nevertheless, the question would remain as to whether, in the 'long march' through higher education systems and institutions, some key publics and public interests, some almost non-negotiable public value principles and some clear limits on privatising interests would have to be identified and asserted, together with a recognition of the structural limits of public-good transformations in the current conjuncture.

3.   The public good: precarious potential?

As indicated earlier, the notion of the public good is a much-invoked term, used across different structural locations and ideological positions (by governments as much as by their critics, by the World Social Forum as well as the World Bank). It is also an often-advocated alternative social imaginary posited as the basis on which to wrest higher education away from its neo-liberal demons. The recuperation of the idea that higher education institutions have a public mission and that this mission is critical to considering the social accountability of higher education now features more strongly in discourses on the value and purposes of higher education. The analytical platform for conceptualising and acting on public-good goals in higher education is also more elucidated. However, the question about the potential of the notion to become hegemonic in the current contest of purposes, not only at a normative level, but also in the structures, relationships and operations of higher education, remains pressing. There are a host of challenges, difficulties and limits in seeking to move from normative commitment or symbolic policy to a public-good praxis. These include questions about the reality of dialogic processes of consensus formation on what the public good is in particular contexts, and the availability of resources and capacity to drive public good-oriented strategic and operational transformations in higher education. They also encompass questions about political will and the extent of the ideological spaces which exist for the reconfiguration of prevailing structural and systemic conditions. What the limits of the notion of the public good are, what its transgressive potential might be in the absence of radical structural change, and what potential dangers are inherent in the very processes of institutionalising the public good are further considerations in translating notions of the public good into strategies and practices.

Questions have been posed about whose responsibility it is to translate the public good from a norm into a set of empirical possibilities for higher education transformations. Analysts have argued that the public good is a moral collective

task not achievable by single effort (Calhoun 2011: 2, Chambers & Gopaul 2009: 60-73) and point to the necessary roles of both government (public authorities) and non-government actors in the pursuit and provision of public-good benefits. What is the track record of different actors in advancing public-good struggles? Despite increasing levels of analytical and policy attention to public-good considerations in higher education, it does not appear to be the case that there is a systematic and substantial institutionalisation and mainstreaming of public-good values and orientations in different higher education systems and structures and within the core functions of higher education, beyond special projects and individual interventions. The reasons are many and varied. Governments are not driving a hard-nosed public-good agenda in higher education with dedicated white papers, regulatory instruments, incentive funding and strong steering as has been the case with other goals such as economic competitiveness or innovation. It may also be the case that proponents of the public good have to wage more tenacious struggles not only to expose analytically, but also to dislodge operationally a number of entrenched approaches which threaten public values in higher education (for example, the corporatisation and commodification of higher education). This undermining of public 'bads' may be a necessary corollary of attempts to define and negotiate pathways towards the public good.

In the absence of a strong official public-good framing of higher education, there remains a serious gap in giving sustained, large-scale and integrated strategic attention to questions of system re-design in higher education in order to be able to translate public-good norms into concrete requirements for funding, governance, and management and for re-thinking research, teaching and learning, and external partnerships. Such a gap leaves a commitment to the public good only as a 'good to have' symbolic position or a soft-edged oppositional discourse that is unable to displace current hegemonic norms, practices and structures of power. The notion of the public good appears to be a weak strategic and operational driver, not yet able to function as the basis for a new praxis in transforming higher education. It is even unclear whether it is, in fact, a shared value across different higher education systems and institutions.

The use of a public-good framing to radically re-think and re-design higher education systems and institutions may very well face challenges from private interests which are both external and internal. The structural foundations and pathways shaped by the demands of a knowledge economy approach remain firmly entrenched in higher education, making many students, for example, focus on self-investment in acquiring qualifications for the purposes of upward financial and social mobility. The private interests of individual institutions and academics seeking to position themselves more competitively in the reputational economy through participation in global, regional and national ranking and

assessment systems may also impact on, or divert attention from public-good goals and initiatives (Marginson 2007). In order for the public good to become rooted in the ethos and practices of higher education, key internal constituencies of students and academics have to accept the notion as fundamental to their work and professional ambitions. What kind of social and intellectual purchase do such constituencies have on the notion of the public good? There are, no doubt, countless examples of academics and students who are actively involved in public-good activities through formalised community engagement projects or through individual interventions within and outside their teaching, learning and research responsibilities.[13] However, academics and students are not uniformly and self-evidently on the side of public-good norms and aspirations, since both constituencies benefit from private positional goods availed by higher education. The public good may be a useful narrative to express discontent with, and even opposition to higher education managers or neo-liberal government policy. However, in order to get beyond commitment 'noise' or *ad hoc* and special projects, concrete questions have to be confronted about what public-good obligations and responsibilities accrue to different role players in the core functions and activities of higher education.

Seeking to embed the normative ethos and the strategic requirements of the public good into the structures and operations of higher education institutions is clearly an important route to making the public good into more of an empirical reality. However, the process of institutionalising the public good could bring its own difficulties and contradictions. One example of this relates to systems for demonstrating public-good accountability. A shift to a public-good dispensation assumes that a different state funding and regulatory dispensation would be sought. Even in contexts where public funding for higher education is limited or where private higher education is a significant part of the landscape, the public-good question would still be pertinent, on the assumption that higher education remains the "proper business of the democratic state" (Jonathan 2001: 41). What would be the appropriate parameters of state involvement in processes of institutionalising the public good in higher education? Jonathan (2001: 39, 76) speaks of "democratic regulation and accountability" and the necessity for the transformation of higher education to be "steered and regulated by government". In seeking to clarify higher education as a public good and public responsibility, Bergan (2005: 16-7) provides examples of non-resourcing dimensions of the responsibility of government authorities for higher education, for example, the

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13   Organised student formations have also signalled commitments to the public good. See, for example, European Students Union 2013, Canadian Federation of Students 2012.

provision of enabling policy frameworks and regulatory oversight in facilitating qualifications frameworks, quality assurance systems, equal access provision, and ensuring protections for institutional autonomy and academic freedom through legal frameworks.

In these arguments about public-good accountability, issues of state regulation and steering (even quality assurance systems) are not regarded as antithetical to public-good orientations in higher education. Relatedly, one assumes that it would be desirable to have publicly available information about the efficacy of public-good orientations and initiatives in higher education. Information on what public-good outcomes are being delivered in and through higher education, to which publics, how effectively and with what impact, may well be a requirement of a public-good regime. However, it is not clear that a regulatory regime with a public-good orientation instead of a private good one would remove the most serious concerns of critics about the nature, terms and impact of external regulation on the academic project. What criteria and modalities could acceptably be used for higher education to be evaluated, monitored and held to public account in a public-good paradigm? Critics of performativity in neo-liberal paradigms of accountability have often focused on state regulation in the form of measurement and evaluation systems such as audit and accreditation as well as on monitoring and reporting systems in higher education. These systems are deemed to buttress a narrow economically framed accountability to the private interests of students as consumers and of employers, and are argued to have entrenched an "audit culture" (Strathern 2000) in higher education whose consequences are increased surveillance, compliance, homogenisation and threats to academic freedom. Are such negative consequences unlikely or more tolerable if regulatory systems are premised on broader public-good accountability to a wider variety of social partners and stakeholders?

In seeking to assess the effective insertion of public-good goals into the operational strategies and activities of higher education institutions, the question is bound to arise about the kinds of measuring and evaluative systems and instruments that would be appropriate. This is likely to raise thorny policy and operational dilemmas about the kind of metrics which might be needed to plan for, steer, judge and incentivise the institutionalisation of public-good goals, and the kinds of evidence which might count as indicators of public-good achievement in conducting a public-good 'audit' of a higher education institution. It might be an unpalatable step to have to draw on 'enemy tools' from new public management in the form of performance indicators and associated measuring, evaluating and reporting instruments. Alternatively, one would have to investigate whether it might be possible to frame or fashion different regulatory tools, drawing on

other literatures and practices of radical planning (Friedmann 1987). The attempt to assess, evaluate and monitor a public-good orientation in higher education in the name of democratic regulation and accountability raises hard issues about regulatory values and cultures as well as regulatory system design and methodology. For democratic regulation not to tread too closely to the much-critiqued audit cultures of new public management, the notion of democratic regulation would itself have to be clarified as well as the nature of the relationship between external regulation and academic self-regulation.

The enlargement of the social accountability of higher education to include the public good could be a double-edged sword. A broader public-good orientation (beyond the economic domain) would translate into many more significant publics and many more public-good targets for higher education to address and deliver on. The emphasis on the dialogical and deliberative could restore to academe a greater space to engage with relevant publics on what it means to balance the relationship between what is valued in, and deliverable through the academic project and what drives societal expectations of higher education, between the public and private interests of academia and the public responsibilities of higher education. However, this would require both academe and relevant publics to be persuaded that a conception of the public good in higher education could be reached that accommodates discourses of both academic freedom and social accountability or at least allows for the tensions between them to be consensually negotiated. The enlargement of social accountability could have repercussions that could enrich, but also burden higher education with proliferating social demands, raising questions again about the core business of higher education and the limits of what higher education could deliver in respect of public-good expectations.

A further example of the potentially contradictory effects of trying to institutionalise the public good stems from the possibility that some forms of institutionalisation could close off the imaginative horizon for ongoing engagement with, and enlargement of public-good potential; produce a creeping fundamentalism and authoritarianism around preferred public-good conceptualisations and approaches; curtail diversity in choice and agency in interpreting and acting on the public good, and result in the bureaucratisation of 'official' public-good initiatives in higher education systems and institutions. Many of these contradictions revolve around vanguardist or exclusionary claims to power and authority in interpreting and enacting the public good in higher education. Such dangers raise questions as to the balances needed between close steering and surveillance of public-good goals and modalities, on the one hand, and academic self-direction and diversity, on the other, in interpreting and acting

on public-good goals. Clearly, some broad framework coherence is needed, but without the undue coercion of official models, templates and criteria.

How full a conception of the public good can be realised under contemporary political and economic regimes? This question applies both to the dominance of global capital in shaping the limits and possibilities for states to fashion social policy as well as to concerns about weak citizen participation in decision-making in the body politic. In higher education, the power of market ideologies and of private interests has not been displaced despite the destabilisations evident in recent socio-economic crises. In many countries, official policy still reflects the dominance of knowledge economy and labour market discourses. The possibilities for re-balancing the weight of the public good and private interest dimensions within higher education are likely to be constrained by continuing socio-economic trends at national and global levels which have seen a concern for the public interest retreat in the face of the private interests of 'consumer citizens' and markets. Despite these constraints of the conjuncture, the aspiration to claim higher education for the public good persists, often symbolically, but also in the form of many context-specific strategies and practices.

4.   Conclusion

In their reflections on public values, Benington & Moore (2011: 4) speak of the need to address three sets of issues when embarking on public values transformations: clarity about definitional issues, having authorising environments in place (enabling policy, partnerships, alliances), and developing the appropriate capacities to move to the next step. The preceding analysis has attempted to indicate the complexities and difficulties of constructing a public-good ethos in relation to all three these issues. Defining the public good as a basis for action has to contend with strong differences in personal and ideological interests and opposing views on how benefit is understood. Constructing the required 'authorising environments' has to traverse different layers of power and influence – from institutions and systems of higher education to state policy and global regimes. What public-good capabilities are and how they are to be cultivated and evaluated in higher education is a very early and tentative debate. Without the effective presence of at least some of the requirements of these three sets of issues, the prospects for a systematic deep-rooted shift towards a public-good dispensation remain uncertain at best. Building the dialogical foundations on the basis of which consensual choices can be made in all three sets of areas may well be the first task in advancing the public good.

It was argued earlier that the nature of the conjuncture could render precarious the possibility that the politics, values, policies and practices of the

public good will become hegemonic in higher education. Where does this leave those with strong political and normative commitments to the public good or those role players (including governments) who are already undertaking a variety of public-good initiatives and projects in different higher education contexts? In *The idea of justice*, Sen (2010: ix) indicates that his aim in the book is "to clarify how we can proceed to address questions of justice and removing injustice, rather than to offer resolutions of questions about the nature of perfect justice".' This paradigm-changing approach is immensely valuable in providing a normative and pragmatic pointer for making choices and acting in contexts of public-good struggle. Resisting, removing or mediating public 'bads', launching more bottom-up public-good interventions in different layers and functions of higher education, and working towards making these initiatives more 'joined up' within systems and institutions could all constitute elements of a credible and realistic public-good praxis. Such an approach could help to steer between an overreaching search for a public-good 'grand narrative', on the one hand, and a pessimist view that public good-motivated resistance is futile in a totalising knowledge economy regime, on the other. In growing the public good in this long haul fashion, a great deal depends on increasing academic agency and fostering more dialogue and alliances among internal role players and external publics (Docherty 2011, Dill 2011).

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