

Reframing higher education as a global common good

Rita Locatelli

University of Bergamo, Italy

UNESCO Chair on Human Rights and Ethics of International
Cooperation



Structure of the presentation

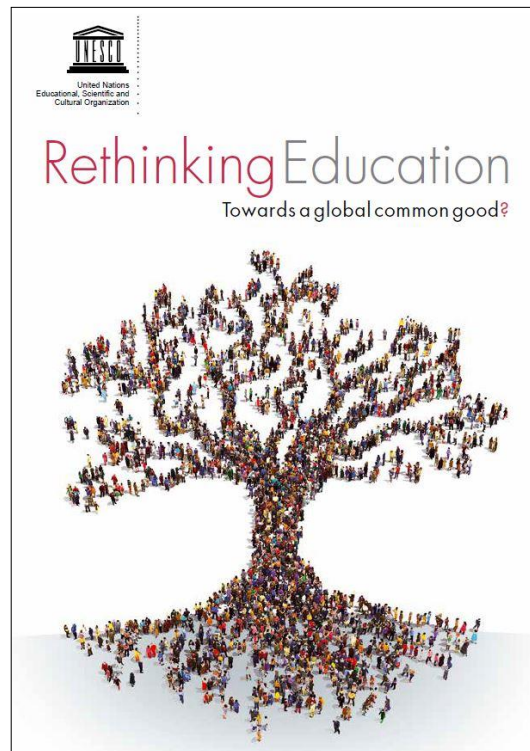
- Origins of this discussion
- The principle of higher education as a public good under strain
- Re-establishing the public in higher education
- The concept of common good as applied to HE
- Higher education and knowledge as global common goods

Origins of this discussion

Rethinking Education

Towards a global common good?

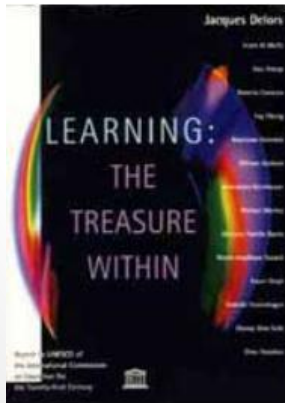
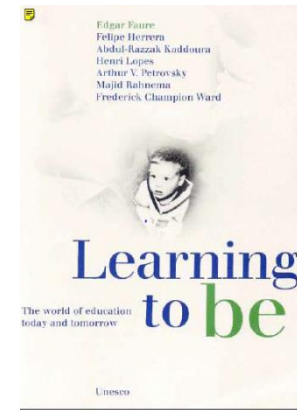
(UNESCO, 2015)



Looking backward to see ahead

In re-visioning education for the future we must build upon the legacy of past analyses

1972: **The Faure Report**: established the two interrelated notions of *learning society* and *lifelong education* at a time when traditional education systems were being challenged



1996: **The Delors Report**: Proposed an integrated vision of education based on the two concepts of *learning throughout life* and the *four pillars of learning* (learning to know, to do, to live together, and to be)

The report proposes the need:

1. to counter the dominant development discourse by reaffirming a humanistic vision of education and development;
2. to re-contextualize foundational principles for the governance of education, in particular the principle of education as a *public good*.

The principle of *higher*
education as a public good
under strain

The principle of public good as applied to higher education

- UNESCO 1998 World Conference on Higher Education
 - “**public support** for higher education and research remains essential to ensure a balanced achievement of its educational and social missions”
- 2004: a particularly important consideration if higher education is required to meet the challenge of **providing a mass quality higher education** at all levels”
- 2004: “new **private providers may**, if certain conditions are met, enhance the capacity to **meet unmet demand for higher education** in countries with decreasing state budgets. [...] **more research on the issue of ‘public good’ is called for.**”
- 2009: in contrast to World Bank’s advocacy of higher education as a **private gain.**
- UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education
 - “Higher education as a public good is the **responsibility of all stakeholders**, especially governments.
 - 47. Funding: Education remains a public good, but **private financing** should be encouraged.”

Diverse levels of interpretation

As an approach/vision	to reaffirm a humanistic/integrated vision of education in contrast to a more utilitarian approach
As a policy focus	to preserve the public interest and societal/collective development in contrast to an individualistic perspective
As a principle of governance	to reaffirm the role of the State as the guarantor/custodian/main duty-bearer of education in light of the greater involvement of non-state actors at all levels of the education endeavour

Challenges to the principle of higher education as a public good

Privatisation and marketization

- Massification has put greater pressures on public funding
- Diversification of providers and funders
- HE as an essential part of the “Knowledge Economy”, an “engine of development”.
- GATS, WTO: a tradable service
- Consumer orientation: commodification and unbundling (McCowan; Robertson)

Implications

- Organisation of HE: role of the State in the governance; equity, quality and funding
- Purposes: greater emphasis on private/economic benefits; changing social compact between HE and society

Reduction of public-good aspects of higher education:
a private good for which individuals and households should bear the costs

Re-establishing the *public* in higher education

What role for what kind of State?

- Higher education for the/as a *public good* (Marginson, McCowan, Tilak etc.)
- Different levels of (State) responsibility (Bergan, 2009);
- A corollary of a larger project of state and societal transformation (Singh, 2014);
- Higher education as part of the public sphere (Biesta, 2012);

HOWEVER, the way the public sphere should be reconstituted requires a “shift in culture”, combining top-down and bottom-up approaches.

The concept of common good as applied to HE

Origins of the concept of common goods

- *Res communes*: Roman law (air, running water, the sea and its shores)
 - “Common”, *com-muniis*: equal sharing of duties and responsibilities (contrary to “immune”, *in-muniis*, without duties)
- *The commons*: Ostrom (1990) resources defined in economic theory as non-excludable but rivalrous or subtractable – irrigation systems, fishing grounds
 - Beyond the State and the market, forms of shared governance and ownership
- The definition has expanded to include more generic material and immaterial goods. However, minimum semantic core (Coccoli, 2013)
 1. Opposition to the dynamics of neoliberalism
 2. Re-composition of networks of solidarity and cooperation within communities
 3. Development of instruments of participatory democracy
- From a philosophical-political perspective: a unitary category which goes beyond the economic classification of goods (Taylor, Deneulin and Townsend, Viola)

The concept of common good as applied to HE

- Humanistic approach
- Quest for knowledge: shared endeavour and responsibility
 - Process is a common good in itself
 - Pursuit of learning as a co-operative enterprise (Oakeshott, 1989)
- Integrated approach to education (capabilities)
 - Empowerment of all actors
 - Democracy and freedom
- Knowledge democracy
 - Fostering the diversity of worldviews and knowledge systems;
 - Decolonising society and imaginaries

The concept of common good as applied to HE

Implications on both the organisation and purposes of the HE system:

- Organisation: deliberative and transparent processes in order to “think jointly” (Arendt)
 - Rethink HE institutions substantially
 - Horizontality vs verticality
 - Enhancing sustainable and ethical forms of partnership and cooperation according to different realities
- Purposes: extend human understanding through open-ended enquiry (intrinsic and societal value):
 - For the person
 - For knowledge
 - For the democratic society

The three functions of universities

- Teaching: Relational dimension of teaching. Holistic approach.
 - Based on the fundamental perspective that knowledge is structured in consciousness of oneself and of the world.
- Research:
 - Long perspective, not merely immediately “useful” research;
 - Freedom of the researcher;
 - Beyond “dominant” research ([REAL Centre University of Cambridge](#))
- Community engagement/public service:
 - Capacity to bring together different components of society
 - Emphasis on the social responsibility of HE institutions
 - Fostering social transformation

Higher education and knowledge as global common goods

Higher education and knowledge as global common goods

“Given the central concern for sustainable development in an increasingly interdependent world, education and knowledge should thus be considered global common goods. This means that the creation of knowledge, its control, acquisition, validation, and use, are common to all people as a *collective social endeavour*.

The governance of education can no longer be separated from the governance of knowledge.”

Rethinking Education (UNESCO, 2015)

The challenge of sustainability: balancing excellence and equity

- Higher education and the SDGs: return to favour after EFA
- HE institutions are in a privileged position to
 - potentially contribute to the identification of alternative models of development
 - by enhancing the diversity of worldviews and knowledge systems

Global institutions, and cooperation in HE, can enable countries, students and citizens to have greater voice in the decisions that affect their well-being.

Thank you for your attention