

High Participation Systems of Higher Education

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Simon Marginson

[Cover slide]

Thank you very much Alis. Welcome and thank you all for coming to the High Participation Systems of Higher Education symposium and book launch. It is good to share this day with you. Working on this book over five years has been deeply satisfying and it is still a joy to handle it. We are deeply grateful to Oxford University Press for the design and cover work, and most of all to Adam Swallow for editorial guidance. Adam chose reviewers who added real value to the book. I want to thank Paul for responding today, and Alis for taking a day out of her sabbatical to chair. And above all I want to thank my co-editors. It has been a delight to work with Anna and Brendan on this. Each through their work on the book have profoundly influenced my own intellectual directions.

But before we blow out than candles, cut up the cake and sing 'happy book-day', I want to take you back down the time tunnel to the start of the project in 2013, to explain what we did, and why. And then to present part of the findings of this study of higher education growth and social transformation. Brendan and Anna will present more parts of the findings, and other observations. We will refer to the 17 propositions about HPS, high participation systems, that we developed from the theory chapters, Part 1 of book. These have been distributed to assist today's discussion.

Gross Enrolment Ratio tertiary education (%)

HPS began from looking at the UNESCO data on the participation rate by country. We became aware that since the 1990s tertiary education enrolment of 50 per cent or more had spread from a small number of systems in North America, Europe including Russia and the Anglo-Pacific to a large number of countries. And rapid growth was the norm in most countries. Growth in higher education was clearly outstripping the global rate of economic growth. At world level 80 per cent of tertiary students are in degree programmes. A much more educated world was emerging. We became more curious.

In 2013, 1/3 of tertiary systems exceeded 50%

There are three groups of countries for which we have standardised enrolment data. About one third in 2013 were 'high participation systems' with more than 50 per cent of the school leaver age cohort entering tertiary education. We decided to call 50 per cent enrolment 'high participation' and not 'universal' as Martin Trow did in his famous 1973 essay on the transition from elite to mass higher education. The distinction between 50 per cent and 100 per cent is important. Normally at 50 per cent some groups are more underrepresented. Several countries have enrolment ratios exceeding 90 per cent – for example South Korea, Finland, Canada.

Another third of countries, or a bit less, have a level of enrolment below the 15 per cent that Trow identified as the threshold for 'mass' higher education. Most of these countries have a per capita income below US \$5000 a year. This indicates that mostly, countries need to achieve a minimum level of public and private economic capacity to kick start the process of rapid growth of higher education that engages more than two thirds of all countries. All the same, there are a few poor countries with levels of participation approaching

the world average of 37 per cent, and a larger group with low enrolment ratios but fast rates of growth, mostly countries with urban concentrations.

The HPS project (2013-2018)

The questions we began with were, what did this emerging high participation system world mean for higher education institutions, for their shape and type. And what did a more educated world mean for society, for economies, for social equity, for human agency, for participation in politics? And because Martin Trow's definitive essay on massification – the most influential single paper written about higher education in the modern period -was written at a time when there was only one near high participation system – the United States – we wanted to know if Trow's ideas applied only to the US, or were more broadly relevant to the 50 plus HPS countries in the data.

Martin Trow (1973) on massification

Trow distinguished between elite, mass and universal (plus 50%) higher education. These were three historical phases, associated with different kinds of practices – in the mission of institutions, student selection, curriculum and teaching, the role of technology, academic and student cultures. However, the institutions marked by each phase continued to exist together in the present. Trow recognised that in the United States, and eventually, he thought, elsewhere, higher education was becoming essential to full social participation. He was also worried that mass and universal higher education was going to overwhelm the research intensive university, which he saw as part of the elite phase. As it turned out, he needn't have worried. Universities elite in both senses, the intellectual and the social, have flourished amid massification.

But how do we think about the familiar in a new way?

At the outset the HPS project posed a challenge for us. How could we think about what was an emerging new world, different to what we knew? How could we use the often very different national system experiences so as to draw from them generic and common tendencies that would define this world, tendencies explanatory at world level? We knew that higher education was global and national, and affected by global transfers, flows and systems. And we sensed a similar dynamic playing out, more or less, everywhere.

The benefits of multi-positionality rather than empty 'comparative' parallels

How could we find the *otherness* essential to finding new truths? How could we find a way into the HPS world? How would we imagine it? By good luck, or rather, on the suggestion of Jussi Valimaa from Finland, we decided not to develop separated country chapters as in the usual so-called comparative studies. We knew would end up stating what we already knew. We would learn little from each other. We would list points of similarity rather than newly identifying common dynamics and generic tendencies. We would miss the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of the other, and to compare and blend perspectives and make something new. For 'the truth is never the same'. Fortunately, we hit upon the device of cross-country chapter groups focused on single themes, like stratification, and equity.

The never-ending project

The idea of high participation systems was strong enough to hold our colleagues in the project, it carried us through tentative joint seminars at CHER and ASHE. Development was slow. The project was never funded and was not everyone's top priority. The fact that it was not funded was a great advantage,

because it left us free to develop the work according to the logic of inquiry. A research council and the process of peer review would never have given the license to theorise, to explore the truth that is not the same, that we took for ourselves in this HPS project. But the danger was that the project would just disappear, and I think it nearly did in 2015. Collaborating on integrative theme work was harder for everyone than writing country chapters. The equity chapter was almost solo, and stratification a duo. There was a lot of rewriting of the fragmented diversity chapter. Governance went better. It took almost three years before we had six chapters in reasonable shape.

Final chapters, HPS, February 2018

We then took an important step. We developed draft generalisations, theorisations that summarised what was learned in the chapter groups, the literature and a critical reading of Trow. We shopped the 17 propositions in the full group of researchers. They were amended. These propositions became both the findings of Part I of the project and a basis for further research.

[second set of chapters]

The next step was to test the propositions in the country studies. This took another year. After that we had a book. The selection of the country studies was determined by two elements – whether the country had reached 50 per cent participation, and whether there had been a potential country author at the initial meeting in Moscow in October 2013 and active in the theme chapter groups. Germany and China missed because they were both below 50 per cent.

Trow and the social drivers of growth in participation

I will now briefly outline our findings about the factors driving universal growth, and horizontal diversity in systems.

As a sociologist Trow saw the growth of higher education as a social process conditioned by economic and political factors, rather than a simple function of the economy. Given that there was no natural limit to social demand, Trow predicted that in the long run systems would just keep growing. Governments, whatever the political system, would have to give ground to social demand. Graduate unemployment would not be a primary issue because as the number of graduates grew, some would move down the occupational scale, replacing non graduates.

What we found: General propositions

Our review of the drivers of growth found that Trow was right on all points. This shaped the first three propositions. There is no limit to aspirations for higher education. Systems that reach 50 per cent participation march on towards 100 per cent. The only countries where the higher education take-off is not occurring are still largely rural. Once a society reaches a threshold level of economic development, the economy does not drive demand. Nor do governments. Rapid growth in enrolments can occur whether economic growth is fast or slow, and whether the economy has a large manufacturing sector or is focused on services. Governments never reduce participation, or not for long. It keeps on increasing. This point about the potency of social demand is significant not just for the HPS study but for social theory. In higher education, at any one time, structural factors like economic wealth and class relations set conditions and limits on what is possible. But over time the agency of families and students breaks through every barrier to participation. Where agency faces greater barriers is in the face of stratification.

Trends in global income inequality: Theil index: 1990-2010

The spread across the world of high participation systems, and systems moving towards that, is levelling out human capabilities on the global scale. This partly modifies neo-colonial relations. The HPS era has coincided with accelerated modernisation and urbanisation in middle income countries in East and Southeast Asia and Latin America, and to a lesser extent in South and West Asia and North Africa. Inequality between countries has reduced, though in two thirds of countries, within-country income inequality is increasing.

Ever-growing proportion of people living in cities worldwide

The growth of higher education and the process of urbanisation, growth in the world's proportion of the population that lives in cities –one of the strongest tendencies in the social and natural world - are closely tied together.

World urban population (%) and Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio (%): 1991-2015

The graph shows the correlation between the growing proportion of the population in cities and the growing proportion in higher education. Higher education is provided in cities where the demand is large and concentrated, with a critical mass of middle-class families; where there are more work opportunities for graduates; where there are adjunct industries such as transport; and where there are economies of scope and scale.

Multiplication of the global middle class

In cities families can place concentrated pressure on governments to provide more places and institutions and pool private resources to supplement the

state. The growth of the middle class is a function of modernisation process; of urbanisation, which enhances wage labour; and of the rise of middle income countries. Demand for higher education moves from the middle class to everyone else.

Trow on governance, horizontal diversity, stratification and equity

So far we agree with Trow. However, on systemic diversity – that is, horizontal diversity by institutional type in higher education – we reached partly different conclusions. Trow expected that as enrolments grow, more diverse provision would develop for more diverse types of students, unless government regulation blocked diversification. This is the market diversity argument dominant in higher education studies last century. However, Trow noted that imitating behaviour by institutions, isomorphism, might limit market diversity.

What we found: Horizontal diversity

We found that overall, Trow's hope for greater diversity of institutional type had not worked out. The picture varies from country to country, but the main trend has been a strengthening in the role of larger multi-disciplinary, multi-purpose and often multi-site universities. There is reduced horizontal diversity overall, except for the growing role of specialist online and for-profit forms. These are marginal to the established high participation systems. Other forms of diversity such as non-university second sectors, and specialist single discipline institutions, had diminished in many (though not all) countries.

[more of diversity propositions]

Further, as Trow anticipated, the emphasis on market competition in many national systems has driven imitating behaviour. This is one of the strongest

findings in the empirical literature on higher education systems. However, at the same time that diversity between institutional types has diminished, diversity *within* the much larger multi-purpose institutions has increased.

Gaps in the study

There are gaps in the high participation systems study, additional topics we might have addressed and country chapters still waiting to be done. But there will be opportunities for you and for us to develop further inquiries that test the relations between on one hand the growing role of higher education, on the hand other social variables, inside and outside higher education. Brendan and Anna will point down some of these paths. Thank you again for coming, and for listening! I hope we have plenty of time for discussion.