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**Higher education anywhere and everywhere: The world-wide trend to high participation societies and what it means**

Simon Marginson

UCL Institute of Education / Centre for Global Higher Education

***[Introductory slide]***

Good evening. I have heard much about the university and its wonderful setting. It is delightful to be able to see it and you close up.

***There’s politics, there are political issues … and there are long term trends shaping both***

It is a strange and unsettling time in the UK. The growing gap between rich and poor, the continuing reductions in local services and the gathering crisis in the NHS. Immigration policy still in the melting pot, with no clarity on the key issue of the size of the intake or where it comes from, and no resolution of the enormous backlog of EU citizen claims for residency. Brexit itself. You may see Brexit as a sad event that the country has imposed on itself, as I do, but it’s certain to go ahead. We can see why. The economic and political benefits of EU membership for the UK are clear but the UK was never fully part of Europe and the inward pressure of EU migration, in a country in which many regions have just been left to struggle, eventually proved too much. And now we have a national election, three years early, which will resolve nothing except who is in power, and for how long. That is, unless there’s another early election.

 But there is politics, there are today’s issues, and there are the long-term economic, social and cultural trends which tend to shape both. People like me who research in social science are meant to understand those longer trends.

***The long-term social trends are often more global than national in form***

These larger, longer social trends are often more global than national—that is, they either pertain to whole-of-world systems, like ecology and climate change, or they are happening in common in many countries of the world. This evening I want to talk about a major social change that is happening in many countries of the world. That is the great growth of higher education.

 In the last twenty years higher education has been shaped by three broad tendencies. The first is mass scale growth, or ‘massification’. The second is intensified competition between institutions and adoption of business-like features, often called ‘marketisation’. The third is the partial global integration and convergence between national systems, or ‘globalisation’. More is written about globalisation and marketisation than massification. But massification is monumental in scale and the most universal trend of the three.

Global convergence touches some national systems more than others. Many countries have become part of the global science system, and global comparison and ranking. Some like the UK have large numbers of international students. But higher education varies in the degree of cross-border engagement. Marketisation has reshaped higher education in English-speaking countries and Eastern Europe but in many Western European systems, and parts of Latin America, tuition is free and business models have a modest role. In East Asia fees the state keeps fees lower in public research universities and regulates quality in the private sector fairly closely. However, massification is everywhere. Nearly *all* higher education systems in which annual GDP per person exceeded $8000 USD, about one fifth of per capita income in the UK, there has been a massive and probably permanent growth in participation.

***Higher education anywhere and everywhere: coverage***

So this is the topic I want to share with you this evening. My first theme is the staggering data on the growth of higher education across the world. My second theme is what is driving this growth. Third, I’ll make some comments about growth and social mobility and inequality. Finally, I will look at what the growth of higher education might mean. What happens to human societies when more than half the population has higher education? What is a ‘high participation society’? There are many answers to that question. We are still learning what they are. But you can be sure that this society *will be different*.

***Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio (GTER, %): World, North America/Western Europe, UK, 1971-2014***

UNESCO provides data on age cohort enrolments in ‘tertiary education’, meaning two-year programmes and above. It varies by country, and the data tend to overstate participation in some countries because of immigration, and mature age students, but at world level about two thirds of tertiary enrolments are in degree programmes of three years and above. It’s about this level in the UK also. A worldwide tertiary enrolment ratio of 35 per cent, as we had in 2014, means that more than a third of the school leaver age group had entered or was expected to enter tertiary education. That means almost one in every four young people in the world enter degree programmes. Of that one quarter, the majority will graduate with degrees, sooner or later. Another, smaller group will graduate at two-year programme level.

 The first education system to achieve 50 per cent participation at tertiary level was the United States, in the mid 1970s. At that time participation in the UK was less than one young person in every five and only 15 countries had [participation rates of more than 15 per cent. By 2013, no less than 56 countries had reached the level of 50 per cent, and another 56 countries had participation rates of between 15 and 50 per cent. Almost three countries in four have mass participation in higher education. And in nearly every country, aside from those like Korea or Canada that are already close to the 100 per cent mark, the rate of age group participation is growing rapidly.

 You can see from the graph that tertiary participation in UK has fluctuated, has mostly been below the level of participation in North America and Western Europe taken together, and is trending slightly downwards, which is not the world pattern. Focus on the world trend line at the bottom of the graph. In the twenty years from 1994 to 2014, worldwide participation jumped from 14 per cent to 34 per cent. In *another twenty years* more than half of all young people in all countries, rich and poor, taken together, will reach tertiary education stage. Almost a third will become degree holders. That’s a lot of qualifications.

***Regional Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratios (%), 1970, 1990, 2010 and 2014***

The large scale higher education systems which began in North America, UK and Western Europe, Russia, Japan and Australia have now spread almost everywhere. Between 1990 and 2014 the GTER increased markedly in each world region except Central Asia, and it is now high or sharply rising everywhere except Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia. When systems reach GTERs of 50 per cent or more they grow towards 100 per cent. In some countries growth has been truly extraordinary. In Turkey the GTER jumped from 25 to 70 per cent in the 12 years between 2000 and 2012. Other large increases included Albania 42 per cent, Cuba 41 per cent, Belarus 37 per cent and Chile 36 per cent. And there is rapidly growing educational participation in three of the world’s four most populous countries, China, India and Indonesia.

***Growth in Indonesia, China and India***

These countries between them have a total population of 3 billion people. A one third participation rate, which has now been achieved, means that in the long run, one billion people will enter tertiary education from these three countries alone. A 50 per cent participation rate means that about one billion people will enter degree programmes, just in these three countries. In future there’s going to be a lot of qualified labour from China, India and Indonesia.

***GTER and urbanisation in Indonesia 1990-2013 (1)***

In these three demographic giants, the growth of participation in tertiary education is correlated to the process of capitalist modernisation, as people move from a Neolithic life in the countryside to jobs in industrialised cities. For example, this graph displays trends in Indonesia between 1990 and 2013. You can see the historical connections between the declining share of agriculture in the labour force, the growing share of the national population living in cities…

***GTER and urbanisation in Indonesia 1990-2013 (2)***

… and the concurrent increase in the national Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio.

***Comparative participation in the UK: The Clancy Index for OECD countries***

Let’s look more closely at UK educational participation. University College Dublin Sociologist Pat Clancy has devised a ‘Comparative Higher Education Participation Index’ for OECD countries which combines five indicators—the expected enrolment rate for the present school leaver age cohort, the sum of the enrolment rates at each age level, the enrolment intensity (the proportion of the age group enrolled in the two high enrolment years, which in the UK are 19 and 20 years), the proportion of 25-34 year olds who have achieved higher education, and the proportion of 35-44 year olds with higher education.

In Clancy’s Index the UK comes 19th out of 31 OECD countries—well below the United States at number 2 after South Korea, Australia at 4, and Canada at 5. The OECD data show that the UK does well in having a high proportion of those who reach tertiary education at degree level, and it has good rates of degree completion. But it is sharply polarised between degree-level graduates and the many young people who do not reach tertiary education at all. The £9000 fee regime has cut part-time enrolments, which has not helped, and the poor resourcing and standing of Further Education also reduces participation.

***Effect of international students on rate of entry into degree programmes by age 25***

The UK position is a bit worse than Clancy’s index suggests. This is because international students artificially boost the UK’s apparent rate of participation in tertiary education. The graph compares entry into degree programmes by age 25, across the OECD countries. As I’ve said, the UK performs better in degree level participation than non-degree tertiary. If international students are included the UK comes equal sixth in the OECD. But if international students are excluded and only domestic students are taken into account, the UK falls back to 15th out of the 18 countries for which we have data. Again, we see that although world participation is growing rapidly, the UK lags behind.

 All the same, we should remember that the long-term trend in UK is broadly similar to elsewhere—massive growth of participation and credentials. Student participation in the UK is double the level it was a generation ago.

***What is driving the growth of tertiary and higher education?***

My second theme this evening is the explanation. What is driving that growth? Some might say ‘the economy’. If so it must be a pretty dynamic economy, all over the world, that suddenly doubled participation in two decades. Some might say ‘government’. But why should government be this generous when it can’t maintain funding for the NHS which is more popular than education? And why did all governments go for growth together? Clearly there’s more to it.

***The spread of higher education through the workforce***

In 1973, Berkeley sociologist Martin Trow published *Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education*. Trow stated that when higher education expands from an ‘elite’ system to a ‘mass’ system educating at least 15 per cent of the youth cohort, and then to a ‘universal’ system at 50 per cent, the education changes. The purpose of higher education—which in the US includes two year programmes, equivalent to ‘tertiary’ elsewhere—shifts from ‘shaping the mind and character of the ruling class’ (at elite stage), to preparing a larger group in professional and technical skills (at the mass stage), to preparing the whole population in ‘adaptability’ to social and technological change (at the universal stage). Access shifts from a privilege, to a right, to an ‘obligation’, at least for the middle class. As more people enter higher education, it becomes ‘a symbol of rising social status’ (p. 41). Young people that stay out, he said, must pay a penalty—less job options, less social status, less personal agency.

Despite ‘loose talk about graduate unemployment or of an oversupply’, argued Trow, ‘people who have gone on to higher education thereby increase their chances for having more secure, more interesting, and better paid work throughout their lives.’ Graduate unemployment was not the problem many thought it was because of the ‘educational inflation of occupations’. Graduate jobs are not fixed, but move down the occupational scale. As the number of graduates grows, they displace those without qualifications, some using their educated capabilities to enrich the jobs. ‘What mass higher education does is to break the old rigid connection between education and the occupational structure’ that prevents graduates from taking non-graduate jobs, he said.

***The dynamic of open-ended growth***

Hence, according to Trow, the ultimate motor of growth was not economic demand for graduates, or even government policy on enrolments. It was family aspirations to maintain and improve social position. This led Trow to two crucial insights. First, there is no natural limit to aspirations for social betterment through education. It is not subject to economic scarcity. Higher education would just keep growing. There will be ‘continued popular demand for an increase in the number of places in colleges and universities’, he said. ‘It seems to me very unlikely that any advanced industrial society can or will be able to stabilize the numbers’ (Trow, 1973, p. 40).

Second, once a mass tertiary education system has been built, government policy follows social demand for higher education, not vice versa. States are crucial in starting mass tertiary education, in providing the infrastructure, support funding for students, and training the staff. But once the system is established growth feeds on itself. More and more families find they have to participate. Trow observed that the middle classes are usually the first to take advantage of increases in educational opportunities ‘of every kind and at every level’. Middle class people have the discretionary income to finance their aspirations through tuition or taxation. Then educational aspirations spread from the middle class to the whole population. In response government expands enrolments further, gaining political points each time it does so.

Why do we know that government is not the ultimate regulator? If the level of enrolment was based primarily on rational public planning it would rise and fall with changes in national circumstance. But the UNESCO data for participation in each national system show that significant falls in participation rates are unusual—and that they are *always temporary. Nowhere*, once mass participation is established, has any state moved to secure a lasting reversal of growth, despite the costs of expansion. Though there are many cases of states shifting part of the cost of high participation to families and students.

***World GDP, population and tertiary enrolment, 1970-2012***

That’s the sociological explanation for the growth of tertiary and higher education. It is not the dominant explanation. Governments, economists and universities mostly believe that public policy shapes expansion in response to economic demand for educated human capital. In human capital theory economic demand is signaled in the labour markets by the wage returns to marginal productivity. Students focus on graduate wages and employability. People (or governments on their behalf) invest in education, in terms of time, income forgone and tuition, to the point where the lifetime returns to degree holders equal the costs of investment. Higher education tends to equilibrium with economic demand. If not, something is wrong with the education.

However, this theory does not stand up well to empirical scrutiny. In North America, Western Europe and the UK the bursts of rapid educational growth in the 1960s, and in the 1990s, did not coincide with especially large changes in occupational structures, skill requirements, or labour market demands. The surge in participation in the last two decades has been associated with a range of countries with differing economic growth rates, and industry configurations, for example the size and character of manufacturing and services. Just looking at the countries where the educational participation rate expanded by over 18 per cent between 2000 and 2012, the rate of economic growth spanned from China at 10.1 per cent per annum to Portugal at 0.2 per cent per annum.

***GDP and GTER, 2013 or nearest year***

As the table shows, high participation occurs in 16 countries with annual GDP per head of less than $20,000 US. When national economic growth rates are compared to tertiary enrolment growth there is a moderate association between economic growth and educational growth. This does not mean that economic growth is driven by educational expansion as human capital theory suggests. It is equally plausible to claim that the causality is reversed.

What about the economic counter argument to human capital theory— credentialism? In the counter argument, the economic role of education is not to impart useful skills but to function as a sorting or screening system for employers. Here the growth of participation is seen as the outcome of growth in the number of people who use credentials as signs of employability, combined with the vested interest of institutions in multiplying and elevating educational programs and credentials to cater for this behavior; or perhaps fostering such behaviour in their own interests as educational institutions.

It is true that educational credentials have a sorting role, and that many educational institutions want to expand their social reach. However, occupational licensing and credential structures vary greatly between countries with similar growth of participation; and the economic self-interest of universities does not seem strong enough to explain a social tendency as powerful as the long-term growth of participation. Credentialism looks more like an opportunistic follower of educational expansion than a leader of it.

Neither economic demand nor economic supply seems sufficient to explain educational growth. It is more credible to argue that economic development and educational development, which often seem to move in tandem, are partly decoupled in terms of causality, both responding to a common process of modernisation. The only economies where educational participation is typically low and slow to grow are low income economies with insufficient public and private resources to support higher education at scale, economies with a high proportion of labour in agriculture, and relatively small middle class populations. The best predictor of a nation’s level of participation in tertiary education is the level of urbanisation, the proportion of the population living in cities. Note that national middle classes are largely concentrated in cities.

***Proportion of population living in urban areas (%) and Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio (%), 2011***

The graph lists 20 large countries by population, arranged in order of the extent of urbanisation. It compares the proportion of people living in cities in each nation, to the proportion who will enrol in tertiary education, the UNESCO GTER. Mostly the rate of urbanisation exceeds tertiary participation. Enrolment ratios are well below urbanisation in the poorest countries: Congo, Pakistan and Bangladesh. But the line of best fit suggests a strong association between urbanisation and the GTER. This does not mean urbanisation ‘causes’ participation. Rather, the expansion of the economies, cities and middle classes are all sourced in capitalist modernisation; and the growing urban middle classes primarily sustain growth in social demand for education.

Between 1970 and 2010 the urban proportion of the world’s population rose from 37 to 52 per cent. In South America it climbed from 60 to 83 per cent, in China from 17 to 49 per cent and in Indonesia from 17 to 50 per cent. It grew more slowly in India, from 20 to 31 per cent. The urban concentration of the middle class builds a critical mass of upper secondary students, and magnifies political pressure for expanded tertiary provision, while also enabling economies of scale. Because of size and cost factors, advanced educational infrastructure is largely located in cities. With higher education concentrated in cities it becomes visible to many other aspiring families, below the affluent middle class. In this manner aspirations for tertiary education spread down through the social structure towards universality.

In a study for Brookings and the OECD, Homi Kharas and colleagues define a middle class person as someone living on $10-$100 USD per day in Purchasing Power Parity terms. On this basis 1.8 billion persons were middle class in 2009, 28 per cent of world population, and a further 2 per cent were ‘rich’. Thus 30 per cent of all persons were middle class or above, a level similar to the world GTER of 28 per cent in 2009. The authors also find that ‘over the coming twenty years the world evolves from being mostly poor to mostly middle class’. The middle classes rise from 1.8 billion persons in 2009 to 4.9 billion in 2030. Most of the growth is in Asia-Pacific, from 0.5 to 3.2 billion, principally in China and India. Using a more restricted definition of middle class, the World Bank expects its share of global population to more than double by 2030 (p. 6). This ballooning of the global middle class suggests that in future the growth of participation in tertiary education will accelerate.

I will now move to the third theme of the four, which is the relations between educational growth, social mobility and social inequality.

***Breaking through? Disadvantage facing 20-34 year olds without tertiary-educated parents, 2012***

A particular concern in UK is that despite the growth of participation, the divide between tertiary educated and non-tertiary educated families is more strongly reproduced than in most other OECD countries. The battle to extend participation across the whole society is by no means over. The graph shows that in England a 20-34 year old person with at least one tertiary-educated parent was 6.3 times as likely to participate in tertiary education, as a 20-34 year old person whose parents had less than upper secondary education. In the United States the ratio was worse at 6.8. This compares to Korea where there was little difference in the position of students from non tertiary educated parents, compared to those from tertiary educated parents.

 In the United States income distribution is now more unequal than at any time in recorded American history, and anywhere else in the OECD except Mexico and Chile. Educational outcomes mirror this gross income inequality. Almost 90 per cent of young people reach some kind of tertiary education, but less than half achieve four-year degrees, and the degree completion rate is skewed in favour of the top 25 per cent of families in terms of income.

***Social inequality in achieved college degrees, USA 1970/2013***

In the US in 2013, 77 per cent of persons in the top family income quartile had completed a Bachelor degree by age 24 years. In this quartile the graduation rate had almost doubled since 1970, rising from 40 to 77 per cent. In the bottom family income quartile, the graduation rate had also risen—but only from 6 per cent in 1970 to 9 per cent in 2013. In the second bottom quartile the graduation rate was 17 per cent in 2013. The overwhelming majority of the bottom half of the population in income terms had not graduated by age 24. At the same time the overwhelming majority of top quartile people had done so. American political scientist Suzanne Mettler finds that: ‘Over the past thirty years … our system of higher education has gone from facilitating upward mobility to exacerbating social inequality.’ Higher education, she finds, fosters a society that ‘increasingly resembles a caste system: it takes Americans who grew up in different social strata and it widens the divisions between them and makes them more rigid’. Higher education ‘stratifies Americans by income group rather than providing them with ladders of opportunity’.

This is not so much a problem of access or even the growing cost of fees. Stratification is reproduced by the steep difference between the value of enrolling in the top universities and in two year public and private colleges. Many people drop out of low status colleges, with tuition debt, without completing. In the United States social mobility is lower than in most other OECD countries. It is harder for Americans from poor families to improve their position, than it is for poor people from other OECD countries. Tertiary education cannot equalize American society on its own. But the sad fact is that US education is so stratified in value that it probably makes inequality worse.

***Stratification within high participation: UK***

‘Stratification of value in higher education’ may sound technical but it is a very important matter. Prior to this I have spoken about participation as if all forms are equivalent. Of course it is not so. There are sought-after programmes and institutions that confer high value, and less valuable places. In every country, the population is divided into three groups: those that access high value elite student places, those enrolled in tertiary places with less value, and those that do not enrol. However, the degree of stratification between elite and mass places, the ‘steepness’ of the hierarchy, varies greatly between countries. In some education systems, every place provides good lifetime opportunities. In others it is not so. This changes the meaning of educational growth.

In the high participation higher education era we are now in, all countries have a choice. On one hand there is high participation education that is both highly competitive, and highly stratified in value and quality, and makes a weak contribution to social mobility. An education system with a small number of clear-cut social winners, many losers, and others in the uncertain middle ground. On the other hand, there is high participation education provided on a common good basis, where participation and quality are both high, all places and degrees have value, with modest differentials between institutions that are achieved by raising up the lower status institutions, and higher education contributes to greater social mobility and social solidarity. This is the approach taken in the Nordic world, and to an extent the German speaking countries and the Netherlands, where all research universities are well regarded and funded.

In the UK, the Russell Group, especially Oxford and Cambridge, provide strong lifetime opportunities that are over-accessed by affluent families whose children have attended high fee independent schools. The top half of the Russell Group receives the most resources per student, produces the bulk of the leading research, and provides more than its share of the most prestigious student places in law, medicine and finance. A highly stratified school system feeds into a highly stratified university system which contributes to unequal outcomes for students of different backgrounds in the professional labour markets and in earnings. No doubt this feeds into greater income inequality

You might expect that as participation expands, bringing more families to the starting gate, there would be greater equality of opportunity in access to the top institutions. Unfortunately, the opposite is the case. Unless governments take firm corrective action, as participation expands, while social inclusion in higher education is advanced, social equality is worsened. As Yossi Shavit and colleagues put it in their 2007 comparative study of stratification in higher education, across a range of countries including the UK, as systems expand, ‘qualitative differentiation replaces inequalities in the quantity of the education obtained’. The institutional hierarchy becomes more determining. High value places shrink as a proportion of all places. When social competition in education becomes more intense, this favours families with the private means and the inside knowledge and experience with which to compete. Families newly participating in tertiary education tend to become concentrated in the lower status institutions, where participation alone cannot generate strong social outcomes. In short, it is more difficult for public policy to change the social distribution of opportunities when participation exceeds 50 per cent of the age group, than when the participation rate was 15 per cent.

***Higher education system settings can affect social equality/inequality***

Not impossible, but more difficult. Essentially, it means either taking privileged places from some middle class families—or it means applying resources selectively to change the university hierarchy itself, so its structure becomes more equal, with more egalitarian system settings, as in Northwest and Central Europe. So that a student place in Bath Spa University would carry much the same prestige and resources as a student place at the University of Bath and a place at the University of Bristol. Needless to say, neither change would be at all easy to achieve at scale. Both would require a government sincere about reform, a social consensus about achieving greater equality, and time.

University of Oxford places will not be redistributed evenly between social classes overnight. Alternately, Bath Spa and Bristol will not be made into equivalent choices overnight. How can policy makers make changes that will move higher education in the right direction. So that it begins to make society more fair and not less fair? A government really committed to improving social mobility through higher education has a tough challenge. Grammar schools will not help social mobility overall. They provide more opportunities for a minority of students but push the majority further down, in a more hierarchical system.

 I will now move to the final theme of the evening: the question about ‘what is a high participation society?’ What kind of world is it when more than half the population of the world enters tertiary education, and a third have degrees? On present trends, we reach that world in the next generation.

***Research finds people with tertiary education, on average …***

We already know something of a world in which half the people enter tertiary education because of two decades of research on the outcomes associated with graduates. There is a useful summary of the research up to 2009 in Walter McMahon’s *Higher Learning, Greater Good*. The association between more and better employment options, and being a graduate, diminishes as tertiary education expands and graduate pay falls back towards the new social average. However, the gain in employability never entirely disappears. This is because all graduates enjoy a generic advantage over non-graduates in communications and relational skills. Above all, graduates have greater confidence and greater personal agency. This shows itself in several domains.

***Educational level and ICT and problem solving skills, OECD survey, selected countries***

This table, taken from the 2012 OECD survey of adult skills, show that when comparing graduates from tertiary education to graduates whose highest qualification is upper secondary education, there is a difference of 11-30 per cent in the proportion of people with ‘good ICT and problem solving skills’ in the countries named in the table. In England the difference is 23 per cent.

So graduates communicate more freely and this opens the cross-border world to them. Graduates are also more physically mobile across national borders. The OECD’s *Perspectives on Global Development 2017: International migration in a shifting world* (2016) contains data comparing the cross-border mobility of people with, and without, university degrees. Among those without degrees the tendency to move across borders is correlated to income. As income rises people had more scope for mobility. The capacity for mobility appears to be economically determined. However, among those with university degrees the pattern is different. First, at a given level of income, those with degrees are much more mobile than those without: in other words, higher education helps to democratise mobility (provided higher education itself is accessed). Second, for those with degrees, as income rises, above a modest threshold of income there is little change in potential mobility. That is, the propensity to move becomes income inelastic. Strikingly, this suggests that because higher education helps graduates to achieve greater personal agency, it weakens the limits created by economic determination and class. Degree level education constitutes greater personal agency, freedom, in its own right.

***Level of education and interpersonal trust***

The 2012 OECD survey of adult skills also reported that people with tertiary education were more likely to trust others, a finding that held after statistically accounting for differences in gender, age and income. In England, only 11 per cent of those with less than upper secondary education reported that they felt able to trust others, but this proportion rose to 26 per cent among those with tertiary education. While the low level of trust in many countries stands out, among tertiary graduates, trust was highest in Denmark at 51 per cent, Norway at 49 per cent, Sweden 47 per cent and the Netherlands 47 per cent. It was higher in Canada and Australia, both at 30 per cent, than in England.

***Level of education and belief that the person has a say in government***

On the question of having a say in government, the OECD found that while just 20 per cent of those in England with less than upper secondary education believed they had a say in government, this rose to 39 per cent among tertiary graduates, again after statistically accounting for differences in gender, age and income. In some other countries, over half the tertiary graduates believed they had a say in government, including 56 per cent in the US. Again, the common thread in these findings is that graduates have greater relational confidence and personal agency. A high participation society is a more sociable society. Whether it is also a more equal society is another question.

***The new politics of higher educated societies?***

High participation higher education is not a simple unambiguous good for all. As advanced education and credentials become more widely distributed, the polarity between the higher educated and others—which, given the demographics of educational growth, is also a polarity between the young and the old—because more regressive for the non-graduate. Non-graduates are more disadvantaged than before. They lack the credential which is becoming the minimum necessary to gain a range of work, and they lack the augmented personal agency, cultural capital and ease of mobility (economic, social, and spatial-global) that tertiary education brings. In effect, they are excluded from the full benefits of citizenship. This closure breeds an understandable resentment. And we now know that the polarity between higher educated and those not, and the resentment, can be mobilized for political purposes. In 2016 this happened in both the US and the UK.

In both countries, there was a surge of political support for ethno-nationalism of the blood-and-soil kind—strong enough to take the UK out of the European Union in the June 2016 referendum and to propel a white nationalist protectionist in Donald Trump into the White House. While not all of those who supported Brexit and voted for a Republican president shared an ethno-nationalist outlook, there was no ambiguity about where the dynamism came from. ‘Give us back our country’ and ‘Make America great again’ were the signature slogans. The ‘alt-right’ divided the electorate between singular ethno-national identity, and global openness and plural identity, which was stigmatised as ‘elite’. Breaking with mainstream globalism, the alt-right opposed all forms of global integration and convergence including free trade, migration and migrants themselves. As I have noted, ease with global mobility is associated with higher education. This helps to explain how the electoral polarisation divided the educated and non-educated.

***Brexit and educational level, June 2016***

The best overall predictors of how people voted in the US and UK were not their income or class position. The predictors were first, whether they lived in large cities, in which case they tended to support the EU and Clinton, or small towns and rural areas, which mostly supported Brexit and Trump; and second, whether they had degrees. These factors are related. Like global connections, degree holders tend to concentrate in cities. In the UK, 26 per cent of degree holders supported Brexit, but 78 per cent of people without qualifications. Young people, the most educated generation in UK history, more at ease with mobility and multiple identity, overwhelmingly voted for the UK to remain in the EU.

The irony is that higher education could not have been mobilized on the wrong side of an elite versus the people duality until it had become partly democratized by the extension of participation. Trump could not have used level of education as a means of dividing the American electorate if only 5 per cent of people went to university and it *was* solely an elite affair. Only when participation reached a third or more of all young people, and higher education had become much less elite, could it be used as a binary political weapon.

This suggests that the educated/non-educated polarity is a weapon with diminishing power. If participation in higher education keeps expanding and we move closer to a high participation society, the potential political base for ethno-nationalism must shrink. People will have more personal confidence and more life options. They will be less threatened by migrants and others who are different. But the warning of Brexit and the Trump campaign is that higher education, and government, need to pay much more attention to those who have *not* themselves benefitted from university or college. Here again we find the question posed by the stratification of higher education. We are at a fork in the road. Will higher education help to integrate the future high participation society? Or will higher education help to make that society more unequal?

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