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Abstract

The focus is on the micro-possibilities of student capabilities formation as the end of public-good higher education, rather than on a systems or organizations approach more commonly found in discussions of the public good and higher education. This does not discount other valuable public-good ends. Using South Africa as a global South context, a capability-based approach to the public good of higher education is proposed for its humanizing ethic, attention to fair opportunities, and participation in terms of what students are able to do and to be in and through higher education. A capability frame is complemented by thinking about decoloniality and epistemic justice to help identify central higher education capabilities. The three proposed intersecting capability dimensions are as follows: personhood self-formation, epistemic contribution, and sufficiency of economic resources, intended to guide university practices and policy interventions in the direction of the public good. By populating the space of the public good with capabilities, a shift is made away from micro-economics which see the public good as a reductionist space of commodities and human capital development. Higher education is rather understood as having both instrumental and intrinsic value,

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generating an alternative logic to that of neo-liberalism, and an individualist ontology of competition and untrammelled markets. The pressures of the global context are acknowledged so that the public good is understood as both “ideal-aspirational” but also “practical-feasible” in the light of local South African conditions. An expanded capability-based framing would contribute to reducing higher education inequalities as a public-good and public-accountable contribution by universities. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Walker, Melanie, E-Mail: walkermj@ufs.ac.za