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Dynamics of national and global competition in higher education

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Abstract

The paper explores the dynamics of competition in higher education. National competition and global competition are distinct, but feed into each other. Higher education produces 'positional goods' (Hirsch 1976) that provide access to social prestige and income-earning. Research universities aim to maximise their status as producers of positional goods. This status is a function of student selectivity plus research performance. At system-level competition bifurcates between exclusivist elite institutions that produce highly value positional goods, where demand always exceeds supply and expansion is constrained to maximise status; and mass institutions (profit and non-profit) characterised by place-filling and expansion. Intermediate universities are differentiated between these poles. In global competition, the networked open information environment has facilitated (1) the emergence of a world-wide positional market of elite US/UK universities; and (2) the rapid development of a commercial mass market led by UK and Australian universities. Global competition is vectored by research capacity. This is dominated by English language, especially US universities,

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contributing to the pattern of asymmetrical resources and one-way global flows. The paper uses Australia as its example of system segmentation and global/national interface. It closes by reflecting on a more balanced global distribution of capacity. (HRK / Abstract übernommen), Marginson, Simon, E-Mail: simon.marginson@education.monash.edu.au