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Higher Education for and beyond the Sustainable Development Goals

Tristan McCowan

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Contents

Part III

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAU	Association of African Universities
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CUE	Commission for University Education
DESD	Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
DfE	Department for Education
DFID	Department for International Development
EFA	Education for All
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GPS	Global Positioning System
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IIEP	International Institute of Educational Planning
INEP	Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Research)
LMICs	Low and Middle-Income Countries
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOOCs	Massive Open Online Courses

NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
THE	Times Higher Education
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education
UDS	University for Development Studies
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNILA	Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana (University of Latin American Integration)
UVI	Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (Intercultural University of Veracruz)

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Part I

1

Introduction

On the day that the army of Bakhtiyar Khalji arrived, Nalanda University was by far the largest in the world. Located in what is today Bihar in North-Eastern India, its students came from as far as Turkey in the West and Japan in the East, to study, in addition to the Buddhist scriptures, linguistics, astronomy, logic and medicine. Posing a threat to the occupying force, the university was ransacked and the vast library burnt. It was reported that the books were so numerous that the bonfire stayed alight for three months (Gupta 2018; Sankalia 1934).

The destruction of Nalanda at the end of the twelfth century after seven centuries of existence coincided with the development of the first universities in Europe, with Bologna, Paris and Oxford gathering together their communities of students and professors. These institutions—in the modified forms that would emerge over the subsequent centuries—would come in time to dominate the global stage of higher education, in conjunction with the general cultural, political and economic ascendancy of the West in the second half of the last millennium. With only a few exceptions—for example, the Islamic universities of North Africa, Al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco and Al-Azhar in Egypt—the many other forms of higher

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learning around the world have faded away, or suffered a more brutal fate as a result of the histories of human conflict and colonisation. While there are some distinctive characteristics in higher education institutions across different countries and regions, for the most part they follow a common epistemic and institutional model.

The global expansion of this modern institution of university has been extraordinary. Few countries in the world do not have their own—and those that do not are often served by cross-national institutions such as the University of the West Indies or University of the South Pacific. Global enrolments in tertiary education (including non-university post-secondary institutions) have increased from 10% of the global cohort in the early 1970s, to 20% at the turn of the millennium, and to 38% in 2017, representing some 220 million students (Marginson 2016; UIS 2018). There are demand and supply drivers for this expansion. On the one hand, growth has been brought about through the pressures of increasing numbers of school leavers aspiring to upgrade their qualifications, and give themselves a better chance of chasing the scarce, high-value jobs. On the other hand, governments have been keen to strengthen their higher education systems as a means to greater economic competitiveness, forming high-level skills in the workforce and developing technological innovation for the industrial sector.

At the same time, in spite of the apparent pre-eminence of higher education in contemporary times, the sector is in the midst of something of a crisis. There are widespread concerns about quality in universities, and a sense of a loss of standards, in many cases as a result of rapid expansion. In particular, critics point to the lack of relevance of universities to the outside world, being out of touch with contemporary society, and as a result not equipping their students with the competences needed, particularly in their employment. Public funding has declined, causing difficulties in keeping pace with massification, and leading to the adoption of income-generation activities that many see as hollowing out the university's soul. The rise of global university rankings has also created anxiety among national higher education systems as they puzzle over how to insert their institutions into the upper echelons of elite research performance. There is, furthermore, an epistemic crisis, with the questioning of knowledge forms from twentieth-century

post-modernism coalescing with populist anti-expert and post-truth movements of the twenty-first.

Nevertheless, concerns about the quality and relevance of universities have done little to dent popular demand for university credentials, or governments' desires to have a 'world-class' higher education sector—the latter without increased public investment, thereby passing an ever greater burden onto students and their families, and exacerbating inequalities. In the midst of this contradictory trajectory of expansion and crisis of identity, equity and funding, there has been a renewal of interest in higher education among international development agencies. Following decades of emphasis on primary education, influential organisations such as the World Bank have begun to see universities once again as central to the development project, leading to new waves of activity in higher education in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). This trajectory led to the increasing prominence of the sector in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed in 2015, in which access to tertiary education is positioned as a key target, and universities as instrumental in driving all of the goals of development.

Yet the question arises, can the university fulfil this role? Can it reduce poverty, equip people for sustainable livelihoods, develop clean technologies, protect the environment, create prosperity and ensure a healthy population? And if so, what kind of university would that be? All too often, the assumption is made that by simply expanding the higher education system, the benefits will automatically accrue, with little thought for the diverse forms that higher education may take or the nature of the link between higher education and development.

This book addresses these crucial issues of the contemporary age. For those engaged in the pressing task of promoting international higher education, the book poses the question: which higher education for which development? Drawing on empirical evidence from around the world, and theoretical work on the university, it explores the impact that higher education is currently having on society, its barriers and limitations, and ways in which its influence can be enhanced. The book argues that many of the policies currently promoted by national governments and international agencies are in fact undermining the

developmental role the same organisations have proposed. If we are serious about achieving the SDGs, then we will need to imagine and create a new university: one committed to universal access, research for the public good and engagement with diverse communities. That university, in turn, has a key role to play in helping us to re-examine and reimagine our fundamental notions of education and development, and to go beyond the sustainable development goals.

The Return of the University

People might be forgiven for thinking that universities are something of a luxury in the poorest countries of the world. Why should some continue their studies to degree level when many are not even going to primary school? Why should a country be investing in libraries and laboratories when it cannot even bring clean water and electricity to all of its population? And why should states be paying the salaries of lecturers when local health workers and police are needed?

These are all valid questions, and—along with economic analyses (e.g. Psacharopoulos et al. 1986; Psacharopoulos 1994) that showed that returns to the lower levels of education were greater—led to a shift of attention towards primary schools on the part of international agencies and national governments from the 1990s (Bloom et al. 2006). Beyond a lack of resources to fund this level, it was considered that public higher education might actually be exacerbating socio-economic inequalities, given the apparently regressive function of giving free university places to the wealthy.

However, the tide began to turn from the start of the new millennium. The publication of the Task Force on Higher Education and Society's (2000) report *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*, a collaboration between the World Bank and UNESCO, showed a much stronger acknowledgement of the sector's role in economic development (although at the same time questioning the role of the state and recommending private sector expansion). Reports such as that of Bloom et al. (2006) also provided much stronger arguments for HE's economic benefits, in this case in the context of Africa.

Importantly, this role was now seen to be not only one of enhancing economic opportunities for those few lucky enough to go to university (enrolment ratios were still extremely low in this period), but more broadly in society, through the mechanisms of increased tax payments of graduates, creation of employment, innovation, technological catch-up and productivity gains. The large-scale rates of return analyses also started to show that the returns to higher education were increasing in relation to primary and secondary levels—possibly due to saturation of graduates at the lower levels, or to changes in calculations (Oketch et al. 2014).

In many cases, measurements of the impact and cost-effectiveness of higher education are unfair on the sector. The problem lies in the multifaceted nature of the work of the university, involving teaching, but also a range of other functions (a bewildering range in the case of Clark Kerr's [1963] 'multiversity'). The misrepresentation occurs when calculations include all of the costs of these activities, but only some of the benefits. For example, dividing the total expenditure of the university by the number of students being taught often gives the impression of exorbitant expenditure in comparison to schools—but fails to account for the proportion of this expenditure that goes on other publicly beneficial services such as research, health clinics, museums, community engagement and so forth.

Another reason for the rekindling of interest in higher education—one affecting all countries, in fact particularly high-income countries—is the new-found role for the sector within the so-called knowledge economy. The movement from the industrial to the post-industrial age has brought with it an increasing emphasis on the value of 'knowledge' in economic success, taking the form of skills and competence in the workforce (along the lines of human capital theory), but also innovation, knowledge production and technological development across society (OECD 2008; Task Force on Higher Education and Society 2000; World Bank 2002).

Another reason of particular relevance to lower income countries is the need for frontline professionals. The focus on primary education, along with other services such as primary health care, ignored a rather obvious point that the people staffing those services needed professional training, and that the training in question was normally carried out in

the tertiary education sector (UN High Level Panel 2013). In many cases, the expansion of education and health systems—and particularly their quality—has been severely hampered by the lack of well-prepared staff. A thriving post-secondary sector has therefore been acknowledged as fundamental to public services (although the question of *how* universities might form professionals to maximise the benefits [Walker and McLean 2013] has not always been addressed).

Furthermore, there are long-standing non-economic arguments for higher education that have been re-invoked in this period. As explored further in Chapter 2, university education has been seen to have a highly positive effect on democracy, political participation, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Universities also have an important role as deliberative spaces, as a critical conscience to society and a source of constructive challenge to governments and other powerful forces.

Finally, from a more counter-hegemonic perspective, maintaining an emphasis on higher education in addition to primary and secondary levels (and clearly it must be addition, not substitution), serves to challenge and reduce dependency within a global capitalist system. Populations without higher education, even if they do receive a high-quality primary education, are unlikely to wrench their countries out of the historical relations as producers of cheap agricultural, mineral and basic industrial goods, while buying back from wealthy countries high-tech value-added goods at a much greater profit margin. Similar dynamics are evident in political and cultural realms as well. Arguments that poorer countries should focus on primary education, while the wealthier ones can develop extensive higher education systems (see Sachs 2008, for example) effectively lock in global inequalities for generations to come.

The *Beyond 2015* campaign was organised by the Association of Commonwealth Universities to explore the role of higher education in this new development agenda. Evidence of the rekindling of interest in higher education could be seen in the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) partnership and innovation scheme SPHEIR,[1] and in the designation of 'Strengthening higher

[1]Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform.

education and workforce development programs' as one of four priority areas for USAID's education programme (Childs 2015; USAID 2015). In fact, allocation of resources by development agencies to the tertiary level has been reasonably high over recent decades (20% of World Bank funds [MacGregor 2015] and 34% of the total education aid of DAC[2] countries in 2013 [OECD 2015]), but a large proportion has been dedicated to scholarships, particularly in the country of origin of bilateral donors—with 70% of all aid to higher education going on scholarships and imputed student costs according to UNESCO (2016). In contrast, there are signs now of renewed investment in universities and systems *within* LMICs.

The global framework of development goals has reflected this shift of understanding. In 2015, the SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that had oriented international development since the year 2000. The 17 SDGs represent a significant step forward in relation to the previous goals in their more extensive incorporation of environmental elements, confined predominantly to Goal 7 in the previous scheme. Furthermore, there is greater acknowledgement of the synergies between the particular goals, being described as 'integrated and indivisible' (UN 2015: 1), following criticisms of the silo-like nature of the MDGs, with concerns that trying to achieve MDG 7 may actually have negatively impacted the others (Le Blanc 2015). There is a greater emphasis on equality, and therefore of disaggregation between different social groups in the achievement of the goals (UNESCO 2016). Finally, the framework involves all countries in the world, rather than just those considered to be 'developing', and in their requirements for environmental protection and equality, are demanding also for high-income countries. Nevertheless, there have also been critiques of the new framework, for example in relation to the emphasis on measurable targets. King (2017) argues that while there was broad consultation in advance of the adoption of the SDGs, this was not the case with the indicators, which have since become the tail wagging the SDG dog. Furthermore, there are deeper concerns (discussed further in

[2]Development assistance committee.

Chapter 10) about the conceptualisation of sustainable development, and its attempt to reconcile the triple bottom line: economic development, environmental sustainability and social inclusion, following the belief that 'With improved technologies and behavioural choices, both development and nature can coexist' (Sachs 2012: 2209).

Higher education was absent from the MDGs which reigned from 2000 to 2015 (except as part of the gender enrolment parity goal that applied to the whole of the education system). The focus of these goals was universal primary education, along with gender equality in education, and while the Education for All goals set in Dakar 2000 were broader, they also left higher education out of the equation. While commitment to the tertiary level was tentative in the discussions around the replacement for the MDGs (King and Palmer 2013; Unterhalter et al. 2013), the new SDGs did make explicit mention of this level, supported by the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. There are three ways in which higher education manifests itself in the SDGs: as a target in itself, as part of the education system as a whole, and lastly as a driver for development.

In terms of the first of these, Goal 4.3 states: 'By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university'. This explicit mention of tertiary education and university is an important step forward from the lack of mention in the MDGs, and reflects the new acknowledgement of importance of access to this level. However, it is not as demanding a target as first appears. The requirement for 'equal access' is not equivalent to universal or even widespread access: as is the case in international law (McCowan 2012), the emphasis here is on non-discrimination in admissions processes. The requirement is for *accessibility* rather than *availability*, that is to say, states must ensure that all people can fairly access the places that are available, but do not need to provide places for all people, or even a significant proportion of people. States can fulfil the letter of the goal here by ensuring equitable access for only one per cent of school leavers. It is a far cry from the guarantee in 4.1 to 'ensure that *all* girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education' (emphasis added). The associated indicator of 'Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and

non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex' does show an interest in overall proportions, but does not distinguish between different kinds of education, so tells us little about higher education specifically. As argued by King (2017), the movement from goals to indicators in the SDGs has resulted in a degree of narrowing of the original focus, and in some cases outright omission of certain elements.

The second way in which higher education is involved is as part of the overall education sector. It is one of the factors involved in the aim to 'By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship' (4.4), and also:

> By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to: promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (4.7)

HE is involved in the broad requirement of Goal 4.5: 'By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations'. It is also heavily implicated in Goal 4.B's call to expand the number of scholarships available to developing countries, and 4.C's call to increase the supply of teachers.

Higher education is, therefore, framed as a goal in itself, with value attributed to expanding opportunities for people to access this level. Emphasis is placed on ensuring non-discrimination in access, and promoting participation of disadvantaged groups, facilitated through scholarships. It is also seen as an instrumental force in promoting positive values (such as global citizenship), and ensuring a supply of key professionals such as teachers. However, it has an instrumental role that goes beyond the text of SDG4. In its role in forming professionals and developing high-level skills, in conducting research and producing knowledge, and in engaging directly with communities to solve

developmental problems, it can be seen to underpin the achievement of all of the goals, from reducing poverty to ensuring environmental protection. The general interlinkages between education and the other goals are explored extensively in the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2016):

> In each set, at least one target involves learning, training, educating or at the very least raising awareness of core sustainable development issues. Education has long been recognized as a critical factor in addressing environmental and sustainability issues and ensuring human well-being. (p. 9)

Higher education specifically is seen as central to empowering graduates, in providing them with knowledge, skills and attitudes to drive inclusive development, fostering economic growth and technological catch-up, and through its research role, in promoting 'green innovation'. It is this role of the university as a driver of development that will form the main focus of this book.

The Global Landscape of Higher Education

The SDGs represent the stated commitments of the global community until 2030. But where are we at the present time in relation to these goals for higher education? As stated above, there has been a vast expansion in recent years, reaching more than 200 million students and some 20,000 institutions worldwide. Yet, there are dramatic disparities between different world regions in their share of these enrolments (Fig. 1.1).

As can be seen above, all regions with the exception of Central Asia (which started with fairly high enrolments from the Soviet era) have been expanding significantly over the past three decades. The regions with the lowest enrolments are also growing rapidly—Sub-Saharan Africa has doubled its enrolment ratio since 2007, even in the context of rapid increases in youth population, and in South and West Asia this figure has tripled. Yet even if these precipitous rates of growth can be maintained it will still take decades to reach the highest enrolment

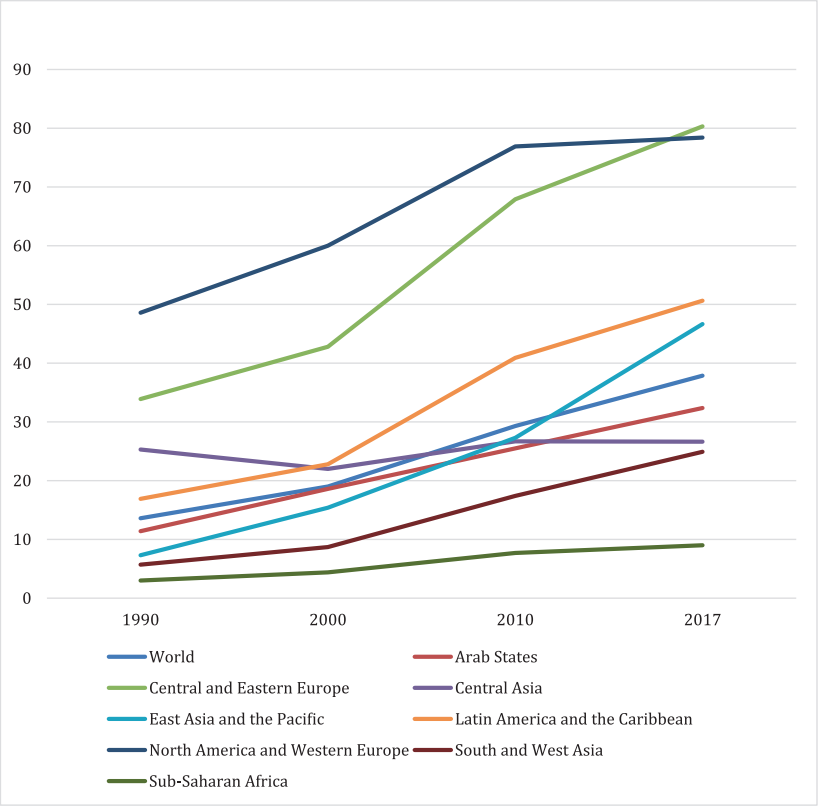

Fig. 1.1 Gross enrolment ratios for major world regions (*Source* UIS 2018)

countries. Worryingly, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for low-income countries globally did not increase between 2012 and 2017 (staying at 9%[3]), while upper middle-income countries pulled rapidly away, moving from 36 to 52%. Furthermore, even within these world regions, there are significant disparities, with countries varying within Sub-Saharan Africa from Botswana at 23% to Eritrea at only 2%, and in Central Asia, Kazakhstan at 50% and Uzbekistan at 9% (UIS 2018). As stated above, the access goal contained in the SDGs is one of equity in

[3]These figures have been rounded to the nearest percentage.

the allocation of places, not availability of places. Yet even taking only the question of non-discrimination, there are still severe injustices. The gap between the richest and poorest is substantial in most countries: in Mongolia, for example, 72% of the top income quintile of 25–29 year olds had completed four years of higher education in 2010, while only 3% of the bottom quintile had (UNESCO/IIEP 2017).

The vast expansion of higher education in recent decades has predominantly benefited the middle classes, with the poorest in society still excluded in most countries, either through prohibitive fees, or due to inability to fulfil entrance requirements or succeed in competitive entrance exams. Depending on the context, factors of region of origin, rurality, religion, ethnicity, language or disability can also present significant barriers to access. Gender is more complex, as the majority of undergraduates globally are female (with the current gender parity index at 1.12), but women continue to suffer disproportionately low levels of access in some countries, with less than half the number of women as men in Burundi, Benin and Togo, for example (UIS 2018). Furthermore, there are continuing inequalities in relation to the learning environment within universities, and in subsequent opportunities as graduates in society. Refugees and the internally displaced also face critical challenges of access, particularly when they fall through the cracks between national systems (the case of Berlin is a hopeful one in respect of concerted efforts to make space for recently arrived refugees [Streitwieser et al. 2017]). Of course, it cannot be forgotten here that initial access is only part of what constitutes inclusion in the higher education system and educational justice, as will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

So much for access, but what about the quality of the systems? Unlike at school level, where there exist (albeit highly contested) tests like PISA[4] and TIMMS,[5] there are few internationally comparable gauges of learning outcomes in higher education. There are some national level gauges (e.g. in Brazil and Colombia), but for the most

[4]Programme for International Student Assessment.

[5]Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

part quality of institutions is gauged through inputs, procedures or non-learning outputs such as publications. As discussed further in Chapter 7, quality in higher education is something of an ethereal concept, accrued as much through symbolism and historical associations as any concrete feature. To a large extent in the contemporary imagination, quality is indicated by positioning in international rankings: the most prominent being the Shanghai (the Academic Ranking of World Universities), the *Times Higher Education* and QS. These lists rank institutions on the basis of criteria that vary somewhat between them—with Times Higher and QS being wider-ranging—but all focus primarily on research quality. Understandably, given the mismatches in resources available, and the dominance of English language journals to mention just two of the many factors, there are vast disparities between countries in the success of their institutions. A total of 20 countries[6] have institutions in the top 100 of the QS rankings: with the exception of Argentina, all of these are in Europe, North America, East Asia and Australasia. Almost half of these 100 institutions are in just two countries: the USA (31) and UK (18). The grotesque lack of alignment to the reality of the vast majority of universities in the world is shown by the fact that the Shanghai ranking uses as its proxy for teaching quality the number of alumni that have won Nobel prizes!

Metrics based purely on research and publication output show similar disparities. The G20 countries, which have two thirds of the world population, concentrate 87% of the world's researchers, 92% of research expenditure and 94% of academic publications, exceeding even their 85% of world GDP (UNESCO 2015). However, the landscape in this regard is changing, with European and North American proportions slowly diminishing in relation to other regions.

Neither the current international rankings nor high-level publication metrics should be taken as valid gauges of the quality of HE internationally, and there are HEIs across the world which play critical roles for

[6]USA, UK, Switzerland, Singapore, China (+Hong Kong), Japan, Australia, Canada, South Korea, France, Netherlands, Germany, Taiwan, Argentina, Denmark, Belgium, New Zealand, Malaysia, Russia, Sweden.

their communities and countries unacknowledged by these assessments. Nevertheless, as explored in Chapter 7, there are substantial disparities of funds, infrastructure and capacity that place significant constraints on their activities. The success story of global higher education, therefore, masks a reality of substantial and enduring inequalities between regions, countries and subnational groups, relating to access, quality and subsequent opportunities. These might be considered by some as inevitable given global inequalities of wealth, and liable to fade away as the tide of expansion of access eventually lifts all boats: yet the *positional* nature of higher education—the relative nature of its benefits—make these disparities highly relevant, intractable, and in many ways determining of the broader global inequalities.

Scope, Methods and Structure

The emphasis in the MDGs on universalising primary education without due regard to quality has been rightly criticised, and in the SDGs, expansion has been made conditional on quality of provision. Attention to quality of HE is without doubt a *sine qua non* of the fulfilment of the ambitious role given to it. Yet 'quality' can be deceptive in its suggestion of a unitary, consensual concept. The challenge goes beyond just achieving quality, to reframing how we understand it, and to interrogating the models of institution underpinning that understanding.

This book has this interrogation as its central aim. Given the inclusion of the SDGs in the title, the reader might assume that its primary focus is higher education's role in relation to the natural environment and the sustainability practices of universities—a topic that has generated a considerable body of literature (on Global North institutions at least), with a journal exclusively dedicated to the topic.[7] Yet this book goes beyond the natural environment to understand holistically the impact of universities on society, including economic, cultural and political dimensions, in addition to the crucial ecological ones.

[7] *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*.

Furthermore, the role of higher education in achieving the SDGs is sometimes identified with 'teaching' the framework: raising awareness of the 17 goals among HE students and promoting positive values towards sustainable development. There is also a body of literature focusing on the role of university research in achieving the SDGs (e.g. Clark and Dickson 2003; Waas et al. 2010; Leal Filho et al. 2018; Neubauer and Calame 2017). These activities are laudable for sure, but on their own fall short of the response needed if the world is to come back from the brink of cataclysm. As discussed in Chapter 8, there is no shortage of sustainability initiatives in higher education, promoted by the UN and other agencies, but these interventions are just a first step. Our unsustainable and unequal world has deep foundations, and only a deeper transformation in the university and the higher education system can begin to set it on an alternative course.

The aim of this book is, therefore, to explore the role of higher education in development in its broadest terms. As will be discussed further in the chapters that follow, this is a complex relationship, involving the impact of the university on society (through the work and lives of its graduates, through the production of knowledge and through direct interaction with communities), but also the influence of society on the university, in a cyclical dynamic. The task of understanding this relationship is empirical (making observations about actually existing higher education systems and their host societies), but also conceptual, in creating and applying theoretical tools to aid in our comprehension and analysis of the phenomena.

The work, therefore, involves both theoretical exploration and empirical evidence, as a form of applied philosophy in dialogue with practical realities. In this way, it resonates with many previous attempts to engage in such a dialogue, through ideas of reflective equilibrium (Rawls 1971; Goldmeier 2018), ideal and real (Sen 2009; McCowan 2009), and action and reflection (Freire 1970; Schön 1983). Like much research in the educational field (and international development), it is multidisciplinary, drawing on scholarship and research in sociology, economics, philosophy, law, management and other areas.

The book presents new theoretical categories—for example, the frame of *value*, *function* and *interaction* and the notion of the *generative*

intrinsic—to explore the institution of the university. But it also engages with a range of existing approaches such as human capital theory, dependency theory, capabilities, and frames for understanding higher education such as public good, internationalisation, commodification and unbundling. Some of these theories are explanatory, in attempting to analyse and predict empirical phenomena. Yet the book does not shy away from the normative dimension: questions of education and development are intrinsically moral and political, and concern value judgements about what we consider to be justice and the good life. The nature and role of the university are highly contested, and no amount of empirical evidence will adjudicate between, say, a position that asserts that the role of higher education is only to strengthen national industry for greater economic competitiveness with a country's neighbours, and another perspective that holds that the role of higher education is to serve as a space for conscientisation, to form critical, reflective political agents who will challenge and transform capitalist society and create a new form of living. The role of this book is not primarily to adjudicate between different world views (although, of course, as author I hold and express my own positions) but to map the normative terrain, and show the coherence or contradictions of different frames of the university in relation to it.

The book sits at the intersection of large bodies of literature: higher education studies—involving analyses of policy and practice of higher education, dominated by research in high-income countries with well-established higher education systems, particularly the USA; global education policy—involving analyses of supranational policy and governance, as well as policy borrowing and influence, at both basic and higher education levels; and international education and development, focusing on educational interventions in lower income countries, with a strong emphasis on primary education. The intersection of these three areas is, at present, fairly limited in size.

There is a relatively small amount of literature, for example, on higher education and development in the countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America with the lowest GDP levels. A rigorous review of published studies in English (Oketch et al. 2014) found only 100 studies providing empirical evidence of the impact of tertiary education on society in all