

The Social Dimensions of Higher Education
Mala Singh
Council on Higher Education
South Africa.

In recent decades, the public accountability discourse in higher education has often been framed in terms of its roles and responsibilities within the knowledge society and the knowledge economy. The social dimensions of higher education are frequently referred to in many policy directives and planning frameworks, e.g. the reference to the 'social dimension of the Bologna Process (as) a constituent part of the EHEA and a necessary condition for the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA' in the Bergen Communique of May 2005. My presentation will raise some questions about trends in the understandings of the 'social' within different aspects of higher education and the implications of these trends for thinking about the social contribution of higher education within national as well as international contexts. The argument will be made that the economic dimension of the social may be trumping all other possibilities of the social, leading to an impoverishment of analytic understandings of higher education and underspecification of certain strategic possibilities in relation to the social dimensions of higher education. This will be explored in relation to

- conceptualisations of higher education within a globalizing context
- preferred graduate competencies
- approaches to quality assurance
- approaches to crossborder cooperation in higher education.

The presentation will argue for a more explicitly multi-dimensional approach to the social dimensions of higher education.

!4 June 2006