

11

Public Goods and Common Resources

PRINCIPLES OF
ECONOMICS
FOURTH EDITION

N. GREGORY MANKIWI

Premium PowerPoint® Slides
by Ron Cronovich

2008 update
Modified by Joseph Tao-yi Wang

© 2008 South-Western, a part of Cengage Learning, all rights reserved

In this chapter, look for the answers to these questions:

- What are public goods?
What are common resources?
Give examples of each.
- Why do markets generally fail to provide the efficient amounts of these goods?
- How might the government improve market outcomes in the case of public goods or common resources?

CHAPTER 11 PUBLIC GOODS AND COMMON RESOURCES

1

Introduction

- We consume many goods without paying: parks, national defense, clean air & water.
- When goods are free, the market forces that normally allocate resources are absent.
- The private market may fail to provide the socially efficient quantity of such goods.
- One of the Ten Principles from Chapter 1: *Governments can sometimes improve market outcomes.*



CHAPTER 11 PUBLIC GOODS AND COMMON RESOURCES

2

Important Characteristics of Goods

- A good is **excludable** if a person can be prevented from using it.
 - excludable*: fish tacos, dial-up internet service
 - not excludable*: FM radio signals, national defense
- A good is **rival in consumption** if one person's use of it diminishes others' use.
 - rival*: fish tacos
 - not rival*: An MP3 file of David Tao's latest single

CHAPTER 11 PUBLIC GOODS AND COMMON RESOURCES

3

The Different Kinds of Goods

Private goods: excludable, rival in consumption
example: food

Public goods: not excludable, not rival
example: national defense

Common resources: rival but not excludable
example: fish in the ocean

Natural monopolies: excludable but not rival
example: cable TV

CHAPTER 11 PUBLIC GOODS AND COMMON RESOURCES

4

ACTIVE LEARNING 1: Categorizing roads

- A road is which of the four kinds of goods?
- Hint*: The answer depends on whether the road is congested or not, and whether it's a toll road or not. Consider the different cases.

5

ACTIVE LEARNING 1: Answers

- Rival in consumption? Only if congested.
- Excludable? Only if a toll road.
- Four possibilities
 - uncongested non-toll road: public good
 - uncongested toll road: natural monopoly
 - congested non-toll road: common resource
 - congested toll road: private good

6

The Different Kinds of Goods

- This chapter focuses on public goods and common resources.
- For both, externalities arise because something of value has no price attached to it.
- So, private decisions about consumption and production can lead to an inefficient outcome.
- Public policy can potentially raise economic well-being.

CHAPTER 11 PUBLIC GOODS AND COMMON RESOURCES

7

Public Goods

- Public goods are difficult for private markets to provide because of the *free-rider problem*.
- **Free rider:** a person who receives the benefit of a good but avoids paying for it
 - If good is not excludable, people have incentive to be free riders, because firms cannot prevent non-payers from consuming the good.
- Result: The good is not produced, even if buyers collectively value the good higher than the cost of providing it.

CHAPTER 11 PUBLIC GOODS AND COMMON RESOURCES

8

Public Goods

- If the benefit of a public good exceeds the cost of providing it, govt should provide the good and pay for it with a tax on people who benefit.
- Problem: Measuring the benefit is usually difficult.
- **Cost-benefit analysis:** a study that compares the costs and benefits of providing a public good
- Cost-benefit analyses are imprecise, so the efficient provision of public goods is more difficult than that of private goods.

CHAPTER 11 PUBLIC GOODS AND COMMON RESOURCES

9

Some Important Public Goods

- National defense
- Knowledge created through basic research
- Fighting poverty

CHAPTER 11 PUBLIC GOODS AND COMMON RESOURCES

10

Common Resources

- Like public goods, common resources are not excludable.
 - cannot prevent free riders from using
 - little incentive for firms to provide
 - role for govt: seeing that they are provided
- Additional problem with common resources: rival in consumption
 - each person's use reduces others' ability to use
 - role for govt: ensuring they are not overused

CHAPTER 11 PUBLIC GOODS AND COMMON RESOURCES

11

The Tragedy of the Commons

- A parable that illustrates why common resources get used more than is socially desirable.
- Setting: a medieval town, where sheep graze on common land.
- As the population grows, the # of sheep grows.
- The amount of land is fixed, the grass begins to disappear from overgrazing.
- The private incentives (using the land for free) outweigh the social incentives (using it carefully).
- Result: People can no longer raise sheep.

The Tragedy of the Commons

- The tragedy is due to an externality: Allowing one's flock to graze on the common land reduces its quality for other families.
- People neglect this external cost, resulting in overuse of the land.

ACTIVE LEARNING 2: Policy options for common resources

- What could the townspeople (or their government) have done to prevent the tragedy?
- Try to think of two or three options.

ACTIVE LEARNING 2: Answers

- impose a corrective tax on the use of the land to "internalize the externality"
- regulate use of the land (the "command-and-control" approach)
- auction off permits allowing use of the land
- divide the land, sell lots to individual families
Each family will have incentive not to overgraze its own land.

Policy Options to Prevent Overconsumption of Common Resources

- regulate use of the resource
- impose a corrective tax to internalize the externality
 - example: hunting & fishing licenses, entrance fees for congested national parks
- auction off permits allowing use of the resource
 - example: spectrum auctions by the U.S. Federal Communications Commission
- if the resource is land, convert to a private good by dividing and selling parcels to individuals

Some Important Common Resources

- Clean air and water
- Congested roads
- Fish, whales, and other wildlife

CASE STUDY: "You've Got Spam!"

- Spam e-mail is a service some firms use to advertise their products.
- Spam is *not excludable*: Firms cannot be prevented from spamming.
- Spam is *rival*: As more companies use spam, it becomes less effective.
- Thus, spam is a common resource.
- Like most common resources, spam is overused – which is why we get so much of it!



"Spam" email is named after everyone's favorite delicacy.

CONCLUSION

- Public goods tend to be under-provided, while common resources tend to be over-consumed.
- These problems arise because property rights are not well-established:
 - Nobody owns the air, so no one can charge polluters. Result: too much pollution.
 - Nobody can charge people who benefit from national defense. Result: too little defense.
- The govt can potentially solve these problems with various policy options.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- A good is excludable if someone can be prevented from using it. A good is rival in consumption if one person's use reduces others' ability to use the same unit of the good.
- Markets work best for private goods, which are excludable and rival in consumption. Markets do not work well for other types of goods.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Public goods, such as national defense and fundamental knowledge, are neither excludable nor rival in consumption.
- Because people do not have to pay to use them, they have an incentive to free ride, and firms have no incentive to provide them.
- Therefore, the government provides public goods, using cost-benefit analysis to determine how much to provide.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Common resources are rival in consumption but not excludable. Examples include common grazing land, clean air, and congested roads.
- People can use common resources without paying, so they tend to overuse them. Therefore, governments try to limit the use of common resources.

Public Goods

- Excludable vs. Rivalness
- Public Goods
 - non-excludable and non-rival goods
- Common Resources
 - Non-excludable and rival goods
- Homework: Mankiw, Ch.11, pp. 238-239, Problem 4, 6, 9.