

Positional Goods Encyclopedia Article

Positional Goods

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Positional Goods

A concept coined by English economist Fred Hirsch (1931–1978) to describe goods or activities whose value depends on their exclusivity. For example, fame is considered a positional good since by definition only a few people can be famous and thus enjoy this "privilege." If everyone were famous, no one would be. Similarly, solitude on a mountain peak or in the **wilderness** would qualify as a positional good, since if one shared the peak or the wilderness with many other people, one could not experience solitude. Ironically, a positional good tends to diminish its own value because of the high demand it creates: as more people enjoy positional goods, they no longer become exclusive or valued. For instance, automobiles were once a positional good in America, but as more and more people began owning cars, they were no longer such a status symbol. A number of concerned environmentalists contend that access to wilderness areas should be restricted or limited to prevent the destruction of this positional good.