A Regional Mismatch? Student Applications and Institutional Responses in the Portuguese Public Higher Education System

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Abstract

Until recent decades the Portuguese higher education system was markedly elitist, with a strong regional concentration in a few major cities. In the 1970s when the system took its first steps towards massification, one of the most important developments was the wider geographical distribution of public higher education institutions (HEIs). Subsequent governments have explicitly stated that geographical diversification is a major objective of the expansion of higher education. In the late eighties, greater institutional autonomy was granted to promote public HEIs’ responsiveness to local demands from both students and employers.

Since almost two decades have elapsed since the system moved to a mass level, we seek to assess the capacity of institutions to adjust to local demands. In this paper we analyze the data on the number of candidates to higher education programs and the number of places available, to assess the effectiveness of Portuguese HEIs in mapping student demand. We discuss possible explanations for the mismatches between regional supply and demand.

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