The Portuguese Higher Education System

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Abstract

This chapter presents a condensed view of the developments that have taken place in Portugal after the April revolution, examining the Portuguese higher education system, its strong points and main problems, as it moved in two decades from an elite system with very low participation rates to a massified system. Expansion was made possible by implementing shorter degrees provided by a new polytechnic sector and by allowing the development of a large private sector, an unusual development in Western Europe. The consequences of this development model are analysed from several different perspectives including the tensions between quality and quantity when massification is very fast; equity of access and participation of students from deprived family backgrounds (both economic and cultural); funding problems in a country with financial difficulties and low growth rates; the consequences of allowing for the fast development of a private sector. Changes in the governance system are also analysed. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the negative and positive consequences of higher education policies in Portugal and of the implementation difficulties of such policies at institutional level.