



Cipes invites you to Porto

CHER 22nd annual Conference
Porto, 10-12 September 2009

Public Vices, Private Benefits?

Assessing the role of markets in higher education

Announcement

Recent years have seen the strengthening of a discourse that emphasises the advantages of private forces over public ones in the higher education realm. The traditional public ethos of many higher education systems and institutions has been questioned and eroded, and the political discourse has given growing visibility to the role of markets and market forces in higher education.

The main drivers for this increasing role of markets in higher education have to do with the financial challenges faced by higher education and the ways of dealing with it. This complex financial context has led to increasing concerns with the level of external and internal efficiency of higher education. Like in many other public services, it became a rather common statement that higher education institutions

should be more efficient in their use of taxpayers' resources. Moreover, most current policy discussions assume that higher education institutions do not necessarily spend resources as society would want, hence the concerns as well with the external efficiency of the system. Thus, many governments have been devising policies trying to strengthen the (internal and external) efficiency of the higher education system, with particular emphasis on greater accountability and performance assessment.

Markets are normally presented as effective mechanisms of social choice that will allocate efficiently resources to activities. Since Adam Smith's (1722-1790) use of Bernard de Mandeville's (1670-1733) original expression of "Private Vices, Public Virtues", it became a central tenet of economic analysis that by stimulating certain morally dubious individual behaviour would produce a most favourable outcome from a society's point of view. Thus, the institutional setting should be designed in order to promote competition, individual self-interest and freedom of initiative, in order to maximize social welfare.

Hence, in recent years we have seen a growing role of markets in higher education. One of the dimensions of that market's influence has been the promotion of competition between providers. Another dimension has been the enhancement of privatisation – either by the development of private higher education or by stimulating some forms of 'privatisation' of public institutions. Finally, we have had the promotion of growing autonomy for higher education institutions, enhancing their responsiveness to the external environment. The introduction of these three vectors has led to what has been called the development of so-called quasi-market mechanisms, in which decisions on demand and supply are coordinated using mechanisms in which only some aspects of markets are introduced, often gradually.

However, even economists have some qualifications about the application of the market framework to higher education. For instance, they often mention the case of what they call market failures. Namely, it is clear that this sector provides relevant social benefits, and it is in the interest of society to contribute to higher education in order to maximise social welfare. Thus, economists consider higher education to be a merit good and that governments should play a role in funding and regulating this sector.

This growing influence of market forces in higher education has stimulated great controversy. Many have voiced concerns about these developments, namely upon the effects on organisational fragmentation or increased administrative bureaucracy.

Some have even considered that it led to a crisis of identity in many higher education institutions. However, others have counter-argued that there have been significant achievements, stimulating more innovative behaviour, greater efficiency in the use of resources and more responsive institutions.

The critical issue for higher education does not seem to be a debate about pure forms of market versus government regulation. As the growing literature available on this topic indicates, both forces do play, nowadays, an important role in most higher education systems, though with variable importance. After some years of policy debates, it seems relevant to discuss how the changes in the relative influence of these two forces may be affecting higher education's effectiveness and cohesiveness. It seems worthwhile to discuss the actual relevance and effects of market mechanisms, both at the system and at the institutional level. It is also important to discuss the impact of market mechanisms in the various missions of higher education.

The 2009 CHER annual conference invites empirical and theoretical perspectives on the current role of markets mechanisms in higher education and its implications. The organizers of the conference expect a wide variety of research-led approaches to the topic. In order to encourage a broad spectrum of proposals the following themes are suggested which will develop into Conference tracks.

Conference Themes

Theme One

The role of Markets in Higher Education Systems

- Market versus government regulation
- Privatisation and its various forms
- The role of Competition and its effects
- The economic dimension of HE

Theme Two

The implications of Market forces for institutions' changes in:

- Mission
- Organisational structure
- Management
- Internal distribution of power
- Governance

Theme Three

Exploring the different markets of Higher Education:

- Academic labour market
- Teaching markets
- Research markets
- Third mission

Open Track

For those who would like to submit a paper proposal but cannot fit their research into any of the above theme we will provide an open track. However proposals should be connected to the overall theme of the conference.

Format of the Conference

We intend to invite a small number of keynote speakers to make initial presentations related to the overall theme and to some of the track themes. The backbone of the Conference will be the tracks. We encourage researchers from various disciplines and with different scholarly perspectives to submit proposals for a presentation. In addition to established researchers we would also like to encourage both newcomers and doctoral students to participate in the 22nd Annual CHER Conference and submit a proposal for a presentation. The organisers of the Conference will endeavour to publish the best papers in a book or a special issue of one of the higher education journals.

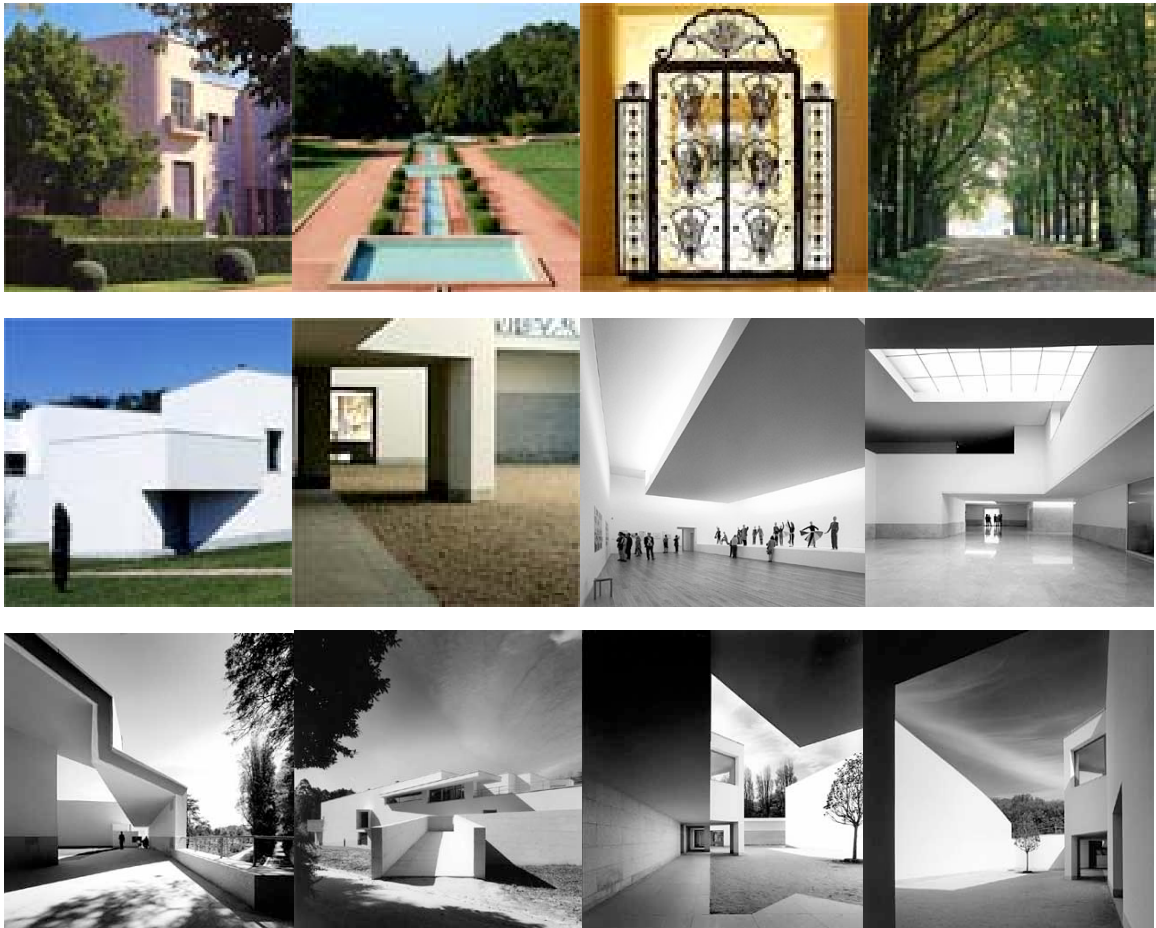
Submission of proposals

Abstracts of papers should be submitted no later than Saturday, **28th of February**. Please submit your proposal through the Conference website following the instructions. Researchers making proposals should indicate to which theme their paper mostly refers. A review panel consisting of the conference organising committee will evaluate the abstracts and notify the authors **not later than April 2009**. Accepted abstracts should be developed into full papers and emailed to **CHER.Conference@cipes.up.pt** before **Thursday, 30th July**. All papers will be made available to participants before the Conference on the Conference website, http://www.fup.pt/cipes/pt_evento.php?id=XX.

Conference location and Dates

The Conference location will be at the Serralves Modern Art Museum, 10-12 September 2009.

Further details on conference arrangements will be in due time presented in the **Conference website**.



Conference organising committee

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