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Enrolment choices in Portuguese higher education : do students behave as rational consumers? /

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**Abstract**

As part of a progressive change occurring in the way public sector beneficiaries are conceived, higher education students started to be more and more perceived as clients or consumers. This implies assuming them as rational and conscious actors aware of what to expect from higher education attendance and of its returns. Framed by the metaphor of students as consumers, this paper aims to discuss whether students behave as rational consumers when choosing to enrol in higher education. Based on the findings of a qualitative study analysing Portuguese students' choices it is possible to conclude that they tend to behave as rational consumers when they decide to attend higher education and when they choose a given institution, but not when they decide on attending a specific study programme. In this last case, instead of comparing the diverse study programmes and collecting information before forming their preference, students first formed this preference and, only then, gathered information. Student socialisation process emerged as a key element in shaping the preference for the study programme and in the vocation to choose it. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)

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