

“Tuition Fee in Higher Education: Issues, Limitations and Perspectives”

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Léonard Moulin’s thesis investigates the effects of tuition fees on students in French higher education. The reformulation of higher education at national and international levels is reflected in the emergence of a large globalized education market. In many countries, students pay for their education. In this context, addressing the issue of this thesis appears even more crucial since, far from being only a theoretical issue, it proves to be at the heart of public debate.

In the first part, Léonard Moulin conducts a theoretical analysis of the motivations for the tuition fees. He provides a critical and multidisciplinary review of literature to identify and question the validity of three motivations for the introduction or the increase of tuition fees: the redistributive effect, the incentive effect and the contributory effect. Léonard Moulin extends this theoretical approach by examining the theoretical conditions that make the establishment of tuition fees desirable, even that exist different social classes with distinct behaviors. He shows, using recent developments in behavioral economics, that the implementation of decreasing tuition fees, even if it can be a fair solution of a purely theoretical point of view, raises other problems.

The second part of his thesis focuses on national experiences in implementing tuition fees. Léonard Moulin highlights the contrasted nature of the results presented in the literature review before providing a typology of institutional contexts. Two regimes appear consistent even if their fundamentals are radically different (the liberal and social-democratic welfare states), while the conservative French regime appears difficult to sustain. The following three chapters provide the first study on the effects of the introduction of tuition fees in the French university context. He begins by looking two aspects of efficiency related to the introduction of tuition fees: a selection effect and an incentive to effort effect. Using optimal matching methods and econometrics tools, Léonard Moulin shows that the introduction of tuition fees in University Paris 9 Dauphine strengthens the effects of social segregation and, contrary to the results developed in the theoretical literature, do not increase the level of success and therefore the incentives to effort for students. Then he discusses possible generalization of previous results beginning with analyzing the specific nature of the students from the University Paris Dauphine 9 in the French academic landscape.

The theoretical limits to the introduction of tuition fees, confirmed empirically lead Léonard Moulin, in the last part of his thesis, to return to the typology constructed by discussing how social-democratic institutional regime could help to ensure equity, efficiency and funding needs of universities in the French context. He concludes his work by setting the foundation of a contributory scheme, characterized by free access, a universal autonomy allowance for students and an increase in resources allocated to universities.