

Satellite university campuses and urban structural change: The case of Italy

by Paolo Seri | Lorenzo Compagnucci | Università Politecnica delle Marche | Università degli Studi
Macerata

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Universities potentially contribute to regional economic development in several ways: education, research and, more recently, Third Mission initiatives. To achieve their goals, universities have started some form of geographical diversification by establishing satellite campuses, which are globally booming. Regarding Italy, the series of reforms which have involved the university system since the 1990s, have produced a proliferation of university branches, even in small municipalities. The diffusion of peripheral campuses has been portrayed as a policy tool to improve equity among regions, especially with respect to access to education. However, there are few studies dealing with the rationales behind the creation of branch campuses. Also, there is a lack of evidence regarding the impact of satellite campuses on urban systems. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it is a pioneering attempt to assess empirically whether and how satellite university campuses have affected Italian municipalities in terms of long term structural change. Second, the study suggests a selection of policy implications for supporting the design of both peripheral campuses and urban development strategies. The paper adopts a quasi-experimental approach to explain variation in change in average earnings and business structure across Italian municipalities. The research draws on a novel data set which covers the period 2000-2020.