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**Abstract**

The development of private (non-state) higher education institutions in Poland has been a phenomenon of increasing importance since 1990. It is a paradox of their existence, particularly in small towns with no previous tradition of higher education, that they have been more successful than the state higher education institutions in educating young people of working-class and peasant background, even though they charge tuition fees. In many ways, the private higher education institutions are more responsive to the demands of an economy in transition than are the state institutions, and they tend to operate more efficiently. Also, they have been rapid to adopt the "Mode 2" variety of knowledge generation. The creation of private higher education institutions has been a stimulus to regional development in Poland. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)