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**Author**

DONINA, Davide (HASANEFENDIC, Sandra)

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**Abstract**

This paper addresses the homogeneous/heterogeneous dilemma regarding formal arrangements of university central governance structures. Most topical studies argue that these structures are becoming homogeneous across countries and prove it by adopting purposive sampling techniques. Yet, other scholars stress heterogeneity within countries. This paper aims to clarify this dilemma through a multi-level analysis that simultaneously considers three levels of embeddedness (i.e., supranational, national and institutional), by employing a policy translation perspective, which can accommodate both homogeneity and heterogeneity. The national sample comprises three countries (the Netherlands, Portugal and Italy). The institutional sample is comprehensive and encompasses all public universities within each country. The study discloses heterogeneity in how countries responded to supranational policy pressures as well as heterogeneous responses at the institutional level even when unitary laws

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are applied. Relying on these findings, we stress the importance of adopting comprehensive (rather than purposive) sampling to infer about international and/or national homogeneity because studies that generalise results based on one/few case studies per country could be biased by the sample selection criteria. In addition, the research implications of our analysis on steering?at?a?distance and on the relation between the grade of cogency of the national laws and homogeneous/heterogeneous reform outcomes are discussed. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)