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Institutional isomorphism and the creation of the unified national system of higher education in Australia : an empirical analysis / Gwilym Croucher ; Peter Woelert

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Abstract

Previous research has highlighted the occurrence of isomorphic tendencies—convergences in terms of formal organizational structure—in higher education systems in times of uncertainty and under external pressure to change. It has been repeatedly claimed that the Australian university system largely followed a logic of isomorphic change in the aftermath of radical national policy reform of the late 1980s. Yet to date, there is a lack of comprehensive empirical studies testing this thesis.

Addressing this lacuna, and drawing on a range of university and government data, this paper tracks and analyses: (a) changes in the formal academic organizational structures existing at all public Australian universities and (b) changes in the numbers of academic staff and students in different academic organizational groupings over the period of 1987–1991. Despite some limitations in the available data, our system-level analysis finds that there was clear and significant convergence in terms of formal organizational structures and student and staff numbers in the majority of academic fields that were taught and researched at Australian universities at that time. We also draw attention to some conceptual limitations of existing accounts of isomorphic change in Australia and outline trajectories for future research supplementing the system-level analysis presented here(HRK / Abstract übernommen) Croucher, Gwilym, E-Mail: gscrou@unimelb.edu.au