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**Abstract**

The Italian Higher Education system has often appeared unwilling or unable to develop effective policies for change, and this struggle to introduce effective reforms is often linked to the system's legacy of failure to cope with earlier higher education challenges over the last 60 years. Within a highly centralized system, universities developed a sense of accountability to the Ministry in a legal and administrative sense, and remained isolated from the needs of external stakeholders or the challenges of a changing environment. The few who sought to innovate or experiment were heavily constrained by a rigid bureaucracy and lack of diversity. However, with the Bologna Process, Italy acted uncharacteristically as a first mover and introduced landmark reforms with clear objectives to extend university autonomy, introduce the new degree structure and develop credit and quality assurance systems. It had expectations of greater efficiency through increased enrolments, reduced

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wastage rates, enhanced graduate employability and improved access to the European Labour Market. A series of further reforms have followed in an attempt to correct distortions that emerged in the system, but without significant results, and against a backdrop of receding finances. Despite the many attempts to modernize higher education by successive governments, structural dysfunctions hamper any real change within the system. Today, it is the increasingly competitive international environment that is forcing individual universities to develop an adequate response. This paper will explore how Italian universities are becoming increasingly aware of the need to take institutional action, and how they are identifying models for internationalization beyond their borders in order to adapt to, and survive in the new conditions. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)

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