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**Abstract**

This study addresses the lack of studies of diversity in post-Soviet higher education systems. It aims to examine institutional diversity in two post-Soviet countries as the result of higher state and market forces in the context of high-participation systems of higher education. The "enrollment economy"™ has become the most powerful signal for higher education institutions in both countries. However, in Belarus, the conservative position of both the state and organizations, mitigates the effects of market-driven signals. The study reveals bifurcation as the key process distinguishing Russian higher education from Belarusian. While still in Russia middle-layer HEIs are not capable of changes in sectoral identity locked-in by the Soviet model. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)