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**Abstract**

This paper proposes a new perspective for higher education policy research. It introduces the concept of policy object to designate the discrete preoccupation(s) of a policy text (e.g. a new governance regime, a quality system, or new degrees) and suggests that actor conceptualisations of the policy object intersect with other elements in the policy process to shape enactment and outcomes. First, the policy object concept is described. It is argued that the policy object does not have an objective existence and two concepts are proposed to explain it: ontology and enacted ontology. The former refers to what actors believe the policy object is, a socially-construed context-determined conceptualisation, whereas enacted ontology refers to what the policy object becomes further to enactment under the influence of ontology. Second, the paper presents the findings of a comparative study of master degrees further to the Bologna process in different national and institutional settings to illustrate the policy object approach. This research puts forward arguments to suggest that the

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policy object could be an important variable to consider in policy research. This somewhat different lens, inviting fine-grained attention to a specific policy object (its ontologies and enacted ontologies), could bring additional insight into policy outcomes..(HRK / Abstract übernommen) Sin, Cristina,  
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