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**Abstract**

This article focuses on the steering of higher education systems in the light of political science and public management approaches. It first recalls that an important part of the existing literature on higher education is focused on public policies in terms of reforms and decision-making, while the other part is dedicated to discovering and understanding the policy network or the policy regimes producing these policies. Both perspectives tend to look at higher education as a specific field. By contrast, the authors state that the transformations experienced in higher education are similar to those experienced by other key public services, and can be understood as a redefinition of the role of the nation state in the public generally. They therefore suggest to look at the steering patterns in higher education by investigating the underlying 'narratives' of public management reform and their variation or combination from one European nation state to another. Three main narratives of public services reform are discussed: the New Public Management (NPM), the Network governance and the

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Neo-Weberian narrative. For each narrative, the authors try to predict some ?signs and symptoms? that should be observed in higher education. Drawing on this reflection, the authors finally suggest further research perspectives which could be developed. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Musselin, Christine, E-Mail: [c.musselin@cso.cnrs.fr](mailto:c.musselin@cso.cnrs.fr)