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**Author**

PIIRONEN, Ossi

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**Abstract**

In 2009, the Finnish parliament passed a new Universities Act that aimed to strengthen the institutional autonomy of the country's universities. But why and how did the idea of autonomy come to frame the reform agenda in the overt way it did? In analysing a sample of authoritative policy and strategy papers by the key stakeholders in the higher education policy fields at the European level and in Finland, the author argues that a conceptual shift took place at the turn of the millennium. This was based on managerial values and top-down organization that emphasized the potential of universities to operate on the education market as would any enterprise. But the Finnish higher education policy agenda was not simply downloaded from supranational actors; parts of the Finnish Higher Education establishment had long been active in promoting the novel idea of autonomy at both national and European forums, thereby making the process of ideological transformation truly transnational.

(HRK / Abstract übernommen)