

zhb Higher Education Research Colloquium Series



Guest Talk:
Prof. Dr. Peter Maassen
(University of Oslo, Norway)

Convergence in university reform agendas, divergence in university organization and governance

Research on higher education in Europe has argued since the 1980s that as a result of converging national reform agendas key aspects of higher education system governance, organisation and funding have become more identical throughout the Continent. This research was inspired by world society theory and also emphasized the homogenizing impact of New Public Management (NPM). References were made to a global trend in higher education in which a 'global reform script' was underlying a gradual homogenization of national higher education systems' structures and cultures. The 'global script' addressed the importance of enlarging university and college autonomy, professionalising institutional leadership and administration, creating more competition, reducing public funding levels, changing the system structure, and strengthening university excellence. However, more recent research shows that instead of a growing convergence, traditional differences among European higher education systems have remained at best stable and in many cases have even grown. How can this be explained? In this presentation I will argue that for understanding reform effects, reform instrumentation and implementation are more important than reform agendas. In addition, national, sector and organisational 'filters' affect how policy aims and reform intentions are perceived, framed, assessed and implemented in practice. In this I will focus especially on variations in public governance ideologies which have a major impact on how 'global reform ideas' are translated into national policy and reform trajectories.

Peter Maassen is professor in Higher Education Studies at the University of Oslo (UiO), Norway; extraordinary professor at SciSTIP, a Center of Excellence at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa; and fellow at the Steinhardt Institute for Higher Education Policy, New York University, USA. His main current research interest concerns the public governance of higher education and science, with a special interest in 'the quality of governance'. Before moving to Norway in 2000 he was working for the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), University of Twente, the Netherlands. He has been a member of many national and international expert panels in higher education, and is currently as external expert participating in the work of the Research Committee of the German Science Council. He is the editor of the academic book series Higher Education Dynamics (Springer), and has (co-)produced over 200 international articles, books, and reports.

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