

02.6.2026

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**Title**

Comparing HE policies in Europe / Ivar Bleiklie ; Svein Michelsen

**Publication year**

2013

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education. - 65 (2013) 1, S. 113 - 133

**Inventory number**

34151

**Keywords**

Hochschulreform : allgemein ; Hochschule und Staat : allgemein ; Hochschule : Verwaltung  
allgemein ; Ausland : Europa : Hochschulwesen allgemein

**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework for a comparative analysis of Higher Education policies that enables us to investigate the explanatory power of structural characteristics of politico-administrative systems. The policies that are studied aim at improving the efficiency and quality of institutional performance. The paper focuses on policy trends in higher education in the eight countries in the study. It discusses how the literature on comparative political and administrative systems can help formulate assumptions about public policy making and policy change. The ideas that are developed are then applied to public reform policies in general and in the area of higher education in particular, followed by a test of the assumptions on available data on reform outcomes in the countries involved. The data indicate that a comparative politico-administrative perspective is potentially useful with regard to explaining cross national variation in higher education reform policies in Europe. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Bleiklie, Ivar, E-Mail: ivar.bleiklie@aorg.uib.no