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Dynamics in higher education politics : a theoretical model

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Abstract

This article presents a model for analysing dynamics in higher education politics (DHEP). Theoretically the model draws on the conceptual history of political contingency, agenda-setting theories and previous research on higher education dynamics. According to the model, socio-historical complexity can best be analysed along two dimensions: the political situation and political possibilities. Politics as a situation connotes the idea of an opportune moment when politics can be changed, and political possibilities concern the different alternatives the actors see in different situations. Depending on whether the situation is favourable or unfavourable to change, and on whether the possibilities are politicised or settled, the DHEP model introduces four types of dynamic: reform, gridlock, consensual change and friction. On the empirical level the model has been tested and developed in the context of Finnish higher education by means of interviews and documentary material. It was found, in the Finnish context, that four policy threads functioned according to each of the dynamics. It appears from the empirical findings that dynamics in higher education politics are

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strongly related to changes that are external to the higher-education system, the changing positions of the actors in different policy threads and the unexpected nature of the dynamics. The DHEP can also be used to shed light on the effects of the silent, settled possibilities that may enable or disable other policy threads within a higher education system. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Kauko, Jaakko, E-Mail: jaakko.kauko@helsinki.fi