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Abstract

The ways in which societies and institutions institutionalize and practice invention management reflects not only how new ideas are valued, but also imaginaries about the role of science and technology for societal development. Often taking the US Bayh-Dole-Act as a model, many European states have recently implemented changes in how inventions at academic institutions are to be handled to optimize their societal impact. We analyze how these changes have been taken up—and made sense of—in regions with different pre-existing infrastructures, practices and semantics of invention management. For doing so, we build on a comparative analysis of continuities and changes in infrastructures, practices and semantics of invention management in North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW, a former Western state) and Saxony (a former GDR state) to reflect on how academic institutions have been handling inventions along transforming socio-political contexts. Building on document analysis and qualitative interviews with research managers, we discuss ongoing differences in practices of invention management and the semantic framing of the societal value of inventions in

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NRW and Saxony, and discuss how this can be understood before the background of their ideological, political and economic separation until reunification in 1990. Joining the conceptual perspectives of path dependencies and sociotechnical imaginaries, we argue that two critical incidents in the history of these states (the reunification in 1990 and a legal change in 2002) allowed for wide-ranging institutional alignments, but also allowed path dependencies in practices and semantics of invention management to prevail. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)