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**Abstract**

This article analyzes the organizational development of freier zusammenschluss von studentInnenschaften (fzs), the national union of students in Germany from its foundation until 2010. It situates it within the variety of student organizations acting on behalf of students within the multi-level system of higher education governance in Germany. Starting out as a rather small, ideologically driven and a more network-oriented association fzs developed into a national-level umbrella organization with a more professional working structure. This institutionalization and professionalization ? especially during the 2000s ? can be explained by several important developments in the domestic environment in which fzs is embedded. The current diversification in German higher education governance, leading to the loss of influence of the federal level and growing diversity between the Bundesländer, together with increasing influence of commodification in the context of the Bologna Process, coincide with the decrease of impact and members of fzs after 2005. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)