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Abstract

Higher education (HE) reforms are usually inspired by New Public Management (NPM) global reform scripts. This article focuses on a pivotal object of NPM-driven reforms—central university governance structures. On the one hand, we present the founding ideas of NPM and sketch how they translate for these structures; on the other hand, two further ideal-type public management narratives to conceptualize reforms (Network Governance and Neo-Weberianism) are presented and we deduct the ideal-type institutional governance structures according to each. Then, we take Italy and Portugal as case studies—two countries in the Napoleonic administrative tradition where previous research has stressed that HE reforms differ from the NPM ideal—and we develop a multi-level analysis (at policy and university levels) to compare their central institutional governance structures with the NPM-driven ideal. Our findings show that both countries present hybrid reform outcomes with similar choices in several aspects that differ from the NPM-driven practical outcomes; thus, a specific regional variance is recognizable. Yet, these structures reflect the Neo-Weberian founding ideas rather

than those of NPM. The research implications and possible explanations to reconcile the decoupling between discursive convergence on NPM global reform scripts and Neo-Weberian reform outcomes are discussed. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)