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Abstract

Twentieth-century massification of higher education and academic research led to mission diversification and structural diversification of national higher education systems (HESs), but also a tendency of non-university colleges to seek to develop into full-scale universities by the emulation of practices of established academic organizations, a tendency that has been called academic drift. The drift as such can have multiple causes, and in this article, we relate academic drift to the concepts of institutional logics and isomorphism from neoinstitutional organization theory, delineating policy-making, norm shifts and organizational action in response to uncertainty as three component processes of academic drift. Using the case of the organizational field of the Swedish HES and its recent 35-year history, we draw both empirical and theoretical conclusions, and demonstrate the weight of the research mission in the building of institutional legitimacy for university colleges.

(HRK / Abstract übernommen)