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**Abstract**

The article deals with the development of national higher education systems and the emergence of macro steering in Europe and to some extent in the USA. It is based on the assumption that this process of integration of higher education systems through macro steering will increasingly be felt as a forceful influence on higher education. Integration confronts policy makers with at least three important questions. Firstly, how should the relationship between the institutions be organized? Secondly, along what dimensions should integration take place? Thirdly, what are the proper procedures by which integration ought to take place? This article seeks to analyze how policy makers and influential actors within higher education systems have responded to these questions. The underlying tension that policy makers are trying to come to grips with is to combine a system that is able to provide education on a massive scale for a large section of the population in a coherent, but at the same time flexible, manner that allows the system to adapt to changing and diverse needs in

**23.8.2025**

society (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007). The article first outlines some major dimensions along which higher education systems may be organized and steered. Then it discusses how different, well-established ideas about the purpose of formal education may interact with current efforts to shape higher education systems. Furthermore, the tensions and instability implied by competing ideas about the mission of higher education is analyzed. In addition, the article discusses how individual institutions may respond to systemic integration. Finally, it presents an analysis of how the growth and massification of higher education systems may be related to new ideas about the role of knowledge ('the extended concept of knowledge') and knowledge institutions in society. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)