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The introduction of two-tiered study structures in the context of the Bologna Process : a theoretical framework for an international comparative study of change in higher education systems

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**Abstract**

This article presents a theoretical framework for an encompassing international comparative study of a central aspect of the Bologna process; the introduction of two-tiered study structures (TTSS), often referred to as 'Bachelor and Master'. The framework is tailored to understand and explain the patterns of TTSS that currently emerge in various national higher education (HE) systems in Europe. It considers both the different inherited institutional contexts and the interaction of organisational actors in HE policy, combining North's theory of institutional change and the actor-centred institutionalism of Mayntz and Scharpf to a framework for analysing change in HE systems. The framework allows to study the similarities and differences between the emerging patterns of TTSS and to investigate if the current changes of study structures contribute to the convergence of European HE systems. Besides developing the framework, proposals for its application and further refinement are put forward and its relationship with implementation analysis is discussed. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)