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Abstract

The theory of institutional isomorphism has been criticized for overemphasizing organizational convergence and neglecting organizational divergence. Drawing on a range of empirical data, this paper shows that multi-dimensional accounts of isomorphic change are not necessarily incompatible with accounts emphasizing divergence as a typical form of organizational response to environmental uncertainties. The specific case investigated is the proliferation of academic organizational units teaching law at Australian universities over a ten-year period (1987–1996) that saw far-reaching structural transformations of the Australian university system. The key heuristic strategy employed in this paper is to scrutinize (a) when isomorphic responses appear to occur, and (b) which specific organizational form they take. In the empirical case examined, scrutiny of each of these dimensions strongly suggests that at least some isomorphic responses of universities were driven by a dual agenda of manifesting not only similarity but also distinction. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)