



Departament de Dret Públic i de Ciències Historicojurídiques

Doctoral Dissertation

**THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR
THE INTEGRATION AND IMPROVING OF HIGHER EDUCATION:**

**Analysis of best practices in the European Union and Latin
America**

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This dissertation started with my interest to study the way in which HEIs attempt to reach the quality level that they offer. Mostly, through those policies which put the emphasis on knowledge, as one of the main assets in social and economic development. In the course of this research I received several advice and constructive comments from my tutors which helped me to grow as a researcher. Beside, derived from main chapters were developed three papers accepted in different world congresses, which helped to keep the focus on quality assurance issues and related with higher education.

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Be part of a transformation process in a European higher education institution (HEIs) as a third cycle student and at the same time as a novice researcher, took me to try to find out, why everybody was talking about a change which so few people could explain? I never realize how big the challenges to confront were and that for sure, I couldn't do it alone.

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Abstract

The aim of this work is to identify the main factors which influence in the implementation and development of Quality Assurance Systems in higher education institutions (HEIs), and compare different regions with similar changes. In such scenario, it becomes a necessary task try to understand the processes that have led to the current education policy as well as the changes in the vision which the European Community (EC) has had on higher education over time. In this vein, higher education and education in general have moved from a marginal location towards the center of the concerns in almost all over the world.

So far, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) do not work in a vacuum, but they are an important part of today's knowledge society. Through out a multiple case studies and two indepth case studies (Qualitative Methodology), was analyzed the way in which different internal quality assurance systems (IQAS) have been implemented and developed in six universities, [three from the Euroepan Union (EU) and three from Latin America (LA)]. From the observation of these cases in the field of quality assurance in higher education, we propose the use of some categories that provide an overview of the quality assurance as a policy domain within which policies are formulated.

Derived from literature review were identified three big lines of work related with quality assurance issues in higher education; historical analysis; theoretical approaches, and political change. The latter has served as guideline to guide our work within the quality assurance in HEIs, particularly in reference to recurrent practices to evaluate the quality of some of the HEIs activities and the structures associated with these practices (Vlăsceanu et al. 2007).

In this proposal we follow a comparative approach to the political process, the outputs and outcomes of policies that facilitate discovering empirical relationships between variables, particularly in the field of public policies. Far to find answers, the results take us to consider some questions about possible patterns or guidelines associated to processes like the Bologna's for instance and compared with the Latin-American situation.

This assignment speaks of quality assurance as a tool for the integration and improvement of higher education, also considers the quality assurance within the policy domain, as well as its different forms of implementation resulting from a national policy or transnational and whose impact is reflected in the actions taken by the HEI's. Even though is not a prescriptive framework, the EFQM excellence model perspective, allows to identifying the basic elements which compose the structure of QA system which is based on the application of the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) towards educational institutions. Whatever the origin of these new activities, no doubt the normative framework derived from the Bologna Declaration has set some trends of accreditation in Europe. It is clear that, in one way or another, this has influenced the development of varied quality assurance outlines in Latin America, as is demonstrated by the development of the QA actions identified on presented cases.

Keywords: *Quality Assurance. Higher Education Institutions, Internal Quality Assurance Systems, Educational Policies.*

Abbreviations

ALFA	Latin America Academic Training
ANECA	National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation
AUDIT	System Monitoring and Evaluation of Qualifications
BP	Bologna Process
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
ENQA	European Network for Quality Assurance
ERA	European Research Area
EU	European Community
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HES	Higher Education System
HEI's	Higher Education Institutions
INFOACES	Comprehensive Information System on Latinamerican Higher Education Institutions for the Common Area with Europe
IQAS	Internal Quality Assurance System
LRC	Lisbon Recognition Convention
LRU	Law of University Reform
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEGASUS	Program for Improved Management and Administration of University Services
QA	Quality Assurance
QAS	Quality Assurance Systems
SQA	Systems of Quality Assurance
TAI	Teaching Activity Index
TQM	Total Quality Management
TUNNING	Educational Structures in Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNIL	University of Lausanne
UNC	Universidad Nacional de Córdoba
UPEC	Université Paris Est Creteil
UJI	Universitat Jaume I
UPV	Universitat Politècnica de Valencia
UR	Universidad del Rosario
UV	Universidad Veracruzana
VERIFICA	Pre-Accreditation of Qualifications/Career
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Chapter I

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Seen from a time perspective, university has been one of the most enduring social institutions in Europe. With little variability in their functions, it has existed through more than 900 years in forms that are recognisable even today (Kerr 1966). As such the university has shown a remarkable institutional dynamics of change that allowed it to maintain a flexible and rather effective balance between internal continuity and external responsiveness. This balance not only showed its effectiveness at times when the university's environment was rather stable with incremental change demands, but also at times when the university's societal functions and its underlying ideas were debated in more fundamental ways (Olsen 2007).

Since its origins, higher education institutions (HEI's) have expressed interest in quality, trying to evaluate its substantive functions. The medieval university already had their own models and approaches to quality control, since demonstrating its ability to adapt to changing environments (Kerr 1982). In this context one can speak of two basic models: the first represented by French institutions and practice of giving control to an external authority (Cobban 1988), jointly with the Italian universities represented by Bologna and Salerno. Both cases can be considered as the epitome of quality control in terms of the accountability by the teachers' union to the Rector in the french case and of the supervisory bodies on the content of teaching from the Italians. The second one is the typical model of autonomous academic communities from the English people, expression of what is now known as quality assurance by peer review. Teachers decide among themselves what should be taught and who should do.

In the early nineteenth century, the dominant institutions of higher education starts their decline clinging to traditional curricula (France), or due to church control over education (Oxford and Cambridge) preventing modernize or adapt to the new changes. In this transition phase, stands out the domain of German institutions,

the University of Berlin being the most prominent example and an important symbol of the modernization of European governments, who gradually became the main funding sources of public HEIs, defining besides, their legal and administrative frameworks. In words of Maassen (1997), the birth of the modern university research-oriented can be seen as a major boost to European government control in the management and financing of its educational institutions. Indeed, after the interventionist phase, the government became a facilitator and to establish a framework within which HEIs operated with considerable autonomy, without this meaning completely delegate their responsibilities in this area. Using these new policy instruments based on less central planning, less regulation, more incentives and more frequent and structural evaluations on the performance of institutions and programs, is what Neave (1988) interpreted as the emergence of 'the evaluator state'. A State which establishes the conditions and priorities, some related to the profile of knowledge and the results of higher education and others with institutional performance.

It also must acknowledge the role that nation states has playing in developing national laws which regulate higher education, so the nation states are primarily responsible for higher education policy and steering at system level. On the other hand, both nation-state and HEI's are currently facing external pressures which present a new challenge, as they ask for a response by them (Luijten-Lub 2007). As an example it could be mentioned the signing of the Bologna Declaration, which demands countries to take a serious look at their higher education system and if necessary to set up and implement changes in the system to work on the objectives laid out in the Declaration.

Understand the processes that have led to the current educational policy and the vision changes which the European Community has had on higher education over time, it becomes a necessary task. The strategic objective on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment, expressed by Delors in the White Paper, has undoubtedly contributed to the ambitious strategy of 'Lisbon'¹ to develop the 'Europe of Knowledge' as a stimulus to further economic growth and social

¹ At the beginning of this century, European leaders was committed with the EU, to become an 'economy capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment'. The so called Lisbon Strategy was agreed by the Lisbon European Council on 23-24 March 2000.

cohesion, agreed in 2000. Thus, higher education and education in general has moved from a marginal location to the center of the concerns of the European Union (EU). In that sense HEI's do not work in a vacuum, they are an important part of today's knowledge society. In this vein, knowledge, in a broad sense, means that we are facing a new ideological climate that moves the emphasis in knowledge production from procedure to outcome. Although the emphasis may be new, the concepts of knowledge involved have been around for a long time. Besides, it is no novelty that results-oriented knowledge exists in academia (cf. law, medicine, engineering, applied science, etc.), but its role and status have changed. As a society is more "educated", higher education is under pressure to expand the class and type of knowledge it provides and to diversify the criteria by which it is evaluated.

Up to this point, it could ask, how we get here? Before attempting to answer, it is important to review some facts which set the base of the current European educational policy as well as certain trends promoted by international organizations which mark developments in the educational domain, beyond national or continental boundaries.

1.1.1. Higher Education Dynamics in the European Union

Undoubtedly, the change processes experienced by HEIs, have the potential for transform them into different levels, in terms of their purpose or mission, work processes, organization, governance and financial base and its role within the political system, the economy and society in general (Olsen 2007:25). It is with the latter and through a reciprocal relationship, where, the actors and environmental forces generate imperatives? or, are the universities oriented in different directions? At this point, it is considered that the discussions at European level, as well as the processes of policy making, are part of that dynamic which place universities beyond university schemes and a nation-state, uniques.

According to Walkenhorst (2008) a closer look at the aims and dynamics of changes reveals three key stages in terms of the direction and focus of the educational policy. The first stage was in the period between 1958 and 1993,

which saw the initiation of the policy and its subsequent consolidation and legalization. The inclusion of articles 126 and 127 in the Maastricht Treaty ended, according to Pollack (2000), with the 'policy competence creep' that had previously dominated debates about education. The following period lasted until about 1999, in which EU education policy was managed predominantly within the EU's legal framework. While the Maastricht Treaty formalized at the European level, it did not represent a radical change in itself, since in economic and political terms its objective remained practically the same: to facilitate the functioning of the newly established Single Market. This phase is described as an interim period where other issues dominated the agenda of the EU, notably the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the expansion into Eastern Europe. The third stage was not the result of the EU's internal policies or legal changes, but rather a result of changes in global and national level.

In the beginning (1950 to 1960) there were the view that the expansion of higher education would be essential for economic growth. At that time, promoting greater diversity in higher education systems (HES) was based on two powerful arguments: 1) the inability to teach large numbers of students in research universities, so that the design/orientation of HEIs towards education and training were the most appropriate to absorb the increased enrollment (Trow 1974, 2000, Clark 1998), and 2) the increasing diversity of backgrounds, talents and employment expectations among the large number of students to be accepted by heterogeneous institutions. However, this desire for diversity differed in several respects: a) what degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity was preferable?; b) to what extent this diversity should be agreed between institutions or within them, c) the differences should be clearly demarcated or in a slight and diffuse way d) the extent to which diversity is established from its formal elements (eg. different types and levels), or through informal elements (eg. reputation, profile, etc..), e) diversity should prevail according to the vertical dimensions (eg. quality ranking/reputation.) or horizontal (eg. institutional profile/curricular axes).

In this vein Teichler (2006) notes that the main political concerns have moved from education and economic growth to equal access and employment opportunities for graduates. The truth is that the debate on diversity and massification of higher

education, we must add, according to van der Wende (2002:193-206), trends in globalization, supranational policy, the presence of private educational institutions non-profit, the continual budget cuts by governments, the emergence of digital technologies and the growth of transnational education. To Fredriksson (2003: 523), in turn, a reflection of these concerns is that for the first time in the history of summits/meeting at the European level, education and training is one of the main tools for implementing strategic goals as posed by the Lisbon European Council in 2000.

Arguably, this has led to see higher education increasingly, not only as a specific type of activity, but as a system within which each institution must contribute to the successful operation of the system as a whole. Bleiklie supposed that the process of integration of higher education systems across these broad guidelines is increasingly perceived as a strong influence on higher education. While nationally the process is geared primarily by the actors, who in turn, are affected by supranational actors such as the EU, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNESCO and the World Trade Organization (WTO) as well as by the international trends. So the process has a global reach, and both the introduction of a standardized grading system, as well as the conformation of systems for institutional assessment and accreditation are some of the basic elements (Bleiklie 2007:392).

One of the processes that have shaped the dynamics in higher education and that has certainly been the catalyst for many complex interactions, is the so-called Bologna process. Regarding the government in the education sector and convergence, cooperation and coordination, King (2008) argues that this development exceeds the classic configuration of political process, primarily for three reasons. First, its objectives have been ambiguous, multiple and sometimes contradictory in part, making difficult the correlation between political objectives with political outcomes. Second, the phases of the policy process have not been differentiated (for example, the design phase is often confused with the implementation phase because Bologna policies are implemented at different times, different ways and in different national contexts). Third, the process is increasingly multi-actor and multi-level, so that what is seen as implementing a

policy from a European perspective, it is often considered as formulation of a national policy. However, the topics on the agenda setting and political legitimacy provide a scope of a solid relationship between normative political discourse on the impact of globalization on higher education and governance models affecting universities.

According to the above and related with the aim of make of Europe 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world', Fredrikson (2003) points out the need for Europe to play a more prominent role on the world and with respect to the development of new technologies and world trade. However, against this developments it is the fact that education policies remain largely a national responsibility, with many specific national interest.

Within global competitiveness in which the knowledge is the main factor for the economic growth, increasingly the policies and the agenda for the future of higher education in Europe, are being established. With such a purpose to becoming the leading knowledge based economy in the world, the EU is concerned about their performance in the knowledge sector, particularly in research, education (higher) and innovation (the knowledge triangle), and intends to resolve the European Paradox; while Europe has the necessary knowledge and research, it fails to transfer them to innovation and improving productivity and economic growth. In short, according to van der Wende (2007), it can be said that both the Bologna process and the Lisbon strategy are the main vehicles or frameworks that guide the European response to globalization in higher education. Although they emerge in different ways with different patterns and origins (bottom-up vs top down) and which can be characterized as intergovernmental agreements (Bologna) versus supranational agreements (Lisbon), both appear to converge slowly towards a dominant approach.

1.1.2. Reform process and re-organization schemes

Derived from the Lisbon Strategy and as a way to avoid future disputes about legal competencies, the EU members states were adopted a new co-operation strategy and a way of intensive transgovernmentalism, called the open

method of coordination (OMC). This new way of working was gaining importance when it was introduced not only in employment and monetary policy, but also in other policy areas like education and research. According to Dehousse (2003) this new approach to solve problems stands out from the previous ones mainly because its flexibility since do not pretends define unique goals and common to all, but just give the guidelines and let each member state define their own specific actions plan according to their particular situation. Also, this method has been seen as a necessary modernisation of the patterns of European policy-making by some, and as the Trojan Horse of intergovernmentalism by others.

To some authors, the OMC was basically oriented to organise a learning process, in terms to how to address common challenges raised by the global economy, in a coordinated way and respecting the national diversity. This would become a new exercise to govern both at European and national level (Rodríguez 2001). On the other hand, the debate about this issue points out that this method is not intergovernmental, given that the Comission and European parliament can fully play its rol. However, the Council's role is crucial in terms of adopting and adapting the European guidelines into the national policies. In words of Larsson (2001) this was more an attempt of theorizing a new form of governance than a true innovation. Certainly, the openness to new patterns of organization among member states has demanded to the HEIs a definition in terms of "being" an institution of and for society (public good), or "be" subject to commodification (educational services firm). It is clear that the implications of these new scenarios pose some problems and challenges arising from globalization and knowledge society.

Without enter into the debate about "public good" vs "service", is important to note the possibility not only to "sell" educational services, but to "sell" those of higher quality. Such scenario shows an environment dominated by the market laws. When it require quality services, undoubtedly it should pay for them, and this is where the competition between who offer them and whom demand them it is more and more present. So, in an increasingly competitive world, as above described, HEIs worldwide have been forced to provide high quality educational services as a solution/answer to compete. In addition to educational institutions and students,

there are other actors with whom a relationship is established within this 'game' of the market, ie, 'employers or the labor market' for which are formed the so-called 'human resources'.

When trying to establish a relationship between higher education and labour market in the context of the sale of services, Nicolesco and Păun (2009) argue that quality services also depends on customer satisfaction, in this case, the student satisfaction as a direct customer and employers' satisfaction as indirect customers. Two general conclusions are of interest: "Providers of higher education services should consider both opinions of students' at graduation and employers', as main beneficiaries of higher education in order to be able to improve their offers and activities and compete successfully"; and "Higher education institutions have to create new models of curriculum, teaching and student's evaluation strategies, so that to develop along operational competencies also transferable skills in students to ensure their survival in the new changing workplaces" (Nicolescu and Păun 2009:30-31).

It is a fact that Higher education is subject to global/national/local effects and has been shaped by hierarchy and uneven development on a world scale. According to Marginson (2004) social competition is much broader than economic exchange, but in the neo-liberal era marketisation is becoming more important, particularly cross-border markets. Globalisation and markets together are changing the competition for status goods (positional goods) in higher education.

1.1.3 The internationalization of higher education

Starting from the idea of (Teichler 1999) that internationalisation has become a phenomena strategically important in higher education, it has been noted (van Vught *et al.* 2002) the inclusion of a wide range of activities like transnational mobility of students and academic staff, the internationalisation of curriculums and the quality assurance, the inter-institutional cooperation in education and research, and the establishment of international university consortia, not to mention the important cross-border supply of education which has

led to a substantial market in import and export of educational products and services (van Vught *et al.* 2002:104).

At the time, Teichler (1999) pointed out the impact which internationalisation of higher education has had for the institutional management, in terms of three turning points or spectacular jumps. The first from a predominantly 'vertical' pattern of cooperation and mobility towards the dominance of international relationships on equal terms; the second, from casuistic action towards systematic policies of internationalisation; and third from disconnection of specific international activities on the one hand and on the other internationalisation of the core activities towards an integrated internationalisation of higher education.

In a context of challenges and tendencies, whatever the internationalization strategy that universities decide to choose, requires carefully strategic monitoring because is a vulnerable process. According to this author, the political and economic context of internationalisation in higher education can easily open the door for support of neo-colonialism and increase in the north-south disparities. Values play a role, as do hopes and fears (Teichler 1999: 21). Within the several conditions that steering the internationalization trends, stands out the liberation of educational market through initiatives from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and particularly, by the General Agreement on Trade and services (GATS). Related with this latter idea, Luijten-lub (2007) observes the relevance of the Bologna Process (BP) to take international cooperation in higher education to the next level within the European region. With the Declaration signed in 1999, the internationalization of this sector reaches the national level through the reform of grade structure, making it more compatible between the different participating countries. In this context internationalization processes are seen as an important boost to the improvements of quality in higher education national systems. Almost in all countries involved in processes of internationalization, recently have been created organisms linked with the assurance or improvements of quality.

In this vein, Latin American HEIs has been not alien to these processes of change however, concerns about the quality of higher education are relatively new in this continent, but not the quality problems. On the other hand, without getting into the

debate about the different conceptions of quality, it should be noted that the establishment of institutional systems of quality assessment in higher education seems to be the most important institutional innovation in recent years. According to some analysts, in this scenario emerges the "market" quality, anxious of qualitative and quantitative information that accounts for the results of the HEIs and also that they can be compared and public (Schwartzman 1988).

1.2 Research objectives and central questions

As we have seen, the developments related with the assessment, monitoring and improving of quality of the different constituents in higher education are not new (governance, contents, pedagogical resources, services offered, etc.). The novelty is that these developments are closely linked with the quality assurance (QA) and its management (Vlăsceanu *et al.* 2007). However is precisely in the implementation of systems of quality assurance (SQA) at universities and its impact on educational offer in which empirical evidence still missing. Enough reason to try to understand processes which until now have centered their efforts in the external assessment without take into account the internal dynamics of their own institutional processes.

In 2010 Harvey and Williams wondered, what has quality assurance done for us? And at the same time acknowledging that this process has resulted in clear documentation and transparency, although external processes could be better aligned to everyday academic activity. They assure that Internal processes are still developing and the link between external processes, internal processes and improvements in teaching and learning seem to be tenuous and patchy. What is remarkable, is the internationalisation of quality assurance and the standardisation of procedures, even though they leave a lot to be desired. They conclude that after 15 years with lots of enthusiasm and ideas, there has been a lot of inertia and compliant indifference among a substantial section of the academic and administrative community. So, it begs the question. Could the quality of higher education have been enhanced more efficiently and effectively without elaborate quality assurance systems?

Derived from literature review were identified three big lines of work related with quality assurance issues in higher education; historical analysis; theoretical approaches, and political change. The latter has served as guideline to guide our work within the quality assurance in HEIs, particularly in reference to recurrent practices to evaluate the quality of some of the HEIs activities and the structures associated with these practices (Vlăsceanu et al. 2007). Drawing on a qualitative approach we pretend identify the determinants that influence the implementation and development of internal quality assurance systems (IQAS), taking into account the perspective of the responsible of the implementation of such systems within their institutions.

Nowadays, more and more countries are requiring the development of IQAS to their institutions, aimed primarily to the teaching and learning process. It is likely that this shift to a inner vision it is related both to the interest to implement new forms of QA derived from recent trends to develop accreditation systems that legitimize HEIs and their programs, as well as a form of adaptation to transnational processes, as 'Bologna' in the European case. It could be argued whether this policy is a new site of competition and control, or just provide new mechanisms to preserve and/or enhance what has been termed as 'academic essencialism'. The truth is that through these processes it has shown that political activity and cooperation in higher education, within and beyond the European Community it has developed unexpectedly. However, it is recognized that a constant factor in the process is its power to strengthen transnational relations, provided the academic values have been respected and most scholars are involved (Corbett 2004). In this context and in line with Weusthof (1995), the emphasis on the implementation of national systems of quality assurance should not get in the formulation of external criteria, but in improving the organization and in the methodological quality of internal procedures for self-evaluation (Weusthof 1995, p. 247).

- *Central questions*

The premise on this proposal is that state control over higher education is giving way to greater institutional management in response to the diverse needs of

society and in the name of efficiency through new accountability processes, among which are included, the quality assurance. In this line of thoughts and based on the objectives of this study, the central research question is as follows:

- *The bologna process is a pattern to follow, or just a guideline for action in higher education within and outside of the European area?*

To answer this central question, we divide this query into several research questions, guiding the research process and analysis.

First of all, a better understanding of quality in higher education is needed to provide the general framework of concepts for this study. As the brief overview in section 2.2 shows, the interpretation of quality concepts in higher education has undergone to different visions over the years which let the possibility to talk about not just of one quality, but several. That is, in depending which side we are, is the used approach. This leads to the first research question.

1. *What are the determinants which guide/direct the change process in HEIs in terms of quality assurance both in the European Union as well in Latin America?*

When this is clarified, the possible responses of HEIs to challenges for improve their educational offer through quality assurance are explored from a theoretical perspective. This search is a first step towards the conceptual basis for research on quality assurance in higher education. The second research question is thus formulated:

2. *What is the role and participation of universities in the development and/or convergence of quality assurance structures in European Union and Latin American?*

As we explain in Chapter 3, the basis at this stage, lies on an interrelated conceptual framework. It is analysed the notions of quality and quality assurance closely linked with the implementation of internal quality assurance systems (IQAS). This allowed us to establish some possible categories to further analysis. Then the next research questions are:

3. *What kind of schemes, models or trends are followed?; and*
4. *Regardless the socioeconomic and cultural environments to which they belong most of HEI's are following the same pathway?*

If we can answering to these research questions, then the objectives set in the previous sections it should be achieved.

1.3 Outline of the study

The starting point to define an issue of study was a process which at European level, co-evolve and interact (Gorniztka, 2010).

The work is organised as follows.

The research questions guide the structure of this thesis. Chapter 2 begins with a brief literature analysis about the different notions and visions of quality, particularly on higher education domain. In the next two chapters, lays out a two phase empirical research strategy; a multiple case study and one in-deep. The former discusses definitions of the three main concepts of this study: quality, quality assurance and internal quality assurance systems (Westerheijden 2010; Vlăsceanu et al. 2007; Cheng 2003) and explore the way in which IQAS have been implemented and developed. The latter begins with the exploration of the conceptual framework used in this study through which it can see the quality as a policy domain, according to Perellon's proposal. The chapter ends inquiring about effectiveness of the IQAS and attempt to compare if there are parallel implementation processes across universities in terms of convergence or divergence. In both chapters the process of and criteria for the selection of cases is also described.

Chapter 5 presents and analyses the results of the empirical research. This chapter also answers research questions 2, 3, and 4. Finally, chapter 6 summarizes and sets out some points for future research lines.

Chapter II

2 The same old history

2.1 Introduction

In words of Reeves and Bednar (1994) the search for a universal definition of quality has yielded inconsistent results. Such a global definition does not exist; rather, different definitions of quality² are appropriate under different circumstances. Even today one of their main conclusions is quite valid; they argue that the basis for choosing pertinent definitions that can guide the development of conceptual frameworks and measurement methods is provided through exploring the roots of various definitions of quality, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and examining the trade-offs inherent in accepting one definition of quality over another. This point of view gives enough room to accept the great diversity and differences in the socioeconomic context, the culture, and the geographical positions in which the higher education systems are located. So, the challenge is to develop models and definitions that are comparable, even cumulative, and that account for many of the components neglected up to now.

On the other hand, most of times quality in education is related with the performance of an institution, from its academic staff (professor or researcher) and with the prestige earned through the years. These attributes, most of times are related with certain kind of information called performance indicators. In many countries it is recognized that performance indicators have been placed at the forefront as a strategic approach to the evaluation of higher education institutions (HEIs). This is shown in the opening lines of the report on the results of Higher Education: identification, measurement and evaluation, product of a seminar held at the University of California, Berkeley in 1970:

² For an overview of the concept see: (Abbott 1955; Feigenbaum 1951; Gilmore 1974; Levit 1972; Crosby 1979; Juran 1974; 1988; Gronroos 1983; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985 and Harvey and Green 1994)

"We'll have to prove that we deserve the money spent on higher education and justify our request for each additional resources"
(Lawrence, Weathersby and Patterson 1970).

According to some analysts, while the burden of rising costs is shifting directly to consumers of higher education services, the interest for prove the value of a college education, also grows.(Borden and Bottrill 1994). The weight given to the information (indicators) reflecting the recognition of a university, is very important these days. Undoubtedly the grade of transparency is not limited to indicators, but without indicators, transparency is difficult. Thus in this scenario, transparency has become a necessity for all stakeholders who wants to know and make decisions about the best education, hire the best qualified professionals, or provide funding based on demonstrated performance indicators. It is clear that in recent years the issue of information about universities (Rankings) receives more attention from different stakeholders and at the same time, demanding more clarity and transparency in the collection and presentation of the data. In this sense, van Vugh and Westerheijden (2010) suggest the need for better tools for transparency, coupled with the question of the sources of the data, the risks involved in the construction of league tables and the challenge of using composite indicators. Also consider that when making judgments about the quality of a good or service (education) is very hard to know, especially for students, to what extent the college experience has improved their knowledge, skills and competencies, assuming that these students can not prior knowledge of the quality of their educational experience. It is in this sense that it recognizes the existence of information asymmetries so the value of transparency tools lies in its contribution to rectify these asymmetries in terms of maximizing the social benefits of higher education (Van Vaugh and Westerheijden 2010: 1-2).

Certainly, there are currently many initiatives to assess the impact that different HEI's have developed, either domestically or internationally, focusing on one or all of its functions (teaching, research, social compromise). The truth is that there is also consensus on the need to define specific quality and impact indicators to ensure that the particular influence of education is recognized and properly measured (Watson 2008). In this vein, it is understood the concern of international agencies (GATS, OECD, etc.) to establish certain conditions for the development

of agreements, standards and mechanisms aimed to quality assurance in the field of higher education. According to Dill and Beerkens (2012) the new demands of mass systems of higher education and the emerging environment of global academic competition are altering the traditional institutions for assuring academic standards in universities. As a consequence many nations are experimenting with new instruments for academic quality assurance.

2.2 Quality concepts and quality visions in higher education

First of all it's important to keep in mind the different aspects of quality regarding higher education, in terms of the political vision from the governments or, as a sensitive concept from the view of the own higher education institutions. Also is important to note that universities are a special kind of organisation, that is, they are not an enterprise, nor like any other services but they have some characteristics from enterprises and often they also offer certain services. In this scenery is also difficult to find a concept that coincide at all levels with the idea of quality as it depend, among other things, on the context, the circumstances, the objectives and over all from the people who perceived it. So, the problem starts when we try to find in the educational domain, a clear definition of such concept. Moreover, also universities are complex entities as they may have very different aims and sometimes conflicting, that is, the teaching and/or research or the community service or the technology transfer, so each of these objectives could have not only a different concept of quality, but a different measure.

Within this conceptual complexity is added the context in which these organizations are located, as it is not the same an university in an isolated community within an unfavorable economic environment, to one that is situated within a city with all facilities and access to resources both financial and information and communication technologies. Therefore, the complexity in defining a concept of quality, the diversity in proposed missions, coupled with the different contexts in which are located, make it very difficult not just measure but also define quality in universities. However, in a basic way, everyone has a minimal idea that some things are better than others. Therefore, this is the idea behind the search of quality, the improving quality and the quality management. Likewise, it consider that enter in the discussion and debate on quality concepts deserves a

special attention which can not be develop in this proposal, however, are used some views that allow us to approach in an inclusive way to all aspects of quality previously mentioned, and which are related to the idea of quality as conceived in HEI's. In such sense we believe that an institution of quality must be, at least, coherent. It must also try to decrease the existing problems if one understands that quality is commitment to positive development which will enhance starting positions (Sallán 1998).

Regarding different visions through which has been analyzed the quality of HEI's it briefly mentioned some approaches which may help us to understand the quality issues related with higher education. One approach that has been linked to the quality of an institution has been named as 'excellence' which in words of Harvey and Green (1994) is that one which exceeds the highest standards. This vision it is related with the traditional notion of quality which implies exclusivity. Furthermore, most of times it is associated with the level of scientific production, however, this not meaning that such institutions are more usefull socially, neither their teaching nor learning processes are better than others, nor that they are best suited with their environment. Therefore, the excelence approach it is valid mainly for research activity, but not for all functions developed in higher education.

Another way to see quality in education is through the so called 'efficiency' that is, doing things well at the lowest possible cost. In this vein and from the internal efficiency perspective, Sadlak (1978) suggest that the notion of efficiency applied to education entails the concern to judge the adaptation of the education system to its objectives and points out efficiency as measure of the success in meeting these operational targets with the resources made available to it. On other side, "the Zero Defects and getting things right" proposed by Harvey and Green (1994) subverts the exclusivity of excellence vision, shifting the traditional notion of quality into something everybody can have. That is in terms of conformance to specification rather than exceeding high standards. So, Quality is that which conforms to a particular specification. But even from this approach the problem remains the sense in which one can talk about 'zero defects' or 'getting it right first time' in an educational setting. Higher education is not about delivering specifications in as near a perfect way as possible. It is, arguably, about

encouraging, inter alia, the analytic and critical development of the student. This involves constant engagement with 'specifications', a process of reworking and reconceptualisation.

The next approach has to do with the customer satisfaction, but the clients are very special, HEI's don't have 'clients' in strict sense. The students are users and at the same time partners in all the processes of teaching and learning. But, quality in higher education is not just a matter of satisfaction. In this line of thoughts Harvey and Green (1994) state that quality is judged in terms of the extent to which the product or service fits its purpose. This notion is quite remote from the idea of quality as something special, distinctive, elitist, conferring status or difficult to attain. It is a functional definition of quality rather than an exceptional one. It may be used to analyse quality in higher education at different levels. For example, if the purpose of higher education is to provide an appropriately educated work force, is the system as a whole providing the right number of graduates? or, in a particular course is provided the right balance of knowledge, skills and understanding? Undoubtedly this approach raises many questions, since the notion of 'customer' is itself tricky, indeed contentious, as a concept applied to users of higher education. In such sense, Walsh (1991) raised that the standards of quality are difficult to state and maintain. In some cases services are not only physically but mentally intangible, because they are difficult to grasp and understand.

The following approach is that of the 'prestige', in this case some universities relate it with the excellence vision, although not always, but this approach is associated with the famous rankings and the idea of prestige which is more a matter of perception than conviction and not necessarily the best idea of quality in education. Meanwhile, speaking of the dynamics of competition between universities, Marginson (2006) argues that competition both nationally and globally, even if they differ, they complement. From this perspective, higher education is located in an open information environment in which borders are crossed routinely and identities are continually made and self-made in encounters with diverse others. This kind of global hierarchy is not necessary to research collaboration or to non-commercial student exchange but without such a global

hierarchy there would be no positional advantage and hence no world-wide social competition through higher education. In this vein, Hirsh (1976) ensures that higher education produces 'positional goods', ie 'goods' that facilitate access to social prestige.

Even though there has been benefits gained from using this approaches, most of them are related predominantly to the efficiency and effectiveness of non-academic functions.

The coming approach has to do with the relation established between the goals and the way of reaching them, whether they're 'big goals' or coming from a 'prestigious' institution. The question here is the consistent with the objectives, that is, if such objectives are achieved. Somehow, this is a reasonable way to manage the quality mainly because the institutional concerns about the service to society. But, again we confront the question of measure and the assesement of goals as different as the quality of teaching and learning processes, or the research, or the academic activity. As will discussed in Chapter 4, along this process of transformation of universities, some indicators have been constructed for evaluate the teaching activity in terms of a qualitative change. Transformation is not restricted to apparent or physical change but also includes cognitive transcendence. According to Harvey and Green (1994), unlike many other services in which the provider is doing something for the consumer, in the education of students the provider is doing something with the consumer. This process of transformation is necessarily a unique, negotiated process in each case. The same reasoning applies to research. The provider does not just produce 'new knowledge' in a vacuum but is involved in transforming a given body of knowledge for particular purposes. So, education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant, be it student or researcher.

In a way this transformative vision of quality establishes the idea of added value to the extent to which the educational experience enhances the knowledge, the skills and abilities of students. In this regard, as noted by Havey and Green (1994) the measurement of value added, for example, in terms of input and output

qualifications provides a quantifiable indicator of 'added value' but conceals the nature of the qualitative transformation. In short, this idea suggest that learners should be both at the centre of the process, by which learning is evaluated, and at the same time at centre of the learning process. This involves giving power to participants to influence their own transformation. Up to this point and away from the idea of discussing the possible definitions of quality in higher education, we just want to emphasize the validity of all of them, how they vary and, to some extent, how reflect the different perspectives both the individual and society.

2.3 The international scenario (The global wave of QA)

We start acknowledging that the idea of quality in educational field is a multi-dimensional concept which cannot be easily assessed through only one indicator and, at the same time, it has the status of service, granted by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS³). In this vein Rizvi and Lingard (2000) argue that education has been affected by those changes associated with globalization; structurally, in policy terms, in practice terms, and in the experiences that young people bring with them to their education. The idea of globalization is seen as a complex and often contradictory process, that is centered around three major regional groupings of states: Europe, America and Asia, which are a social and political-economic constructions rather than geographically inclusive. They have different levels of interaction and integration and may to some extent be seen as competitors. For some authors, recognizing how globalization might affect national education policies and practices involves three things; appreciating and specifying the nature and force of the extranational effect; specifying what it is that may be affected, in this case "education", and what forms those changes may take; and how that effects occurs, whether directly, in traceable ways indirectly, or consequentially on other changes it may bring about within or on the educational sector (Dale 2000). In such a sense it looks like that quality assurance could be a possible route to get evidence for such changes and impact on educational policies.

³ According to Robertson (2003), the GATS have the potential to transform and liberalise education, a once relatively protected and decommodified sector into a multi-billion industry, powered by market-liberalising proponents from the developed economies.

Also it must be acknowledged the different developments around quality issues in higher education like the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) through which several countries and its higher education systems have established reforms related with quality assurance and qualification recognition. In such sense the growing importance of quality assurance and its location at the core of the construction of the European Higher Education Area and the Bologna Process, which in words of Dale (2000), is part of the states' responses to changing global economic and political pressures who seen education as the key factor in honing states' competitive edge with respect to each other, since in the new global economy human resources are much less "foot loose" than other kind of resources.

Undoubtedly, in such scenario the accreditation remains the primary vehicle for quality assurance in higher education and the major driver of learning outcomes assessment, but so far remains a challenge to ensure that the processes of quality assurance translate into real change in improving student learning. In this sense Blaich and Wise (2010) asserts that moving from assessment to improvement implies to work with assessment evidence to create changes that improve student learning. Either way, in different regions and systems has been made changes with an orientation, most of them, towards the recognition of results for each region and particularly for the higher education institutions.

With the above we want to emphasize in a kind of 'tsunami' of quality, which has been shaped by the growing Influence of external processes in the higher education arena, such as the need for comparable skills in a world with an increased flow of labor force. As a secular institution committed to producing knowledge, higher education finds itself at the center of an scenary in which it is required to play multiple roles as the production (and reproduction) of knowledge which is increasingly considered a critical instrument for societal development. Also, it must acknowledge that both cooperation and competition can be seen as a way to respond to the external pressures of globalisation and internationalisation (Van der Wende 2007). Competition is often associated with globalisation and connected to English-speaking countries, whereas cooperation is associated with internationalisation, associated with academic exchange, quality and excellence.

As an exemplary case of regionalisation of practices in higher education it could be mentioned the intergovernmental European initiative for building a common area through the Bologna Process, which has had impacts in other parts of the world, such as in Australia, Africa and Latin America (Lazzari 2008).

It is a fact that Higher education is growing in complexity through multiple inter-connections. Therefore the old binary distinctions between education for 'public good' or 'private gain' seem increasingly anachronistic. We should challenge ourselves to find more sophisticated categories linked to quality assurance arrangements that recognize and give value to diverse forms of learning – and learners - in both local and global contexts. Following this idea, during the First Global Forum on International Quality Assurance in 2002, where identified five kind of providers: those who offer the full range of educational processes from enrolment to assessment and certification; consortia who do the same; part or joint providers; multi-agent providers which each offer a part of the educational process; and self-assembly arrangements where the learner assembles their own provision, with guidance and subsequent certification from elsewhere (UNESCO 2002). The above description include the co-location (or not) of students and tutors and the amount and type of interaction between groups of learners and tutors, between learners themselves and between learners and other resources of learning. The support systems – social, academic and technological – to which learners have access are important aspects of quality assurance. (UNESCO 2002 p.34)

In this context, it mention two statements which describe this kind of 'quality wave' that has led to reforms and changes both in national policies as in the higher education systems. The former emerge in 1988 at the Sorbone, as a prelude to the subsequent agreement to harmonize the architecture of higher education systems in the form of intergovernmental agreement at European level (Bologna Process) which set:

the “adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees... in order to promote European citizens’ employability...”.

The adoption of a system means changes at different levels, as well as agreements on a readable and comparable degrees system, all oriented to facilitate a borderless flow of professional labour force. And latter appear in the form of voluntary co-operation between Latin American countries called TUNING-ALC, whose proposal is:

“... a shared project which looks for and builds languages and mechanisms for reciprocal understanding of systems of higher education, which will aid transnational and transregional processes of recognition. It has been conceived as a space of reflection for agents committed to higher education, which through a search for consensus, will contribute to advancing the articulated development of easily comparable and understandable qualifications in Latin America”.

Put in different words but with the same goal, the so called project TUNING emerged originally from a deep reflection on higher education and according with its definition⁴, tries to reach the ambitious goal to contribute to the creation of a Higher Education Area in Latin America through curriculum convergence. All this efforts are oriented to continue to “fine tune” the educational structures in Latin America through consensus, with the goal of collecting and exchanging information and improving the collaboration between higher education institutions to develop quality, effectiveness and transparency. It is difficult to deny that internationally, demands for greater certainty over the quality of higher education are multiplying. In other words, globalization drives changes in education towards global perspectives, besides; the impact of globalization on education (design education) is a subject of debate and discourse within the whole global community (Lam 2010). Even though this is not the place for such a debate, we coincide with Berkeens (2004) in terms to understand globalizaton from a dialectical perspective, that is, internationalisation means setting up flows (connections) between two or more countries, while globalisation refers to a process where

⁴ To ‘tune’ means synchronise a radio on the desired frequency; it also means, ‘tuning’ the various instruments in an orchestra, so that music can be played without unwanted dissonance. Final Report of Phase 2 TUNING European Project. <http://tuning.unideusto.org/>

social arrangements that shape these connections become integrated on a world-wide scale.

2.4 The quest of measure/The information systems

The starting point to know, analyze, compare or even to benchmarking higher education institutions, are those information systems to which can be accessed or consult. Such systems emerge from the need of institutions to revise radically some existing practices, as well as to improve others, and most of them are based on increasing sources of information about its own development. Now a day this kind of information is known as 'rankings'. Most of those classifications tend to overestimate the research function and the number of scientific awards and publications, leaving aside all other university activities as if teaching and applied research were unimportant, or as if this kind of organisations could not have any impact, either social, cultural or regional.

In this vein and according to Merisotis (2002), no matter how cuestionables the rankings are, they are here to stay since, even with all its imperfections, they satisfy a public demand for transparency and information that institutions and governments have not been able to meet on their own (Usher and Medow 2009). Yes but, the truth is that all this information is relevant mostly to the anglo-saxon world but not for the latinamerican case, because many factors which correspond to the contributions of the HEI's to their context are not considered and thus such information is useless for the latinamerican stakeholders.

Talking about information and the ways of gathered, in terms of the data related with this processes there is a close relationship between indicators that attempt to measure the quality of a service or the results of a process, and the information system through which they integrate and analyze the data for decision making. But what it is should be measured and how does the information system are constructed? As a source of reference to compare the higher education institutions have been mentioned the rankings, most of them based from a research perspective. However, according to Federkeil (2008) analysis of existing rankings shows that the vast majority do not have an explicit and theoretical grounded

concept of quality. Meanwhile (Dill and Soo 2005; Usher and Savino 2007 and van Dyke 2005) suggest that “there are vast differences between university league tables in terms of what they measure, how they measure it and how implicitly define Quality”. Therefore, we agree with the difficulty of articulating the meaning of quality and with the idea of Harvey and Green (1994) in terms of which, like the concepts of 'freedom', 'equality' or 'justice', the concept of quality is a 'slippery concept', because of its polysemia and multidimensional reach.

Having some idea about the main actors involved in any measuring processes, imply to acknowledge the challenge which all nations are confronting to design a policy framework which effectively balances the forces of the state, the market and the academic profession to assure academic standards in universities (Dill and Beerkens (2012). So, one way or another HEI's are moving through these trends, mainly because international forces in form of development agencies like the World Bank has not only put a renewed focus on higher education, but also emphasized that quality assurance is the main orientation of its current programme.

To the question, is a global agreement on quality possible? the answer could be yes, and not just one but several at different levels, in different moments at the whole world. So, it could be said that the manifested external factors via globalisation combined with massification have tremendously altered the relationship between the state and institutions. As an example of those kind of agreements, at the continental level in the beginning, could be mentioned; the - Magna Charta Universitatum, the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Bologna Declaration, the Global Alliance for Transnational Education, and all the Conventions on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education that have been signed at national, regional and international level since 1974. (See Annex 1)

All this schemes of organization between countries reveal the development which has led to the internationalization of quality assurance and accreditation in the last twenty years. In such scenario, higher education has been attracting political interest focused mainly on educational quality (Uvalić-Trumbić 2007). So is very

important to note the role of international organisations in shaping developments in this increasingly sensitive area of national prerogative. According to Dill and Beerkens (2012) the design of more effective public policies to assist autonomous universities in improving the collegial processes essential to assuring academic standards in the new age of academic globalization and massification, depends on critical design principles like the self-organization of internal governance arrangements, the importance of face-to-face communication among peers for increasing trust, and the active collective monitoring of valid measures of performance for assisting organizations to voluntarily address collective action dilemmas in the provision of public goods (Gugerty and Prakash 2010).

At this vein it is important to mention a project which has been following the ideas mentioned above, regarding improving processes and the assuring academic standards as a collective effort to find valid measures related with the performance of HEI's. The INFOACES⁵ project purpose is to build a comprehensive information system which contributes to institutional development and academic cooperation between latinamerican universities and as a support to the development of a higher education common area. Such system is based on indicators regarding on three dimensions which reflect; the structure, the results and the context of higher education institutions in Latin America.

From the above it could sum up that information is a key issue to understand the different developments of higher education systems, its own internal academic and management processes, as well as the growing number of international agreements between nations and quality 'agencies accredited'. About the latter, according to Stensaker *et al.* (2010) is debatable whether the external review processes are as transparent as they are in theory, since the formal setup, the many standards and guidelines, and the codified language in the external reviews of quality assurance agencies can easily be seen as a more bureaucratic procedure that does not provide real value for money for society in general. So in

⁵ INFOACES (Integrated Information System for Higher Education Institutions in Latin America for the Common Higher Education Area in Europe) is an ambitious project funded by the European Commission, within the ALFA program, which brings together a total of 33 partners from 23 different countries -18 in Latin America and 5 in Europe. In addition, the project has the participation of 42 IES attached, the endorsement of 15 International Organizations and Higher Education Associations and external advice of 11 international experts. They are coordinated by the Technical University of Valencia, through the Center for Quality Management and Change.

a way, the people involved, the procedures, and the methods used and a very narrow understanding of what constitutes proper 'evidence', represent a potential problem to any initiative oriented to establishing trust and transparency in a broader societal perspective.

From a positive point of view, according to Mora (2012) is not possible to have a fair and globalized world without demanding transparency to all actors regardless the field in question. And higher education is not immune to these demands, since it has also become a global good to who is required, now more than ever, provide transparent information. It is a fact that accurate information on inputs, processes and especially outcomes and impact of universities is scarce. In this sense the main stakeholders are the most affected by this lack of information. Even when there are gradual changes, this has been a widespread deficiency that has been part of the idiosyncrasy of institutions everywhere. Increase the transparency of information on what universities do, but above all, what they produce, could resolve the situation.

As has been said, the need for information on the HEI's is not resolved through the *rankings*. The apparent "competitive advantage" granted through these methodologies, only seems interested in those market-oriented universities, most of them Anglo-Saxon, so, thanks to the 'good positions' in the *rankings* such universities charge what they want for the services offered. Is important to note that the change from be an elite university to becoming a mass university, the need of improvement, the growing complexity of universities, competitiveness and diversification at national and international level, makes university systems should lean more towards meeting social demands, revealing the preferences of direct users (students) and indirect (business), generating a stimulating environment for the quality of these institutions. In this vein, this change of paradigm demands transparency, in an scenary where universities are considered productive units in which there are a logical tension between those who offer an educational service and those who required it.

2.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter we just tried to sketch the complex economic conditions and social circumstances that the higher education institutions have to confronting, as well as the different stakeholders who are involved at all levels and over all, the difficulty to establish one concept of quality that fits and satisfies all of them. In such sense, is quite pertinent the proposal of Harvey and Green (1994) for whom the idea of quality is not a different perspective on the same thing but different perspectives on different things with the same label, and according to them, linking an activity to quality may serve to validate or justify irrespective of what the notion of quality it self might mean.

As we have seen, this interest for quality is not that new, from its origins universities has been concerned about its reputation, accountability and peer reviews. Since the early twentieth century, it have been producing countless lists and classifications of the 'best' universities according to a great variety of criteria, at the begining at the regional and national level and later, around all over the world. Now a day the cross-border provisión of higher education is a fact and still growing. To this respect, Blackmur (2007), in a critically way suggest that the nation-state is not helpless if it wishes to respond to this phenomena. According to this view, governments are powerful in regulating imports of higher education.

An event with an important impact on HEI's has been the development of practices and principles to regulate cross-border provision of higher education, jointly elaborated by UNESCO/OCED and published in 2005 as the Guidelines for Quality Provision of Cross-Border Higher Education. Taking this as a response to the growing of commercialisation of higher education have some risks, on the one hand, according to Blackmur (2007) if the principles of GATS are applied completely to higher education services, this will increase the risks that the provision of 'low quality' cross-border higher education will expand significantly. On the other hand, as the sector becomes ever more complex with the impact of new information and communication technologies (ICT's) on distance learning for instance, new opportunities for unethical and corrupt practices are emerging (Hallack and Poisson 2005). Nonetheless, even with all regulation proposals in this

arena, it is assumed that the persisting growth in the demand of higher education services coupled with the multiplicity of agencies involved in the market, as well as the lack of regularization will sustain the pressure for more distorted practices. Perhaps, as a positive and as direct consequence, there is a trend for more transparency and accountability and ethics is simultaneously on the rise. However it is a fact that the cross-border student movement has been an important driver for internationalisation and globalization and it has fostered global markets and competition between institutions.

No matter if we talk about the ICT's developments, or the knowledge society⁶, the common denominator in both is information, either the simple transmission of data through the Web or the knowledge transfer within the teaching/learning processes. So, this information flow should be as clear as possible and accessible at the same time in a setting where, in words of Cremonini *et al.* (2008), the HEIs compete to become ever more attractive to those potential “student-customer”. Thus, derived from the high demand for opportunities to enter higher education and the need for improvements in professional development, in and out of HEI's have been developed frameworks for quality assurance, accountability and accreditation that could become platforms for future opportunities and development in education in the global world (Lam 2010).

In the next section we will focus mainly on quality assurance within higher education institutions. What kind of schemes, models or trends are followed? Regardless the socioeconomic and cultural environment to which belongs it, most of HEI's are following the same pathway? Such questions are the guide to explore the presence or absence of benchmarking practices, systems or schemes, as response mechanisms to environmental, social and over all economic changes.

⁶ The meaning here of ‘knowledge Society’ emphasised the importance of knowledge in creating economic growth and global competitiveness, according to Marginson & van der Wende (2006).

Chapter III

3. An overview on quality assurance perceptions: case studies EU-LAC

3.1 Introduction

Nowadays is well known that quality visions, methods or models used in higher education come from the business world and have been adapted and applied to this sector. The World Declaration on Higher Education in the XXI century, by UNESCO, sets the need to implement strategies for improving quality of higher education, although it seems that still prevail disagreements on quality concepts (Harvey and Green 1993; Poole 2005; 2010), the ways of measuring it (Welsh and Dey 2002), their impact (Westerheijden *et al.* 2007; Massaro 2010) and quality as result (Stensaker 2008). It is not new that various developments have taken place relative to the assessment, monitoring, and improvement of the quality of different components of higher education (its governance, its contents, its forms of pedagogy, the services offered, etc.). What is new refers to those developments which are related to quality assurance and its management (Vlăsceanu *et al.* 2007). However, there is little empirical evidence on the implementation of systems of quality assurance in the universities and their impact on educational provision. In this work we attempt to understand processes that have so far focused its efforts on the external evaluation, without taking into account the perceptions about its own institutional processes.

The next chapter analyzes in six European and American Universities the way in which IQAS have been implemented and developed. The analysis suggest the question whether such process is leading HEIs to standardizing, instead of tailoring the QA? It is structured as follows, in the next section from the literature review; we present some ideas about the notions of quality and quality assurance and particularly for the internal systems at universities. Secondly the path followed is explained in terms of methodology and research design. Thirdly we present the discussion starting from a comparison between empirical evidence and literature. The conclusions consider it some reflections and questions for future research.

3.2 Conceptual framework

Without going into the current academic debate about the quality issues in higher education, we focus on definitions related with this research field. First of all, there is no doubt that changes in the environment are affecting the HEIs and the way of managing its own processes. All this changes are related with the origins of the notion of quality in this context. In the industrial/business environment there is substantive agreement on core aspects of the definition of quality, but in higher education is not as simple as that. According to Houston (2008) the interlinked environments and expectations in which universities operate, are too complex. Depending from which side we observe to these institutions we get economic (employers, industrial groups), societal (families of existing and potential students, community organizations) and educational perspectives (academic disciplines, other education providers). In addition, different interested parties (internal/external) seek to build bridges across these environments in terms to accommodate and respond to the array of diverse expectations related with quality.

In this vein and according to our objective, first of all we propose in a very broad and informal sense that the notion of «quality» in higher education has to do with how well 'something' works to achieve certain goals (Westerheijden 2010). Secondly, related with; how we know that 'something' works?, it is proposed the notion of quality assurance (QA) which refers to recurrent practices to evaluate the quality of some of the HEI's activities and the structures associated with these practices (Vlăsceanu *et al.* 2007). And finally, we mean by internal quality assurance systems (IQAS) and according to Cheng (2003) all those efforts for improving the internal environments and processes, such that the effectiveness of teaching and learning can be ensured to achieve the planned goals.

According to Harvey (1998), even though that uniformity of approach to quality monitoring grows, there is little analysis of the rationale behind the methods because there is little exploration of what 'quality' is in a higher education context. However, it is acknowledged that 'quality' has evolved from marginal position to being the foremost concern in higher education alongside funding issue. The

certain thing is that in most countries, approaches to quality have started with an assumption that the quality of higher education needs monitoring. However, according to the EUA 2009 report on *Improving Quality, Enhancing Creativity*, the “monitoring and evaluation process alone, with no link to the curriculum development process, do not guarantee the quality of higher education” (EUA 2009: 13).

Combined to those national external systems for evaluating teaching and learning, more and more countries are also requesting HEIs to develop internal systems for quality assurance, including demands that such systems should secure the core processes in higher education -teaching and learning (Stensaker *et al.* 2008). Probably this shift to an internal vision, is related both with the interest in developing new forms of quality assurance, derived from the recent tendency for developing accreditation systems which provide legitimacy to HEIs and its programs, as well as a way of national adaptation, in processes like the Bologna’s in the European case.

On other hand, regarding the Latin American area and according to Fernández (2009), it observes a chaotic and growing process of diversification in higher education, alongside a simultaneous process of privatization and with a great heterogeneity in its quality levels. In addition, there is a growing tendency to link financing mechanisms with processes of accreditation of institutions, programs and teacher-researchers. In words of Díaz (2007) this induces a change process oriented in one direction, ignoring the history, dynamics and conditions of institutional development.

In that sense, we consider that all major transformations in higher education are taking place all over the world and quality assurance issues have a central role to play, above all, with the emergence of accreditation, as the dominant objective of national policies for quality assurance in such sector. Therefore, the emphasis on QA and related with efficiency of institutions, has lead to a second level the reflections and concerns related with the training goals for improvement pointing out the regulation of national higher education systems (Perellon 2005). All this trends, according to Stensaker (2007) have been stimulated by supranational and

international organizations such as the EU and the OECD, picked up and implemented by national governments in various parts of the world and with an array of new organizations supporting quality both internationally and nationally.

In a scenario as it's described above, we will intend to analyze the implementation of the internal quality assurance systems within European and Latin American universities, as a response to environmental changes they faced. The final analysis will consider different levels of the process; the purposes, the practices and the effects. Besides, we propose a brief reflection on why certain characteristics of IQAS appear and why similarity occurs? Far from being able to respond, we agree with Ertl and Phillips (2006) when state that the potential standardization of educational provision is also affected by the different current educational situations, as well as by the historical and traditional context of education in each country.

3.3 Methodology and research design

We develop a qualitative and exploratory research design of multiple cases (Yin 1994), whose purpose is to identify the determinants that influence the implementation and development of IQAS. The number of cases to be analyzed will be within the range of cases (between 4 and 10) recommended by Eisenhardt (1989).

3.3.1 Selection of cases and criteria

In pursuit of external validity (Lecompte and Preissle 1993) were selected six universities from both Latin America and Europe (See Annex 2) in which has been established an internal quality assurance system, according to the definition used. Another criterion includes its character; private or public.

3.3.2. Protocol to each case and analysis of information

To ensure comparability of information, all universities and informants were subjected to the same protocol as described below. Based on the stated

objectives and in literature review, we developed a semi-structured interview guide (see Annex 3) that would describe all actions taken with regard to quality assurance within universities and in relation to its immediate environments. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), semi-structured interviews seem most appropriate for inductive-exploratory study such as ours.

Following Eisenhardt (1989), we analyze the information from the main regularities detected in each case. The search for patterns that repeat in each case study is widely used technique that increases the internal consistency of the results (Yin 1994). In the particular situation of QA, this methodology has been used in several studies (Rosznyai 2003; Villanueva 2004; Vidovich 2002; Bertolin and Leite 2008; Ursin *et al.* 2008; Asderaki 2009; and Al-Alawi *et al.* 2009).

3.3.3. Description of cases

The description of cases corresponding to each of the items of the questionnaire (Annex 3), which consider both the purely internal aspects of the institution, as well as those in which are interrelated with the socio-economic environment in which they are established. At first sight, it observes that all analyzed IQAS have some common characteristics. First of all, a) can or cannot, be present in a formal way; b) not always is related with quality assurance norms and its processes, at least in all the areas or components of the educational practices; c) most of them began in around the last ten years; and, d) the diversity of reasons and ways of implementation is a constant.

3.3.4. Discussion

This section will consider three levels for the analysis of the process: the purposes, which takes into account the rationale for implementing those kinds of systems; the practices, considering the activities oriented to improve their own educational activities; and the effects, emphasizing a self-assessment exercise with regard to the implementation and development of the system itself. According to our findings we arranged the regularities obtained in relation with the rationale of implementation an IQAS, and as we can see is ranging from continuous

improvement until to a different ways to organize and achieve the educational practices into one way to quality.

The first evidence show a common and important element in all analyzed cases, which in words of Harvey and Williams (2010), refers to the transferability of the system established elsewhere in the world, as the basis of different developments without greater variations among them. So, the continual improvement, the educational innovation, the certification of processes (ISO 9001), evaluation and accreditation of careers, seem to be some of the determinant reasons for the implementation of such systems. Returning to the idea that quality movement comes from industry, this situation reflect what Stensaker (2007) defined as the movement of translation of a management idea into higher education.

The second empirical evidence, is related with the presence implicitly or explicit of quality goals within the institutional mission which cross in a transversal way all the strategic plans and decisions associated with substantive functions of teaching, research and diffusion of knowledge. Another common element to the systems was the relation between the process and the possibility of success which not always reflect a tension in terms of control and improvement, as Meade and Woodhouse (2000) has pointed out. However, taking into account the elements presented in each case, that is to say, design, planning, implementation, evaluation and accreditation, those overall similarities reflect the uniformity of which Harvey (1998; 2002) talks. No matter if the system is focusing in academic processes, accreditation of careers, quality management and so on, the thing is that the links between accountability mechanisms and quality improvements remain unclear.

The evidence about to monitoring of problems related with the operation of the systems has to do mainly with the absence of an entity dedicated to this issue or due to the limited scope of the activities implemented by the systems whose only purpose is the academic management related to administrative tasks. It is important to mention the issues about to the sources of funding, that in words of Jongbloed (2008), has multiple aspects: who pays for higher education (including the topics of cost-sharing and external funding), how public funding is allocated to

universities, what incentives the allocation mechanism creates, and how much autonomy universities have in decision-making over financial and human resources. In that sense, considering that universities each time receive less resource from the government, they are obliged to search for extra funding through the establishment of interrelations with their environment, which currently is a common activity, whether throughout agreements for consultancy, vocational practices and mainly in those areas with a high level of innovation like Biochemistry or Medicine. So, is important to notice that this trends and practices increasingly point towards more market-based or performance-oriented and decentralized types of funding mechanisms in both regions, the European and the Latin American. As Etzkowitz *et al.* (2000) said; it appears that the 'entrepreneurial university' is a global phenomenon with an isomorphic developmental path, despite different starting points and modes of expression. Also the autonomy processes allow them to make their own decision about the use and generation of new resources.

All cases without exception have the infrastructure and the mechanisms to guarantee, or at least to know, the level of satisfaction of its stakeholders. Mostly via different kind of surveys oriented to students, academic staff, alumni, research sponsors, governments (national, regional or local), employers, other universities as well as to know the level of insertion to labour market from their own graduates. With all this information, the universities try to gain support, reputation and status within their community, and at the same time, participate in processes of differentiation and dedifferentiation in higher education systems, which make that behavior of HEIs, is triggered by competition for reputation in imperfectly markets (van Vught 2008).

Regarding planning, the strategic management and the management by process, all are oriented by the highest authorities. All this is a token of diversity of organization forms, and as dynamic process, on one side the Latin American universities show a vertical form on the decision-making processes, on the other hand, for their European counterparts most of times, the decisions of change are put into consideration at all level of responsibility. Olsen (2005) has pointed out, regarding this institutional dynamics that organizing principles include: constitutive

rules; command and hierarchy; bargaining and majority votes; as well as market prices and competitive selection.

About the self-evaluation from the responsible of the systems, we acknowledge that such an assessment is incomplete mainly because we not taken into account the relation between the level of attention given to different constituent of educational practices and the level of expected results. Even so, the self-evaluation is positive, considering that most of systems are in an initial phase within which the ongoing processes are taking place, with exception of UNIL-Switzerland, and UAB-Catalonia (Spain) who has around 20 years of experience. Finally, there are two interrelated issues in terms of the effects or outcomes in this process: the valuation of the development of the system and the level of consensus achieved within universities. Until now, the systems have been reaching to a level of development which ranging from mid to high, but in all cases and according to Anderson (2006), although the academics are committed to quality teaching, continue to resist to the quality assurance processes within their universities. This apparent paradox reflects a series of disputes surrounding issues of power, definition and efficacy.

3.4. Concluding remarks

In general terms, the research summarized in this chapter shows that most of the characteristics mentioned about IQAS, appear in all the cases analyzed, although not at the same time nor in the same manner, however, it seems that HEIs are beginning to set what Brink (2010) describe as “a whole-university approach regarding to quality and standards, not by reinventing any wheels but attaching some available wheels to a single vehicle” (Brink 2010: 144).

Considering the above it can argue that, if standards are seen as the benchmark by which quality can be judged, then raise minimum standard raises quality overall. In such vein we believe in the diversity of quality as an opportunity to the university management. In that way, our findings match with Clark (1996) when states that the dynamic of differentiation is a powerful root cause of the tendency for higher education to be a self-guiding society, or a kind of entity which develops

from its own self-organization, according to Wessler (2005). Even more, to Leichleiter (2010), the quality assurance should be aware that diversity is a condition for change; therefore, the quality assurance helps to institutional diversity and institutional diversity favours quality assurance.

Through the analyzed cases we observed that university quality management is basically a productive process of organizational learning and in accordance to Nickel (2010) we also believe that the *raison d'être* behind IQAS is that quality could become the overarching aim for all management activities, if, strategic management and quality assurance were integrate in an only one management system, which in our study rarely happen. Is in this sense, we confirm that sustainable management of quality, require contexts of trust to reduce uncertainty about the risk involved in the changes but needed in the efforts towards quality. According to Massaro (2010), the introduction of quality assurance systems is a measure of accountability, but it can succeed only if it is acknowledged to measure what is important to society in a manner that it can understand.

So, taking for granted the above, is our conviction that diminishing the difference in the meanings of quality among internal stakeholders, and involving from the lowest level and in a horizontal way of communication all parts of the system, will lead to quality enhancement more rapidly.

Chapter IV

4 Visions and Strategies on IQAS: In-depth case studies

4.1 Introduction

Even though the discourse about quality do not shed light on what happen at the institutions after an audit process, however, can indicate how society values the work and functions of the higher education institutions (Stensaker 2000; 307). The true is that the development of a quality culture within higher education has lagged behind the implementation of quality assurance practices (Yorke 2000; 19).

In words of Harvey (2010) twenty years of quality assurance has seen the systematic misalignment of quality culture and academic culture. Furthermore it had been recognized that quality enhancement is a messy business and that achieving success with improvement initiatives (QA) present challenges, and in most cases told us very little about quality enhancement or how we might actually improve the student experience, as opposed to improving quality bureaucracy (Newton 2010). In this scenario we try to figure out how are confronting this challenges universities from Spain, the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV) and the Universitat Jaume I (UJI).

4.2 Overall objectives

In this phase of the research we try to explore the effectiveness of the IQAS through an in-depth analysis both in the UPV as well in the UJI, in order to better understand the needs and expectations of each other, regarding the goals for improving the quality of its educational provision. We gathered views and opinions from the main stakeholders involved in the implementation process. With this information were analyzed specific issues and aspects of the possible advantages and benefits of developing an IQAS. At the same time we attempt to compare if there are parallel implementation processes across universities in terms of convergence or divergence.

4.3 Conceptual framework

Drawing on Perellon (2007) we approached quality assurance as a policy domain trying to look into those policies that are formulated and implemented therein. In line with the overall objectives pursued, we pretend to check the cross-universities convergence, in terms of the basics rationale, within the internal quality assurance policy, the mechanisms through which this convergence takes place, and the components of the quality assurance policy that converges and those that, on the contrary, do not.

We taking into account the perspective of Heidenheimer et al. (1990), in terms of the comparative public policy as "the study of how, why and to what effect different

governments (institutional policies) pursue a particular course of action or inaction", in the sense of the policy cycle, that is to say; policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. At this point, it is important to note the components of a public policy. Without discussing this notion, we point out the two salient characteristics to which Heclo (1972) refers. Policy is a 'middle-range' concept "bigger than particular decisions but smaller than general social movements" (Heclo 1972; 84).

In this vein Perellon (2007) relates the notion, to more or less long sequences of activities undertaken under governmental action and their consequences, rather than to limited and isolated actions, which permits looking at the elements of continuity within a given policy domain. The second characteristic, in a practical sense, encompasses some kind of 'purposiveness' according with Heclo (1972), which implies that those legitimated to formulate a policy, do so with certain objective in mind. However, the purposes of the policy will not necessarily be reflected in their outcomes, as well as some unintended consequences which may derive from the action undertaken.

For the purpose of this part of the research, it considers the notion of policy as those proposals formulated by governmental/institutional authorities as a course of action in a particular domain (HEI's). According to Perellon (2007) this is a construction based on beliefs about the organisation of that domain, which results in the formulation of instruments (IQAS) through which the beliefs are translated into action. This idea maintains that, a policy is formed by two different, though interconnected, dimensions. The ideational one relates to the normative elements that support the action and the material one which consists of the instruments developed as a mean for public action (Perellon 2007; 157).

From this perspective we will try to view through a common analytical framework, the possibility of policy convergence in a particular context, in terms of the use of similar or different procedures to assess quality in HEI's. Besides, it is important to note the role of ideas in public policy, which according to Goldstein and Keohane (1993) are 'beliefs held by individuals' which 'help to explain political outcomes', and can be grouped in to three main categories: world views, principled beliefs,

and causal beliefs (Goldstein and Keohane 1993: 3-11). The first one refers to wide perceptions of how things should be, the following help to distinguish between what is morally 'right' and what is 'wrong', vision which is deeply rooted in people's minds as an effect from socialisation in a particular society or social group. Finally, causal beliefs establish a cause-effect relationship between two or more dimensions of social life. In particular, this kind of belief provides general guidelines about how a given objective can be reached.

In regarding this latter argumentation around the ideas and public policy analysis Perellon (2007), emphasizes two problematic points and highlight examples from higher education. First, worldviews on the role of the state in the organisation of higher education systems cannot be translated into practice if 'principles' about what is 'right' or 'wrong' about it are not already formed. Acknowledge the importance of institutional autonomy implies the pre-existence of principles about it, by which its proponents act accordingly. In this sense policy formulation combines the three types of beliefs within a single, general worldview. However the fact is that there also exist a plurality of concurrent worldviews and the process by which some become more powerful than others with regard to the organisation of policy domains, so; analyzing the emergence of particular views on quality assurance policies implies relating them to developments in other domains and, indeed, in society at large (Perellon 2007; 158).

In transposing these ideas into the field of policy analysis and according to Perellon (2007), it is understood that each policy is composed of two different elements: the ideational and the material. The latter refers to the implementation of the policy, the tools used to make it as efficient as possible and the procedures of evaluation of the policy. The ideational dimension on the contrary, is the set of cognitive values and norms underpinning the production of new policies in a given domain.

So far, it could be said that this approach let us to come close in to the way in which the HEI's responds through its policies and throughout the quality assurance implementation at policy level. As some authors refer, the policy paradigm always reflect the reality of the moment in a particular national setting and it will always bring together elements related to the particular domain under investigation

(Perellon 2007; Premfors 1992). Within the policy analysis in higher education, there has been outlined the existence of six fundamental choices (size, structure, location, admission, governance and curricula) as elements to be addressed by all higher education policies, so according to Premfors (1992), the application of the five basic values (excellence, equality, autonomy, accountability and efficiency) to those six fundamental choices, result in the policy formation in higher education (Premfors 1992; 1911-12).

Within a competitive world, nowadays the HEI's are not excluded of the scrutiny of the society to which they belong. In a continuous race, trying to be the best and responding to the societal demands, this kind of organisations has had to change in a continuous adaptation process. To Perellon (2007) a redefinition of the place of higher education within society has been taking place, where the previous structure of the policy domain, in terms of beliefs and instruments, is questioned in a context marked by expansion, financial cutbacks and increased influence of the economic value of higher education for national wealth, among other trends.

In this line of reasoning, the formulation of a particular policy (IQAS) has to do with the actualization of the fundamental policy choices of a policy domain (HEI's). Once actualized in a particular place and at a particular moment in time the policy domain will be governed by a policy paradigm, that is, a combination of the ideational and material dimensions of the policy. As stated above, the ideational dimension relates to the basic beliefs about the organisation of the domain and the objectives it should aim it. These beliefs are translated into practice through the formulation of different instruments (IQAS) as means to address the fundamental choices of the domain (HEI's). Therefore, the formulation of a public policy reflects choices deriving from beliefs about the organisation of the policy domain as well as from more formal constraints such as the political organisation of the territory, the structure of the decision-making process or the environmental, national as well as international.

In order to establish a referential framework which allow us to get insights with respect to the domain of quality assurance in the HEI's, in line with Perellon (2007), the fundamental choices to be made concern the following dimensions: **objectives**, in terms of the aims and objectives of quality assurance policy;

control, it refers to the people who exert the control over the processes of quality assurance; **areas**, has to do with the domains covered by the quality assurance procedures; **procedures**, relates to the way in which the quality assurance procedures are setting up; and **uses**, in terms of the use give it to the information generated (Perellon 2007; 161).

To sum up, on the one hand it considers quality assurance as a policy domain within which policies are formulated. These policies are assumed to encompass an ideational and material dimension or, in other words, policy beliefs and policy instruments. On the other hand, the previous conceptual discussion identifies a-temporal and a-spatial choices to be made within the domain of quality assurance and, by assessing the institutional responses to them, determines whether and to what extent, cross-universities convergence is taking place.

Drawing on the above discussion, in the next section it attempts to build a set of categories which will provide us some insights into the reasons for cross-university differences and/or similarities regarding the formulation and implementation of internal quality assurance policies.

Trying to establish empirically the above mentioned choices, we use the proposal from Perellon (2007) to constructing a set of categories within the domain of interest, that is, quality assurance in higher education. These categories could be approached as pair of oppositions to be addressed by the actors involved in the formulation of quality assurance policy. First, hypothetically it could say that the policy **objectives** of quality assurance reflect beliefs about the organization in this domain. Those can be expressed in the form of official statements that establish the role that quality assurance can play within the higher education system and which can be of two different types: summative or formative.

The summative objectives stress the importance of linking the results obtained through the procedures to some particular consequences. The current emphasis placed on accreditation highlights a modification of the objectives of quality assurance policy in favour of a more summative-oriented approach. Formative objectives, on the other hand, pursuing a real improvement of pedagogies of teaching and learning and organizational models within HEI's are, losing out to

more regulatory concerns aimed at making HEI's and study programmes as compatible as possible worldwide.

It is a fact that all implementation processes must be controlled by responsible bodies. Within the particular objective of **control**, we found several scenarios. First, the opposition between the political authorities and the HEI's reflects two different ways of dealing with quality assurance. In this respect, the opposition needs to be carried out in two stages. With regard to the political authorities it is distinguished between central and regional governments. With regard to the opposition within institutions, the focus should be on the way in which higher education sectors' deal with quality assurance.

Generally there are three **areas** or categories addressed by quality assurance procedures: research activities, study programs, and general institution management. The first two regards the traditional mission of HEI's, whereas the third encompasses broader activities ranging from the proper use of financial subsidies to the type of institutional government. In this particular work, we are looking into the different procedures done by different bodies only within HEI's.

The moment when policy beliefs are translated into practice means entering the exclusive area of policy instruments (**procedures**). This point can be looked in more detail into at two different levels. The first refers to methodological questions which have to be addressed in three pairs of oppositions: outcome oriented vs. process oriented procedures; internal vs. external procedures and qualitative vs. quantitative methods. The second level concerns the degree of involvement of the HEI's.

The first opposition emphasizes two different approaches to quality assurance procedures. The outcome oriented procedures are based in turn on two assumptions. The first is that there is an objective 'product' that comes out of HEI's, such as the number of graduates or publications or the number of accredited study programs. The second assumption is that these outcomes can be assessed against a number of predefined criteria and standards. In the opposite side, the process oriented ones do not have as a prime objective the

measurement of a supposed product, the emphasis here is on the general process through which education is delivered and/or research carried out in the different institutions. The second pair of oppositions before mentioned; internal vs. external procedures, focuses on the different stages of the procedures as well as on the actors involved. In this case, we are only interested in processes within universities, in which the self-assessment reports' are the basis of the internal procedures, usually prepared from guidelines defined by the body responsible for the whole process of quality assurance.

The quantitative/qualitative distinction, as the third pair of oppositions, highlights two widely used methods to assess the quality in higher education: the use of performance indicators and the use of peer reviews. The former put the emphasis on information as the underpinning of political decisions. This particular point, according to Perellon (2007), links together the development of quality assurance procedures with the objectives stated. In further chapters we will analyze some of the problems related with the use of performance indicators and its pertinence as well as with the problem associated with the comparability of the data collected which, in some cases, makes difficult to undertake valid comparisons.

Concerning to the **uses** of information gathered during the procedures of quality assurance, such uses would reflect previous decisions regarding the objectives and the control of the system. Depending on the responses on the one hand, the information can be made available not only to the institutions that have been assessed but also to broader sector of society. On the other hand, such information is used to rank the units assessed according to their results. A way of dealing with the information which has become more and more frequent, and that it has an impact on the study programmes, research and the institutional management.

Even though the diversity and the sometimes contested sources of information, according to Perellon (2007), we still lack in-depth studies into their actual impact on student and parent behavior when it comes to choosing a field of study or a university. But, certainly this is the kind of information which is need it to both, procedures and stakeholders involved.

4.4 Methodology and research design

Is no longer a novelty that the development of quality assurance processes within the HEI's are increasingly influenced and interrelated to broader development trends in society (Harvey and Stensaker 2008). Particularly this kind of social systems are characterized by strong individual-group interrelations and behaviors aimed to reach the institutional goals. At this stage, it will consider the quality culture idea as a notion heavily related to political ambitions, national and internationally, of changing the way in which HEI's work and function, in a more fundamental way.

Taking into account the Harvey and Stensaker (2008) proposal, here the notion of quality culture is seen as a tool for asking questions about how things work, how institutions function, with who they relate to, and how they see themselves, in sum, a concept for identifying potential challenges around the quality assurance processes. It is these interactions and behaviors in which we focus our attention to get and treat the information, descriptive data, not objectively measurable.

Conceptualize the HEI's as a social systems, implies acknowledge the complexity of such systems, given the multiplicity of interrelations between people. In this sense, it seems that qualitative research is best suited to analyze the speech and behavior involved in the processes of implementation, development and improvement of internal systems of quality assurance in the field of higher education. According to Stake (1995) through this methodology, are looked for patterns of relations, trying to build and increase the knowledge about the subject of study, focusing on interpreting the phenomena. In a simultaneous way, this inductive analysis process contributes to the formulation and contrasting theories and concepts.

Within qualitative methodology, in-depth interview is considerate as one of the main methods of data collection used in research. Our starting point is that this kind of interview is thoughtful as a social form in terms of the social and interpersonal interaction. In that sense, through this form of interviewing, we seek deep information and knowledge, usually deeper than what is sought in surveys,

informal interviewing or focus group, for example. This type of information, on the whole, concerns very personal matters, such as an individual self, lived experience, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective. In such a way, it pretends to capture the words and perceptions of informants.

According to Legard *et al.* (2005) there are some key features that distinguish it. First, this kind of interview is intended to combine structure with enough flexibility, in such a way that permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee, which allow responses to be fully probed and explored and to allow the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee. A second one feature is that in-depth interview is interactive in nature. The material is generated by the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. Thirdly, the researcher uses a range of probes and other techniques to achieve depth answers in terms of penetration, exploration and explanation. This in-depth format also permits the researcher to explore fully all factors that underpin participants' answers: reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs. This furnishes the explanatory evidence that is an important element of qualitative research.

4.4.1. Selection of cases and criteria

One criterion for selecting our cases has to do with the processes of reform and changes which the European universities have been through in recent years. In that sense we decide to work with two higher education institutions from different origins and contexts but following the same purpose, improve their educational offer. According to the conceptual framework utilized, another criterion used takes into account two of the dimensions suggested; the ideational and the material, which refers to policy beliefs and policy instruments. For that reason the interview was oriented to a managerial level as well as to technical level in search of both the basic beliefs about the organisation and the objectives it should aim it and in those beliefs which are translated into practice through the formulation of different instruments (IQAS).

4.4.2. Description of cases

Both the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV) and the Universitat Jaume I (UJI) are located at the autonomous community of Valencia, Spain. One way or another, since their foundation both institutions have had a strong orientation to quality processes and according with the national plans to assessment the higher education system since 1992.

The UPV has more than forty years of tradition related with quality topics and linked to the following of programs, centers and departments, but is until 2009-2010 period that the institution refocuses its activities with a dual purpose; quality and assessment of academic activity. Everything is included within the institutional strategic plans with a vision towards 2014. One of the main strategies focused on quality assurance issues, on the one hand, in the services of the university and on the other through an initiative from the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA). The latter to developing internal quality assurance systems (IQAS) for the degrees that UPV offer. Instead of working in each program, were decided to develop a protocol that would serve to all programs and centers.

On the other hand, since its origins in 1991 the UJI pledged to the quality management. After the start period and learning process in 1999 established the Quality Committee through which analyzed the possibilities of such policy, oriented at the beginning to a few of degrees. The advantage to be a young university is rooted in the possibility to set up the rationale and the structure for a double purpose; quality and strategic planning. Taking into account that most of the key processes in the management of degrees are transverse, they start to applied different standards and norms, getting in a few time the quality certification ISO-9000.

With the application of the European Framework for Quality Management (EFQM) and after a very poor self-assessment process they realized the areas for improvement and in 2010 get the gold seal EFQM-500 plus. Through the time

such norms has been apply to the academic management and all services related with this processes.

4.4.3. Discussion

This section put in relation the findings from the cases analyzed with those from literature. We follow the same conceptual framework, that is to say, to see the QA as a policy domain in terms of policy beliefs and policy instruments in straight relation to ideational and material dimensions (Perellon 2007). In such sense, we found that the weight given to the quality goals through the strategic plans clearly shows the political vision according with the environment conditions.

Analyzing the reasons of changes, we found that change in beliefs has to do with the conditions through which the higher education systems (HES) have been integrated. As Bleiklie (2005) argue, the process is primarily driven by actors at the national level such as political authorities or other institutions owners and funders and they are affected by national as well as supranational organizations like OECD, UNESCO, WTO and international developments.

Related with this latter idea there were a decision at European level with a very high impact on institutional policies, we refer to the Bologna process which suppose the use of tools for quality assurance, mainly to the academic programs and teaching learning methodologies. The way for driven this policies was established in the Berlin and Bergen declarations for the development of quality assurance systems (QAS) and with the definition of common quality standards in 2003 and 2005 respectively. As Huisman *et al.* (2009) points out, institutions have to adhere to the national regulations, but beyond that there are many ways in which higher education institutions “take up” elements of the Bologna process.

In both cases, (UPV-UJI) stands out the development of frameworks and structures for internal quality assurance like the “system monitoring and evaluation of qualifications” (AUDIT). This scheme is the framework through which is covered the whole academic programs and, even though was rejected at the beginning, it is acknowledge as a tool for quality assurance. According to Reichert and Tauch

(2003), all these actions correspond with the driver behind the Bologna process in terms of enhancing the quality of education and graduates' employability. From the institutional perspective this is the fundamental way to reach homologable quality systems' and get in tune with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). But not everything comes from the outside institutions have defined and encouraged different values convinced of its meaning and most of them oriented to quality goals through its own official statements.

Taking up the previous idea about quality goals it seems that in both cases prevails the subordination of the amount of funds delivered, to how the institutions are able to performance in the evaluation of their activities. These summative objectives, according to Perellon (2007) are opposite to those formative objectives in which no matter what type of procedures of assessment are introducing, the matter is that they allow for pointing out weak points of the domain under scrutiny and learning how to improve. In such sense quality assurance has become a particularly important element in those higher education systems that have adopted a self-regulation approach to relationships between government and higher education. With this approach, governments set the policy framework and steer from some distance but put a major emphasis on monitoring performance (van Vught 1994).

In terms of control, at institutional level we found a strong emphasis on rectors leadership through which they trying to reach or keep a position within their own social environment and beyond. However, there is an opposition between political authorities and HEI's, which reflects two different ways of dealing with quality assurance. Furthermore, it should be mentioned a distinction regarding the political authorities in terms of central and regional governments where there exist a line of shared competencies which goes from the top via the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA), crossing the national agencies down to rectors and its institutions at the base, showing a growing interaction between the quality assurance sector on the one hand and recognition of degrees and qualifications on the other. As Campbell and van der Wende (2000) points out; the requirements of compatibility and comparability refer strongly to the transparency function of quality assurance systems, whereas quality assurance in the national context is

typically geared towards accountability and improvement. This raises questions regarding the relationship between these various functions of quality assurance and between transparency and improvement in particular. Such scenario requires some kind of convergence in structures, which make it easy the compatibility between this jungle of degrees and systems, which in words of Cambell and van der Wende (2000) has been the biggest obstacle to mobility.

Following the line of analysis around different categories or concepts correspond to talk about the areas covered by QA procedures. We do not find signs of quality assurance procedures related with research activities. Only two areas are covered: study programmes and general institutional management. Common to both cases is the definition of an operative instance specific on quality assurance matters. A structure mainly oriented to the follow up of study programmes and the improvement of the services. Nevertheless, it was already introduced the assessment of teaching through student and staff surveys and following up of the occupation level of graduates every two or five years. In both cases the services area is the first in which has been exerted the control.

At this point it is important to underline that because research still being an autonomous activity, most of the times is evaluated by external bodies. So, it looks like nearly all the efforts and resources are oriented to the bureaucratic management processes. Until now, the analyzed cases don't have any quality assurance process oriented to this activity. They are trying to develop QA structures to harmonize its own systems at national level, which has implied a lot time and work. Nonetheless, as Birtwistle (2009) suggest, any inclination to resist or ignore outside forces will merely allow a university to lose market share, academic credibility and hence, at some stage (depending upon the funding model), sustainability. Through such a vision, the HEI's are trying to see themselves and make decisions about its own developments and in straight relation with their environment.

The move to quality is not merely a matter of assessment or development, it is a matter of modernize and linking to the European Research Area (ERA), the Lisbon Agenda and the Bologna Process. All this connects to the context of a global

competitive framework in which the EU as a whole is trying to combining its own research policy and the overall economy strategy (through the Lisbon Agenda for a knowledge-based economy) to the wider process (Birtwistle 2009). In this sense we observe a particular movement, through which quality is recognized and awarded. Such is the case of University Jaume I in which has been developed since their origins the so called 'European Foundation for Quality Management' (EFQM) Excellence Model. In 1999 was created the Quality Board through which the institution analyzed the possibilities of the ISO norms implementation and through which define their own quality policy⁷:

'Being an excellent university in the field of teaching, research and management in accordance with the philosophy of total quality, and more specifically, in accordance with criteria established by the European model of excellence. In order to reach the satisfaction of society through the various services offered. Likewise, the University will use appropriate methods to continuously improve the quality management system'.

Following the quality norms and criteria, in 2010 through an external assessment the UJI gets the EFQM 500+ seal, a kind of award oriented to the public sector organizations through which identify the organisation's strong points and areas of improvement, giving numerical scores to the results. In this vein it is clear that the pathway to quality solely stress the importance of linking the results obtained through the procedures to some particular consequences, in the sense of the summative objectives according to Perellon (2007) and in opposition to those (formative objectives) in which no matter what type of procedres are introduced, these should by no means influence the amount of funds institutions receive. So, it assumes that through the adaptation of the original model of excellence, the quality of a higher education institution will depend primarily upon its processes (namely teaching/learning, research and services provided) and its achieved results. But, according to Rosa and Amaral (2007) actors, partnerships, resources, processes and results alone do not define a higher education institution. It also depends on and is characterised by its internal structure and organisation leadership, policy, strategy and culture (Rosa and Amaral 2007; 193).

⁷ <http://www.uji.es/CA/serveis/opaq/qualitat/marc.html>

Retaking the notion about of control, it is important to mention the weight given to the leader within the organisation, which it has to be convinced in first place about the quality policy applied. Although it should be acknowledged that the chains of responsibility go from the top to the lowest level of staff both in terms of the definition of the quality goals as well as for the design of the instruments to be used and the areas through which they are going to be implemented. On the other hand and in line with Perellon's (2007) proposal, there is an opposition between the political authorities and the HEI's which reflect two different ways of dealing with quality assurance. Related with the political authorities, we distinguish the line established through the central and regional governments via the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) which is the instance who recognize the quality agencies developed at national level like ANECA, in the Spanish case. The latter is who oriented the way in which the HEI's have to deal with the accreditation of its degrees in order to reach the so called European Higher Education Area.

Regarding the opposition within institutions, even though they develop themselves its own procedures, all the actions are within institutions' umbrella organisation. In the particular cases of the UPV and the UJI's, is important to note the AUDIT program⁸ in which two regional agencies and one national agency have been taken an active part in its definition. Its main goal is related with the stablishing of an internal quality assurance system through two main objectives; a) analysis or diagnosis of its own centers and its quality assurance internal systems, against a set of principles and b) definition and documentation of the systems implemented by the institution. With a certain delay as Pazos and Sapico-Goñi (2002) argue, Spain is following the international trend on program evaluation through which some developments are taking place. In that sense and particularly at Universities units specialized on evaluation were created.

As we can observe, there is a line which comes from political authorities until HEI's through which different choices were taken, all oriented in a framework of quality assurance, although most of them with a heavy emphasis on accreditation of qualifications. Changes in education laws, the new policies on science and innovation, as well as the state agencies law are the precedent which allows to

⁸ The Program of Recognition of Quality Assurance Systems in HEI's (AUDIT) is one of the five which was proposed in the 2009 Action Plan of the National Agency of Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA).

HEI's, work on the building of the so called European Area of Higher Education (EAHE).

At this point to our inquiry we will approach to the level at which policy is implemented through different instruments and mechanisms showing the strengths or weakness of the system. According to Perellon (2007) there are three categories generally addressed by quality assurance procedures: research activities, study programmes and general institutional management. The first two regard the traditional missions of higher education institutions, whereas the third encompasses the broader activities of these institutions such as the proper use of financial subsidies or the type of institutional government.

In both cases (UPV-UJI) there is no particular internal procedure related with research activities, apart of the number and type of scientific publications reported by researchers. So it is a matter pending. Such situation it is probably related with the different challenges pointed out by Menéndez (2004) in terms of that any evaluation process should be able to avoid that its application hinder the development of innovative ideas in science. Secondly is the quality control out side the disciplinary areas. Thirdly, the evaluation of research faces difficulties differentiation of two elements: firstly, the quality of a project or a job and, secondly, the relevance of it with regard to research priorities are established. Fourth, the evaluation system of research should find a greater balance between the objects to be evaluated (compared to the dominance of the *ex-ante* in front of research proposals) and, above all, develop methods and complementary techniques to the traditional peer review. Finally, the transparency of the evaluation process is an important element, not only for the relationship between the evaluator, the object of evaluation and decision maker, but especially by the effect of learning that takes the whole process. In this context the right of appeal and the appeal against the assessment is an essential property of the guarantee system.

From Perellon's (2007), we analyzed the moment when policy beliefs are translated into practice, that is, the area of the policy instruments. In such sense this process can be looked into at two different levels. The first is related with methodological

questions addressed in three pairs of oppositions: outcome-oriented vs process-oriented procedures; internal vs. external procedures and qualitative vs. quantitative methods. The second level concerns the degree of involvement of the HEI's.

From this point we will focus on the structures of quality assurance specifically designed for teaching and learning processes taking as reference the three pairs of oppositions mentioned above. Following the proposal of Perellon (2007), the first opposition highlights two different approaches to the processes of quality assurance. The consideration of **outcome-oriented** procedures aim at answering the question, "How good is the product delivered by the institution?" This directly raises the concomitant question of defining what 'good' is and how it should be measured. Outcome-oriented procedures are based on two assumptions. The first is that there is an objective 'product' that comes out of HEI's such as numbers of graduates or the numbers of accredited programs. The second assumption is that these outcomes can be assessed against a number of predefined criteria and standards. On the other hand, **process-oriented** procedures do not have as a prime objective the measurement of a supposed product. In this case, emphasis is on the general process through which education is delivered and/or research carried out in the different institutions.

In such sense, both the UPV as the UJI, have been developed its structure towards the outcome-oriented procedures, following the guidelines established by the national and regional quality agencies to the design of internal quality assurance, mostly oriented to the study programs. In the UJI's case since their foundation has been working with the ISO 9000 standards and its application to their degrees. According to their design, originally they try to put in relation two domains which most of the times are rarely involved; the academic and administrative management. Given the size and its departmental structure, the UJI's built a system common to all the centers and unique for the institution at two levels of work; the design and implementation. Internally, this system takes into account all stakeholders; administrative and services staffs, faculty and students. By means of the Quality Council are represented the external groups within the 'Social Council' but only during the implementation process.

On the other side, the UPV has been working in a kind of structure based on strategic planning starting from improvement actions oriented in three directions: services, teaching and learning and research. It should be noted the design and implementation of a program for improved management and administration of university services specifically created for and by the UPV called PEGASUS, in contrast to the improvement plans for teaching which includes monitoring plans study and accreditation of programs whose source is the national agency for quality assessment and accreditation (in Spanish abbreviated as: ANECA). Within these initiatives it includes a process of pre-accreditation of qualifications/career named VERIFICA, besides the recognition program of quality assurance systems of universities (AUDIT) which requires that there should be an internal system of quality assurance of qualifications, requirement which the UPV has fulfilled.

This kind of systems has been developing since mid 90's in countries as Germany which apart from answer to the social environmental conditions has its origins within the institution. In this vein Weusthof (1995) find that an adequate and thorough internal quality assurance design, results in more 'intensive' attempts by individuals as well as organisational units within a institution to improve the quality of education. Besides, the accent in the implementation of the national system of quality assurance should not lay on formulating external criteria, but on the improvement of the organisational as well as the methodological quality of the internal self-evaluation procedures. From a systemic point of view, the process of internal quality assurance is considered to be a form of self-regulation occurring within the own system. Thus, we find that these two institutions (UPV-UJI) follow two different paths but oriented the same destination, improving its processes focusing on results.

At this point we analysed the way in which the actors are involved in the several stages of procedures and how the responsible area, handled the quality goals and the assessment results obtained. To do that, according with Perellon's proposal we use the second pair of oppositions, that is, **internal vs. external** procedures. In both cases they analyse the information generated through the surveys applied (UJI) and through the institutional data bases (UPV), from which derived the improvement actions, notifications and decision making oriented to stimulate both

at personal as well as at economic level. This kind of self-evaluations is targeted at two levels within the organisation, at the level of services and at the teachers' level. The indicators used are the satisfaction surveys and the teaching activity index (TAI⁹), respectively. The latter comes from the concerns in the UPV about motivation in teaching activity and the outcomes of the teaching/learning process. Each academic unit establishes their goals by year and within their own reach, in terms of efficiency, rates of enrollment, demand, learning outcomes, rates of abandonment and so.

In the UJI's case, the ex-post analysis is followed by two levels of discussion both in the academic units as with the Vice-Rector of the quality matters. All the improvement actions are based on the results obtained. It is important to note that both institutions are redefining its teaching/learning processes, oriented in a progressive way to the development of competencies as learning outcomes. Such an answer is congruent with the (external) European Higher Education Area approach and as a part of the (internal) processes in the institutions.

As we have seen, the conceptual opposition used in this analysis (internal vs external procedures), allow us to see the different stages of the procedures, the actors involved in these stages, all in a continuous combination of internal process and external reviews as well as the organisation of these two phases. In both highlights two complementary widely used methods (**quantitative/qualitative**) to assess quality in higher education: the use of performance indicators and the use of peer reviews. The latter has been seen as an effective tool for quality assurance. Although, in words of Warner (1989), successful reviews often depends on the support of a nonjudgmental environment. When the goal of the review is problem identification and problem solving, not blaming, peer review can result in true quality improvement.

According to Van Vught and Westerheijden (1993), performance indicators provide clear, objective and measurable information which can serve as a solid basis for

⁹ The teaching activity index is a parameter which incorporates the different dimensions of teaching activity both qualitative and quantitative which allows to value in TAI points in a comprehensive way, research, teaching and management. Assessment Manual Teaching. Vicerectorat de Qualitat i Avaluació de L'Activitat Acadèmica. Universitat Politècnica de Valencia. (<http://www.upv.es/entidades/VCEAA/info/U0594125.pdf>)

political decisions. Although, there are who thinks that the real challenge is to find admittedly imperfect evidence to create improvements within the complex governance environments and in the social, political and value structures that mark our campuses (Blaich and Wise 2010; p.67). Nonetheless, Perellon points out that political decision made over solid and measureable information, links together the development of quality assurance procedures with the objectives stated. In this vein, Borden and Botrill (1994) propose that performance indicators require an across-the-board approach to measure inputs, process and outputs. That is, the higher education systems, the institutions and its units must address each of these three components of the production cycle and the relationships among them to fully assess performance. Besides, according with Sizer *et al.* (1992) the *rôle* of performance indicators depends on the political culture, the educational funding system and the quality assurance procedures that determine the optimal allocation of resources.

From a critical point of view, Perellon (2007) raises some problems in the use of performance indicators. The first is the pertinence of such indicators in the field of higher education and, implicitly, in education itself. Another problem concerns the actual comparability of the data collected, which sometimes makes it difficult to undertake valid comparisons, overcoat between a great diversity of countries and educational systems. On other hand through its study about efficiency, Taylor (2001) shows that although the application of performance indicators has an impact on the activities of academics, the consequences are not always positive. First, it could be argued that the ratio of optimal vs non-optimal decisions, taken by professors may be high for them but not for their institutions. The question is that although the academics have an obligation to act in their universities' interests, they are likely to strike a balance between pursuing the interests of their institutions and their own interests. This author conclude that although an increase in pressure can lead to higher effort, the rise in effort can only be useful to the institution if the ratio of maximising to non-maximising decisions made by the academics is high for both them and their institutions, as well as for all the essential objectives/activities of the institutions, and not just those which are measured by the indicators.

Related with methodological issues, addressing the how question, also implies making a decision with regard to whether taking part in the quality assurance procedures is compulsory or, on the contrary, if higher education institutions can decide not to participate in such procedures. Even though teaching or institutional evaluations were developed at the beginning on a totally voluntary basis, nowadays opting out is not an option. Evaluations are increasingly part of the day-to-day life of universities, the accreditation of study programmes or whole institutions are the prime objective but, what can we do with all this information?

According to our conceptual proposal, this part of discussion correspond to the last fundamental choice (Perellon 2007) made in the domain of quality assurance policy. That is, those kind of actions, decisions and strategies related with the **use** of all information gathered during the quality assurance procedures which reflect previous decisions regarding the objectives and the control of the system. In this vein were observed different responses in depending of availability of information not only for the institution but also to broader sectors of society. In both cases, the choice made by its Quality Commission (UPV) or Quality Council (UJI) was oriented through its internal quality assurance system, basically in two directions: to the degrees and to the services. First, each one of responsible of university degrees submit to the Quality bodies, an annual analysis based on different performance indicators and related with the objectives established for the next period. Such reports are assessed by the quality commissions and which once approved it becomes in action plans according with the quality guidelines from the own system.

On other hand, online surveys and a mailbox of suggestions, complaints and congratulations, are the main instruments to analyse the relation between the users and the services offered. The information gathered has a special treat to each type of personnel. Regarding the administrative and services staff, the information about the outcomes may become in economic incentives. In the case of academic staff, the outcomes take into account the performance measured through an individual index of the academic activity. Most of the information comes from the surveys applied to the main stakeholders, that is, the students. Every reports should proposing improvement plans with clear and measurable goals

which again will be evaluated the next period. The information from the annual reports is geared toward personal and economic incentives both from the responsible for a degree as to those responsible for the services.

It is important to mention that still remain some uncertainty regarding the use of the quality systems and sometimes it is difficult to find evidence about what doesn't work, even though in such units have been working with ISO norms. To Blaich and Wise (2010) HEI's should shift their focus from gathering assessment data to using it to improve student learning. They firmly believe that the absence of high-quality evidence constrained both knowledge generation and institutional will to improve student learning. Their main conclusions establish on the one hand that assessment can lead to institutional improvement only if concentrate more energy on understanding the political, social, historical, and budgetary context in which our institutions exist than on gathering evidence about student learning and on the other, that the governance and bureaucratic structures at most universities are not designed to use the assessment evidence to make changes. In such sense Kuh and Ikenberry (2009) find that it is common to Institutions of higher education adopt some forms of assessment mainly because of accreditation or other external pressures, and not because they have a deep desire to become data-driven institutions. A lot of attention has been paid to the processes and/or outcomes, but less to the improvement of student learning.

In our analyzed cases, the situation is more complicated because most times the information it is not enough or on the contrary it is too much. In both cases what is need it is information according to the needs for making decisions at all levels, apart from acknowledge that the key is that people are motivated and implicated in the whole process. One should also consider that the information generated is oriented in two directions, one to the internal audience and another to the external stakeholders, that is, not all information is public, the internal comes from the self-evaluation processes and is used for improvements design, the other one is one that reflects the results that the institution wants to show. In this sense it arise the question of availability of information and to who is targeted, not matter if such information goes to the rankings, league tables or reports, according to Cremonini *et al.* (2008) even though the information are intended for all, which is sought and

how it is used may differ between potential users hailing from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

4.5. Concluding remarks

This section began with a conceptual framework that allows seeing the QA as a policy domain in terms of policy beliefs and policy instruments (Perellon 2007). According with Gorga (2007) the transformation of higher education is part of a systemic change that concerns both the society (at all its levels) and the education system in its entirety.

Even this chapter is not presented as conclusive, it argues that the discourse about quality do not shed light on what happen at the institutions after an audit process, however, can indicate how society values the work and functions of the higher education institutions (Stensaker 2000; 307). The true is that the development of a quality culture within higher educations has lagged behind the implementation of quality assurance practices (Yorke 2000; 19).

The next chapter is only intended to contribute to the reflection on the efforts made in different places and from different perspectives to develop schemes of quality assurance in the context of higher education institutions both in Latin America and Europe with special emphasis on the best practices identified. This analysis is based on empirical evidence from the case studies developed in chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 5

5 Two continents and just one pathway? Are there parallel processes?

5.1 Introduction

This chapter details the lessons learned and the good practices observed in higher education institutions involved in change processes derived from supranational policies and international trends. So, in the following lines and starting from the case studies from chapters 3 and 4, we identify the determinants of the implementation of internal quality assurance systems both in Europe as Latin America as an attempt to answer our first research question.

The transformation of higher education is part of a systemic change that concerns both the society (at all its levels) as well as the education systems in its entirety. Such education policies were triggered by the Bologna process and the implementation of new higher education structures. At this point, it is important to mention the significance of these reforms within and outside Europe. As in the case of the structural reforms established in East European countries which lead them to follow the rationale of change triggered by the fall of the communist regimes to the logic of the change instituted by the Bologna reforms, at least from a systemic and long-term perspective. In such sense the Bologna process not only seems to have different speeds at national level (Gorga 2007), but also it has different areas of influence.

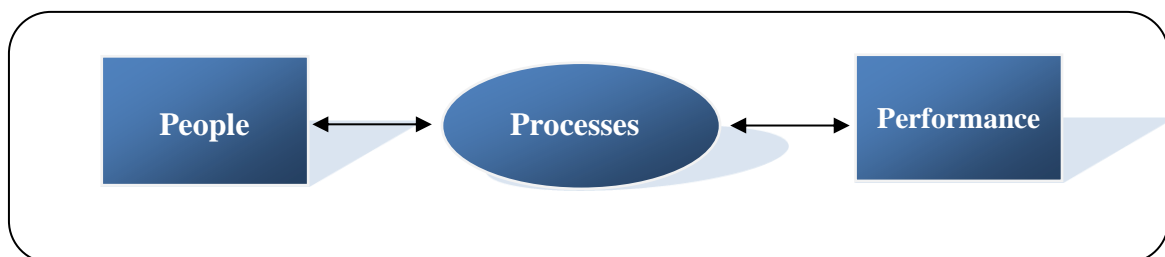
On the other hand, according to Brunner (2008), the idea of building a common area of higher education in Latin America seems unattainable, mainly because no exist common areas, nor in political, economic or monetary and much less in higher education. The only similarities are the frustation because of poverty and inequality; environmental deterioration; the precariousness of social networks; political patronage and corruption; the precarious states and distrust in democratic institutions; citizens' insecurity, and violence deaf. Under this reasoning it is not possible to think about a common pathway or parallel process between the latinamerican institutions, however, we found that individually, HEIs are developing processes and structures which contribute to generate certain conditions, or as

Brunner (2008) pointed out, there are some 'echoes' of Bologna which reverberate from México until the Patagonian.

5.2 Kind of models/Kind of systems

The steps taken by HEIs in the last forty years to quality and continuous improvement of their education, has led them to occupy a central position in the development of current society, considering they are the site 'per se', for generation and transmission of knowledge, the human resources training, research and more recently the development and innovation. It also could be said that processes of improvement are at the heart of any organizational development. However, without the talent of people it is hard to produce better performance. This latter argument describes a simple model (Figure 1) whose proposal is that improvement in the performance can be achieved only by improving the processes and by involving the people.

Figure 1. *The simple model for improved performance.*



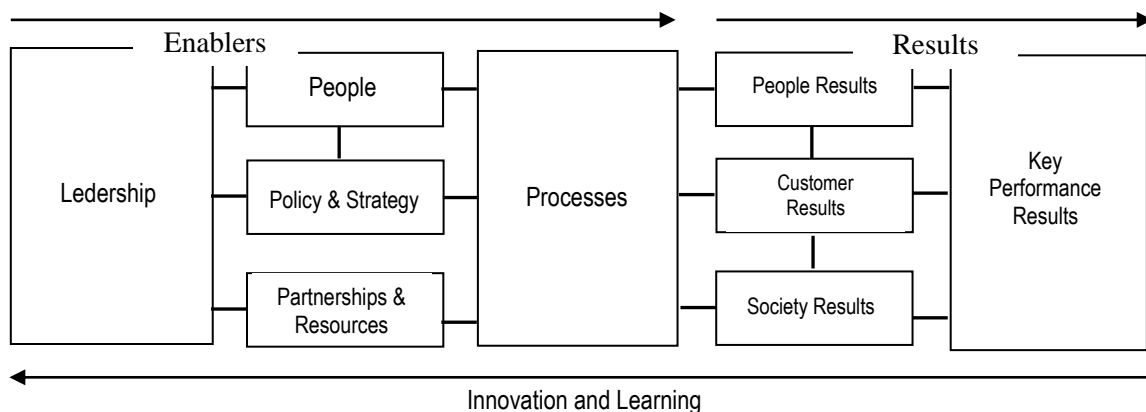
Source: *Total Organisational Excellence*, John S. Oakland, 1999.

The above idea is the basis of what has been termed as the EFQM Excellence Model, which is described as "a practical tool to help organizations establish an appropriate management system by measuring where they are on the path towards excellence, helping them to understand the gaps, and then stimulating solutions". As it shown in the Figure 2, without been prescriptive the enabling criteria cover what the organization does, and the results criteria cover what the organisation achieves. That is to say, 'Enablers' cause 'Results'.

The reference to this model is just to emphasise the pathway followed by the studied cases and identifies the elements which prevail in quality assurance

actions. It is a fact that to reach the kind of reforms and developments as those proposed by the Bologna process has been necessary to have a structural basis of organization and functions to converge with the same impulse. In this sense and according to our findings, stand out the origins of quality assurance actions in the University of Lausanne – UNIL at Switzerland (See Annex 4). The first step was targeted to questioning the teaching practices by the own teachers. The main concern was if pedagogic strategies and evaluation used were the proper tools. This took to a major discussion and to involve all the teaching staff, the students and subsequently the administrative and management staff. The consequence of such impulse was the creation of a Comitee to assess the teaching activity, as the center of all derived actions. As it observes in the diagram of internal quality assurance systems, the UNIL oriented all the assessment actions at all levels, that is, the teaching and learning process, teaching and research, faculties, programs and central units.

Figure 2. The EFQM Excellence Model



Source: European Foundation for Quality Management, 1999.

Related with the above mentioned model, it should be noted the people which since the very beginning, becomes the basic element to develop of self-assessment processes and fundamentally to discuss and analyzed the implementation of a policy through the University Council in the context of the national framework of qualifications. As it can observe in both sides of the model, is inevitable the human resources crossover at all phases, from enablers until results. Their strategic vision is based on quality and is focused on mankind and the living world in their natural and social environment. Its aim is to develop in a spirit of partnership. It conceives quality as the frame of mind in which the UNIL

intends to perform its teaching and research missions and its priority objective is to develop a quality mindset. From the all studied cases in chapters 3 and 4, the UNIL is the only one who develops an internal quality assurance system which includes and relates the research function with the teaching activities in a comprehensive way and within all its processes of assessment, monitoring and improving of quality. As a result it was created the unit support to the teaching and learning process to accompany all the transition stages established by Bologna.

As it could be observed in another european case, the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (see Annex 5) which following the way marked by national and regional quality agencies (ANECA, AQ Catalunya and ACSUG-Galicia) develops, among others, an scheme centred on a monitoring and assessment system of qualifications called AUDIT¹⁰ oriented to the new degrees in the context of European Higher Education Area. In this particular case, the impulse to QA actions, eventhough involve people, comes from the own institution but in a vertical way, which is not always accepted or comprised. According to Sabiote and Pérez (2003) the corporative trends in the University structure on one hand, and the complex networks of the collegiate bodies, on the other, contributes to filter and slow down the decision making processes which, at the same time, become an obstacle to any practical and operative execution. However, such a system is oriented to all centres, schools, faculties, departments and institutes who are involved in educational processes through the office of planning and quality, offering all the technical support to know how each unit ensures the quality of its training programs.

In the next European case, Université Paris 12 Val de Marne Paris-Est UPEC (see Annex 6), the impluse to implement qaity actions starting from the “*Loi d’orientation sur l’enseignement supérieur de 1968*” through which the university autonomy is confirmed and sanctioned by the “*loi du 26 janvier 1984*”. In its Article 20 it provides that “*the public scientific, cultural and professional institutions are national higher education and research which enjoys of legal personality and autonomy educational and scientific, administrative and financial.*” In this sense

¹⁰ The AUDIT programme is an initiative of the national agency ANECA, in the framework of Spanish laws through the Royal decree 1393/2007. Such proposal it constitutes as a tool for the diagnostic in the implementation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems in the path to harmonize the European Higher Education Area.

the autonomy of universities can be a reality only if such institutions are able to assert their identity, have a strong government and define a development strategy based on a genuine financial policy. Under these considerations the UPEC defines its strategy, aimed primarily at developing a plan to improve their qualifications with a strong emphasis on the potential students and the early stages of the new enrollment as well as a clear following up over the student trajectories stressing the skills and competences related to foreign languages and the information and communication technologies (ICT's).

So far, it has been analyzed the main rationales to implement quality assurance actions in the particular context of the three European cases presented. We now continue with the analysis of the actions taken by Latin American universities. First of all, we will refer the closest case to the lines of action set out in the above schemes. It is the Universidad del Rosario-UR in Colombia (see Annex 7) whose strategy follows a systemic approach based on inputs, processes, outcomes and impact. Since its origins this self-regulation system is based on one hand in an information and on the other in an indicator system which provides all the necessary inputs to assessment, supervise and make a continual follow up of the improvement plans. These QA actions are framed within institutional planning, strategic management and academic development, that in turn receives peer reviews and develops audit processes through the national and international accreditation agencies. The creation of a specific QA center clearly denotes what Brunner (2008) has termed as 'Echoes of Bologna', in terms of those actions developed and its orientation to build a common space of the iberoamerican knowledge.

The next Latin American case corresponds to that kind of institution which applied the ISO-9001 norms solely to academic-administrative management services. The Universidad de Córdoba (UC) in Argentina (see Annex 8) start with a self-analysis of academic and administrative activities, mainly related with desing and/or modification of the study programs, the accreditation of degrees and academic-administrative procedures. In this particular case, the focus on administrative management activities linked to the use of the ISO norms neglects the other areas and stakeholders involved in the process. Clearly this kind of scheme is a limited

strategy because the development of certain processes is just at one level, ie, the academic-administrative procedures.

In the last case study, curricular reforms as well as the teaching and learning organization are the biggest gamble at the Universidad Veracruzana in México (see Annex 9). For more than ten years such institution has been working with a model of teaching/learning centered on the learner, even before the Bologna agreement were signed. Even though exist strategical planning and a working program with a long term perspective, there is no central unit responsible of the assessment and control nor of the monitoring and register of the evidences in terms of the achievement the goals proposed by the reform. According to this scheme the development of a comprehensive and flexible educational model has demanded all human and financial resources, but at the same time, the coordination of all involved areas. In this last case, it's important to note that the actions implemented do not correspond to a national policy, because not exist, at least in terms of the quality assurance processes at the bachelor level within higher education institutions.

So far have been reviewed the determinants in the implementation of IQAS in the six analyzed cases, ie, the main forces which impulse the QA actions. Excels the work towards **quality culture** and around the own evaluation of its teaching practices, in the UNIL case; the adaptation of national policies as an **response to the change processes** towards the european higher education area in the UAB case; **the freedom to choose the actions** of quality assurance according to the university autonomy declared by the government, as the of UPEC case shows. In Latinamerican cases, we found within the UR, a systemic model derived mainly from **institutional accreditation process** which is impulsed by the national council and fully oriented towards continual improvement. The Argentine case of the UC, confirms that the way to quality is more than the **use of international standards** (ISO 9001) in the academic-administrative management processes. As in the latter case, in México the UV does not count with a monitoring system at no level, which prevent to know the extent of their goals and objectives, primarily those related to the **new educational model** promoted in recent years. No matter how many programs have been accredited, if innovation in educational process is

not measure, nor its impact, or its acceptance and understanding. It also doesn't matter increase the enrollment rate year by year, if we are not capable to know the direction and reach of our goals.

Derived from this analysis exercise, it identifies eight QA practices mainly oriented to:

- i) the teaching and learning process;
- ii) the teaching and research process;
- iii) the faculties;
- iv) study programs;
- v) the academic units and management;
- vi) the academic staff;
- vii) the services offered; and
- viii) The units of monitoring and follow up.

Far from be prescriptive, we emphasize some of the main constituents of internal quality assurance systems, which do not mean they are the unique areas of activity or that should be developed simultaneously. Nor do we intend to invalidate the work done so far, however, considering that the idea of quality assurance implies the monitoring and evaluation of each action, we can say that the basis of quality assurance within the universities is, on one side, its definition as a policy clearly established in its strategic planning and on the other, the information available about all processes, its systematization and constant updating.

As clearly shows in the last two schemas developed by the latin american universities, the UV and UC, they can't to know, what is the impact, the reaching and the outcomes derived from all quality actions, mainly due to the lack of an organizative structure (Quality Commitees) which allows them to make tracking all necessary indicators to assess the possible steps forward. The feedback, not only about the services, but about of the political proposed, in its design, development and implementation, as well as its difussion among all stakeholders involved, are key for the system as a whole.

5.3 The weight of indicators

As Aguillo (2010) argues regarding evaluation processes, it is not just a matter of debate and discussion on methods and interpretation of results but a question of relevance and objectivity in the evaluation of individuals and institutions of which they are part. In such sense it can talk about indicators derived from assessment processes which in most cases are rejected mainly because there is no quality culture. Eventhough we all know that the funding of academic and research staff and the public institutions at large comes from public resources, such not always are subjected to the democratic control of the taxpayers or to guidance and monitoring of educational policy makers.

In such scenario, the information becomes relevant not just for the information itself, but for its significance, its accessibility and its possibilities of measure and comparison. As stated in section 2.4, most of the well-known information systems measures the institutions by one single set of criteria which tends to define them by rank or by the score they obtain compared to other institutions, letting aside most of times everything do not fits with the research qualifications. In this sense Zha (2009) proposes that higher education institutions are neither becoming strictly homogeneous and isomorphic at a national or global level, nor highly differentiated and polymorphic at the local-organizational level. They could rather be conceived as variants (not different forms) of a very limited number of institutional archetypes at global level. In this vein, van der Wende (2008) argues that in order to avoid an adverse effect on diversity, rankings should only be used within defined groups of comparable institutions (classifications) and that in the development of indicators to measure performance areas other than research, such as teaching, needs to be advanced.

Certainly the European response towards competitiveness, established by the global university rankings has been definitive, since just asserting 'we are world class' or 'we are a top international university' is no longer enough. Data must confirm it. That's why information becomes relevant, so its systematic use and organized within a system facilitates the decision making process, in first place for stakeholders within the institutción and in relation to all the processes and results.

As already said, there is no classification system (Rankings) which provide guidance on the quality of teaching. It is important to secure "clean rankings", transparent, free of self-interest, and methodologically coherent, which allow creating incentives toward a broadbased improvement. Besides, according to van der Wende and Marginson (2007) it is vital that rankings systems are crafted so as to serve the purposes of higher education, rather than purposes being reshaped as an unintended consequence of rankings. To some experts, the main concern about change processes provoked by the international classifications is in terms of a growing trend to transform the universities from be a social policy tool to become a university-enterprise (Haug 2012).

5.4. Who asses who: managing quality versus quality assurance

One of these days, university could be as a crystal box through which clearly can see, besides its values, its mission, and vocation, their capacity to deliver quality outcomes. According to Massy (2003), processes reflect the way people organize their work and the kind of data they use to inform decisions. So, people who works according to good processes accomplish more than those who working with poor ones. Here 'good' represents a necessary condition for high quality. With the above it is clear that relation between quality processes and the people who manage them are so important to achieve the institutional goals as well as by the information generated and systematized.

Keeping the idea of QA as a policy located within the broader domain generally known as higher education (Perellon 2007), in the following paragraphs we analyze the fundamental choices related with the internal quality assurance systems both in the UPV as well in the UJI (Chapter 4). The main idea behind the discourse on quality in both cases is related primarily with a national policy which looks for quality and at the same time the teaching activity assessment. The UPV has had traditionally, as polytechnic, a natural vocation towards quality; meanwhile all the efforts of the UJI were oriented to quality and strategic planning. In concordance with the general lines established by quality national agencies in both institutions there were developed transverse processes to all qualifications starting from a self-assessment. From the perspective of Perellon (2007), the quality actions derived from a quality policy, are based on beliefs about the own organization,

which result in the formulation of instruments through which the beliefs are translated in such actions. Here, is where emerge the normative elements that support public action forming up the ideational dimension and which refers to two subdimensions or categories; *i)* What should be the aims and objectives of QA policy? and *ii)* Who should control the process of QA? The responses may reflect power relationships among stakeholders struggling to impose particular world views and beliefs as to how this domain should be organised.

Talking about changes, in the UPV case the things were taken step by step, the first impulse came from the legislature to create a vice-rectorate with a double goal, the quality and the teaching activity assessment. The creation of a Quality Committee through which was approved and applied the ISO norms to all qualifications management processes was the first step taken by the UJI. At supranational level through the proposal of Bologna to harmonize the structure of European higher education systems, were identified in a first level, the beliefs as worldviews referred to wide perceptions of how things should be. This talks about a paradigm shift which has occurred from notions such as academic freedom and professional integrity towards accountability, the efficiency and social responsibility. According to Perellon analysis, this shift corresponds to a redefinition of the place of higher education within society where the previous structure of the policy domain, in terms of beliefs and instruments, is questioned in a context marked by expansion, financial cutbacks and increased influence of the economic value of higher education for national wealth, among other trends (Perellon 2007; 159-160).

In this vein, any change process which compels to actualisation of the fundamental policy choices, that is, the formulation of a public policy, reflects choices deriving from beliefs about the organisation of that policy domain. On other hand, the bologna goals were rejected within HEIs in its beginnings, especially by frontline academics which not mutely accepted changes or the particular demands of quality assurance systems. In such a sense, Harvey and Knight (1996) emphasise the desirability of 'quality enhancement' and 'continuous quality improvement', and take full account of the constraints, circumstances of situation and context which influencing both the policy implementation as in the

activities of 'system users' in terms of changing or reshaping the quality policy. To Newton (2000) policy implementation is at the same time, complex and uneven. Through their interpretative work, actors attach meaning to the various aspects of the quality system as they interact with it. They are not passive recipients of management objectives. In such sense, academic staff are 'makers' and 'shapers' of policy itself.

Considering the analysis categories proposed by Perellon (2007) to approach quality assurance as a policy domain, we focus into the policies formulated at national level and implemented at institutional level in the HEIs, particularly in the beliefs (ideational dimension) and the instruments (material dimension). With respect to the domain of quality assurance in higher education this conceptual proposal identifies a-temporal and a-spatial choices to be made within the domain of QA and by assessing the responses to them. First of all, it considers the belief about the quality policy and the excellence as a value to achieve. In terms of the control, the opposition between the political authorities and higher education institutions reflects two different ways of dealing with the QA and at the same time the intermediary arrangements between these two extremes. That is, in the beginning the Bologna process comes as a top down policy which is gradually mixed to the institutional control of the procedures with a major weight in the regional authorities (through regional quality agencies).

Far from having been initiated as a collective reflection, the quality policy it has been implemented following a leadership scheme at the highest level which in turn follow the lines marked by the national quality agency in a kind of shared responsibility. Regarding the areas covered by the QA procedures stand out two; study programmes and general institution management, since in most cases do not takes into account the research activities. Perhaps the new openness of policy markers to the use of competitive markets to steer the university sector is the major change that has accompanied the higher education massification and could explain the above. Meanwhile, Dill (2005) argues that many policy makers and academics believe that there is a relationship between the degree of market competition and academic quality. The truth is that the idea of be each day a better university is behind of any action oriented to quality, although not allways is

a shared belief within the own HEIs. In the Spanish university case, with their managers and services offered and, in particular teachers, have been living a feeling of constant change since the enactment of the LRU¹¹ in 1983.

In chapter two was pointed out the extensive debate about the meaning of quality concept. Particularly, there has been suggested that such notion when is applied to education is amorphous, non-measurable, or ambiguous, depending the approach used. So, from a public policy perspective, Dill (2007) suggests that academic quality is equivalent to academic standards - in terms of the level of academic achievements attained by higher education graduates. This definition is also consistent with the emerging focus of attention in higher education quality assurance policies. Even if a government adopts a market orientation to higher education, which produces varying levels of academic quality among institutions, there is an important public interest towards the academic standards.

Following our analysis scheme, until now we try to understand the quality actions developed at the level of goals and the responsible bodies for the implementation of the policy and the extent to which this responsibility is controlled. All this actions are based in the beliefs about the domain referred. Both the Quality Committees/Commissions as well as Technical offices represent on the one hand, the bodies responsible to define the kind of quality goals through its institutional vision and mission -- either in terms of the importance of linking the the results obtained through the procedures to some particular consequences (Summative objectives), or emphasizing QA procedures, by means of evaluation or otherwise, which have primarily a formative role, that is, they allow for pointing out weak points of the domain under scrutiny and learning how to improve them (Formative objectives) -- and on the other hand, the people responsible to translate the policy beliefs into practice.

In this vein corresponds analyze the areas covered and the QA procedures, these latter enter in the exclusive area of the policy instruments that according to Perellon (2007), represents the material dimension. The main areas covered by QA procedures, both in the UJI as well in the UPV are; the services offered

¹¹ In septembre of 1983 the Spanish Official Bulletin (BOE) published the Law of University Reform impulsed by the Government of Felipe Gonzalez.

(libraries, integrated employment services, the international relations or the sports, etc.) study programs, the follow up of qualifications and its accreditation as well as the teaching activity assessment through students surveys and faculty directors.

The point of departure is the question, how are the QA procedures set up? According to the methodological proposal, in this analysis were found that process-oriented procedures are mainly based in the ISO 9000 norms and later in the EFQM excellence model, as the UJI shows. In the UPV case, in opposition to the latter we found an outcome-oriented procedure with two watersheds: a) the improvement program in management and administration of university services (PEGASUS) originally designed to all units of support both to teaching and research, as well as the services; and b) the periodical assessment, through a serial of criteria and indicators in terms to know the goals reached and its improvement possibilities. Thus we found the presence of internal and external procedures, via the self-assessments and peer reviews respectively, and in relation with quantitative (performance indicators) and qualitative (peer reviews) procedures.

One of the aspects within the processes of QA is related with the degree of involvement of the higher education institution that is to say with the kind of staff and different stakeholders involved in such procedures. According to our analysis, the processes take into account three levels of participation; at the highest management bodies, at the level of academics and students and at the level of administrative staff, all of them involved since the design until the implementation. The QA instruments mostly used are the opinion surveys mainly oriented to assess the teaching activity, the qualifications and all the services offered. In a second step during the process, the information gathered demands improvement actions and the creation of groups which are comprehensive part of the process. At this point is important to mention the presence of external groups with a remarkable level of participation and which represent the social voice within the QA actions. So-called Social Council is a paralell body to the Quality Council which do not participates in the design stage, only at the implementation process. So far we have seen the fundamental choices arising from the quality policies and carried out from the highest management level in both institutions as part of the

European higher Education Area. The values and beliefs translated into QA instruments generate considerable information amounts obtained at all levels and coming from all stakeholders involved.

At last but not least, the last choice analyzed it is related to what to do with the information gathered during the procedures. In terms of its use, the first step is to analyze the information in two levels; at the qualifications level by mean of the the vice-deans of each degree and through the vice rectors in terms of make appropriate notifications, the decision making, and propose the improvement actions. All data related are recorded and were accesible to all stakeholders both internal as in assessment, and to the external agencies, for verification. Other possible uses of the information are related firstly with the performance-based incentives both administrative and service staff as well as for academics, allowing the possibility to rank the units assessed according to their results. The second step has to do with the feedback that the responsables of qualifications or the services receive to make improvements.

Following the conceptual framework for the analysis of quality assurance in higher education (Perellón 2007), it could say that quality actions referred above reflect the previous decisions regarding the objectives and the control of the system. Without doubt the basic substrate of internal quality assurance system is all information generated, collected, analyzed and used via feedback reports and which has an impact on study programs and institutional management. So, an information system becomes a mean for providing to the users and potential users of university services, the inputs needed to make rational choices. However according to Perellon, it is not quality control which matters in the current context of higher education but rather the use of the information collected during these procedures (Perellon 2007; p.168.).

In the following section proposes to close the analysis by means of a comparative exercise from different internal systems of quality assurance and through the factors at play taking into account the emergence of QA as a political issue. It also identifies best practices related to the development and implementation of such systems in Europe and Latin America.

5.5 A comparison of internal quality assurance systems

5.5.1 QA policies in the Bologna and Latin American context.

Once upon a time...

Perhaps nobody imagines that one way or another, the ancient tradition of moving from one university to another in searching and spreading knowledge, could have the chance to survive until now. Arguably nowadays the ultimate expression of this movement around higher education is the Erasmus programme, applauded as the most successful student exchange programme in the world which has become a driver in the modernisation of higher education in Europe and, in particular, has inspired the establishment of the Bologna Process (BP). Just as Birtwistle (2009) outlines, this journey being undertaken by the universities, is linked to changes in the economy and the social dimension within and beyond of geographical borders. In such sense, what began as marginal issue within the European legislation, through the time it becomes a way to transforming the higher educational systems within and outside the EU.

Through the vision of Hodgson (2004) such process (BP) is a powerful engine of approximation, if not harmonisation, and regarding its implementation it also has different national speeds (Gorga 2007), in depending of the different historical, political and socio-economical roots from each country. In this sense, to Central and East European countries which shared common goals in the EHEA, aside from autonomy with regard to the state, Bologna implies a strong force that pushes toward diversification of national higher education systems. With a very precise view of the process, Scottt (2012) describes the apparently endless transition of higher education, when states that over a longer time-scale the tectonic plates of higher education have also shifted, initially from elite to mass (and universal) systems in terms of access and more recently from 'public' to 'market' systems. In such scenery it's impossible to deny the effects beyond the original starting point. As a kind of echoes Bologna in Latin America since the Guadalajara Declaration in 2002, it starts to talk about a common area for higher education with a clear goal to build it.

Once upon a time... and beyond

Perhaps the most notable difference between European and Latin American universities are their origins. The national universities in Latin America were created after the independence process and were oriented to vocational training of doctors, lawyers, chemists, engineers and other attorneys to occupy the public administration charges and give intellectual sustenance and technical skills to the new nation-states. Without doubt the Bologna Process has moved into new frontiers which encompassing educational and cultural dimensions. All of the realms of cooperation and integration are complementary and lead to a strengthened regional area of Europe that is unlike any other in the world. However it could be said that Bologna has shown an horizon which without to be reachable to Latin America, evokes new conversations, proposes topics to analysis, and shows possible solutions, policies and procedures to reach them (Brunner 2008).

In this vein it is important to consider the existent colonial legacy, the social, economical and political situation of the area and overall the rigid structure of teaching and learning process, as the main limits in the current Latin American scenario. It should be added the Intergovernmental Declarations, Meetings of University Presidents and collaborative projects among universities which express a commitment to advance towards the construction of common space for higher education. However, as Brunner (2008) points out, unlike Europe, in the Latin American case there is no common area, neither political, or economical, nor monetary and much less of knowledge-to which to appeal.

The truth is that all initiatives mentioned above, have somehow been used to sensitizing and developing certain guidelines that reflect those echoes from Bologna. According to the cases analyzed in this study, we found that one of the points of agreement in higher education policies has to do with the quality of education offered and particularly with its quality assurance. That is to say that fundamental choices which appear on institutional missions and strategic planning reflects the ideal of HEI's to becoming world class universities, but, without a

common space, all these intents will be limited, perhaps eloquent and rhetorical but devoid of content, objectives and mechanisms to implement them.

However, something has been done to this respect, not at the same intergovernmental level as the Bologna, but at individual level each institution try to maintain its position, even though they differ in size, rate of participation, its relations with the state, ammount of funding and the relative weigth of private enrolment. Even with all these differences, as Brunner (2007) points out, it is possible to identify some common trends between it could be mentioned the TUNNING project for latin american and the ALFA convocations, among which stands out more recently the INFOACES project, all of them with funding from the European Union.

5.5.2 Best practices: EU-LA

A comparative exercise...

Without trying to be prescriptive this section points out and compare the so called 'best practices' related with the QA activities developed both by HEI's from Europe as well as from Latin American. The cases presented here are an example of what has been called IQAS according to Cheng (2003) ie, all those efforts for improving the internal environment and processes, such that the effectiveness of teaching and learning could be ensured to achieve the planned goals. Moreover, this approach considers the transfer from an ideational dimension to a material one, that is, from the policy goals towards mechanisms which materialize these objectives (Perellon 2007).

As seen in Table 1 were identified eight practices as part of the mechanisms of quality assurance inside these systems:

- 1) Teaching and Learning;
- 2) Teaching and Research;
- 3) Faculties;
- 4) Study Programs;

- 5) Academic and Management Central Units;
- 6) Academic Staff;
- 7) Services; and
- 8) Monitoring and Follow Up

At this point is important to keep in mind that If the best practices are detached from their context and applied mechanically, they risk to not producing the expected results (Radaelli, 2002a, Rose 2002). So, we just want to emphasize the elements in play within the QA practices for each case analyzed.

Table 1. Internal 'QA Best Practices'
EU/LA

Practices ¹² Cases	T & L	T & R	F	SP	A & M CU	AS	S	M & F
UNIL	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
UPEC	○		○	○	○	○	○	○
UAB	○		○	○	○	○	○	○
UPV	○		○	○	○	○	○	○
UJI	○		○	○	○	○	○	○
UR	○		○	○	○	○	○	○
UV	○		○	○	○		○	
UC				○	○		○	

With exception of the Laussane University, the analyzed cases considered almost all the elements identified within their mechanisms of QA. It should be noted that in the case of Mexico (UV) and Argentina (UC), the lack of monitoring and follow-up of QA actions, hamper to know the extent of what has been doing. No matter if the efforts are oriented to one or all elements into the system, without a feedback

¹² T & L= Teaching and Learning; T & R = Teaching and Research; F = Faculties; SP = Study Programs; A & M CU = Academic and Management Central Units; AS = Academic Staff; S = Services; M & F = Monitoring and Follow Up.

which facilitates the self-evaluation it is very difficult to measure the progress and achievements of the institution.

In the opposite side are the Spanish universities which follow the guidelines established through the Bologna process. Even though their institutional reforms were initiated more than twenty years ago, is in 2001 when Organic Law of Universities (LOU) was promulgated and when quality plays a central role on it. So quality assessment and quality assurance have become central issues in the higher education agenda and in the policies of regional governments. In 2003 starts the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) marking the relevance to the entire university system. In this regard, the Catalan and Valencian universities develop their IQAS with a twofold origin marked on the one hand by the Spanish laws and on the other by transnational policy named Bologna process.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

This assignment speaks of quality assurance as a tool for the integration and improvement of higher education, also considers the quality assurance within the policy domain, as well as its different forms of implementation resulting from a national policy or transnational and whose impact is reflected in the actions taken by the HEI's. Even though is not a prescriptive framework, the EFQM excellence model perspective, allows to identifying the basic elements which compose the structure of QA system which is based on the application of the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) to educational institutions. Whatever the origin of these new activities, no doubt the normative framework derived from the Bologna Declaration has set some trends of accreditation in Europe. It is clear that, in one way or another, this has influenced the development of varied quality assurance outlines in Latin America, as is demonstrated by the development of the QA actions identified on presented cases.

It seems that even with the large differences between Europe and Latin America, the trend in quality policies undertaken by higher education institutions is the same. The most noteworthy is the creation of agencies or national assessing

bodies either for accreditation of degrees and more recently for the evaluation and accreditation of postgraduate studies. It is clear that the only pattern to follow is that which each institution defines for itself, as of its own strengths and bearing in mind the social and economic environment in which it is located.

As argued in this chapter, there are parallel paths to quality that higher education institutions have been following. Among the most notable it includes: a) a shift towards quality culture based on self-assessment of teaching; b) as a response to adaptation processes derived from new transnational policies; c) the definition of internal policies, based on the autonomy granted to HEIs; d) institutional accreditation processes promoted by national councils fully oriented to continuous improvement e) the use of international standards (ISO 9001) for academic and administrative processes and finally; f) educational innovation through learning-centered models. No matter the place where it is located, the orientation of its educational offer or membership in a public or private system, the fact is that the pursuit of quality assurance, but particularly the definition of this action as part of the institutional policies, is a fact. The way to achieve it, and the quality level demanded, are tasks of each university.

6. Summary

6.1 General conclusions

It can't deny transformation processes which higher education institutions have experienced over the last 30 years. The dynamics triggered in Europe by geopolitical integration process, monetary, tariff and cultural, besides by competition to occupy a recognized place in league tables or rankings has led them to rethink their objectives and its educational offering. On the other side regarding legislation, the inclusion of articles 126 and 127 in the Maastricht Treaty ended the 'policy competence creep' that had previously dominated debates about education. Thereafter Schmitter (1996) suggests a steady growth in policy-making at European level as from 1990, and through which areas as education and research were motive of policy decisions at both national and EC level.

Perhaps the most salient policy is that which tries to make European economy becomes the most competitive and most of all, based on knowledge. We refer to the Lisbon strategy which at the same time puts this intangible capital as the main factor of economic growth. According to some analysis, globalization has not only contributed to a 'borderless world of higher education' (Council of Europe/UNESCO 2001) but has introduced increased competition between Europe, the United States and, increasingly, Asia (European Commission 2004: 13). So, globalisation and markets together are changing the competition for status goods (positional goods) in higher education.

In terms of figures and positions, the most remarkable sign of competition between HEI's are the so called «rankings», that only reflect a growing concern about excellence, and most of times offer a biased vision of the situation, in depending of what is measured and who measures it. The rankings are more a matter of perception than conviction and not necessarily refer to the best idea of quality in higher education. Despite Rankings, as a positive and as direct consequence, there is a trend towards more transparency and accountability and ethics is simultaneously on the rise. However it is a fact that the cross-border student movement has been an important driver for internationalisation and globalization and it has fostered global markets and competition between institutions.

It seems that HEIs are beginning to set "a whole-university approach regarding to quality and standards (Brink 2010). So, if standards are seen as the benchmark by which quality can be judged, then raise minimum standard raises quality overall. In such vein we believe in the diversity of quality as an opportunity to the university management. So, the transformation of higher education is part of a systemic change that concerns both the society (at all its levels) as well as the education system in its entirety (Gorga 2007). The best practices observed reveal that through different social groups in form of quality agencies, legislative bodies and government, international organizations, and society at large, HEIs are following different pathways to improve their offer, image, management and perhaps most important its results in terms of the teaching learning process. Most notable is that the competition begins to give way to the establishment of academic networks. Recognize each other's strengths and benefit from them through cooperation and

exchange, not only strengthens the integration of higher education systems, but of cultures. It can be argued that the base of any QA actions should have clear, valid and reliable data from all organizational levels and derived from self-assessment processes. Far from be conclusive in a more detailed level this piece of work offers the following contributions, as an answer to our research questions:

a. Delineates some possible schemes of IQAS.

Among most ways of IQAS analysed prevails the absence of QA processes specifically within research activities, either in training, in projects of I+D or towards researchers. The base or perhaps the key element of a possible scheme of internal quality assurance undoubtedly is defined by its ability to self-evaluation and monitoring of the system itself. As Fernández *et al.* (2013) stated, all the elements within such processes, suggest a "circular" and ascending movement in the sense that breaks with the traditional, "linear" idea, which assumes these dimensions as sequential steps and not as components of a multidimensional process in which each step must be consistent with others of mutual feedback and aimed at improving the system as a whole. In such sense, it could be argued that there no pattern defining quality assurance actions, each country, institution and university organisations defines, interprets and implement their own visión of quality. Nonetheless, the EFQM Excellence Model in the European case, or the PNPC Model in the Mexican HEIs, or application of ISO 9000 standards to some educational services, are some of the trends identified in this study.

b. Provides some insights about beliefs and values on QA, and how these become an action through mechanisms and instruments that each HEIs defines in their own way and according to the policy in force.

Our analysis heeds to the determinants which guide the change process in HEIs in terms of QA, these are: the purposes, which takes into account the rationale for implementing those kinds of systems; the practices, that consider the activities oriented to improve their own management and academic tasks; and the effects, emphasizing a self-

assessment exercise with regard to the implementation and development of the system itself.

- c. *Propose an approach to QA as a policy domain (Perellón 2007).*
- Analysing the process of internal quality assurance in terms of the beliefs about the educational organizations themselves, which are translated into formulated and implemented actions (instruments) within particular policies, allowed us to scrutinize the combination of two dimensions at a given moment in time and in a given place, providing the structure of the policy paradigm governing the quality assurance policy domains. That is to say, the formulation of ideas and beliefs about the general organisation of the domain in a particular spatial and temporal location (the policy beliefs) and the translation of these beliefs into policy instruments. So far, through this approach we just introduce us into the analysis of cross-national convergence in the domain of quality assurance policy in higher education. At this point one could argue that we are far from achieving convergence of the structures of quality assurance between Europe and Latin America, mainly because the role and participation of universities in such developments, is still limited.

Last but not least as an answer to last research question, it found that is precisely because the particular characteristics of socio-economic environments in which HEIs are located, that we can state that they are not following the same pattern. The formulation of a European agenda for quality assurance in HE has provoked a shift in the relationships among the actors taking part in the formulation and implementation of quality assurance policies. In line with Perellon (2005), admittedly, the Bologna agenda puts pressure on European countries for collaboration and increased harmonisation, which they are indeed taking place. However, variations certainly remain as important as the harmonised aspects can be.

6.2 Limitations and lines for Future Research

It acknowledges that this proposal has several limitations which at the same time become in new avenues for further research. First of all we focus at managers first level perceptions in relation with the definition of quality assurance policies. Secondly we try to delve into the technical areas, through out the responsible for implementing and developing these processes. Thus, future research is needed in order to have an overview of such process, adding the point of view of two of the main stakeholders, the students and employers, (eg., interviews with employers and/or students surveys). The phase of the qualitative analysis showed clearly that the QA domain is a complex multidirectional process, mainly due to the different stakeholders involved, in and out of the HEI's, whose presence deserve further research attention.

The analysis of public policies on quality assurance at the national, regional and continental level lead us into the question if the actual orientation can only emerge from cross-national comparisons of the two dimensions of the policy. In this sense it opens a possible vein of research in terms of whether national policies can converge, diverge or continue in previous patterns. According to Perellon (2007) a definite answer to the question of the extent of policy convergence can only be provided after in-depth empirical investigations which allow us to identify the structure of the quality assurance policy paradigm in different national settings and to compare differences and similarities. Thus the conceptual apparatus proposed by Perellon shows that assuring quality albeit in a number of different forms (quality assessment, programme review, accreditation, licencing, etc.) is nowadays an (intrusive) reality in each national higher education system and will remain an important regulation and steering tool for many governments.

Last but not least, the possibility to use mixed methods that combine qualitative and quantitative data could show us a more comprehensive approach about different models currently used and perhaps we could know more about how quality assurance as an idea and concept is spread internationally. Furthermore, even we focus on internal processes there is a need for a critical review of what the impact of external quality monitoring is on higher education.

6.3 Final reflection

Having in mind the unity of teaching and research like the universal idea about contemporary university, it should also recognize the variations that collect regional traditions. The anglosaxon idea of liberal education or the Latin American tradition based on research, teaching and learning and strong links with society at large, are the main functions which define the university as institution. Beside this purpose, academic values, governance and its autonomy in front of political and economic power also are other attributes historically developed which give meaning to the word of "university".

However, it is important to note that besides the idea of university as institution, also can be considered as organisation with a particular identity. According to Bernasconi (2009), it should be distinguished between what the university has as organisation and what it has as institution. In such sense, what it counts to establish quality criteria, assessment of performance and continuous improvement, is precisely what differentiate each HEIs as organisation and not what it defines them as institution. That is to say, organisation is an object of management, institutions not. So, in university as organisation it is possible to planning, designing and implement mechanisms to keep the functioning thereof, reasonably bonded towards the planning and periodic evaluations of objectives established.

With all of organizations' diversity, it is recognized in terms of globalization, that there is an increasing homogeneity of the university institution. The possibility of regional institutional definitions seems to have given way to the dominance of the idea of a research university. Nonetheless, whatever the university mission was, whether at degree or postdegree level, how can we define the organization's objectives to build an internal system of quality assurance? Probably, through the meaning given to research, training, professional training, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, peer review, collegiality and academic hierarchy to each university.

On the other hand, have also noted positions that identify a rise of centralisation of decision-making leading to less governance and more management, at the expense of the traditional components of university governance, governing bodies, academic boards and faculty boards, and a growing tendency to push academic participation to the periphery that they may lead to a loss in academic vitality and distinctiveness. Universities have become more hierarchical and the academic voice has become distanced from central institutional policy debate (Shatock 2013). Far from be conclusive and trying to be propositive, perhaps the main challenge will be to answer in conceptual and action level, in terms to what and to where should be directed the efforts for the development of functions of university.

It is clear that any programme, system or action towards quality, should be deliberately designed to achieve improvement and renewal and necessarily require of a solid base of information. According to de Vries *et al.* (2013), the problem is not the absence of information but the way in which has been defined, systematized and most of all, its access and interpretation. There is such amount of information that it is impossible to discern the main indicators within a sea of data. In such sense, it should be pay more attention in those indicators which could inform to decision makers within universities than those imposed by external agencies.

One way or another, the national policy agendas for quality assurance in higher education are increasingly influenced by supra-national trends and decisions, which in words of Perellon (2005), set a kind of path dependency. Meanwhile there are who thinks that such pathways are only a neocolonial imposition which could negatively affect to build of so called Latin American Higher Education Space (Lamarra & Coppola 2013). The truth is that IQAS can contribute to generate information for decision making, planning, but perhaps most important, for self assessment and improvement derived from precise and unbiased indicators. In this vein, agreements on common indicators for different types of IES could facilitate, maybe not harmonization, but in principle the convergence of interests between universities.

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ANNEX 1

Table 2. Agreements on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in Higher Education adopted under auspicius of UNESCO

Kind of Agreements	Reach	Countries involved	Signing Date
Regional Convention	Latin America	18	1974
International Convention	The Arab and European States Bordering on the Mediterranean	11	1976
Convention	Arab States	14	1978
Regional Convention	States belonging to the European Region	44	1979
Regional Convention	African States	21	1981
Regional Convention	Asian and Pacific	20	1983
Regional Convention	European Region	41	1997

Source: Own development based on Uvalić-Trumbić 2007.

ANNEX 2

Table 2. Participating Universities

Nº	Name	Country	IQAS name/date of implementation	Enrollment and Academic Staff	Responsible
1	Universidad del Rosario UR	Colombia	Quality Assurance Center - 2006	E= 12,923 AS= 1342	Vice-Rector
2	Universidad Veracruzana UV	México	Comprehensive and Flexible Educational Model - 1999	E= 57,207 AS= 4994	Director of Academic Development
3	Universidad Nacional de Córdoba UNC	Argentina	N/A - 2005	E= 108,553 AS= 8203	Academic Secretary
4	Université Paris-Est Créteil-UPEC	France	Improvement Plan for Degree 2008	E= 32,000 AS= 1666	Vice-Président du Conseil des Etudes et de la vie Universitaire
5	Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona UAB	Spain	Office of Planning and Quality 1996	E= 30,882 AS= 3354	OPQ-Head Unit of Evaluation and Quality
6	Université de Lausanne UNIL	Switzerland	Internal Quality Assurance System - 1997	E= 11,500 AS= 1791	Vice-Président

Protocol of Interview¹³



Valencia University of Technology Center for Quality Management and Change

The following questionnaire pretends to be a first approach to the determinants of implementation and/or development of an internal quality assurance system (IQAS) within higher education institutions (HEIs). As part of a research medium-term project, starts from the perceptions of responsible of such process, in terms to understand the way in which education quality is manage taking into account their own institutional processes and its interface with environment. We guarantee that all information provided it will use only for the research goals.

1. Name of the institution and Web-page.

2. Name of the responsible of the internal quality assurance system

3. When was established the IQAS?

4. What was the main reason for its implementation?

¹³ These guide interview and kind of questions stem from that used by Loukkola and zhang (EUA 2010) in "Examining quality culture-first part of the survey on quality culture", but in this particular case it's also oriented to the Latin-American region.

5. The implementation it is related with the institutional mission?

☐ Yes ☐ How? _____

☐ No ☐ Why? _____

6. How guarantee the institution their internal process and the fruitful learning experiences?

7. Are there any monitoring and/or reporting of problems or deficiencies derived from the IQAS operation and their structure?

☐ Yes ☐ Who do that? and how often?

☐ No ☐ why?

8. Is there any amount of resources (material and human) available to ensure the different types of inputs required for the system?

9. In which way your institution ensured that educational practices and offering services fulfilled the stakeholder's needs?

10. From your own point of view, what are the main values through which the institution tries to gain support, reputation and status within the community?

11. Could you indicate which of your institutional programs are related with the IQAS, and briefly say in which way?

☐ Strategic management

☐ Development planning

☐ Staff/Academic development

☐ Other (Please specify)

12. From the quality assurance point of view, please indicate which of the following constituents gets more attention, and how?

Gets more attention							Should get more attention						
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5	5	7	1	2	3	4	5	5	7

<input type="checkbox"/> Learning objectives	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning objectives
<input type="checkbox"/> Study programs/curricula	<input type="checkbox"/> Study programs/curricula
<input type="checkbox"/> Study process	<input type="checkbox"/> Study process
<input type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff
<input type="checkbox"/> Students	<input type="checkbox"/> Students

☐ Other (Please specify)

13. From your perspective, how evaluate the development of the IQAS until now?

Unsatisfactory				Highly satisfactory			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Why?

14. Do you think that there is a consensus among the different levels of the institution about the quality assurance?

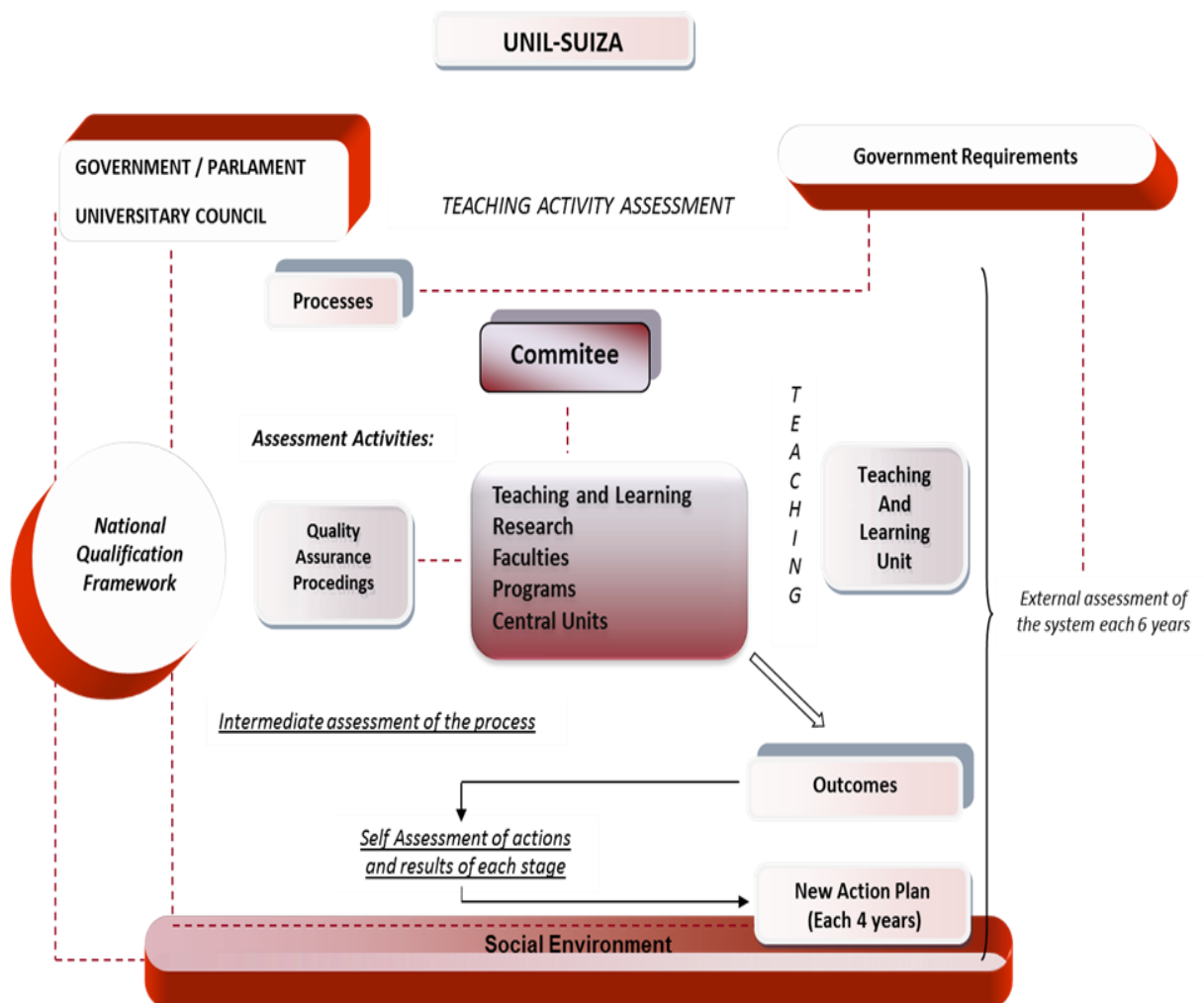
☐ Yes - Why

☐ No – Why

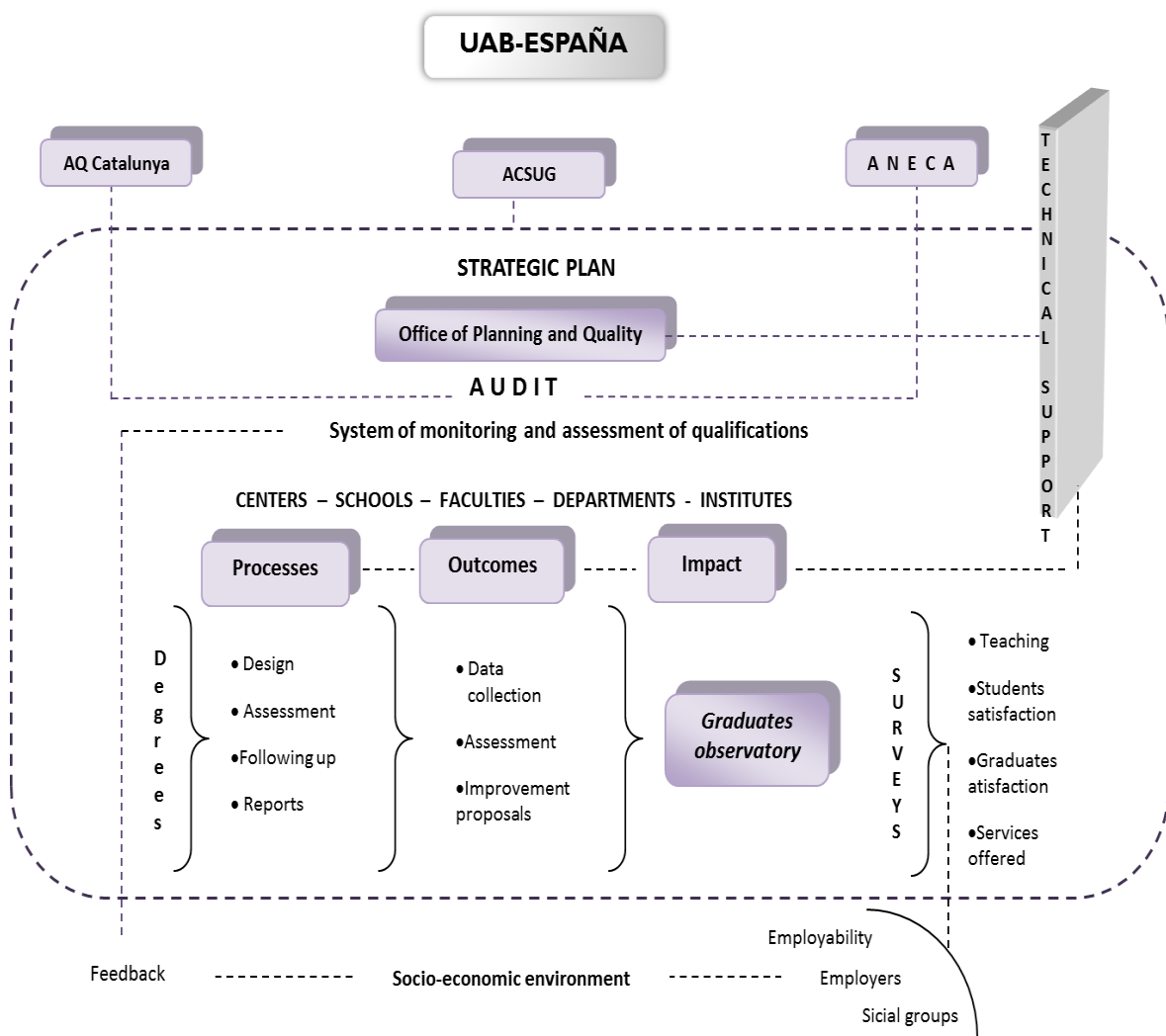
15. Finally, could you give us your own definition of quality education?

¡Thank you very much!

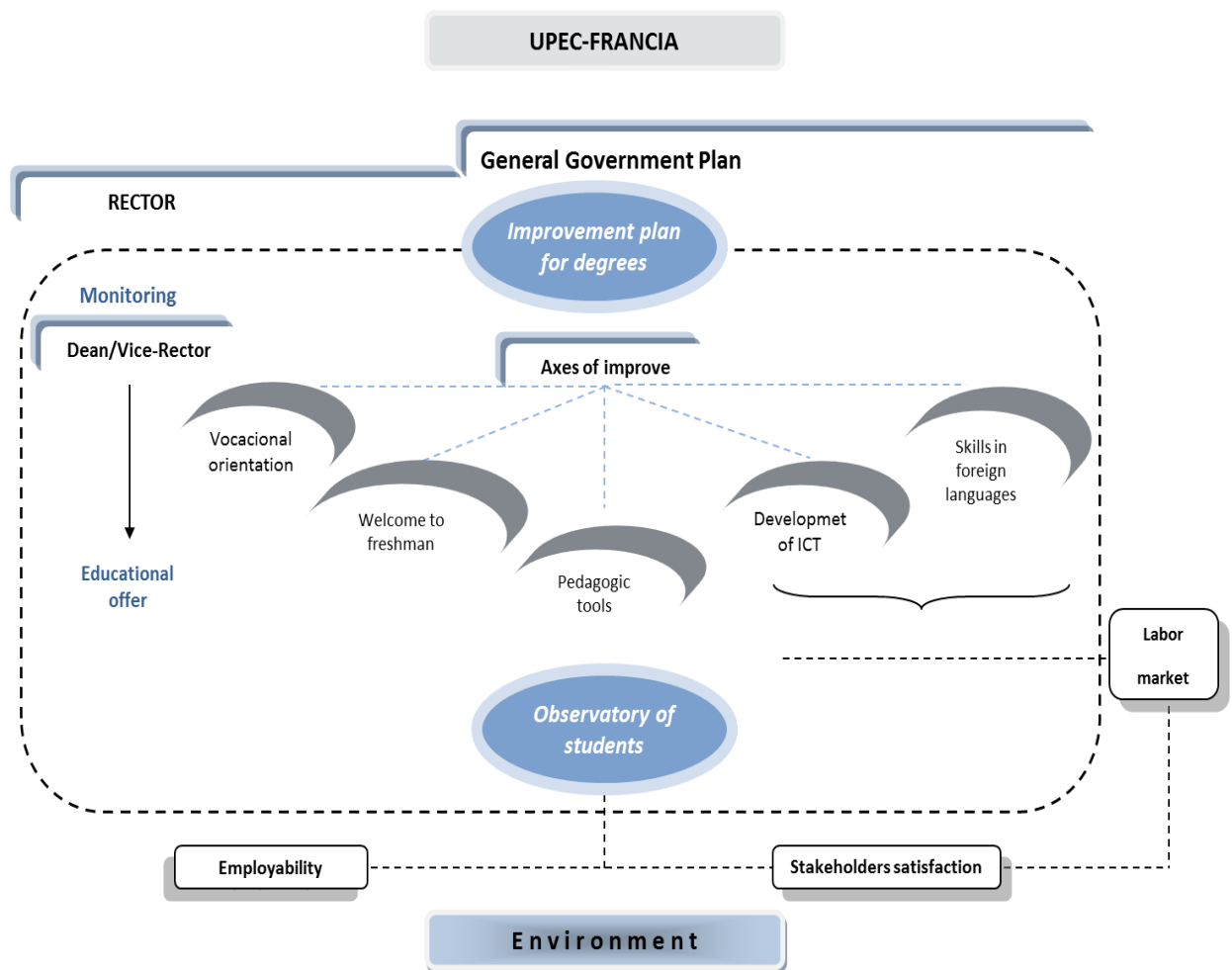
INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE DIAGRAMS



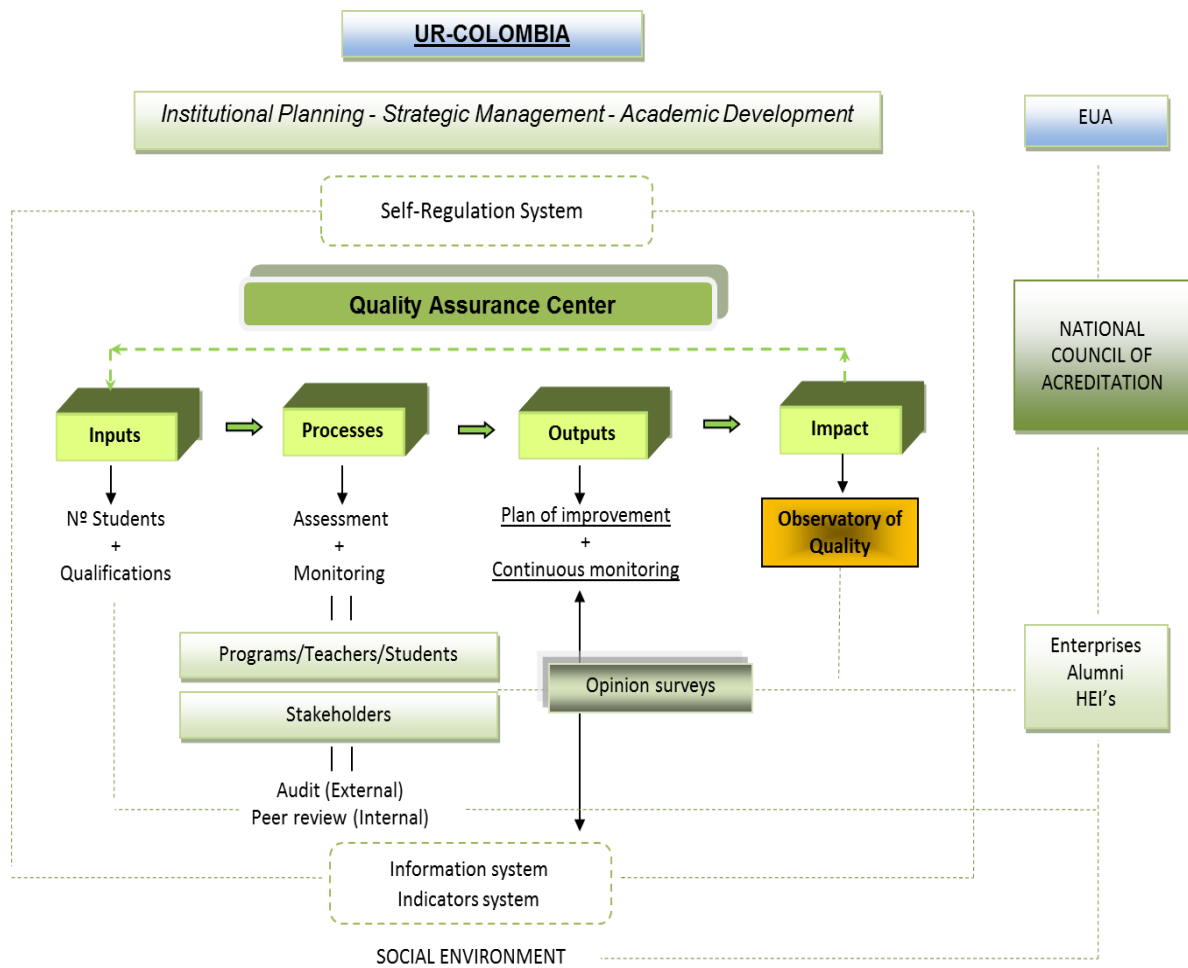
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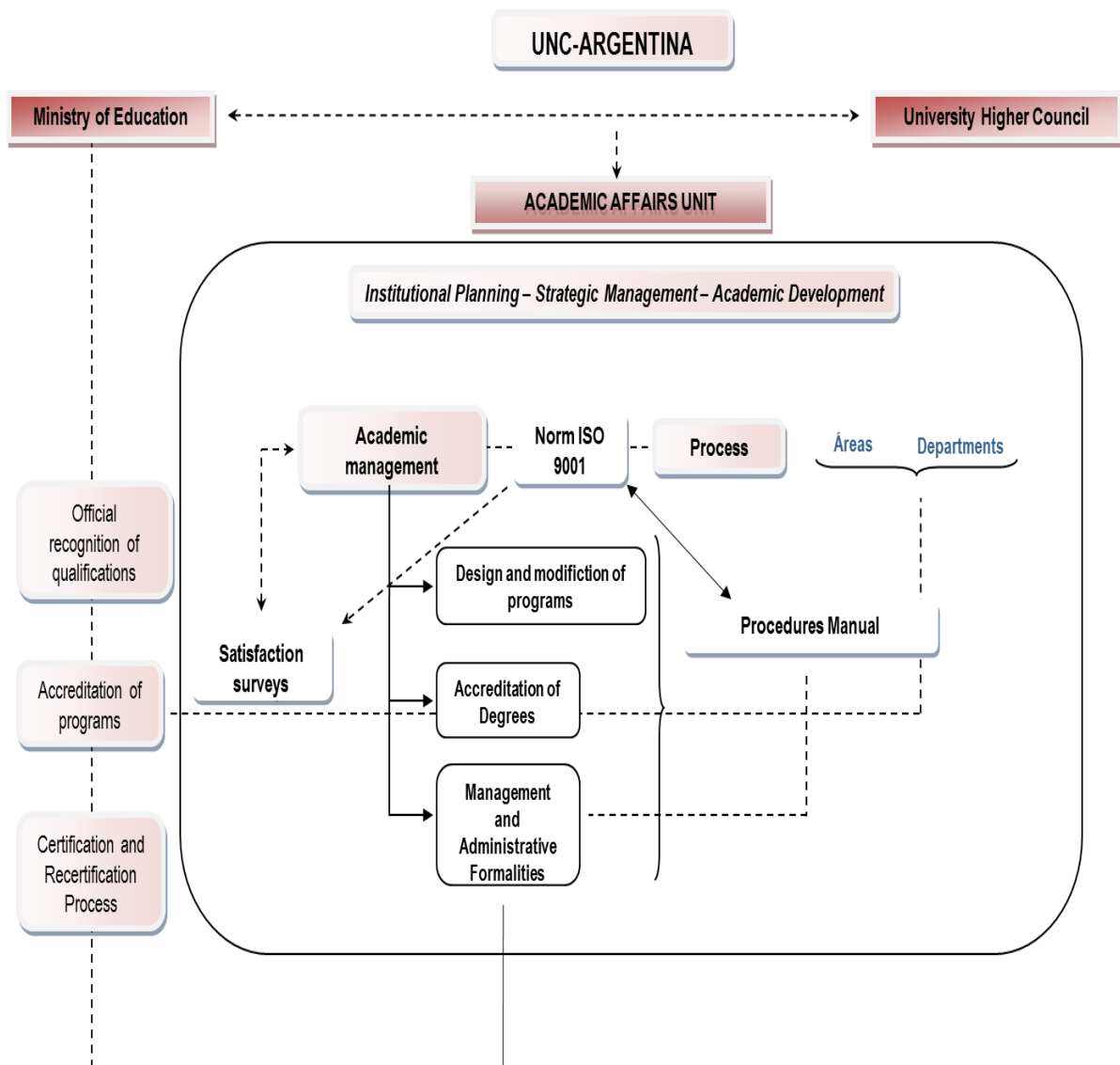
INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE DIAGRAMS



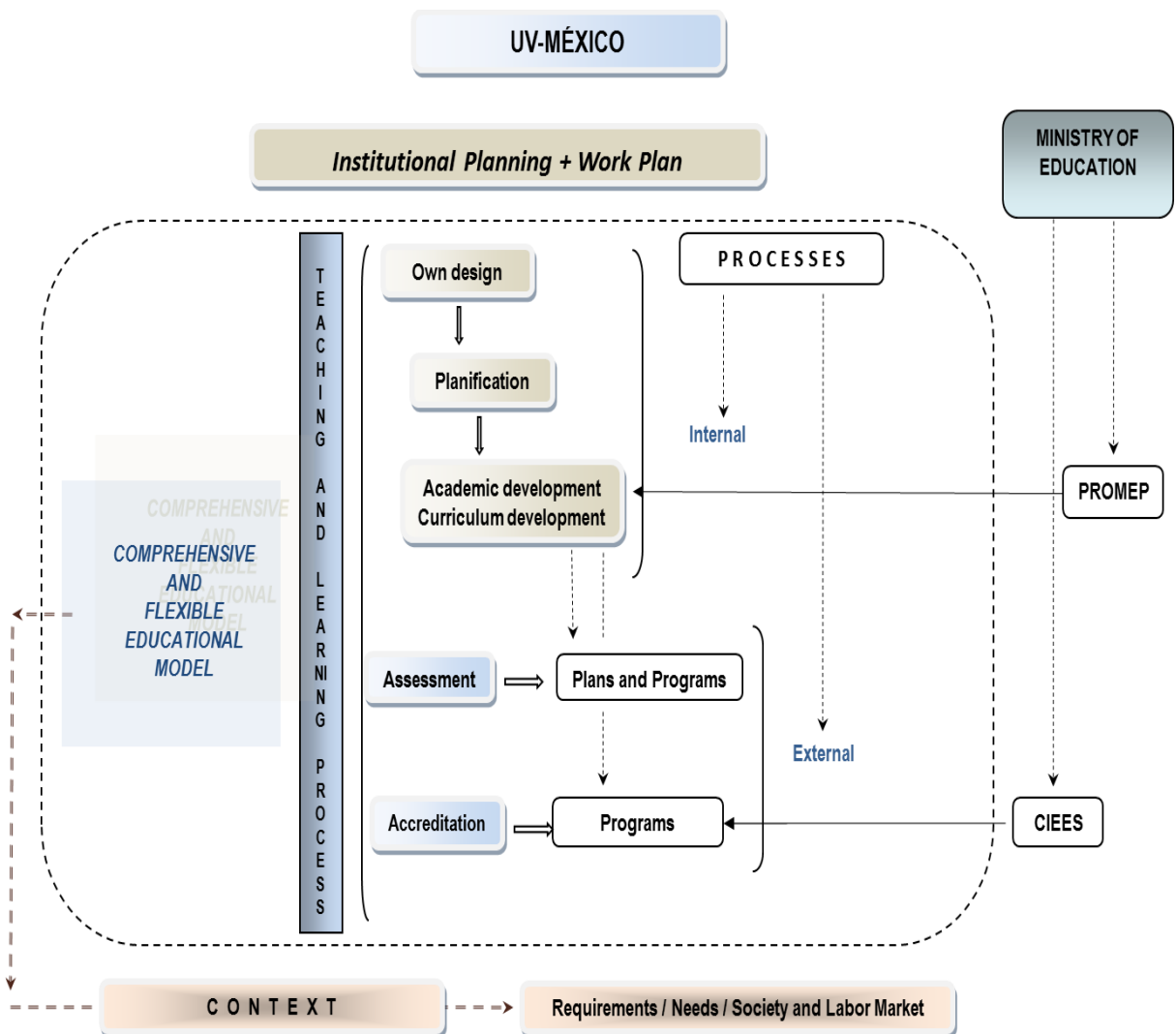
INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE DIAGRAMS



INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE DIAGRAMS



INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE DIAGRAMS



ANNEX 10

IN DEEP INTERVIEW GUIDE Dimension I

1. How emerged the issue of quality in this university?
2. Is there any official document or statement on quality assurance?
3. Does the Bologna Process influence the development of QA actions within this university?
4. What do you think would be the main values on which it is built and based the policy of quality assurance at your institution?
5. Do you believe that values such as excellence are present in these processes?
6. For the definition of these values, do you consider all stakeholders within the institution to carry out this project?
7. When begins introducing the system of quality assurance in your institution?
8. How would you define the role of the Rectory in building a quality culture within the university?
9. How far and in what way does the Rector is implies within this process?
10. The decisions of the Rector are they by consensus or unilaterally?
11. In organizational terms, what types of structures or units have to support the internal processes of quality assurance?

12. Monitoring processes, takes into account the feedback for strategic planning?
13. Could you mention specifically, what are the activities covered by its system of quality assurance?
14. And what about research?
15. Could you mention what are the services offered by this university to society?
16. This or other services oriented to society, counts with quality assurance processes?
17. What are the challenges to be faced in the near future regarding the culture of quality in the UPV?
18. From your point of view, how do you perceive the implementation of a quality culture and the related processes?
19. What is your perception of what is being done at national level?
20. In the case of this university, what are its major strengths?
21. Do you believe that the work done so far is enough to guarantee the result of the teaching-learning?
22. From your perspective, what would be the definition of quality education?

Dimension II

23. Could you tell us, how you design the quality assurance structure for your teaching and learning process?
24. You designed the structure of work? Or, is something tailored or, just follows a pre-fixed model?
25. How are involve different types of staff and stakeholders to the formal process of quality assurance?
26. At general management, or at level of management of services, Is there a collegiate body or government for decision-making?
27. In relation to all the information generated by the system, how do you use these results?
28. How this university has developed a definition of learning outcomes?
29. Do you have any indicator which measures the level of direct care with the student?
30. This information is accessible to the public?
31. How do you known about the students' workload?
32. What is the mechanism used to define / modify a curriculum?
33. What kinds of processes are established to monitor the design of programs and curricula?
34. This institution takes into account some process of quality assurance for doctoral studies?

35. What is your perception about the changes arising from the Bologna Process in the case of the PhD?
36. What are the characteristics of assessment procedures for students?
37. How does ensures that academic staff is qualified and competent?
38. The information on the skills and performance of teachers, is available to the public?
39. What are the services that regularly are offered, supervised, evaluated and/or improved?
40. Do you have established a process to monitor individual student progress throughout the cycle of the degree?
41. Does your institution have a global information system (DB) for the effective management of their activities?
42. Which and what type of indicators includes your Internal Quality Assurance System?
43. What is the information offered to the public about the programs of study?
44. The information on evaluations carried out, is public?
45. From your point of view, how do you perceive the implementation of a quality culture and processes of quality assurance within your institution?
46. What is your perception about what is being done at national level?

47. In this context of changes within the university, do you think that is also changing the idea of university?
48. For you, what is the most tangible benefit which teachers and students gets through the application of quality assurance instruments at this university?
49. What are the challenges which will be faced in the near future this university, regarding the culture and processes of internal quality assurance?
50. Do you think that the information generated by the IQAS is enough for the relevant processes of decision-making?
51. In which way would align the quality assurance process with the improving student learning and / or services you offer?
52. Before closing, would you consider that on this path towards harmonization of higher education systems in Europe, we are moving away from diversity and approaching to the homogenization of the universities?
53. Finally, what would be your definition of quality education?