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# **Impact Evaluation of External Quality Assurance: Different Perspectives and Prospects for the Future**

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# Studies on QA in Europe: a brief history

The shifting (but also enduring) research interest in QA:

- 1) QA and (changed) governance of HE
- 2) QA and methods (control vs improvement)
- 3) QA and the human dimension (Q-culture...)
- 4) QA and impact on teaching and learning/students (learning outcomes)

## Impact evaluation – some considerations

- «Impact» of what? If «quality» means different things, we need impact studies that reflect this diversity
  - Many studies on QA and the impact on governance, power, people...
- «Impact» – only about causal relationships?
  - Higher education is a complex area, what about in-direct and unintended effects?

# Impact evaluation – some considerations

- Impact studies – just for accountability purposes?
- Impact studies for designing the next generation of QA systems.....
  - How change takes place
  - How changes are perceived
  - Who engage in change processes

# What do we know about impact of QA from previous studies?

- Power (centralization, identity, student interests enhanced)
- Professionalisation (formalization, «bureaucracy», routines established)
- Public relations (external communication, education put on the agenda)
- Permeability (transparency, informed decision-making)

# Impact studies: current empirical coverage

Dominant perspectives:

- Governance
- Organization
- Leadership
- (Culture)

Less visible perspectives:

- Student views (Quest...)
- Teaching and learning practices
- Academic results

## Enter: Learning outcomes.....

- A shift in political interest from «process» to «outcomes»
- Qualification frameworks are becoming more visible and more important in a number of countries
- The political emphasis on the link between higher education and the world of work is strengthened

# Learning outcomes and QA-frameworks

- Towards a global shift where QA is much more attentive to learning outcomes?
  - US example, transforming accreditation
  - Australian example, TEQSA and the new threshold standards
  - European examples, with perhaps Sweden as the extreme case (71% of agencies are «covering» LOs in their activities, Grifol et al. 2012)

# How dramatic will the shift to a learning outcome approach be for QA?

- Depends on whether learning outcomes should be understood as «pre-defined» or more «open ended»
- Depends on whether learning outcomes should be assessed at the individual or at the organizational/study program level

# Possible links between LOs and how these can be assessed through EQA

		Assessing learning outcomes at the	
		Individual level	Organizational level
Learning outcomes understood as	Predefined	Academic standards, tests,	Drop-out, completion rates, entry qualifications, employer satisfaction
	Open-ended	Attitudes, values, beliefs	Quality culture, leadership involvement, staff-student interactions

## Implications for impact studies

- Impact studies will provide QA with increased public legitimacy (or, not...)
- Impact studies will be expected to provide comparative information
- Impact studies can be a way of connecting the academic community closer to QA (beyond bureaucracy...)