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Impact Analysis of Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Methodology, Design and Preliminary Results

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- **Why** impact analysis of (external) quality assurance?
- Methodological options and **methodology** of (E)QA impact analysis in higher education institutions
- The **IMPALA project**
 - Partners
 - Research design
 - Objectives
 - The case studies
 - Project status and preliminary results
- **Conclusions**

Impact of (External) Quality Assurance

- More than two decades of external quality assurance (EQA)
- EQA is expected to have an impact on study programmes and institutions
- HEIs complain about high evaluation workload and need effective and efficient QA procedures (e.g., massification; economy measures in HE; national and global competition)
- Governments complain about evaluation costs

BUT

- Only **few** (*ex-post*) **impact analyses of EQA**
- **No simultaneous impact analyses** (accompanying EQA)
- **Students, teachers, QA staff are not considered** [focus on institutional leadership (and peer assessments)]
- **Need for know-how** about impact analysis in **QAAs** and **HEIs**

Why do we need impact analyses?

- Assessment **which part of EQA achieves its intended effects** in HEIs
 - Assessment **which part of EQA has which non-intended effects**
 - Assessment **in which ways** EQA impacts HEIs (“causal social mechanisms”)
- **Get empirically (more) reliable knowledge** about conjectured effects of EQA
- Further **professionalisation** of QA staff in QAAs and HEIs
- Insights for the **strategic and systematic improvement of EQA procedures**
- **Improving on efficiency and quality development in HEIs**
- However: new methods and instruments for QA agencies seem not to be in sight (exception, probably(?): CSS and “big data” approaches)

Typical EQA events of expected causal influence (coarse-grained)

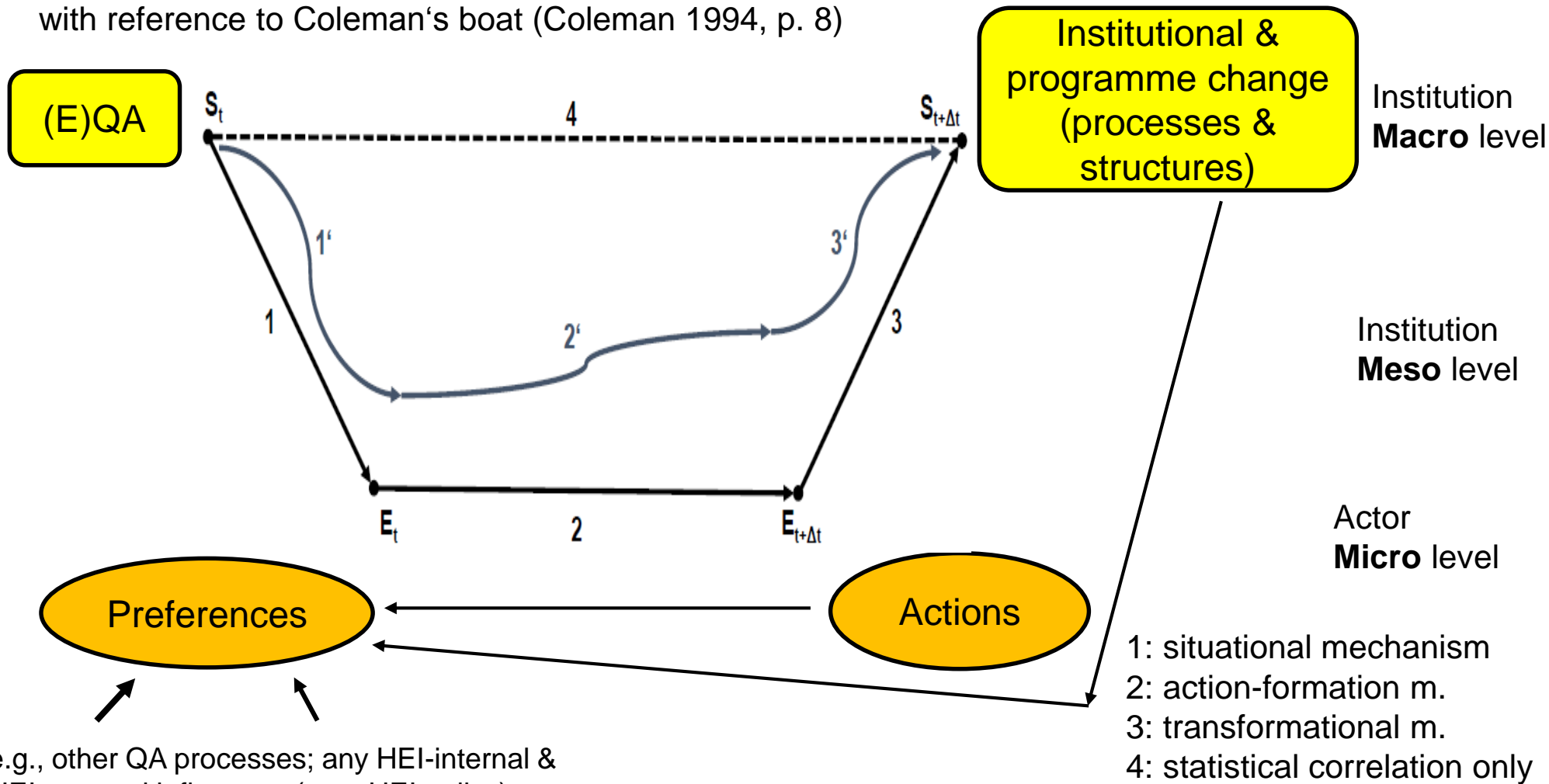
	Before	During	After
Criteria	Reflection (ideas for change); adjustment		
Self-evaluation		Reflection; (obvious, direct changes; adjustment)	
Exchange with peers		Reflection	
Assessment report		Reflection; (obvious, direct changes)	Reflection; recommendations for follow-up
Formal decision			Accreditation requirements (conditional accr.); follow-up with fulfillment
No formal decision			“Free” follow-up

Methodological options for impact analysis

- Experimental design – repeatability
 - Unfeasible for impact analysis of QA in HEIs
- Control group design – define control system (with intervention vs. without intervention)
 - Unfeasible for impact analysis of QA in HEIs
- **Before-after comparison design** – compare system after intervention with system before intervention
- **Ex-post analysis design** – gather information and assess system after QA procedure has ended

Causal social mechanisms model

with reference to Coleman's boat (Coleman 1994, p. 8)



e.g., other QA processes; any HEI-internal & HEI-external influences (e.g., HEI policy)

Methodological elements of impact analysis

- **Before-after comparison** design

Allows to analyse **if** and **when** and **how** an effect has been achieved

- **Causal mechanism hypotheses**

Allow to analyse how effects are achieved

- **Standardised surveys** with different target groups (academic staff, students, QA staff, leadership etc.)

Allow to analyse goals, processes, structures, preferences, actions and institutional & programme change

- **Structured interviews** with key actors

Allow to analyse causal mechanisms

- **Document analysis/observations**

Allow to analyse goals, processes, structures, actions and institutional & programme change

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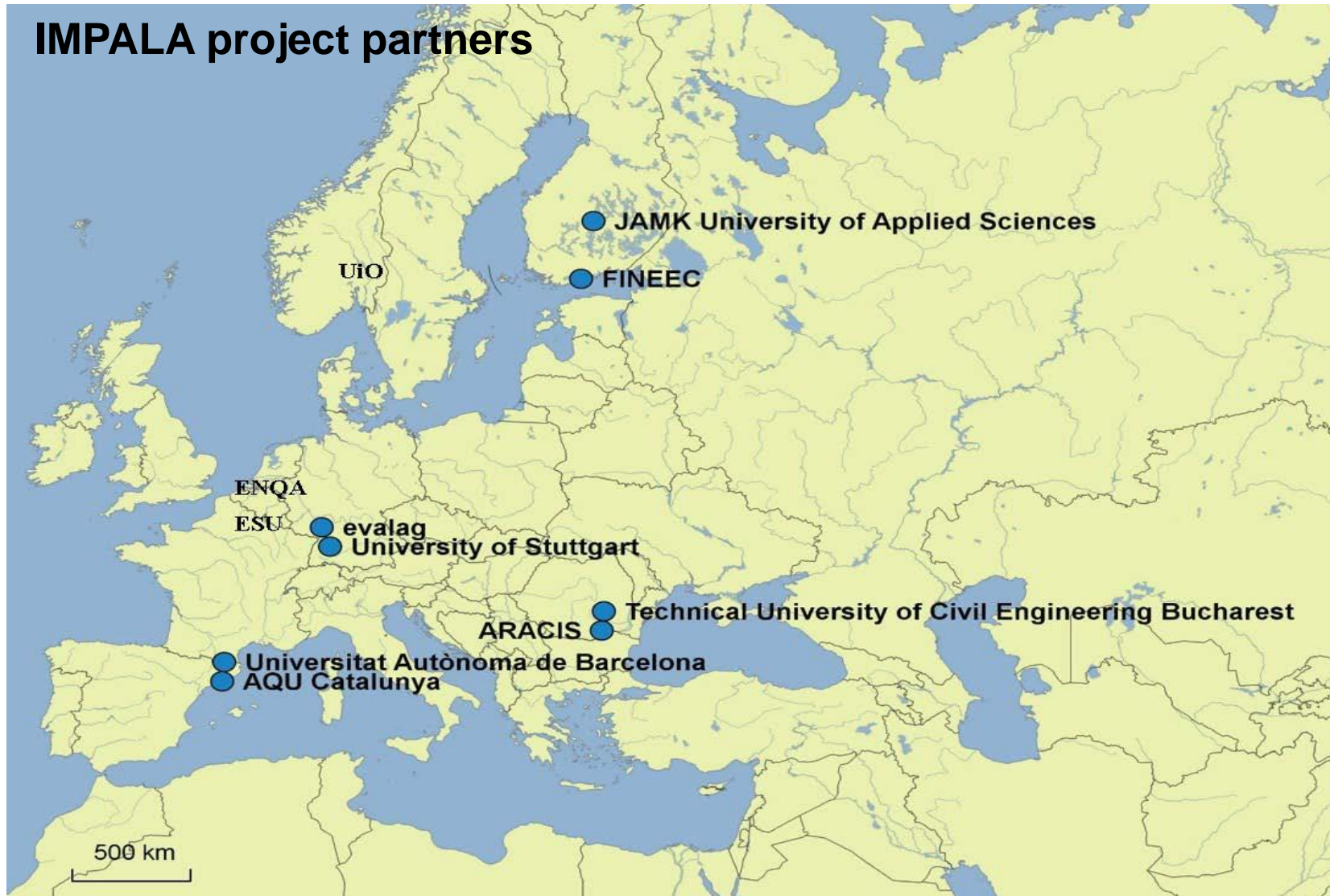
IMPALA Project

- “Impact Analysis of EQA Processes in HEIs” <http://www.evalag.de/impala>
- Funded by European Commission (LLP)
- Eight main project partners: four QAAs and four HEIs in four countries
 - **Finland:** FINEEC & Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences
 - **Germany:** evalag & University of Stuttgart
 - **Romania:** ARACIS & Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest
 - **Spain:** AQU Catalunya & Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
- Further partners
 - ENQA (**Brussels**)
 - ESU (**Brussels**)
 - Prof. Dr. Bjørn Stensaker (Univ. of **Oslo**)

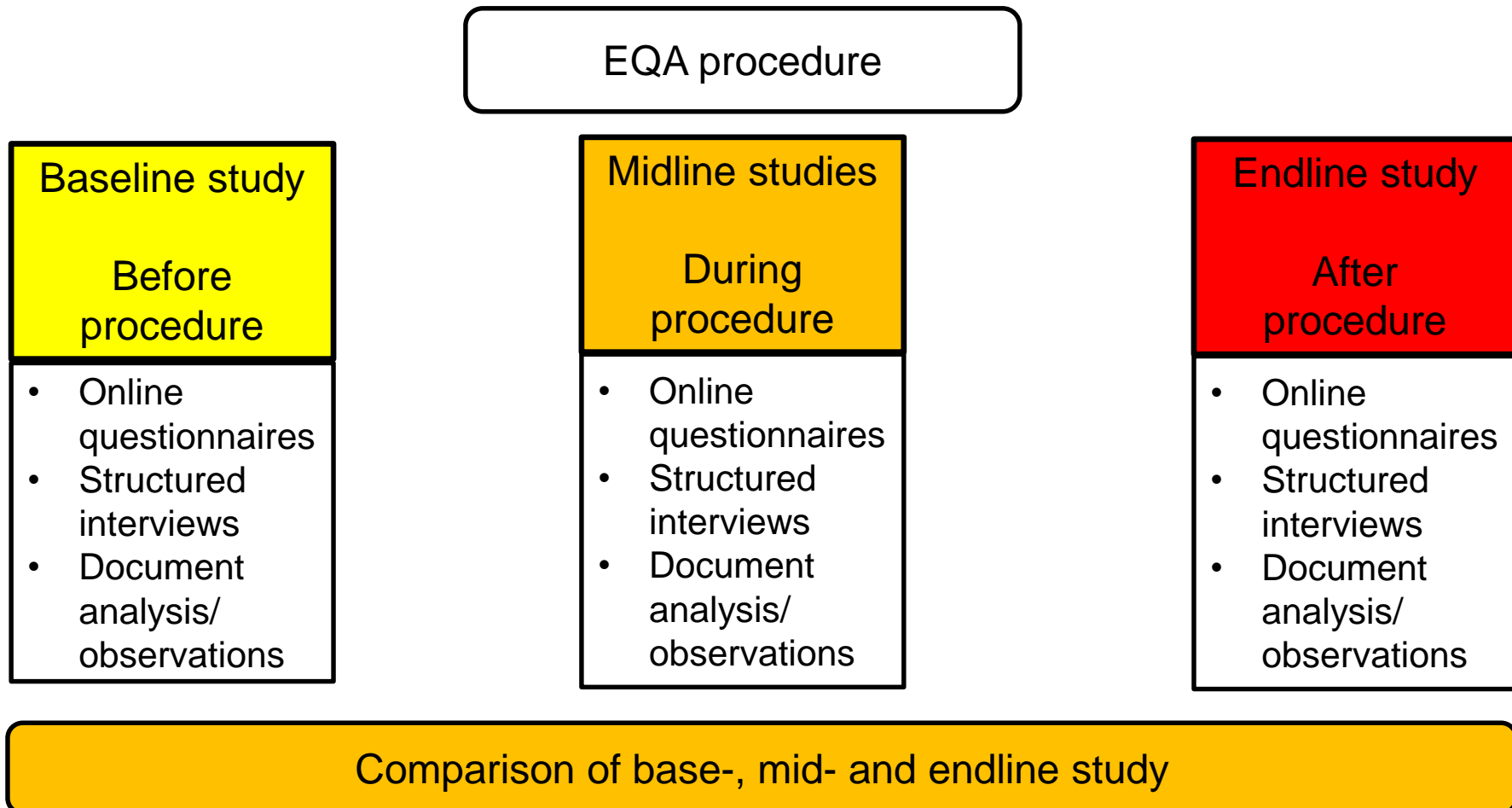


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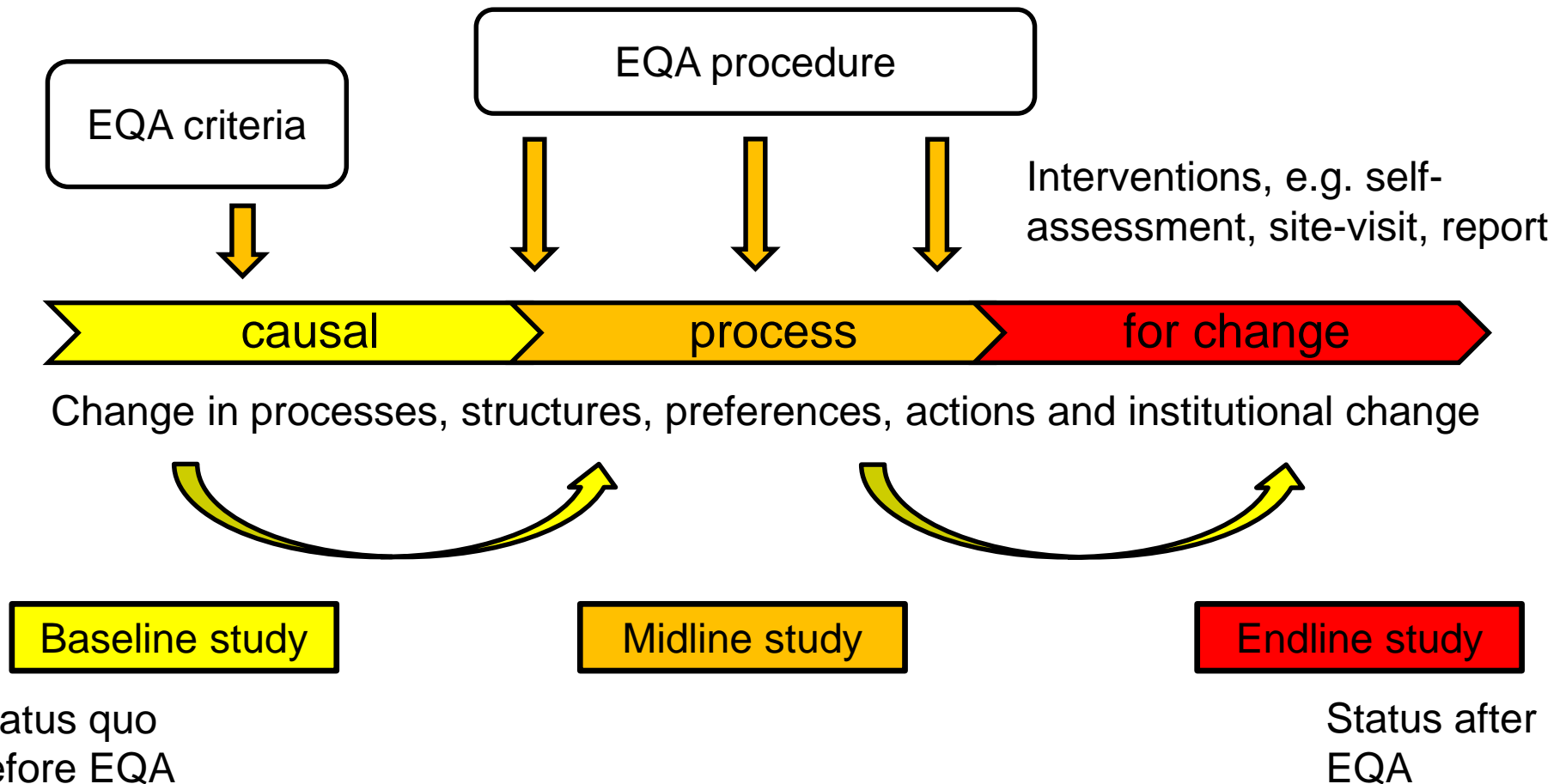
IMPALA project partners



IMPALA research design



IMPALA research design



IMPALA objectives

- Design of a **generic methodology** for impact analysis, that can be applied by QAAs
- **Publications** on state of the art of methodology and impact analysis results
- Application and test of the methodology in four **case studies** in the four partner HEIs
 - Different EQA procedures
 - Different national settings
- **Practical guide/manual** for impact analysis
 - Inform about methodological options
 - Present and describe exemplary survey instruments
 - Discuss strengths, threats and practice problems of methodology and application

IMPALA case studies

- Finland: international EURACE programme accreditation
- Germany: internal programme review process (module evaluation)
- Romania: national institutional audit and programme accreditation
- Spain: national programme (pre-)accreditation

IMPALA project status

- **Methodology developed**
- **European conference seminar held (May 2014)**
- **Baseline studies completed**
- **Midline studies currently running or planned for Summer 2015**
- **Two papers published**
 - Leiber, Theodor: **Evaluation of the Success or Failure of Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions: Methodology and Design.** In: The Journal of the European Higher Education Area 2/2014, pp. 39-74.
 - Leiber, Theodor: **Zur Methodologie der Wirkungsevaluation von Qualitätssicherung an Hochschulen.** In: W. Benz, J. Kohler, K. Landfried (Hg.) (2014) Handbuch Qualität in Studium und Lehre. Ausgabe Nr. 46(3), E 7.13, Berlin: Raabe, S. 41-80.
- **Special issue of *Quality in Higher Education* in preparation**
(“Impact Evaluation of QA in HE. Exploring Stakeholder Perspectives between Methodology, Policy and Practice”)

IMPALA preliminary results (baseline study)

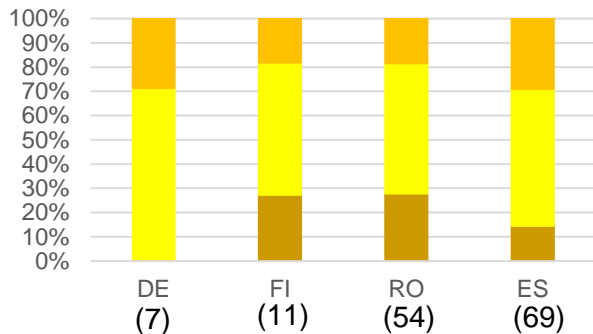
- Online questionnaire asks for
 - Preferences (attitudes), actions and institutional change (observations)
 - Observed change in the last year
 - Reasons for change
- Objective is to compare base-, mid-, and endline studies
- Stakeholders surveyed
 - Students
 - Academic staff (teachers)
 - QA staff
 - HEI leadership

IMPALA online questionnaire

- Questionnaire Items
 - Course type in study programme
 - QA instruments used in programme
 - Competence-oriented assessment
 - Discussions of study programme
 - Attitude towards internal QA
 - Attitude towards external QA
 - Perceived attitude of leadership towards QA
 - Observed impact and cost/benefit of QA

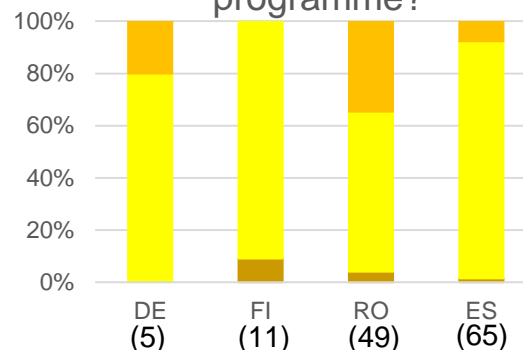
IMPALA sample results

How often do teachers of your study programme meet in order to discuss the further development of the study programme?



- Less than once a year
- At least once a year
- At least once every three months

Have you in the last year seen a change with respect to the frequency of teachers' meetings for further developing the study programme?

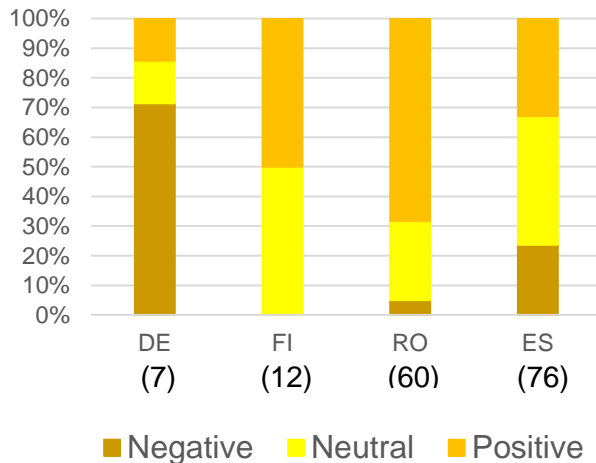


- Yes, the meetings became more frequent
- No, no changes
- Yes, the meetings became less frequent

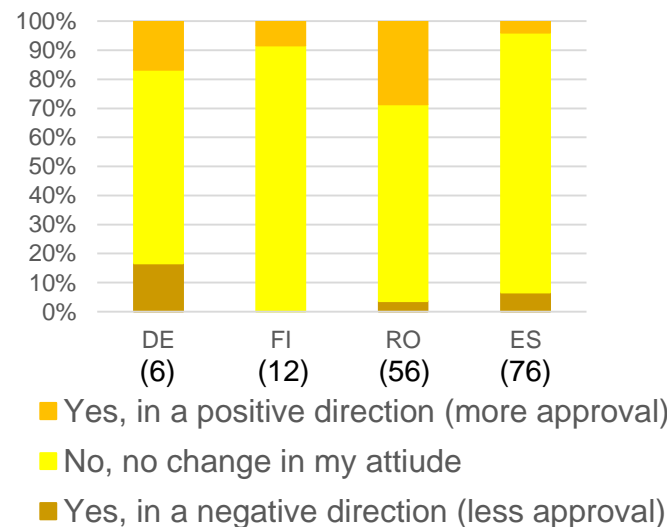
Who or what initiated the change?	
Frequency of responses	
RO	
- students	1
- teaching staff	13
- HEI management	7
External QA (e.g., accreditation)	2
Internal QA (e.g., surveys)	6
Legal requirements	0
External Stakeholders	0
ES	
- students	0
- teaching staff	2
- HEI management	2
External QA (e.g., accreditation)	2
Internal QA (e.g., surveys)	0
Legal requirements	1
External Stakeholders	0

IMPALA sample results

In general, what is your attitude towards external quality assurance and quality development in learning and teaching?



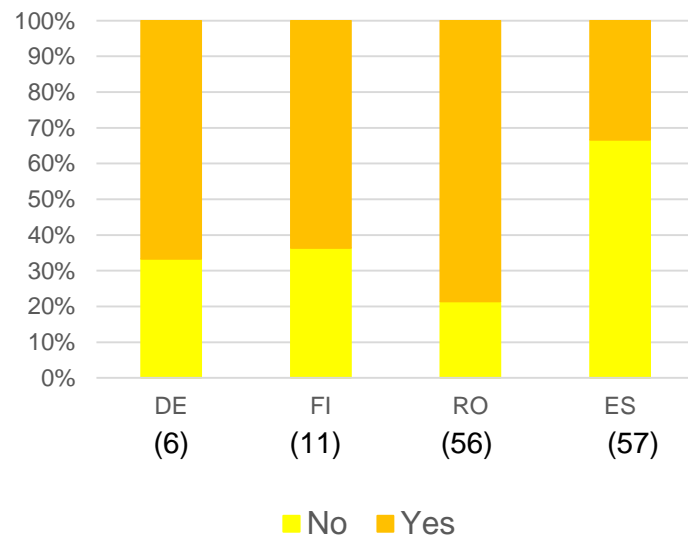
Has your attitude towards external quality assurance and quality development in learning and teaching changed in the last year?



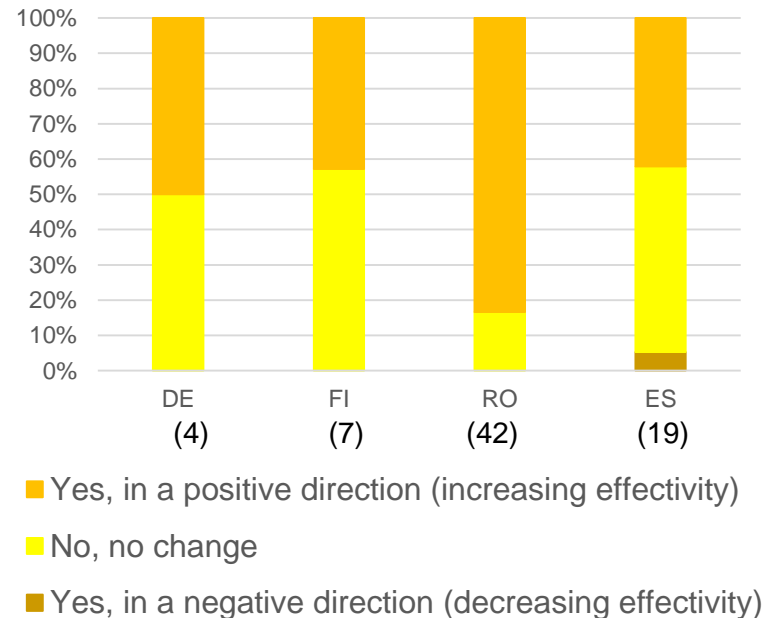
What has changed your attitude towards external quality assurance?	
Frequency of responses	
RO	
internal procedures of quality assurance	10
external procedures of quality assurance	8
Taking note of peer reports	6
ES	
internal procedures of quality assurance	2
external procedures of quality assurance	2
Taking note of peer reports	2

IMPALA sample results

Do the procedures of quality assurance and quality development in learning and teaching which are carried out in your HEI, have effects which are observable for you?



In your view, have these effects changed in the last year?



Conclusions

- Impact analysis (of QA in HE) is complex
- IMPALA methodology seems to be promising
- Baseline data of case studies demonstrate that
 - General attitudes towards EQA reported by stakeholders seem to be markedly different in different countries (e.g., more positive in Finland and Romania as compared to Germany and Spain)
 - (E)QA effects observed by stakeholders recently are not at all classified as negative
- Further research and a more detailed look at the available data is necessary
- IMPALA project is continued (until Autumn 2016)

Activity		Participants	Time & place
Special Issue of Quality in Higher Education	Seven papers on the state of the art of impact analysis in HE		2015
4th project meeting	Stocktaking and discussion of previous results Inspection of impact data	Project partners	06-07 Oct 2015 Barcelona (AQU Catalunya)
ENDLINE STUDY		Agencies + HEIs	Nov 2015 – February 2016
5th project meeting	Stocktaking and discussion of previous results Inspection of impact data Planning of conference	Project partners	Febr 2016 Bucharest (ARACIS)
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (in collaboration with ENQA)	Public conference to present and discuss project results	Project partners + keynote speakers + participants	April 2016 Barcelona (AQU Catalunya)
PROJECT PUBLICATION	Publication based on project and final conference	Project partners + keynote speakers	(June –) Sept 2016
Euro-Region training workshops	Four training workshops with QM managers, students, experts, and policy makers	evalag AQU ARACIS FINEEC	Sept 2016 Germany Spain Romania Finland

IMPALA project plan



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