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

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Impact of external QA

- More than two decades of external QA
- 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)
- BUT: Only few (*ex-post*) impact analyses of EQA
 - No systematic simultaneous analyses
 - Questionnaires and interviews
 - Focus on institutional leadership

Why do we need impact analyses?

- Assessment **whether** EQA has an impact on HEIs
 - Assessment **which** impact EQA has on HEIs
 - Assessment whether impact is **intended or non-intended**
 - Assessment **how** EQA impacts HEIs
 - Assessment **which part** of an EQA has an impact
- Insights for the strategic and systematic improvement of EQA procedures
- Insights for new methods and instruments of QA agencies

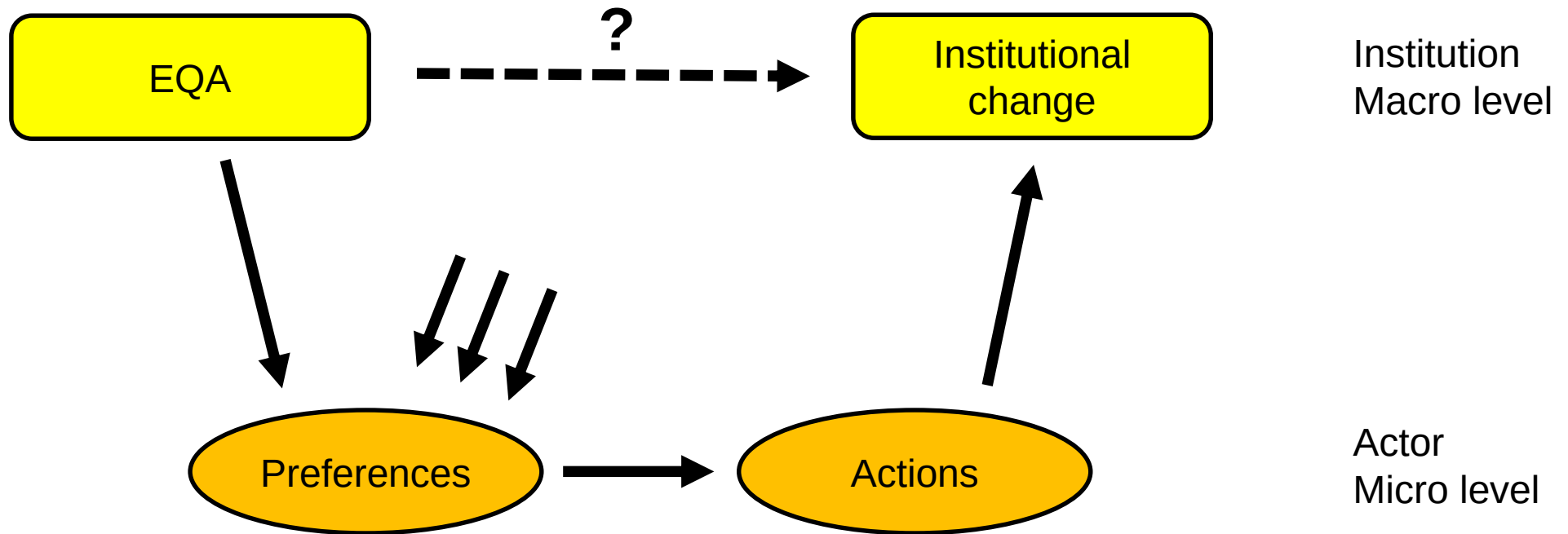
Expected impact of EQA

	before	during	after
criteria	adjustment reflection		
self-evaluation		reflection	
exchange with peers		reflection	
assessment report		reflection	reflection
formal decision			adjustment

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 – gather information and assess system after QA procedures has ended

Social action model



Social action model based on Coleman's boat (Coleman 1990)

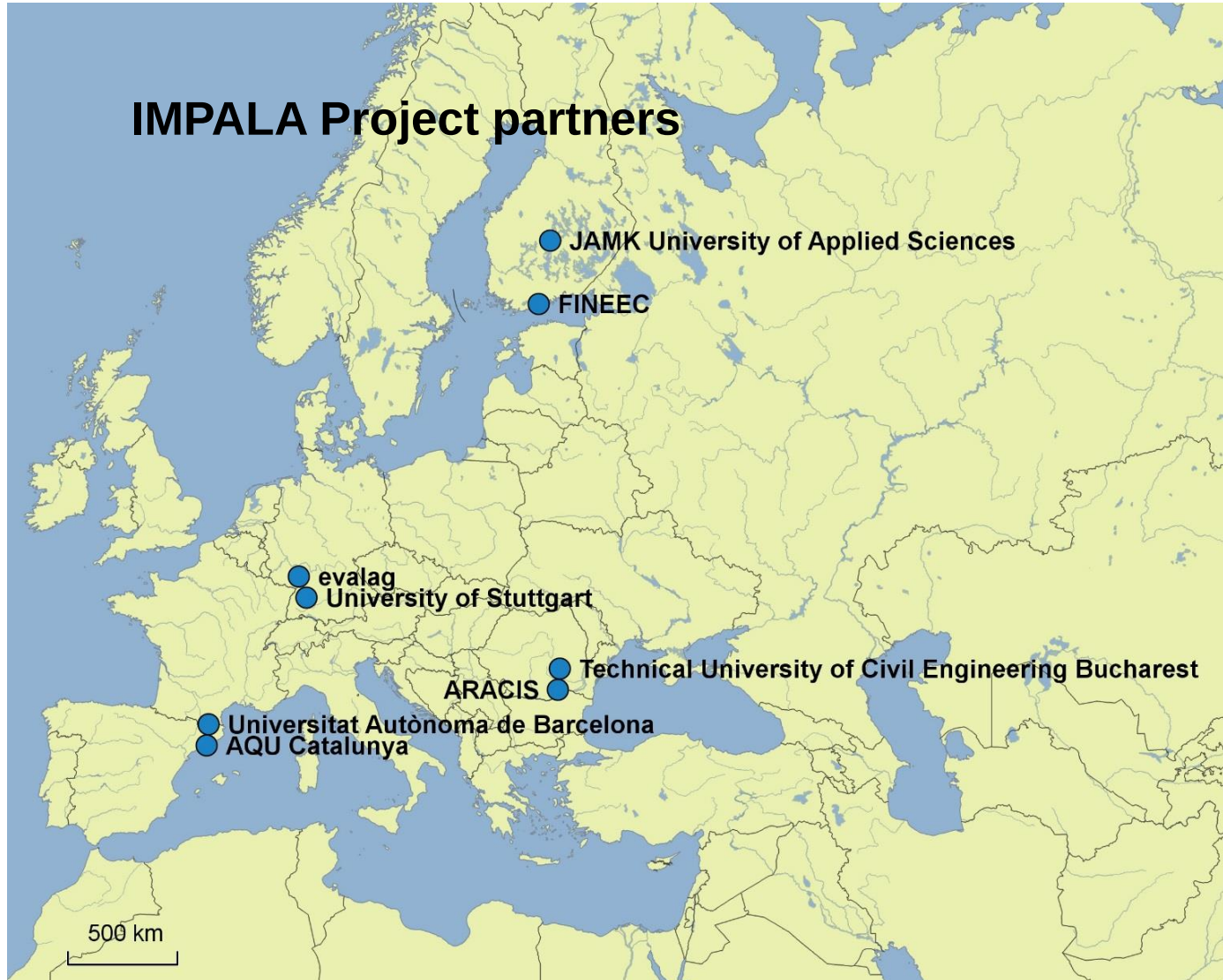
Methodological elements of an impact analysis

- Before-after comparison design
 - Allows to analyse if and when an impact has been achieved
- Standardised surveys with different target groups (academic staff, students, QA staff)
 - Allows to analyse preferences, actions and institutional change
- In-depth interviews with key actors
 - Allows to analyse causal mechanisms
- Document analysis/observations
 - Allows to analyse actions and institutional change

IMPALA Project

- **“Impact Analysis of External Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions”**
<http://www.evalag.de/impala>
- Project funded by the European Commission in the Lifelong Learning Programme
- Eight main project partners: four agencies 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

IMPALA Project partners



IMPALA research design

EQA procedure

Baseline study

Before
procedure

- Online questionnaire
- In-depth interviews
- Document analysis/ observations

Midline study

During
procedure

- Online questionnaire
- In-depth interviews
- Document analysis/ observations

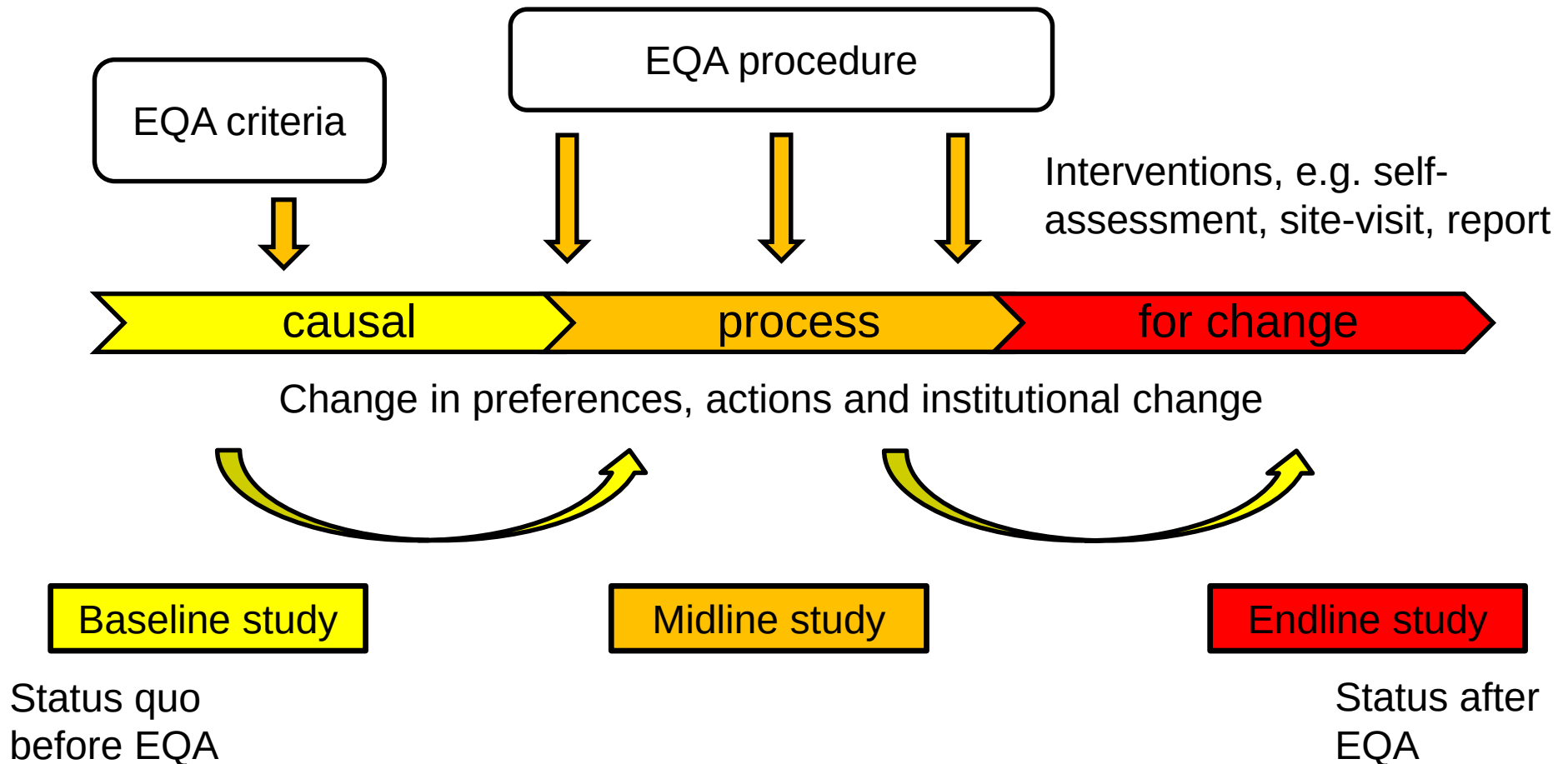
Endline study

After
procedure

- Online questionnaire
- In-depth interviews
- Document analysis/ observations

Comparison of base-, mid- and endline study

IMPALA research design



IMPALA objectives

- Design of a generic methodology for impact analysis, that can be applied by all agencies
- Application and test of the methodology in four case studies in the four partner HEIs
 - Different EQA procedures
 - Different national settings

IMPALA case studies

- Finland: international EURACE programme accreditation
- Germany: internal programme review process
- Romania: national institutional audit and programme accreditation
- Spain: national programme accreditation

IMPALA project status

- Methodology has been developed
- European conference seminar has been held
- Baseline study online questionnaire has been completed
Midline study is expected for Summer 2015
- Two papers have been 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.
- Journal special issue is in preparation (“Impact Evaluation of QA in HE. Exploring Stakeholder Perspectives between Methodology, Policy and Practice”)

IMPALA preliminary results (base-line study)

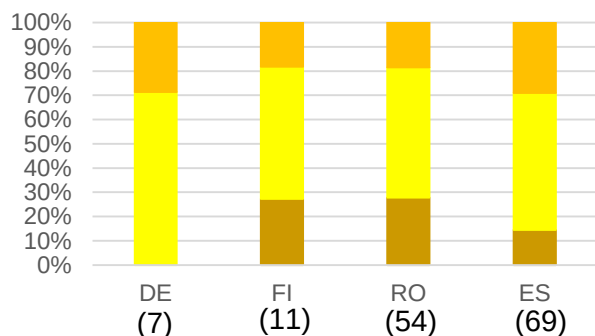
- Online questionnaire asks for
 - Preferences (attitudes), actions and institutional change (observations)
 - Observed change in the last year
 - Reasons for change
- Objective is to compare base-, mid-, and endline study
- Stakeholders asked
 - Students
 - Academic staff
 - QA staff
 - Leadership

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

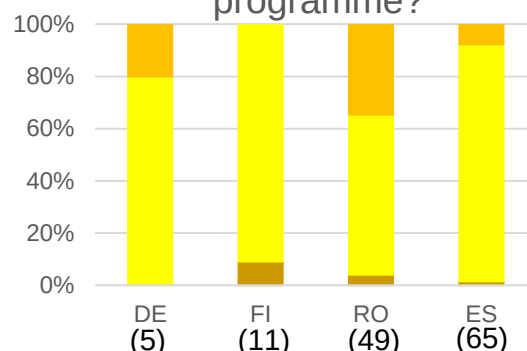
IMPALA sample results

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?



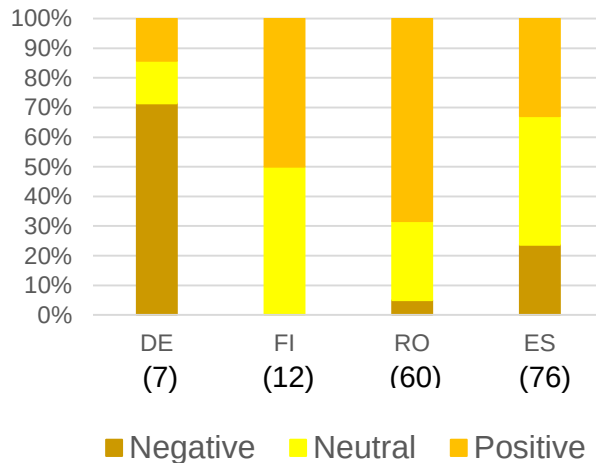
- Yes, the meetings became more frequent
- No, no changes
- Yes, the meetings became less frequent

Who or what initiated the change?

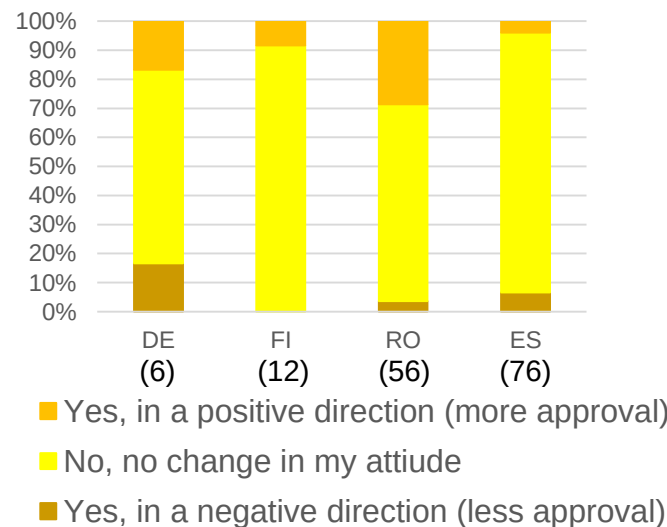
Frequency of responses	
RO	
- students	1
- teaching staff	13
- HEI management	7
External QA (e.g., accreditation)	2
Internal QA (e.g., surveys)	6
Legal requirements	0
External Stakeholders	0
ES	
- students	0
- teaching staff	2
- HEI management	2
External QA (e.g., accreditation)	2
Internal QA (e.g.,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



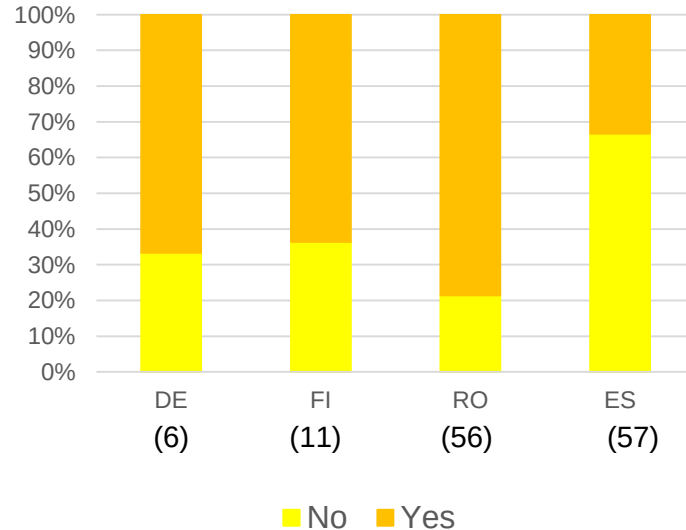
Has your attitude towards external quality assurance and quality development in learning and teaching changed in the last year?



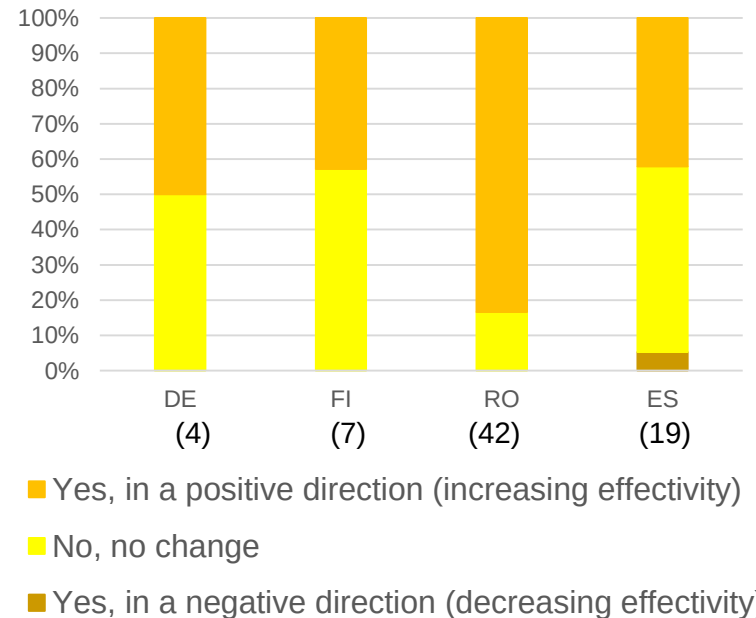
What has changed your attitude towards external quality assurance?	
Frequency of responses	
RO	
internal procedures of quality assurance	10
external procedures of quality assurance	8
Taking note of peer reports	6
ES	
internal procedures of quality assurance	2
external procedures of quality assurance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