

# Enhancing Quality: Fidelity and Context



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Identifying barriers in promoting European Standards  
and Guidelines for Quality Assurance at institutional level

## Project IBAR

### About the project

Assuring quality of teaching and learning activities is the quintessential task that higher education institutions must face in an increasingly competitive national and international environment. Adoption of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#) in 2005 has added new momentum to research in the quality assurance policy domain.

So far, the corresponding research has centred on national (quality assurance agencies), not institutional level, and lacked the outreach to secondary education as well as the theoretical base. The project aims to fill in this gap in theoretical and empirical knowledge and to identify barriers to the ESG Part 1 implementation, and, based on that, to provide recommendations to modification of this document. The research will be done on a sample of 28 HEIs in 7 European countries (CZ, UK, LV, PT, PL, SK, NL).

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The IBAR project is funded by the European Commission under the EACEA programme to identify barriers in promoting the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) at institutional level.

The research is being undertaken from a sample of 28 higher education institutions in 7 European countries.



# Project Partners

- **CZ** CHES Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague
- **UK** CAP Centre for Academic Practice, Durham University
- **LV** University of Latvia
- **PT** CIPES Center for Research in Higher Education Policies
- **NL** CHEPS Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente
- **PL** Warsaw School of Economics
- **SL** Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra

# ESG



- Berlin Communiqué 19 September 2003
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
- ESG Part 1 - European Standards and Guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions



# ESG Part 1

- 1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance
- 1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
- 1.3 Assessment of students
- 1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff
- 1.5 Learning resources and student support
- 1.6 Information systems
- 1.7 Public Information

# Work Packages

- WP 5 Internal Quality Assurance Systems (LV)
- WP 6 Quality and Access (UK)
- WP 7 Quality and Student Assessment (CZ)
- WP 8 Quality and Management/Governance (PT)
- WP 9 Stakeholders and Quality (NL)
- WP 10 Quality and Teaching Staff (PL)
- WP 11 Quality and Information (SK)
- WP 12 Quality and Secondary Education (UK & CZ)

# WP6 Quality and Access

1. What is the institutional policy on access? To what extent does your institutional policy align with national policy? How is information made available to the secondary sector?
2. What data do you collect on offers/enrollments/non-completion/graduates? Within the student profile of your institution, can you disaggregate this data to provide information on different cohorts (e.g. mature learners, learners with disabilities, different ethnic groups)?
3. What is done to support the admission and progression of distinct cohorts of students? How does this vary by academic programme? Distinct cohorts might include: lower socio-economic groups, ethnic minorities, non-native language speakers, mature students, students with disabilities



# WP6 Quality and Access

4. How has the pattern of enrolments changed in the last decade (by academic programme/cohort)? What are perceived to be the main drivers of change?
5. Have any of these developments altered the approach to the way that your university manages quality?
6. Where does responsibility lie for ensuring and monitoring access?
7. Are there any problematic issues surrounding access and quality in your system?

# WP 10: Quality and Teaching Staff (PL)

Q1. What is the institutional policy on assuring quality of teaching staff? How it is related to the national rules concerning QA and employment?

Q2. What are the criteria of staff recruitment and appointment procedures? How do they assure the quality of teaching?

Q3: How is the HEI supporting the quality of teaching performance?

Q3a: How is the HEI supporting the development of teaching skills?

Q3b: How is the HEI supporting the quality of teaching performance by modernisation of teaching equipment , size of groups, etc. ?

# WP 10: Quality and Teaching Staff (PL)

Q4: How is the quality of teaching performance assessed? How is the assessment undertaken? How does the HEI use the results of the assessment?

Q5: How are teachers motivated by the HEI to assure and improve the quality of their teaching?

Q6: Who is (and what does it mean to be) a good university teacher?

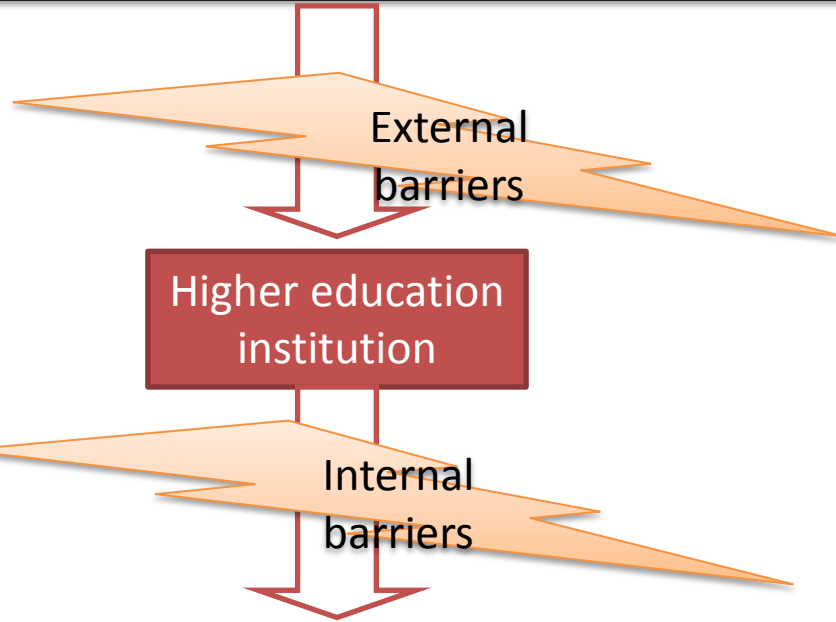
# Barriers to Implementation



Context



(Westerhuiden 2011)

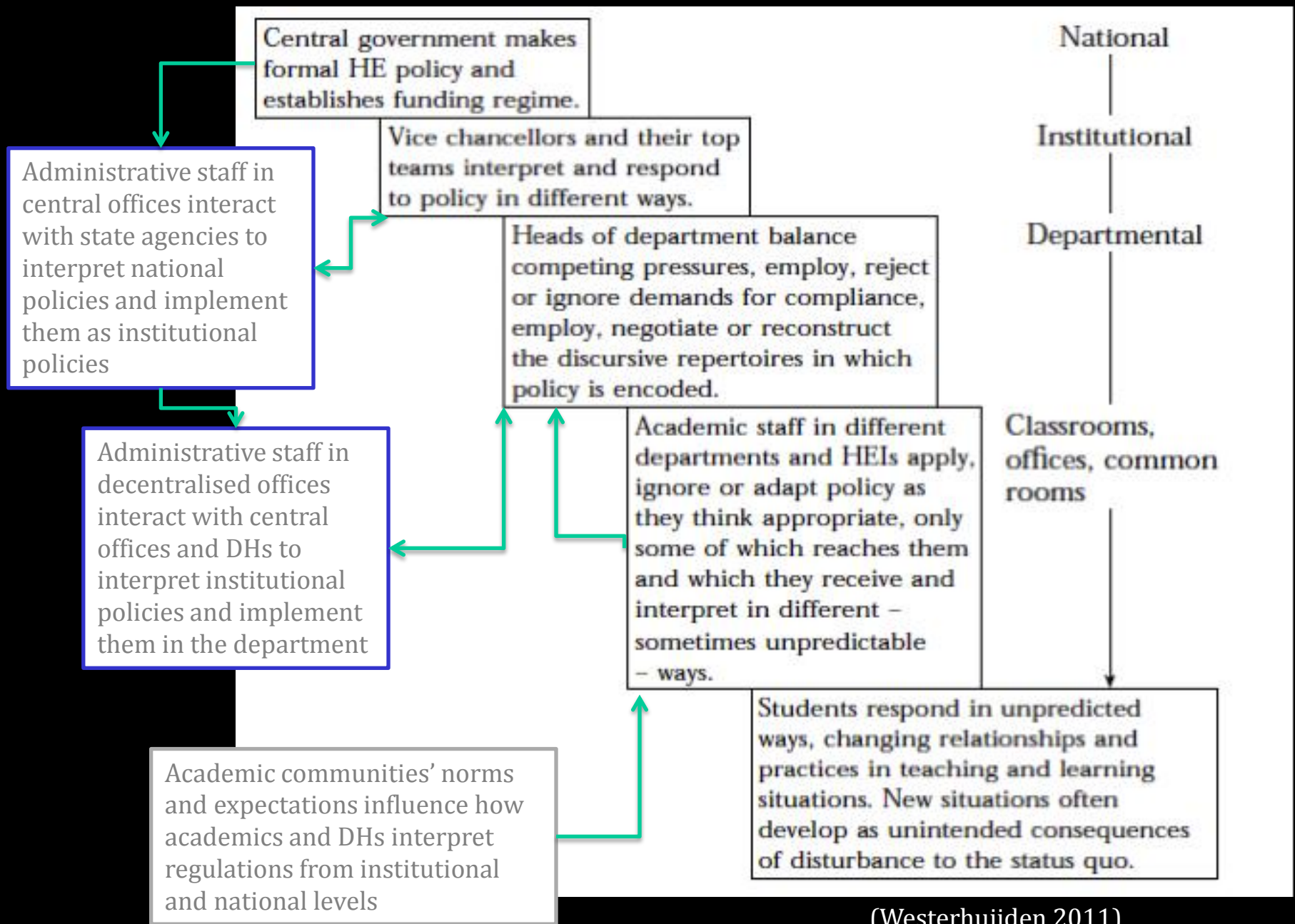


Education quality



# Conceptual Lenses

- Implementation theory (Reynolds & Saunders 1985)
- Instrument –context theory (Kohoutek 2011)
- Street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 2010)
- The nature of barriers & drivers - historical, political, social, cultural, ontological, discursive  
(Meyer & Land 2005, Westerhuijden 2011)



Academic oligarchy

Government

Market / Society

Bologna Process actors

Academic side

Administrative side



barriers:  
1...5 =  
external  
a...b =  
internal

National authorities

Higher Education institution

Academic side

Administrative side

Stakeholders:  
Students, alumni  
2ary education  
Employers,  
professions, etc.



Department / study programme

Academic side

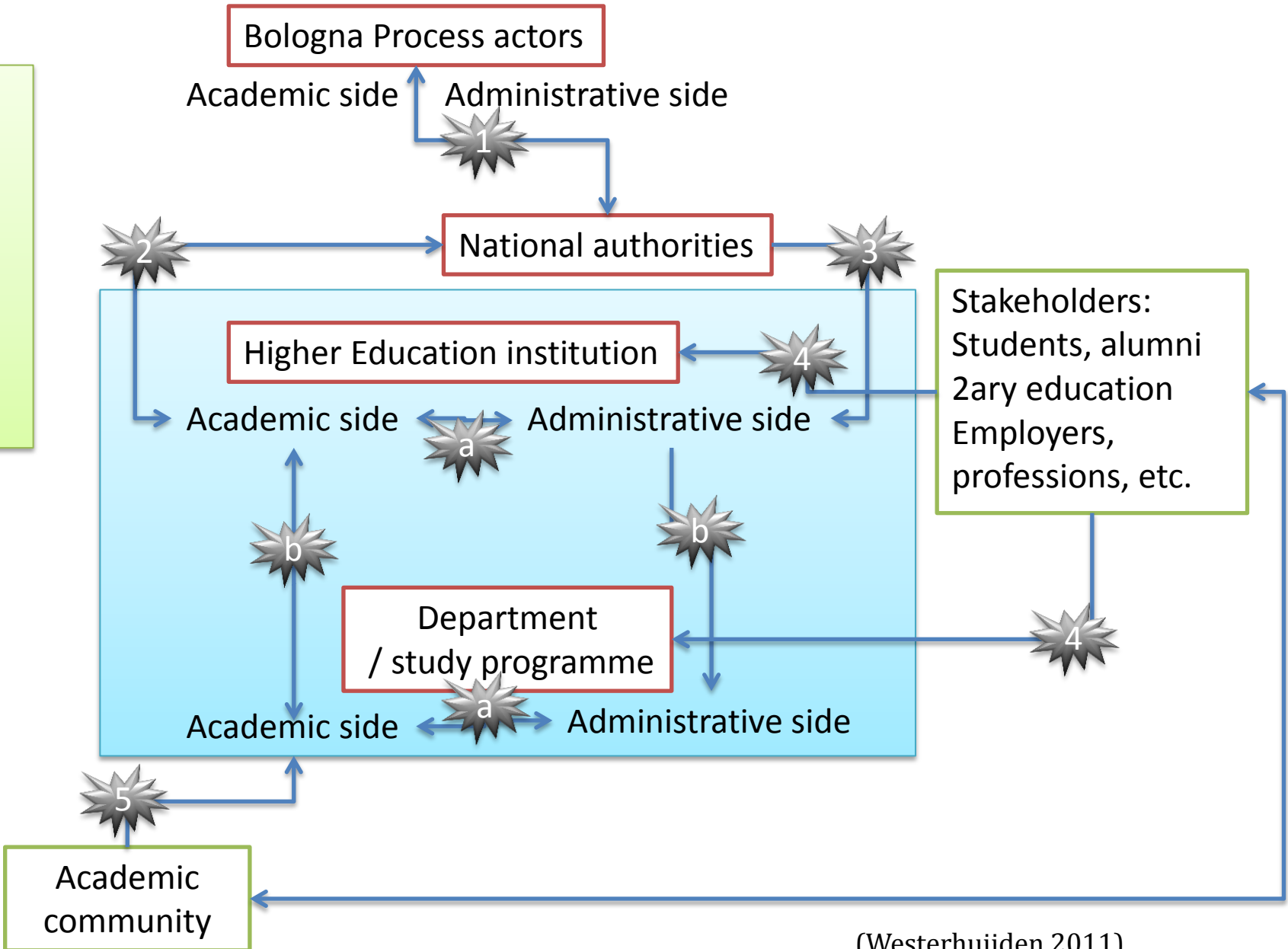
Administrative side



Academic community



(Westerhuijden 2011)

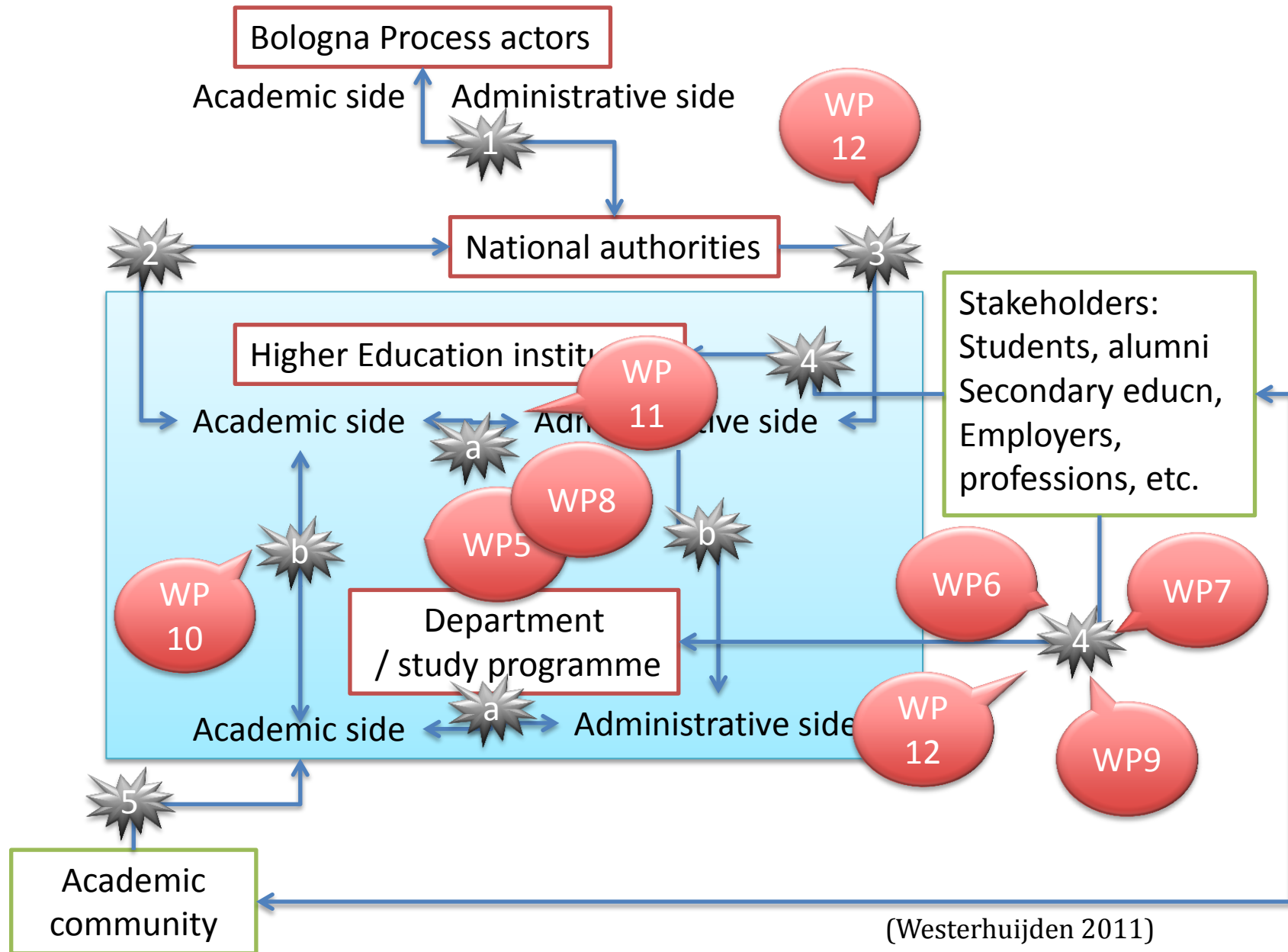




Academic oligarchy

Government

Market / Society



# Barriers

## External

1. Bologna Process vs. national authorities
2. national academic vs. institutional academic
3. national administrative vs. institutional administrative
4. stakeholders vs. institution
5. academic community vs. local department

## Internal

- a. academic vs. administrative sides
- b. central vs. department / programme

## Barriers in Governance

‘...the legal framework could be further developed to foster the interpretation/translation of ESG into national legislation and institutional practices. For example, the Czech Republic recognised a somewhat passive role of the state bodies (i.e. the Ministry and the Accreditation Commission)’.



‘..there is a fine borderline between a national initiative that allegedly contributes to raise awareness and the consequences of national top-down movements which can have perverse effects, as was the case in Poland. National top-down movements may not favour the development of institutional quality cultures, thus weakening the motivation for their development’.

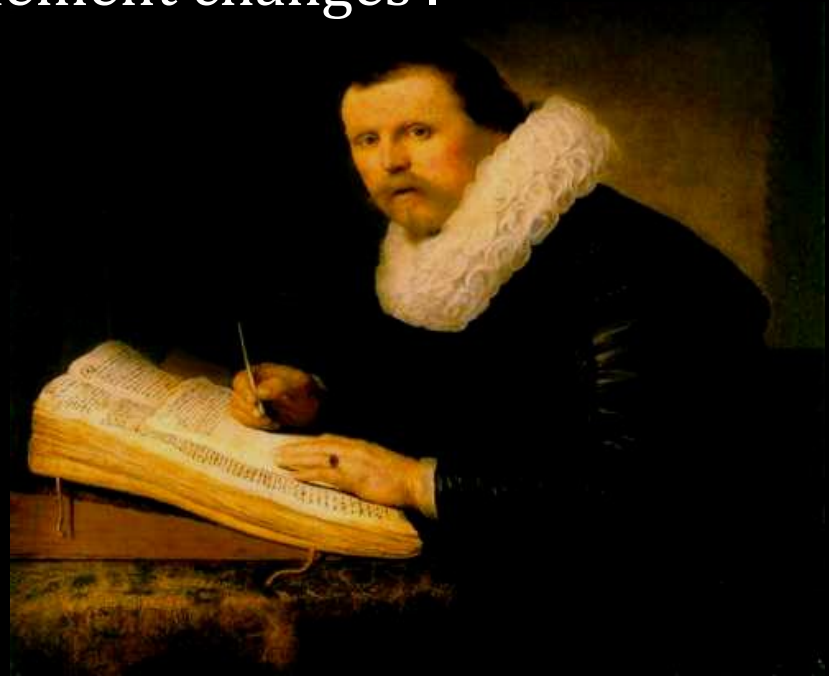


‘These preliminary remarks point to the fact that national structures and processes of governance are probably better understood taking into account national and institutional specificities and priorities’.



‘at institutional level, it is apparent that there is a tension between the development of a quality culture and centralised control management (LV, PT, NL, SK)’.

‘In the case of Slovakia and Latvia there generally seems to be a lack of staff motivation, or inertia, and a lack of flexibility to implement changes’.



‘In the UK, there is a the potential for tension between the increased ‘marketisation’ of higher education and new pressures on governance systems. These pressures include increased levels of external scrutiny and accountability measures, diversification of business bases (for example through partnerships with other providers) and commercialisation of university assets’.



‘There is little evidence from this study however that there has been much serious attempt to rethink governance arrangements to reflect these changes and some concern that certain constituencies of students and other stakeholders may be affected.’





# Barriers to Access

- Shortcomings within national legislation and policy
- Lack of institutional autonomy
- Insufficient inclusion of specific groups
- Costs and insufficient funding for widening participation activities
- Potential barriers within national contexts  
(eg.CZ labour market needs, LV demographics, funding inconsistencies , high emigration, PL currently no means of identifying ethnic minorities or students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, etc)

# Possible recommendations on Access

- Include access as a key dimension of a revised set of *Standards and Guidelines*.
- Encourage higher education institutions to take 'ownership' of access, embedding a culture of good practice in this area.
- Introduce greater capacity for HEIs to choose their students directly.
- Encourage higher education institutions to track their students
- Improve outreach measures
- Promote inclusion

# Barriers to effective Student Assessment

- *'Old habits die hard'*: policy histories and path dependencies. Strong recurrent practices remain. *(institutional level)*.
- *'We want to do it our way'*: considerable variation in aspects of assessment practices (eg single/multiple examiners, student absence, class participation, exam enrolment, marking and grading) *(institutional level)*.



*'There is only assessment of higher education students':* limited reflection on assessment practices within the secondary education sector (especially pertinent in case of secondary supply schools) *(institutional level)*.

*'Learning outcomes as a fashion':* top-down imposition of learning outcome-oriented strategies for curricular modification, limiting individual initiatives and fostering a compliance culture *(institutional, national)*.



*'The ESG are what?': limited awareness of the ESG  
(institutional, national, international).*

*'Learning outcomes are what?': different  
understandings and interpretations of learning  
outcomes (institutional, national, international).*



# Contexts of enhancement

1. High Fidelity approach
2. Low Fidelity approach
3. Managerial approach
4. Consumerist approach

# 1. High fidelity approach

<b>Context</b>	<b>Informing notion</b>	<b>Idea of quality</b>	<b>Gains</b>	<b>Risks</b>	<b>Trust</b>
<b>High Fidelity</b>	convergence, and alignment	consistency, conformity to standard	coherence, consistency and reliability	stifles innovation, insufficiently context-sensitive, tokenism, compliance	low trust of variation

## 2. Low fidelity approach

Context	Informing notion	Idea of quality	Gains	Risks	Trust
<b>Low Fidelity</b>	importance of context, tolerance of variation	engagement, innovation, variation	taps into grain of practice, impact on practitioners, fosters motivation, sense of ownership, relevance	restricted to specific enclaves, practice fragmented	high trust of local practice



# 3. Managerial approach

Context	Informing notion	Idea of quality	Gains	Risks	Trust
<b>Managerial</b>	effective resource deployment, 'joined-upness'	transformed practice	better matching of resources to strategies, greater efficiencies	resistance, conflict, 'noise', non-compliance, judicious subversion	low trust of local practice

# 4. Consumerist approach

<b>Context</b>	<b>Informing notion</b>	<b>Idea of quality</b>	<b>Gains</b>	<b>Risks</b>	<b>Trust</b>
<b>Consumerist</b>	market competition, institutional positioning, strong brand, eg excellence	fitness for purpose, value for money	student-centred provision, consumer satisfaction, improvement of student learning	distortion by the market, stifling of innovation, reputational damage	high trust of the market







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# Implications for ESG



## What needs to be High Fidelity?

- Access arrangements to ensure social inclusion?
- Transition arrangements to ensure mobility?
- Student assessment?

## What might better be left as Low Fidelity?

- Enhancement of teaching quality? (cf UK PSF)
- Aspects of institutional governance?
- Student assessment?

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<http://www.ibar-llp.eu/homepage.html>

