

Overcoming The Barriers to Achieving Quality in Higher Education: a European Perspective

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Project

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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 will be done on a sample of 28 HEIs in 7 European countries (CZ, GB, LV, PT, PL, SK, NL).

In concrete terms, the objectives of the project are as follows:

- a) description of policy practise at institutional level;
- b) identification of barriers of the ESG Part 1 implementation at institutional level in the following domains: access, student participation, institutional governance and management, employers including private sector, teaching staff, information systems, quality and secondary education;
- c) comparison of similarities and differences in the ESG Part 1 implementation;
- d) analysis of the impact of the ESG Part 1 implementation on secondary education;
- e) formulation of recommendations on ESG Part 1 modification, including the pertaining guidelines;
- f) publication of the book and the final synthesis report;
- g) dissemination of examples of good (best) practice. These project outputs will aid in informed policy-making in the quality assurance domain, with respect to facilitation of the implementation of the ESG Part 1 in particular, i.e. ENQA (and partners), management of HEIs, chairs of secondary schools, ministries of education, interested higher education research community.

Project

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For team members

IBAR Funding by EC

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

- CZCHES 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

Each national team works with four higher education institutions on each work package



Modes of Enquiry

- Semi-structured interviews
- Questionnaires
- Focus Groups
- The personnel involved are chosen in accordance with the demands of the particular work package.

Use of data:

- National legal documents
- National Higher Education Acts
- Regional documents
- Institutional documents such as Strategic Plans

Work Packages

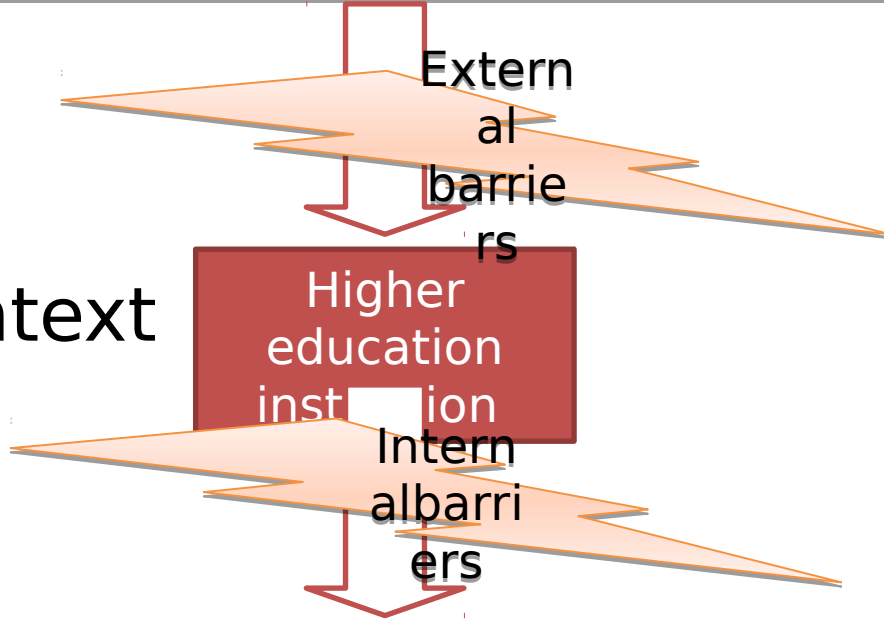
- WP 5 Internal Quality Assurance Systems (LV)
- WP 6 Quality and Access (UK)
- WP 7 Quality and Student Assessment (CZ)
- WP 8 Quality and Management/Governance (PT)
- WP 9 Stakeholders and Quality (NL)
- WP 10 Quality and Teaching Staff (PL)
- WP 11 Quality and Information (SK)
- WP 12 Quality and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

Context

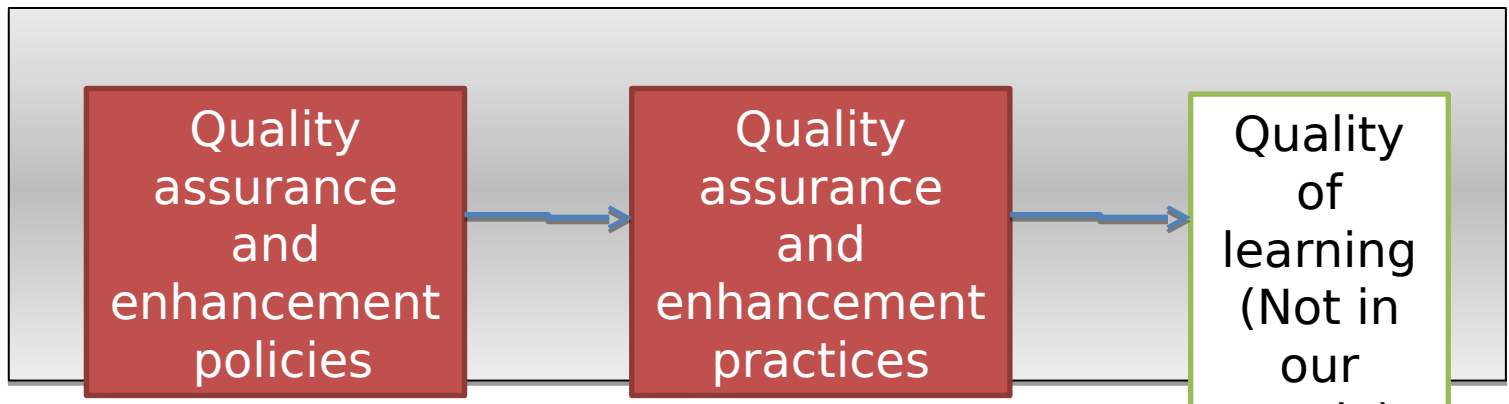


(Westerhuijden 2011)

The Quality Context



Education quality



Conceptual Lenses

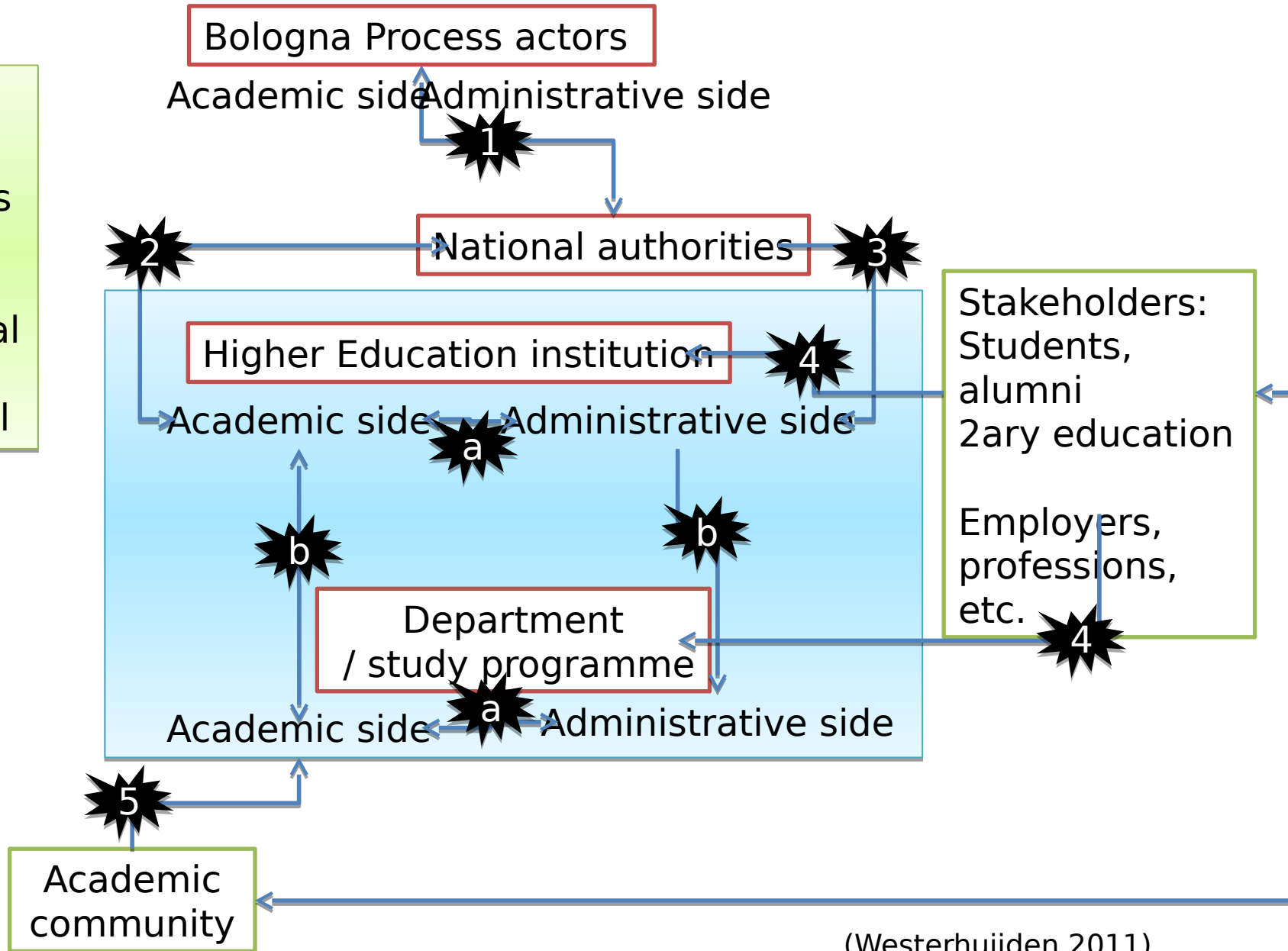
- Implementation theory (Reynolds & Saunders 1985)
- Instrument -context theory (Kohoutek 2011)
- Street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 2010)
- The nature of barriers & drivers - historical, political, social, cultural, ontological, discursive (Meyer & Land 2005, Westerhuijden 2011)

Academic oligarchy

Government

Market / Society

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

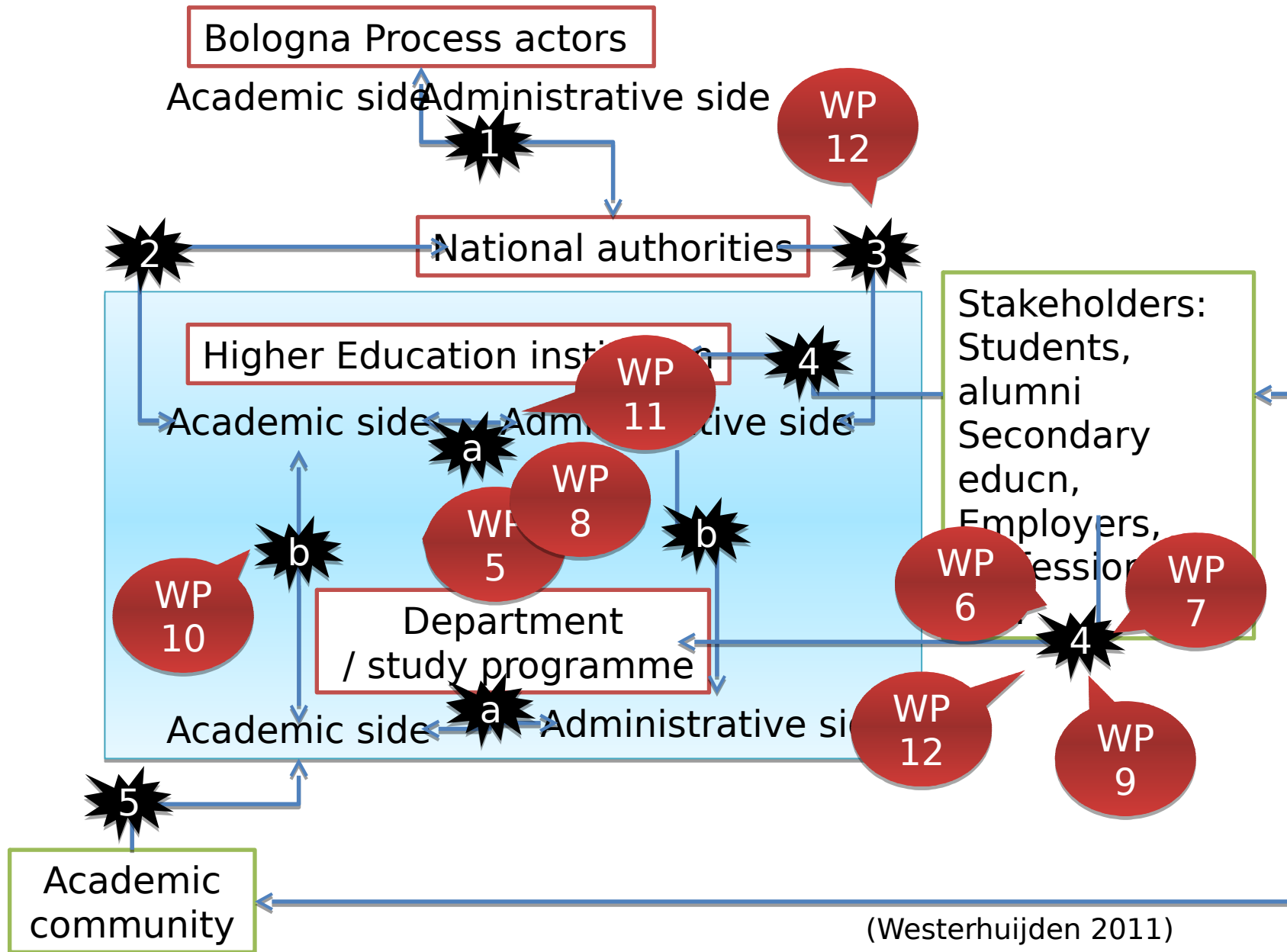


(Westerhuijden 2011)

Academic oligarchy

Government

Market / Society



Areas of Study

- Management and Governance
- Stakeholders
- Access
- Academic Staff
- The interface with secondary education

Management and Governance

The Context

- A competitive higher education market
- Increased transparency and stratification
- Moves towards accreditation with an emphasis on accountability and student satisfaction
- Quality assurance more formalised, more centralised and more managerial

Management and Governance

The Findings

- Changes in legal framework/government policy in last 5 years
- Modernisation of governance structures
- Simplification of committee structures
- Hybrid quality cultures - top-down/bottom-up
- Centralisation and formalisation
- Development of institutional quality management promotes the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance



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Stakeholders

The Context

- Roles of non-academic stakeholders strengthened
- Cost sharing: student as consumer
- Growth in interaction with the community
- Growth in executive centralised decision-making powers
- Collegial bodies becoming advisory with weakening of decision-making powers

Stakeholders

The Findings

- National regulations for stakeholders common
- Students now the most prominent group
- Evidence of increasing involvement of all groups of external stakeholders
- Representation of students and international external peers on quality assurance committees
- State and regional public authorities viewed as stakeholders in some countries
- Stakeholders from diverse categories providing learning opportunities, research links as well as strategy setting

Access

The Context

- Expansion of graduate jobs
- Equality legislation and fair access
- Student demand
- The global knowledge race
- Capacity building

Access

The Findings

- National legislation
- Impact of the financial crisis
- Widening participation activities to be funded by HEIs
- Lack of institutional autonomy in some countries
- Encouragement of private HE but quality assurance important

Academic Staff

The Context

- Changes in the delivery of learning
- Movement to student-centred concept
- Development of learning outcomes and competencies for every course
- Competing pressures to teach and to research
- Accountability: powerful quality agencies
- Obligatory initial training for teaching staff widespread

Academic Staff

The Findings

- Legislative pressures to develop a quality culture
- Inadequate earnings in some countries
- Excessive workload in some countries
- High staff motivation to develop new teaching and learning approaches in some countries
- Responsiveness to student satisfaction surveys important
- Professional skill development expected

The Higher Education Interface with Secondary Education The Context

- Mass entry to higher education
- Diversity of educational backgrounds
- Transparency and availability of information
- Limited systematic support for formal links
- Government policy to widen participation

The Higher Education Interface with Secondary Education The Findings

- Provision of information
- Preparatory liaison work with secondary schools
- Co-delivery of learning
- Summer schools
- Pre-university education including subject specific activities
- Curriculum design
- Specialist support

Conclusion

- Meeting future challenges
 - Global context
 - Population movement
 - Information exchange and transparency
- Establishing quality in European higher education
- Establishing fair access and maintaining a cohesive, equitable society
- European Higher Education Area

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Acknowledgement

The speaker wishes to acknowledge the support of the research teams drawn from the seven European countries referred to –

Czech Republic, UK, Latvia, Portugal, Poland, Slovakia and the Netherlands.

And the support of the European Commission that enabled this work to be undertaken : ref. 511491-LLP-1-2010-1-CZ-KA1-KA15CR.

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