

## Greek quality assurance challenges beyond 2010

**Antigoni Papadimitriou**, PhD Candidate CHEPS/ University of Twente, The Netherlands and Research Teaching staff member, Department of Economics, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, Greece, [a.papadimitriou@utwente.nl](mailto:a.papadimitriou@utwente.nl), [antigoni@econ.auth.gr](mailto:antigoni@econ.auth.gr), tel. 00306944261326, fax 0030-2310-996452

**Dr. Don F. Westerheijden**, Senior Research Associate, Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), School of Management and Governance, University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands, P.O. Box 217, NL-7500 AE Enschede, [d.f.westerheijden@utwente.nl](mailto:d.f.westerheijden@utwente.nl), Tel. 0031 53 489 3263, fax. 0031 53 434 0392, [www.utwente.nl/cheps](http://www.utwente.nl/cheps)

### Abstract

This paper covers the “meta-quality assurance law” period (2006-2009) in Greek higher education and offers a dialogue of the “challenges beyond 2010”. This paper incorporates multiple views of the Quality Assurance (QA) policy as we try to “navigate in the archipelagos of Greek higher education” under “ever changing weather conditions.” QA is regarded by Greek actors as relating to laws and regulations; i.e. the policy and managerial side of QA. In neo-institutional theory terms, this equals coercive pressure. The collegial aspects of QA are better understood, however, as normative (and mimetic) pressures. We argue that for QA to be also directed towards quality improvement, both managerial and collegial aspects are needed. Indeed, the adoption of QA for accountability and performance improvement requires the tripod of coercive, normative and mimetic isomorphism.

### Paper

The Bologna Process has stressed quality assurance issues increasingly. Since 2003, all signatory countries were expected to develop quality assurance schemes. In Bergen 2005, midway through the first phase of the Bologna Process towards 2010, all participant countries had produced National Reports showing good progress. The task at the national level is to match the demands of comparability with those of the trans-national level and the quality assurance systems inside individual higher education institutions Saarinen (2005). European countries in their 2007 national reports were asked to indicate the main challenges that they saw ahead at national level: quality assurance and accreditation were mentioned as the main challenge by 27 out of 48 countries (57%) (Stocktaking working Group, 2007, p. 46).

Quality assurance is often seen in higher education studies as a policy instrument of governments, and as a management tool with higher education institutions. However, in higher education systems with their professional ‘production technology’ (both when it comes to teaching and to research) quality and excellence are actually ‘made’ by the ‘professionals’ on the work floor, i.e. the academic staff members (Westerheijden, Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2007). Academics’ cooperation in quality improvement to strive for excellence is therefore crucial. Hence, governmental, managerial and collegial features of quality assurance co-exist.

Governmental and managerial features—we shall take them together as ‘managerial’ henceforth—stress fitness for purpose and accountability whereas collegial is concerned with quality enhancement. Excellence is more likely a feature of collegial quality assurance as the managerial approach highlights rationalisation and consistency of activities.

However, the capacity of the modern university to respond to change (i.e. adoption of quality assurance policy) has remained an enigma (Johnson, et al., 2003). Perhaps, the greatest challenge for the university in the Knowledge Age is determining how to balance its historic traditions and heritage with the powerful societal forces. Johnson and his associate believe that vision must come from inside the university, at the department and college levels. They stated that leadership, technology, and academic culture are interconnected dimensions of managing organizational change. They also perceived that deans and chairpersons in universities must manage all the above-mentioned dimensions concurrently if they are to create systemic change in their organizations. The study of *universities* is complex, not only because the nature of institutions themselves is somewhat amorphous, but also because of the varying relationships of the different disciplines with the institution (Dill, 2003). Clark (1983) observed that changing higher education from above is very difficult, although there is a lot of bottom-up change. Blazey et al. (2003, p. 4) affirmed that changes in education are tough, stating that it is hard work to change an educational and learning system that has been relatively untouched and unchallenged for decades: “It is easier to move a graveyard than to change curriculum”. Change is reputedly even more difficult in Greek higher education institutions. Bonikos (1998, p. 87) observed: “Greek universities are notoriously rigid establishments that lack the flexibility institutions require to respond imaginatively and reasonably to new academic needs and priorities. Therefore, introducing change in a Greek university has always been a battle between status quo preservationists and evolutionary expansionists who welcome new forms.”

From a neo-institutional view, organizations (such as universities) operate in an environment dominated by rules, requirements, understanding, assumptions, beliefs and procedures (scripts) about what constitutes appropriate or acceptable organizational forms and behaviour (Mayer and Rowan, 1977; Oliver, 1991; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 1987). Schwarz and Westerheijden (2004) stated that quality assurance as a separate instrument in university management and in government policy started in the 1970s (in the USA) and 1980s (in Europe), when it was discovered as a new management tool in industry that mimicked the success of the Japanese economy. They interpreted this from a European perspective as both the old isomorphism drive to copy whatever seemed successful in US higher education and the new isomorphism drive to copy whatever seemed successful in industry. This brings us to the concept of isomorphism, one of the central elements of neo-institutional theory, denoting that institutions tend to copy other institutions that seem to be successful. In neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) three mechanisms can be identified through which isomorphic change occurs: coercive forces which stem from political/legal influence and the striving for legitimacy; mimetic forces resulting from standard responses to uncertainty; and

normative forces associated with professionalization. Distinguishing the three mechanisms gives additional insight into what drives change (i.e. adoption of QA policies or/and quality management) in higher education institutions. Neo-institutional theory has become a dominant approach for explaining how organizations adapt to institutionalized pressures for change of their *business theory* from their environments.

Universities in Greece are legal entities under public law, with full self-administration under the supervision of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (YPEPTH), in accordance with article 16 of the Constitution. In Greece, the implementation of quality assurance is in its early phases. Greek National Reports on 2003 and 2005 claimed that the framework for operating a National System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was under consultation before the Greek Parliament. This framework is now a law. The Greek Government has established a National System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Greek Law 3374/2005 – Greek Government paper Issues (FEK) 189/August 2, 2005). According to this law the national quality assurance system is composed of two levels: internal assessments and external evaluation and review schemes. Universities are encouraged to set up their own internal quality assurance mechanisms to provide a sound of basis for external evaluation. Nevertheless, general provisions are provided by the law. Furthermore, teaching staff, administration personnel, and students are viewed as the main participants and contributors to this process. According to this law, a single national agency in charge of quality assurance is an essential feature of the Greek higher education system. Notably, the Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education–ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ (ΑΔΙΠ-ADIP)–website appears for the first time on March 2007<sup>1</sup>.

Kiriazis and Asderaki (2008, p. 56) noted that “there was no quality assurance system in Greece until 2005. However, Greece committed, within Bologna Process, in Berlin in 2003 to develop quality assurance systems according to standards and guidelines that ENQA and its partners (EUA, ESIB, EURASHE) would elaborate. Therefore, just before Bergen, a draft law was submitted to parliament and finally adopted in July 2005.” Kiriazis’ and Asderaki’s specifications in terms of isomorphism related to mimetic pressure and correspond with Papadimitriou’s (2009 forthcoming) empirical evidence. What is evident from Papadimitriou’s examination is that the adoption of quality assurance as law, is likely the result of mimetic pressure on the Ministry. In such a case it is possible that the adoption of quality assurance is simply “myth and ceremony”. Tolbert and Zucker (1983, p. 27) indicated that “legal requirements do not always ensure adoption”. In other words, the adoption of the law might happen, but would that lead to actual adoption of quality assurance practices inside universities? However, in 2007 stocktaking Greece reported having light green in all four categories for indicators related to QA (i.e. National implementation of Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (ESG), Stage of development of

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed information regarding the National System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NSQAHE) is available at [www.qhaa.gr](http://www.qhaa.gr)

external quality assurance system, Level of Student participation, Level of international participation). At the state – macro- level adoption of quality assurance is related to policy development and therefore is easy to develop. Although the actual implementation of a policy (i.e. quality assurance initiatives) follows dissimilar patterns within universities (meso level) and academic departments (micro level). Indeed challenges beyond 2010 are related to actual implementation of quality assurance policies. Examining the Greek case we believe that we can learn what the policy problem exactly is.

At a time when institutional accountability, assessment, and data-driven decision making pressures are at a high in Europe and worldwide, Greek university more or less remained apathetic. Greece is only recently (2005) forming a national quality assurance system and internal quality assurance is in its infancy, too. Systematic reporting, evaluation of academic units, and course evaluation are pieces of a puzzle waiting to be put together. Quality assurance in Greek higher education remains a complex and controversial issue as long as there is neither clear insight among academia nor its stakeholders.

From ADIP's first annual report (2006-2007)<sup>2</sup> one can see that it had discussions with 3 out of 12 Technological Colleges' (TEIs) administrations. Additionally, from this report one can see that from the end of 2007 many academic departments from the Greek higher education institutions expressed the desire to move towards a quality assurance approach. ADIP was waiting for the first of these departments to submit self-assessment reports before July 2008. In addition, ADIP expected these departments to undergo external peer review by the fall of 2008.

By the end of November 2008, the newspaper, *Vima* (18-November-2009) wrote, "two universities' departments from the periphery and 3 from TEIs [Technological Colleges] will come face to face with the evaluation 'quiver' of five evaluators from abroad." Similarly, another newspaper (*Ethnos*, 17-November-08) wrote: "...already five external international expert evaluators are in our country where they will complete their work and later will give [their report] to ADIP, in order to follow the way to the Parliament as the quality assurance law requires." Additionally, the same article stated: "the external evaluation procedure began in one university department in a northern part of Greece, although APID asked the department's name not be mentioned (to remain anonymous) because they were afraid of adverse reactions from students and others". Moreover, the newspaper wrote: "[what is] impressive is that 42 out of 456 departments from Universities and TEIs required already [had started the] peer review process and this approach [was] waiting to begin in 2009" (*Ethnos*, 17-November-08).

Katsikas, Papazoglou, and Tsakkloglou (newspaper *To Vima*, 4-5-2008), noted that about 110 departments from universities and TEIs had started internal procedures of quality assurance (self-assessment). (We shall not go into the question why their

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hqaa.gr/files/Εκθεση%20Πεπραγμένων%20ΑΔΙΠ%20final%2017%2006%2008.pdf>

figure was much higher than the one mentioned in the newspaper.) They also discussed that the problems are not few; absence of a quality assurance culture, resistance from several groups, and a type of insecurity with and a fear of something new and unknown. Moreover, they observed “ignorance about the relative procedures or/and disinformation (black propaganda).” The authors also underscored the lack of confidence from the participants’ quality assurance involvement with regard to the use of the quality assurance results from the Ministry and they mentioned the lack of specific express condition” (*To Vima*, 4-5-2008).

The above background shows the slow motion of the quality assurance movement in Greece. Adoption of quality assurance by Greek higher education institutions appears a challenge and a puzzle for the Greek Ministry of Education. In the 2007 national report for the London meeting in the Bologna Process, there was a final section where countries were asked to “give an indication of the main challenges ahead for their country.” In the Greek report appeared: “One of the main challenges is the attempt to reorganize and modernize the higher education system in order to meet contemporary challenges, the Lisbon goals and satisfy the need for quality, openness and attractiveness” (p.22).

For the moment, it seems that one of the urgent challenges for the Greek Ministry of Education was to link the quality movement with rules and regulations and with the hope that these rules and regulations would be adopted by academia to culminate in the achievement of longer-term goals (performance improvement) by Greek higher education. Reform of the legal framework for the structure and the operation of universities was the most recent law (3549/2007); it concerns the transformation of higher education institutions, which was announced on February 20, 2007, passed on March 13 2007, and published on March 20, 2007.

Quality assurance requires indigenous knowledge and motivation. A challenge to higher education is to guide inexperienced faculty in order to make the process easier and not a process that should give rise to “window-dressing”. Welsh and Metcalf (2003, p. 191) noted that “Administrators [in Greek case rectors, vice rectors, and department heads] cannot simply institute institutional effectiveness process in isolation and expect spontaneous support from faculty. Faculty involvement and support are critical to successful implementation”. Maybe these results combined with the fact that till now less than 30 out of 266 departments (31/3/2008 Newspaper Typos) decided to adopt quality assurance systems indicate that quality assurance at the micro -departmental- level in Greek higher education is a major challenge.

The key challenges that affect the successful quality assurance implementation in higher education institutions were reported by Horine and Hailey (1995) as: organizational culture, senior leadership commitment, faculty support, implementation time and training. Implementation of quality assurance needs a lot of work and more importantly, it needs leaders who remain in their position for more than several years, thus avoiding changes every four and two years as happens in Greek higher education. On the other hand, the establishment of small research units supported by departments from different fields in each university is another

option. In countries where higher education studies are quite underdeveloped, these research units will primarily aim at developing skills in this field. Best practices need to travel, faculty and staff need experience “bad and good,” “hard and soft” and for the moment, as we see in Greece, “quality assurance in terms of peer review process” remains a top secret in Greek archipelagos, or it travels in a submarine and it is unfeasible and unobserved.

In the national 2007 report also mentioned: “Furthermore the effort [Ministry of Education] is focused on the quality enhancement of institutions. Many departments have already completed the internal evaluation processes and proceed to the external evaluation. The main issue, however, is not only the development of ameliorative measures by institutions in cooperation with the Ministry but also the development of a quality culture that will apply to all HE” (p. 43). This statement pointed out that the purpose of the development of quality assurance law related to a change in culture. Back to the neo-institutional theory, DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 147) discussed that “highly structured organizational fields provide a context in which individual efforts to deal rationally with uncertainty and constraint often lead, in the aggregate, to homogeneity in structure, culture and output.” And that is the challenge which the Ministry of Education needs to hear, now that the quality assurance policy as a tool for legitimacy will “transform” as a tool for performance improvement. It seems that the major challenge for the Ministry of Education is an appropriate strategy: to change academic quality culture.

Quality culture needs change, how? That is the puzzle of mimetic isomorphism that Greek academia needs to complete in order to adopt quality assurance for performance improvement and for legitimacy. To achieve anticipated results from quality assurance, it must become a routine way of doing business in HEIs. For the moment, it seems that in Greece, adoption of the quality assurance is limited by its local culture of practice to resist changes such as the quality assurance law.

Finally the last (?) piece of the puzzle at the macro level seems related to how the Ministry of Education will develop an “organized” mimetic pressure in order to have quality assurance practices for performance improvement rather than law and regulations for legitimacy. Learning from others’ experiences is the best way to adopt best practices (Dill (1999). That is the missing piece in the quality puzzles. Lessons need to be drawn from these experiences. Kiriazis and Asderaki (2008) wrote that one of the “most important responsibilities of the ADIP is to perform studies and carry out research in order to develop the methodology, techniques and applications of quality assurance and keep all competent bodies of the state and the Greek HEIs up to date” (2008, p. 70). It seems that research and empirical studies will begin to shed light on these challenges in the very near future. Perhaps it might be helpful to invite experts from abroad who will have the trust and the respect from the Greek academia; they could organize training seminars and workshops in each university and in each department. Perhaps incentives could be provided that reward the first adopters and implementation of quality assurance.

Kladis (2008) pointed out that the two quality assurance phases in Greece (before 2005 when 8 universities invited the EUA-IEP<sup>3</sup> and after the QA law) have one significant difference: In the first phase, the Greek universities participated voluntarily in an evaluation process -through peers - conducted by their own European association, which they trusted. In the second phase (after 2005) the Greek universities are obliged to participate in an evaluation process driven (though indirectly) by the State, which they do not trust.

Recently (June 2009) at ADIP's report<sup>4</sup> we see that 77 out of 286 academic departments within Greek universities are in the process of developing quality assurance and only 22 of them submitted a self-evaluation report (till 31/12/08). Regarding external evaluation processes only 2 academic departments received comments from external evaluators and these two reports appeared at ADIP's website. Examining ADIP's report we also observe specific explanations related to the slow motion of the adoption of QA, including bureaucracy from the Greek State, lack of human and budget resources.

Within this context this paper covers the "meta-quality assurance law" period (2006-2009) and offers a dialogue of the "challenges beyond 2010" in Greek higher education and beyond. This paper incorporates multiple views of the QA policy as we attempt to "navigate in the archipelagos of Greek higher education" under the challenging/turbulences of "ever changing weather conditions." We believe this navigational metaphor matches well the Greek topography but also its higher education changes and the future challenges. In this archipelago, QA is regarded by the sailors as relating to laws and regulations; in other words, QA relates to higher education policies, i.e. the managerial side of QA. In neo-institutional theory terms, this equals coercive pressure. The collegial aspects are better understood, however, as normative (and mimetic) pressures. We will argue that for QA to be also directed towards quality improvement, both the managerial and collegial aspects are needed. In other words, the adoption of QA systems for accountability and performance improvement requires the tripod not just coercive, but also normative, and mimetic isomorphism.

The proposed paper addresses the idea of challenges in Greek universities and related policies. The 4<sup>th</sup> EQAF offers opportunities for discussing these topics at the interface between institutional and macro levels between introduction and implementation of quality assurance policy and can serve as an excellent forum for timely discussion of our questions:

1. How we will develop and improve trust between policy makers and institutions?
2. When QA policy monopolizes the Greek higher education, how such a tool for legitimacy will "transform" to a tool for performance improvement?

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<sup>3</sup> Papadimitriou and Westerheijden, 2009

<sup>4</sup><http://www.hqaa.gr/files/EKΘΕΣΗ%20ΓΙΑ%20ΤΗΝ%20ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑ%20ΤΗΣ%20ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗΣ%20ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ-2008.pdf>



3. What should the focus be of legislation in the next decade regarding QA implementation?
4. Finally the core ideas in contemporary organization theory (NIT) really matters in making sense in organizational life? How much of university life can be explained by non-rational process-rules and regulations?

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