



Is quality assurance a European profession?

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- Professionalisation of academic leadership: „hybrid professionals“ (Fitzgerald/Ferlie 2000) or „academic bureaucratisation“ (Coccia 2009)
- Expansion/Professionalisation of university administration: evaluation, employability managers, equal opportunity etc.



The emergence of new occupational groups around universities: i.e. specialised management consultants, quality assurance agencies

- What is „European“ quality assurance?
 - European evaluation and accreditation agencies as „buffer organisations“
 - Quality assurance: a powerful steering device
- Research Design
- Analysis
 - National Level
 - European Level
- Conclusions



What is „European“ quality assurance?

European evaluation and accreditation agencies as „buffer organisations“

- 1990s: Introduction of quality assurance in European higher education.
- „**Buffer organisations**“ (Neave 1989) or „**intermediary agencies**“ (Braun 1993) find themselves in the midst of the revolving relationship between state and public institution (New Public Management debate).
- The four „tasks“ of quality assurance:
 - Control for the implementation of Bachelor/Master
 - Accountability check of the public institution
 - Provide information for the public subvention (or not) of study programmes
 - Optimizing teaching quality

- Accreditation and evaluation agencies have a powerful stance in the regulation of higher education provision.
- Yet their working conditions are characterised by strong **power asymmetries...**



research question...



Research Design

Research question

- What is the professional status of this new occupational group?
- Are we dealing with an emerging profession?

Data

- A case study of the German evaluation and accreditation market 1990-2008
- Document analysis of national and European policy documents related to the provision of quality assurance for higher education (1998-2010)
- Interviews with national and European quality assurance experts (2006-2008)

- **„Ideal type“ professionalisation** (Freidson 2003, Wilensky 1964):
 - Self regulation
 - Formal and codified knowledge base/monopoly
 - Ethics of professionalism



What kind of professionalisation (if any) do we find in the case of European quality assurance?



Analysis

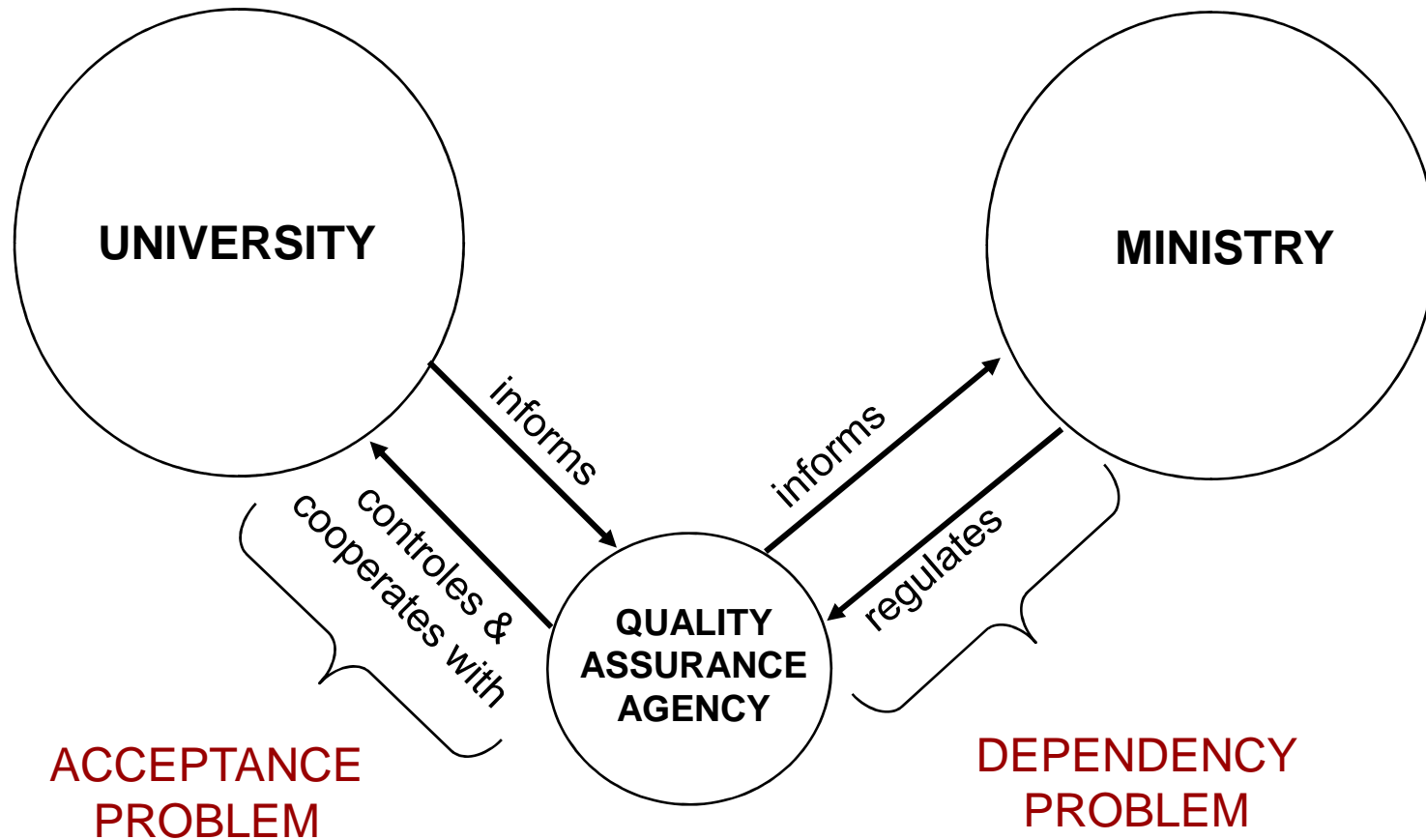
The national level: Constraints and resources of quality assurance

- A European patchwork of quality assurance „regimes“:
 - Laisser faire: „market type“ quality assurance (Germany)
 - Directive: „state agency“ (Spain, Sweden, Poland)
 - Semi-professional agency (Austria)
- Common denominators:
 - **No political leverage** with regard to ministerial regulations
 - Problematic acceptance **in the academic community**:
Academics as gatekeeper to the expansion of other occupational groups in the academic sphere

The national level: Academic „resentment“ towards quality assurance

- Tradition of „academic freedom“ clashes with external control
- What kind of specialised expertise do quality assurance „professionals“ possess?
 - An „intuitive“ approach to the development of professional standards and routines
 - The specialised expertise lies with the „peer“
- Who becomes active in quality assurance?
 - „Failed academics“
 - High turn over rate between agencies and within the sector

The national level: Is there place for yet another autonomous actor?



The European level: Professional emancipation through Bologna?

- In 2003, quality assurance became one of the main policy incentives within the European reform process:
 - **Politization and formalization** of quality assurance in the Bologna process (ENQA association)
 - Emergence of **professional standards**
 - **Creation of a register** for European quality assurance agencies

 - political leverage,
 - codification of the knowledge base,
 - and social closure
- } Do European quality assurance agencies aim for professional status?

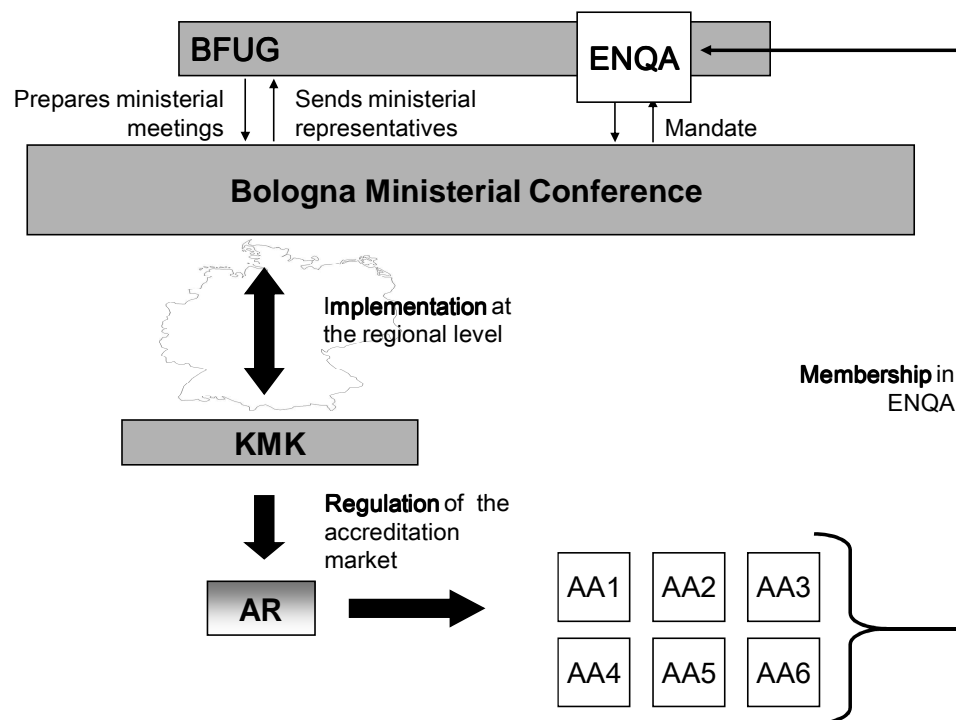


Is quality assurance a European profession?

Is Quality assurance a European profession? Political leverage

Fragility of the political situation...

- No direct political impact on national/regional legislation
- No political visibility
- Fragility of the overarching political process (Bologna), that starts to loose its momentum...



Case study: Quality assurance politics in Europe and Germany

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Codification of the knowledge base

Standards of „professionalism“

A content analysis of the „European standards and guidelines for quality assurance“

- **Technocratic requirements:**
No room „creativity“ or „discretion“ (Larson 1977)
- **Standards without „norms“ (Durkheim):**
„Professionalism“ for the sake of „credibility“
 - „Professionalism“ as **exogeneous value**
 - No standardization of **endogenous values/behavioural concepts** (i.e. „responsibility“)

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Social closure

Social closure: what for?

- Creation of a register for quality assurance agencies to regulate access to a European market for quality assurance provision
- Yet: most countries do not allow for non national quality assurance provision!



A register to regulate access to a market that does not exist?

What kind of professionalization for European quality assurance?

- No means of professionalization at the national level:
 - Dependency from the ministry
 - Problematic acceptance on behalf of the professional client organisation
- At the European level:
 - „Ideology of professionalism“ (Evetts 2003)
 - Politics of „standardization“ (Brunsson/Jacobsson 2000)



Thank you for your attention!

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