

## Individual paper

### Quality assurance in a market-oriented higher education system: Analysis of the Chilean experience (0216)

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#### Outline

Emphasize the presence of quality assurance in different countries or the « worldwide » developments in quality issues, has become in the indispensable introduction to show that these processes are no longer a novelty. These developments has given to professionals and researchers a new subject to explore, generating an interest to seems proportional, to the astonishing expansion of the even call “quality revolution”. Publications about quality assurance are also not a novelty. The studies which presented the agencies, the mechanisms and the goals of quality assurance in different national contexts, have gradually left the place a new lines of research about the sense, the use and usefulness of quality assurance (Westerhijden *et al.*, 2006).

In the context of the quality assurance rhetoric and within confused meanings associate to quality assurance terms, explore the sense and the orientations, sometimes in an underlying level, became pivotal to understand what changes which are promoted by the quality assurance system.

In this line of research this paper will explore the introduction and development of external quality assurance in Chile. The Chilean higher education system retains particularly the attention: Chile is currently among the countries with the highest degree of *privatims*<sup>1</sup>, and the market as almost the only regulatory mechanism, turned their higher education system into a “paradigmatic” case (Brunner, 2000, p. 14). Competitiveness between the institutions and high fees for the students and families, are maybe two of the most significant characteristics of the system.

The quality assurance system is considered as consolidated (Lemaitre, 2008). For the Accreditation National Agency, the participation of the institutions in the voluntary process of accreditation was successful and the Chilean accreditation model has influenced the development in other regional countries (CNAP, 2007). Nonetheless, we think that are still a lack in the understanding of global orientations of the Chilean quality assurance system.

Perellon (2003; 2007) provides a conceptual framework to analyse quality assurance in higher education like a policy domain<sup>2</sup>. Understanding the policy as the *proposal formulated by*

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<sup>1</sup> Here we adopted the neologism proposed by Brunner and Uribe (2007, p.181). The authors consider two variables: The relative proportion of students enrolled in private institutions and the relative proportion of total expenditure of the country from private sources. The “*privatism*” is “the extent to which something (in this case enrolled and resources) is private”

<sup>2</sup> Although the author propose the framework for comparative analysis, this paper suggested that its also useful for the unique case study.

*governmental authorities as a course of action in a particular domain*, the author considers two dimensions within policy formulation: *an ideational one based on normative beliefs about how policy domain should be organised and a material one, composed of the instruments to translate these ideas and beliefs into concrete action* (2007, p.155).

Five questions which represent the “fundamental choices” in this conceptual framework have to be responded: 1) about the objectives, 2) the control and actors, 3) the areas covered, 4) the procedures and 5) the uses of collect information.

Analysing how policy makers in Chile answered to these fundamental choices and how the answers had evolved, the particular interest in this paper is to answer two major questions: What are the ideational orientations of the quality assurance system in Chile? What are the changes proposed in the context of quality assurance system?

Between guarantee and enhancement the answers trying to make a balance among summative and formative objectives. This balance is nevertheless inclining in favour of the first one. Accreditation is positioned as the central mechanism able, at least in the idea, to aim multiples objectives like assurance, guarantee and enhancement. At the institutional level, accreditation links in an indirect way economics and symbolic benefits putting in question the voluntary character of the processes. The second mechanism is the “funding for competitive projects” (actual “funding to the academic innovation”) that aim is the enhancement of quality programmes. These mechanisms introduce project logic and reinforce the outcome-oriented funding.

Moreover, the two central agency created in 1999, had left the place to build an “accreditation market” (Vinokur, 2004; Stensaker & Harvey, 2006), at present formed by eight private agencies responsible for the programmes accreditation. The use of “Accreditation Agreement” of institutions and programmes is public. This document contains the strengths and weaknesses founded in the evaluations process. The institutions currently made “advertising use” and the results of these processes are used to make informal rankings. Hence the analysis of the quality assurance developments in Chile reveals that the ideational orientation is part of the market-oriented logic presents in Chilean higher education and confirms that these mechanisms are in place not to replace de force of the market but to accompany them (Brunner, 2009, p. 363).

The presentation will be organised into four parts. First, we will introduce the most relevant characteristics of the Chilean higher education. Second, the analysis of the quality assurance in Chile as a policy domain. Third the framework is discussed in their pertinence, finally the presentation will conclude answering and discussing the two major questions of the study.

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