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Negotiating Quality: The crisis of the Greek public university

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Introduction

Since 2000 Greek public universities are in turmoil, their regular function disrupted by strikes of the academic personnel and occupations of departments/faculties by students. Academics and students alike have been resisting sternly the efforts of two different administrations (socialist and liberal) to implement at the national level European education policies proposed through the EU (Lisbon Agenda) and the Bologna Process. On a previous phase of the debate the opposition focused on the creation and implementation of a Quality Assurance system (Law 3374/2005). Presently it concerns the recently voted Law on the Regulation of Higher Education.

During this discussion we consider higher education as a policy arena where outcomes are the result of legal, normative and cultural pressures exerted by networks of stakeholders acting across the national and supranational level. It appears that the efforts to implement Europeanisation policies, especially the ones proposed through the Bologna process, upset the till now relative stable power relations between government (i.e. the Ministry of Education) and academia and brought to the fore differences in norms and values. In this paper we argue that the deadlock that has been reached in the public debate concerning the implementation of Europeanisation policies can be, partially at least, attributed to a tension or incongruence of values rooted in the “culture” of the academic community concerning quality and the normative pressures exerted by Europeanisation policies concerning the establishment of a Quality Assurance mechanism. We use the quality debate as an example to highlight the different conceptions of quality put forth both by the government and the majority opposition party on the one hand, both of which appear to fully espouse the EU discourse, and the academic community on the other.

The opinions of academics presented in this paper are based on material posted on the internet (university sites and personal and blog-sites discussing education policy issues) and articles published in the press. They should be seen as representative of the views expressed by various (groups of) academics, but omissions are unavoidable as the relative Greek literature is quite extensive.

1.Theorising Policy Conflicts: Policy Advocacy Coalition Networks

The Policy Advocacy Coalition framework (PAC) was developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1988, 1999) in order to explain intense conflicts over policy issues. It regards policy making as a continual process with no strict beginning and end, the content of which is influenced by changing coalition networks representing different policy beliefs (values) and interests. Policy coalition networks involve bureaucrats, politicians, interest-group representatives, researchers, policy analysts and journalists. Although not a fully developed theoretical framework, PAC makes use of certain interesting concepts. Like other theories of the policy process PAC generally assumes that actors are self-interested and instrumentally rational (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1995; Ostrom, 1990). It also borrows several assumptions from social psychology: Individuals weigh losses more than gains (and remember defeats more than victories), use belief systems to filter perceptions, and overemphasize the influence and nastiness of their opponents (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Quatrone & Tversky, 1988; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). These all strengthen in group cohesion and external group antipathy.

Central to an actor's belief system are policy core beliefs, which are normative values and problem perceptions that focus on an entire policy subsystem. Policy core beliefs serve as the primary perceptual filter for actors in a policy subsystem to determine their perceived allies and opponents, potential sources of coordination, and potential sources of advice/information. In other words, PAC predicts that policy core beliefs will structure an actor's choice of network interactions and these interactions will occur predominately with other actors of similar policy core beliefs in an advocacy coalition. In fact, PAC defines an advocacy coalition as the set of actors in a policy subsystem from a wide variety of institutions who:

- (a) share policy core beliefs and
- (b) possibly engage in coordinated action in order to translate those beliefs into public policy (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1988).

Three different types of networks are distinguished by theorists working within the PAC framework: ally networks, coordination networks and advice/information networks. Ally networks do not necessarily imply actual interactions, which means there should be minimal effect from functional interdependence and resource dependence. Coordination networks presuppose, to some degree, interactions among members of an advocacy coalition who work together to translate shared beliefs into public policy. Advice/information networks also involve actual interactions and the acquisition of resources. PAC predicts that actors would prefer to seek advice/information from sources within their advocacy coalition. The idea is that two to four competing policy advocacy coalitions, each with its own ideas about policy content, compete for dominance in a subsystem, and that policy making (in terms of agenda-setting and implementation) is dominated by elite opinion. Knowledge plays a crucial role because the coalition is a reflection of the ideas and interests about a set of policy issues.

The analysis is thus not only about actors and networks, but also about values and conceptions. Institutions play a key role through the salience of levels of government and the interaction of government agencies and committees. Key to the framework is the assumption that actors learn over time and that the policy process and the ideas shaping it remain relatively stable unless disrupted by a major crisis. Rapid change in the external world (especially social and economic factors and the advocacy of new solutions to policy problems) can disrupt previously stable¹ patterns of interests and exchanges. Thus the interaction between external changes and domestic ideas and interests is seen as a key factor in explaining policy change and a useful way of analysing policy at European level, which is characterised by fluidity of networks and an importance of new ideas in shaping policy.

It is our thesis that PAC is a suitable framework for the analysis of the conflict over a quality assurance and the reform of the higher education system in Greece. The decision for the creation of the EHEA has brought at the top of the political agenda in education the issue of high quality systems and of quality assurance processes. In the previous years most European countries have been instituting/upgrading and/or operating quality assurance systems based on the model of the British Research Assessment Exercise or various other performance indicators (PIs).

The majority of Greek academics have resisted, the quantitative education targets decided in Lisbon (2000), which seem to conflate with this general idea of quantifying

¹ This major assumption made in the PAC framework - that the policy process is relatively stable unless disrupted by external change – has been heavily criticised and it appears that it cannot be taken for granted.

or measuring educational outcomes that are considered as related to “high quality” education.

Up to 2005, when the discussion of the Law for Quality Assurance was underway, academics appeared to form a rather cohesive ally coalition network rallying around the professional and trade union association of the university academic staff – POSDEP.² This initial network adopted an extremely militant stance, which led to a series of strikes and brought the dialogue to a standstill. Presently it has become obvious that large groups of academics always held different opinions, but were at the time “silenced” and did not publicise their views.

When in June 2006 the Ministry of Education publicised a Draft-law for a new Law Framework for higher education the representatives of POSDEP demanded its withdrawal and the beginning of a new public dialogue. A different opinion was expressed through the “Declaration of Academics”, currently signed by 761 university professors and lectures, which considered the reform of higher education indispensable and viewed the Draft Law as a window of opportunity to express their views. In the fall of 2006 the group AR.SI (Left Today) made public an extensive policy proposal for the reform of higher education. By the beginning of 2007 a policy paper entitled “Reform on the basis of common sense” was signed by another group of approximately 300 academics. In the beginning of 2007 academics belonging to the above groups tried to agree on the common points of their proposals and came up with the “21 points for the reform” along four axes: (a) increased public funding, (b) University autonomy (c) quality assurance and (d) accountability.

Around the same time the “university reform forum” presented on its blog-site the paper “A few thoughts on Universities”, currently signed by 199 academics, working in Greece and abroad.

On the basis of the above it can be maintained that today four groups of academics are forming a coordination coalition network, which seeks reform but opposes current government policies for different reasons and defending quite different rationales, but who agree on several basic points that can form the basis for the educational reform underway. This result seems related to academics’ efforts to “voice” their opposition to government policies and dominate majority opinion through extensive presentation of their views through the press and the Internet, in coordination with journalists and socialist and left wing parties.

2. Negotiating Quality in Higher Education: Definitions and Measurement

It is by now a well-accepted argument, that there are different conceptions of quality in education. “What counts as quality is contested” states Barnett, (1994:68) while Harvey and Green (1993) describe quality as a “relative concept”. Quality acquires different meanings for various stakeholders in higher education, (students, academics, government and its funding agencies and employers). Such stakeholders

² It is to be noted that traditionally POSDEP rallied only a small percentage of academics due to its extremely left wing political stance. Since 2000 due to heightened frictions in the higher education sector POSDEP acquired a status and significance, which it did not enjoy in the past. It is characteristic that in the 2002 elections for a new POSDEP Presidency, the participation of academics in the procedure was raised by 65% in comparison to previous elections. (Stamelos and Papadiamantaki, 2004). At the time the Law for quality assurance was pending at the parliament. It is to be noted that till the passing of the law for Quality Assurance the work of academics was extensively discussed and judged by peer review during promotion or election to the academic ranks, a process that could be judged as rather informal (despite its occasional severity), subjective and under the control of academics.

usually have different interests in higher education; relate "quality" to different educational outcomes that require different methods of assessment education systems, which in turn may be seen as reflecting different aspects or conception of quality.

Behind the various notions of quality lie, explicitly or tacitly, different views as to the role of higher education. In turn, these prior conceptions generate different methodologies for evaluating quality, and call for alternative sets of benchmarks or PIs. Barnett (1994) illustrates this interconnectedness between conceptions, approaches and outcomes in the context of four dominant contemporary conceptions of higher education. When higher education is conceived as a lever for the production of highly qualified manpower, graduates are seen as products whose career earnings and employment relate to the quality of education received. When higher education is linked to training for a research career, the performance indicators (PIs) tend to emphasize the research output of staff and students presented as research ability. When quality is related to the efficient management of teaching provision PIs are developed as efficiency indicators consisting of completion rates, unit costs, and student-staff ratio. Finally, when higher education is conceived as a process related to the extension of life chances, the focus is on the participation rate or percentage growth of students from under-represented backgrounds, including mature, part-time and disabled students. These are different, not always overlapping, conceptions of the purposes or role of higher education. Each reflects a different definition of quality and a distinctive set of PIs that are associated with it. Common in these conceptions is the view of higher education as a 'black box'. None of them focuses on the educational process, or the quality of the learning achieved by the student. They focus is solely on inputs and outputs. Barnett (1994) contrasts such approaches with conceptions of higher education that focus, on the quality of the student experience. Here the focus is on the exposure of students in the experience of pursuing knowledge and the development of autonomy integrity and critical reasoning. The cultivation of general intellectual abilities of students to form perspectives and vision beyond the confines of a single discipline is valued. The final conception of higher education is about the development of critical reason. Such conceptions, do not easily lend themselves to evaluation by PIs. No measurement can capture the complexity and quality of the educational process and of student experience hence, the usefulness of performance indicators by focusing primarily on input and output is very much in doubt.

Barnett (1994) describes the quality debate by different groups of actors in higher education as a "power struggle", where each group tries to fight for their voices to be heard and taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken. Each of the different voices is valid deserving serious exploration in its own right, but none can be the only legitimate voice to be heard. It is therefore the challenge for any kind of performance evaluation to be framed so as to permit the equal expression of legitimate voices, though they may always conflict or compete in some ways.

Harvey and Green (1993) in their discussion of the relationship between quality and standards in higher education identify different aspects of quality: Quality as *excellence* (linked with elitism), as *fitness for purpose*, as *value for money*, and as *transformative* interpreted as "the enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge" (Harvey, 1995; see also Harvey *et al.*, 1992)³. Each of these notions of quality has implications for the methods and approaches used to

³ There is also a fifth definition of quality as perfection. Perfection refers to the flawless consistency of a product or service. This approach to quality is the basis of much of Japanese motor car manufacture but appears as inappropriate in the higher education setting

measure the desirable outcomes that emanate from it. There are problems raised by this pluralistic view of quality and its measurement:

2.1. Quality as Excellence

This is the traditional notion of quality that equates it to excellence and high standards (Harvey & Knight, 1996). Just as a Rolls Royce car is universally regarded as a 'quality' car because of the high standard of its components, engineering and finishing, so it is possible for a higher education institution to be viewed in the same way. Vidovich claims that whereas notions of quality as accountability to stakeholders (or value for money) seems to be resisted 'quality construed as "excellent standards" ... would be much less likely to trigger resistance from academics than explicit forms of accountability, especially quantitative PI as developed by bureaucrats' (Vidovich, 2001: 258).

In Greece a minority of academics (especially but not exclusively in hard science disciplines and in departments with strong research orientation and international linkages) appear to embrace a notion of "quality as excellence". These appear to be strong proponents of the enforcement of even stricter evaluation mechanisms than the ones proposed through the Law 3374/2005 and consider that such mechanisms would enhance the competitiveness and standing of Greek universities. This position is taken by the University Reform Forum. They seem to embrace a traditional academic notion of quality that equates it to high standards. They also seem to judge as "inadequate the steps taken by the current measures, which cannot be considered as an educational reform", as they also demand that evaluation should lead to reallocation of funds and the public ranking of Greek universities, a view that is definitely not shared by the majority of academics. They also demand that the results of evaluation should be made available to the public.

This is also the stance taken by I. Panaretos (2002), former Special Secretary for Higher Education at the Ministry of Education, who maintains that the results of an objective evaluation and information concerning the level of studies at universities and departments should be made public, so that the youth completing secondary education are able to choose the university/department that better suits them based on realistic criteria.⁴ From a similar perspective, D. Sotiropoulos (2006) in a recent study conducted for ELIAMEP⁵ maintains that the situation would ameliorate if the "informal hierarchy of Greek universities and departments was replaced by a more formal one, based on criteria set by a quality assurance mechanism"⁶.

Quality as excellence is often associated with elitism. Massification and widening participation has led to the development of different conditions in higher education with the university being less of an academic community than it was in the 1960s and 1970s (Barrett, 1998). This leads to the development of the argument that 'more means worse'. Proponents of this argument claim that widening participation in higher education leads to poorer quality provision (Radford, 1997) and relates the policy target of widening participation to the development of a mass higher education system that turns higher education institutions to institutions of vocational training (Rowland, 1999) providing a 'plethora of quasi-academic courses' through vacuous

⁴ An argument similar to the one made by Panaretos is made by the university reform forum, namely that it is the poorer families that stand to benefit from the publication of evaluation results, in the sense that these families depend on public Greek universities for the higher education of their children, whereas well off families always had the option to educate their children in universities abroad.

⁵ Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy

⁶ For a relevant discussion on multiple, informal university hierarchies see also Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, Stamelos, and Papadiamantaki 2005.

degrees in areas like for example media studies, knitwear, beauty therapy and golf course management (Smithers, 2000).

In Greece, which is experiencing since 1989 an unprecedented expansion of the higher education sector, academics do not subscribe to this notion of 'dumping down', arguing that there is a social dimension of higher education and that the curriculum should be relevant to all groups in society. This stance seems to relate to the fact that the Greek higher education system operates on a numerous clausus basis and until 1989 was unable to accommodate the high social demand for university services (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, Stamelos, and Papadiamantaki 2004). Currently however, due to the policy for the expansion of higher education, the number of available places are in position accommodate social demand. In fact academic complaints nowadays focus on the worsening of working conditions and the under funding of the expansion process.

2.2. Quality as Fitness for Purpose

Fitness for purpose requires that a product or service fulfil a customer's needs, requirements or desires. Fitness for purpose requires that a product or service fulfil a customer's needs or requirements. Higher education goals are articulated at a general institutional level through an university's mission statement and at a more precise academic level through a particular programme's aims and learning outcomes sometimes referred to as programme specifications. Here universities are required to say what they do, do what they say and then prove it to a third party.

This seems to be a conceptualisation of quality that would be more or less acceptable to the majority of academics in Greece today. It is to be noted that recently a group of academics, which represent different groups or are affiliated to different parties, referred to by the press as the "movement of 1000", put forth their proposals for higher education reform in Greece. They take a rather pragmatic stance on the issues of quality assurance and the necessity of a new Law framework for higher education. They accept that a quality assurance mechanism could be beneficial for the function, standing and competitiveness of Greek universities in general, so long as measures are taken to avoid

- The excessive bureaucratization of the quality assurance procedures
- The emphasis on quantitative performance indicators over a more substantial and qualitative assessment of teaching and research in universities
- An emphasis on standardisation procedures that contradict the notion of university as a locus of creativity in teaching and research. (Conference for the Upgrading of Public Universities: targets and prerequisites, 2007)

Newby (1999) claims that utilitarian and standardising approaches to quality, sometimes related to the notion of quality as "fitness for purpose", identify specific, disaggregated purposes of higher education and then try to 'measure' the fitness for these purposes. Teaching effectiveness is linked to the meeting of course aims and objectives: teaching efficiency to the resources that are used in order to meet the stated aims and objectives. They are both concerned with rooting out non-conformance and ensuring adherence to the stated aims and objectives. This is echoed in the position of "the movement of 1000", which view with scepticism the measurement of teaching quality, teaching effectiveness and efficiency.

Although the majority of Greek academics now appear in favour of the reform of higher education and accept (with modifications) the implementation of quality assurance, a significant group still defends earlier positions, sternly opposing all forms of standardisation. Their views are represented for example by the arguments

of G.Maistros, General Secretary of POSDEP, in his article entitled "*Higher Education Selling out*", where he argues that implementation in Greece of Europeanisation and Bologna policies will lead to the "commercialisation" of higher education, students will become "customers" and universities "knowledge supermarkets". He seems to agree with Greatrix (2001) that the belief that standardisation of higher education institutions' academic programs is a means of assuring standards is essentially an industrial model that is inappropriate for higher education. An understanding of this perceived trend towards greater standardisation in higher education is aided by reference to the notion of McDonaldisation⁷ (Ritzer, 1993, 1996) that portrays Western societies as characterised by a desire for rationality, efficiency, predictability and control.

2.3. Quality as Value for Money

The notion of accountability and the need for restraint in public expenditure is central to this definition of quality, (Harvey & Knight, 1996). Overall, public services and in this case higher education institutions are expected to be accountable to their funders especially the government.

This is a position put forth by Greek governments (both liberal and socialist) and the issue of accountability was dominant during the discussion of the Quality Assurance Law in the parliament. Both the government spokesman (who introduced the law) and the majority opposition speaker agreed that universities ought to be accountable to the society for the funds they receive. The majority of Greek academics appeared to be very much aware of the fact that Greek higher education operates under conditions of continuous financial stringency and interpreted this stance as related to the gradual erosion of their limited academic autonomy and professional self-determination.

Although there are strong arguments in favour of accountability, both from academics the forum for university reform and from academics that have joined the movement of the 1000, the majority would agree with Rowland (2001) that higher education has become obsessed with narrow measures of accountability, standardisation and managerial control.

It is characteristic that academics affiliated both with the "movement of the 1000" and the "university reform forum" consider full university autonomy (academic, administrative and financial) a prerequisite for the upgrading of the Greek universities. They demand higher funding with a four-year span to enable long term financial planning and participation in the processes for the appointment of administrative personnel. They consider that the red tape for the institution of new departments and new programmes of study should be minimized and control over these decisions be given to academics. They demand simplified procedures for the invitation of visiting professors and total control over the election and promotion of academic staff and the appointment of adjuncts.

⁷ McDonaldisation is the process by which McDonalds fast-food restaurant principles are applied to a wide range of production activities and service provision. Ritzer argues that higher education institutions are no different from other service industries and consumers require the same standardisation, reliability and predictability as they do when purchasing a burger meal or dealing with their bank, while Harvey (1999) identifies a consumerist and instrumental perspective in higher education institutions.

2.4. Quality as Transformation

Transformation involves a change in form from one state to another (Harvey & Knight, 1996). This is very much the subjective and reflective approach to quality (Pirsig, 1976). Transformation in education often involves cognitive transcendence with the provider "doing something to the customer rather than just doing something for the customer" (Harvey & Green, 1993: 24). To achieve transformation, Bradley argues, "...the flames of inquiry, tolerance and excellence require hard cash and supportive education policies. Innovative research needs money; university staff and students need accommodation, library resources and laboratory equipment. Everyone needs time, a commodity that is being squeezed out of the system by the increasing bureaucratic and financial demands imposed by education policies" (Bradley, 1994:13). This seems to be especially the case in Greece, represented by the stance taken by the Rector of the University of Athens (Babinotis, G, 2005) It appears that a good part of Greek academics would agree with Gibbs (2001) that education policies emanating from the European level, are most unhelpful for the development of a transformative approach to quality as they place emphasis on employability skills rather than critical reflection.

Although a definition of quality as transformation appears appealing to academics, problems of measurement of intellectual capital may well mean this interpretation has relatively little impact. Peters (1992) claims that if you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it. As Seddon has noted problems with measurement can often lead to quality measures tending to concentrate on what you can count rather than on what counts (Seddon, 2000).

3. Summing up: Europeanisation and Greek Policy

What were the changes in core policy beliefs that the law presupposed and which come to direct opposition with current academic values?

The Law for Quality Assurance fully embraced the EU discourse, rationale and general guidelines for the creation of the national organisation for Quality Assurance. It is characteristic that during the introduction of the law in the Greek parliament explicit reference was made to the guidelines set by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, setting as goals the promotion of mobility, the training of high quality manpower which is seen as critical for the global standing and the "competitiveness" of the EU. Now valid as these claims may be at the EU level, they seem to come into conflict with certain parts of the Greek legal and institutional framework.

The rationales presented by the representatives of the Liberal and the Socialist parties (i.e the government and the majority opposition party) put forth the notion of quality as "Value for Money" stressing issues of accountability, while few of the majority opposition speakers appeared to be in favour of a quality assurance system that would guarantee "fitness for purpose". The representatives of the minority (left wing) opposition parties supported notions of quality that adhered more to a concept of a "transformative" approach to quality (that ultimately sees "quality" as not measurable). Finally the representative of the communist party seemed to espouse Greatrix critique that any form of quality assurance would "align the higher education system with economic interests and finally lead to the degradation of the public university". This is the position put forth also by the academics' professional association (POSDEP) through its decisions dd. 17/5/2005 and especially 1.7.2005 when it was publicly announced that the two of the oldest and most prestigious Greek higher education institutions (University of Athens and the National Technical University of Athens have decided not to implement the Law for Quality Assurance).

Here it is to be noted that these different notions of quality were not made explicit during the discussion in the parliament and that the public debate on quality assurance focused rather on the type (internal/external or both) of evaluation, the criteria and the timing than on what quality is and the role of higher education.

The notion of accountability and the need for restraint in public expenditure is central to the definition of quality as “value for money”. Accountability can be seen to relate to the gradual erosion of academic autonomy and professional self-determination as the government, is seen as concerned to assert control and align higher education to the economic interests.

Combining the two tacit notions of “quality” present in the discourse of the major political parties the majority of academics opposed the Law for QA since:

They are convinced that the Law Framework will evaluate universities solely on the basis of quantitative performance indicators that may eventually lead to ranking of universities (Theotokas, 2005). Such a system they perceive it as divergent from core academic values i.e. institutional autonomy and academic freedom and as contrary both to the universities’ and their own immediate interests.

Although the view that a quantitative evaluation process does not measure quality is widely supported, a good part of the academics take a pragmatic view and recognise that since *such processes are already widespread in the “international environment” they will eventually influence Greece as well*. They agree *“something must be done about it”*. Such academics seem to put forth an argument in favour of accountability but they are still concerned about the application of narrow measures of standardisation and managerial control.

The view taken by academics is that if the MoE wants to promote an evaluation process analogous to the quantitative evaluation processes promoted internationally, as well as by other EU member states, it should develop “weighted quality indicators” taking into consideration the *“specific circumstances”* of each university (related to size, age, disciplines taught, location and existing infrastructure).

Furthermore as Chrysohoou (2005) argues, the Ministry of Education, prior to implementing the Law for Quality Assurance should provide universities with:

- adequate **resources** to improve the university’s infrastructure.
- adequate national **funding for research**, especially in fields like the social sciences and humanities where research funding internationally is scarce
- a **regulative framework** that would provide universities with full autonomy.

Even academics that embrace the concept of quality as excellence oppose the Law. In this case one may also notice a conflict of interests between the Ministry of Education and academics (especially the ones in disciplines with longer first cycles of study for 5/6). This can be seen as a case where academics in favour of evaluation choose to act in accordance with the majority view and denotes the allegiance of the academics to their institution and the scientific field.

One may also note the implementation of an institutionalised quality assurance mechanism disrupts the existing power relations between Ministry of education and academia. Till now the legal framework gives academics almost total control over decisions related to the contents of an academic programme, and over the election in the academics ranks. To phrase this differently, such a development would undermine the current status of academics who in the framework of academic freedom and institutional autonomy act as “professionals, exercising their control over the state via cultural-cognitive and normative processes, constructing cognitive frameworks that define arenas within which they claim jurisdiction and seek to

exercise control". In any case in the perception of academics an institutionalised evaluation process would *"ideally complement not profoundly alter current standards or substitute the current peer-group evaluation process"* In this sense it is seen as "contradictory" to current practices (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, Stamelos and Papadiamantaki 2005).

The theme that emerges is that the QA mechanism proposed was vague (Tziritas & Georgakopoulos, 2005) and failed to assure quality in any meaningful way. The criteria to be applied remain unspecified, while the whole process is extremely bureaucratized (Koumantos, 2005). Resistance seems related to issues referring to the distribution and exercise of power, concerns about the effectiveness of QA, doubts about the reliance on quantification and differences in defining and understanding quality.

Although evaluation and assessment is in principle accepted, it is obvious that academics and government support different notions of "quality". Ambiguities related to different understandings of "quality" contribute to conflict and discord between academics and government on the issue of quality assurance.

In developing their critique some academics appear to draw on notions of quality as understood within traditional academic discourses of excellence in scholarly endeavour and/or fitness for purpose. Those who embrace quality as excellence regard quality assurance replacing the traditional academic notion of quality with instrumental, minimalist and mediocre notions of 'Quality'. The majority of academics adhere to quality as "fitness for purpose". They point out to the significant differences concerning age, geographic location, number of scientific fields taught in universities, number of students and academics per departments. They refuse to accept uniform criteria of quality based on PI for all universities. Despite the differences in the understanding of quality all academics resist quality as "value for money" and a concept of new managerialism in higher education. The opposition seems to focus on meanings embedded in Total Quality Management discourses, where quality is understood as compliance with minimum standards.

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