

2022 European Quality Assurance Forum

Shaping or sharing? QA in a value-driven EHEA

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Call for contributions: Paper submission form

Deadline 22 July 2022

Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.

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Short bio (150 words max):

Currently, Gvantsa Dzidziguri is working at National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement. She is specialist at Higher Education Quality Assurance Department. She has studied History as a bachelor at the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and also Public Policy and Public Administration for a master degree at the same university. Now she is PhD student at Grigol Robakidze University in the field of Public Administration. Through the research, she plans to assess the readiness for decentralization, which is the main precondition for coordinating different actors in a self-organized way. More specifically, she intends to explore the need of a meta-governor for the coordinated work of different actors in terms of gender equality policy.

If there are several authors, please copy and fill in the fields for each author and indicate who is the corresponding author and who will be responsible for presenting the paper at the Forum.

IMPORTANT: If you are submitting a proposal, please do not register for the event until the results of the selection process have been announced. Papers selected for EQAF 2022 will benefit from one reduced fee per contribution, which will be applied through a special registration process.

During the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum as well as the associated Powerpoint presentations will be published on the Forum website. If you do not wish your paper to be published, please indicate so here. This has no consequences on the selection of the papers. Please however note that all Powerpoint presentations will be published, regardless of whether the full paper is published.

Proposal

Title: The regulatory policy approach to the higher education system and the need for value-based international cooperation on the example of Georgia

Abstract (150 words max):

The presentation will focus on the result obtained by sharing values in the international space by discussing the case of Georgia. More specifically, the focus will be on the period from the break-up of the Soviet Union to 2005, when Georgia was not a participant in the Bologna Process, as well as what has changed since 2005 by involving Georgia in the international educational space and sharing values, on which any system is based, including the higher education system. The case study of this issue,

which includes the analysis of the concepts related to the topic and particular regulatory policy approach, will make clear the importance of value-based international cooperation for the higher education space.

The corresponding sub-topic of the proposal: Value-centred international cooperation in higher education

Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? If yes, give details.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

International cooperation in the direction of transnational networks in terms of higher education policy

First of all, it is necessary to explain the concept of international cooperation, which is mainly discussed in the literature of the international relations field. Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane defined as action that occurs when “actors adjust their behaviour to the actual or anticipated preferences of others” (Axelrod & Keohane, 1985). So ” (international) cooperation describes interactions to achieve common objectives when actors’ preferences are neither identical (harmony) nor irreconcilable (conflict) “ (Paulo, 2014).

Transnational networks are a practical expression of international cooperation, in connection with which Thomas Risse, a researcher of international relations, notes that such networks involve “regular interaction across national boundaries when at least one actor is a non-state agent or does not operate on behalf of a national government or intergovernmental organization” (Risse-Kappen, 2009).

Transnational networks of a similar type exist in the direction of higher education policy. One of the main characteristics of transnational associations is a common value spectrum, which is based on the cooperation of higher education institutions or education quality assurance agencies united in each network.

For clarity, there can be presented European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) as an example, which is the umbrella organization for quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Here, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) should also be mentioned as a space of international cooperation regarding the issue of higher education, which unites 49 culturally and politically different states and creates a space for their cooperation in the direction of reforms or structural changes of the higher education system.

Another clear example of international cooperation is The European University Association (EUA). With its policy, the said association plays an important role in the Bologna process and in general in uniting higher educational institutions towards a common goal.

Specifically regarding students and their interests, the European Students’ Union should be mentioned. It is an umbrella organization that promotes the social, educational, cultural or economic interests of students.

These examples illustrate the importance of international cooperation, the structural expression of which is transnational networks that unite any party involved in the higher education system and create a platform for uniting around goals driven by common values.

Regulatory Policy approach

Regulatory policy is the systematic design and implementation of government instruments and institutions used to shape how governments exercise their regulatory powers. It involves integrating competition policy and market openness initiatives into regulatory policy, which is changing the agenda and culture of regulators to adopt more flexible and results-oriented approaches. A regulatory reform policy serves several important purposes in implementing, sustaining and deepening regulatory reforms (Malyshev, 2008).

As for the policy of regulation in the direction of higher education, through the creation of independent agencies, the state establishes regulatory instruments such as external quality assessment mechanisms. Development of external quality systems in Western Europe from the 1990s to the early 2000s was seen as part of the modernization of higher education governance, which often included greater autonomy for higher education institutions and stronger universities providing institutional leadership and a reformed funding system that emphasizes a stronger result-orientation (Gornitzka & Stensaker, 2014). In this context, the creation of quality assurance agencies has become a central mechanism for implementing external evaluations. The number of agencies has grown rapidly, resulting in the creation of international and continental agency networks, such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) (Fernandez, Pérez-Durán, & Portugal Celaya, 2021). Formal laws and regulations were introduced for higher education institutions, obliging them to create their own internal quality assurance systems with a strong managerial and administrative component, leading to more centralized, professionalized and formalized systems (Stensaker, 2003).

Due to the fact that the paper addresses the case of Georgia, it will be interesting to discuss the regulatory policy approach regarding the Georgian educational space. Georgia joined Bologna Process in 2005 May at Bergen Summit. A similar type of regulatory agency operates in the form of LEPL - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement in Georgia. Center is working in the direction of the development of the quality of education in Georgia, which was established in 2006 as the National Center for Educational Accreditation (NCEA) to conduct institutional accreditation. After the first round of the revision of the external quality assurance system in 2010, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) was established as its legal successor. The center is actively involved in the process of internationalization of the Georgian higher education system. NCEQE is recognized as the only national body authorized to implement an external mechanism for ensuring and enhancing the quality of education (National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, 2010).

Due to the relevance of the issue of university autonomy, the issue of deregulation of the education system is on the agenda of the world. Despite increased state control, patterns of globalization and increased competition have created a more complex regulatory space for higher education in which national governments are less able to fully set the agenda (Scott, 2021).

John Braithwaite and Christine Parker focus on the concept of meta-regulation in relation to the educational space. Meta-regulation involves requirement on the regulator to do something, but without specifying what to do, with some kind of feedback about what is being done in response to the action request (Braithwaite & Parker, 2003).

Also, Roger Patrick King in his article „Governance and Accountability in the Higher Education Regulatory State“ talks about the role of regulator and regulation. He notes that regulators are often in an evasive position due to their labeling as regulators. For instance, when discussing external quality assessment, public statements suggest that many in national quality assurance agencies will not accept that they are acting as regulators. In particular, they argue that they enforce standards set by others, institutions and their academics, rather than setting their own, unlike standard-setting functions in other regulatory systems. Some forms of regulation may inhibit innovation or quality improvement more than others. Command and control approaches or external investigations with summary and essentially binary approval outcomes, such as accreditation, can hinder the development of a culture of quality improvement or a culture of risk-taking by focusing institutional attention on a minimum threshold standard (King, 2007).

Accordingly, it can be said that the regulatory policy has both positive and negative aspects and should be determined individually, according to the value situation in the state and the structure of the educational space based on it.

Value-centred higher education system on the example of Georgia

Any type of state policy is based on a value spectrum, including higher education policies. The process of globalization plays an active role in the exchange of values on a worldwide scale, and this is especially evident in the networks that exist as a single educational space.

The higher education system is based on a number of values, among which are: academic freedom, accountability, equitable access, institutional autonomy and social responsibility (Scholars at Risk, 2020).

Ministerial Conference on Global Approaches to Research, Innovation and Higher Education was held in Marseille, On March 8, 2022. The President of France, Emmanuel Macron presented the "Marseille Declaration", which sets out his proposals for a common understanding of the values and principles of international cooperation in research, innovation and higher education, which includes: Freedom of scientific research, Ethics and integrity, Research excellence, Gender equality, Open Science, Intellectual property, Personal data, Value creation and societal and economic impact, Societal and environmental responsibility and solidarity, Risk management/security (EURAXESS, 2022).

Due to the periods of world history and the various political regimes that existed during this period, the higher education system was appropriate to the values of the society. The paper focuses specifically on the case of Georgia, for which will be considered the period from 1991, when Georgia was declared an independent republic. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, independent states began to reassess values, including Georgia. As mentioned above, the paper focuses on a specific case, which implies the reform of entrance exams. Until 2005, there was a different system of entrance exams in higher education institutions in Georgia. These tests can be perceived as Soviet remnants because it involved a bribery system. School-leaver could pay a certain amount to enroll in different faculties (which the

admissions committee openly told them), as well as having to stand in line for a certain period to enroll in popular faculties. So, an important milestone in the Georgian higher education system is the 2005 reform, which included a complete change in the university enrollment procedure.

Ketevan Rostiashvili's research „Corruption in the Higher Education System of Georgia“ is important in the direction of these processes, which was published in 2004. In this research, important reasons are identified, which specifically reflect value-based reasons of corruption on the example of Georgia, such as the cultural and historical traditions with the principles of management in the Soviet Union. Heads of several leading universities came from the most corrupt elements of the old Soviet system and functions accordingly. Not open competition and regulation of the top administration nor any effective board of trustees in them institutions. In addition, there was no financial transparency in the budget process of universities either resource allocation (Rostiashvili, 2004).

The 2012 report of the World Bank clearly reflects the situation in this direction. By the time of the Rose Revolution, the university admissions system was considered a corrupt area of higher education. Candidates were admitted only by appearing in university entrance examinations. The patronage system permeated the entire process, where university presidents received the sons and daughters of politicians in exchange for political support. Another way to get into the university was to bribe middlemen—little-known university professors or school employees who were responsible for collecting money and passing it upward to influential university staff and members of the examination panels. Outstanding students were usually able to pass and get into the university entrance exams based on their knowledge and results, but many other students only got in based on their ability to pay bribes. The system left students from poor families, especially those living in the regions, little chance of obtaining a university degree. Even students from middle-class families in Tbilisi had to change their major or choice of university because they could not pay the bribe for the school or program they wanted. Bribes for university entrance before 2003, ranged from \$8,000–\$50,000, depending on the department. admission to medical and law school cost the most (World Bank, 2012).

In 2002, the government adopted a decree called the “Main Directions of Higher Education Development in Georgia,” which recognized the problems of corruption and patronage in a system. The resolution called for a more transparent system of entrance exams, the replacement of student vouchers with direct grants to institutions, and proper procedures for university accreditation and better governance of higher education. The measure failed, due to lack of support from all levels of government. The huge number of low-quality institutions accredited in nontransparent ways was evident (World Bank, 2012).

University admission reform is taken as the case study, which followed the events developed in 2005 in terms of the inclusion of Georgia in the international educational space, therefore the mentioned period is taken as an important break in the direction of the change of the policy approach to the educational space of Georgia. As for the change in the specifics of the entrance exams, it was obligatory for all university entrants to take three compulsory exams (Georgian Language and Literature, Foreign Languages and Ability Test). According to the demands of different universities and courses, some students were also obliged to take an exam in Mathematics (Keshelava & Mzhavanadze, 2017). The

entrance exams gave students the opportunity to enter the desired university or program with their knowledge and competition.

At the same time, it is important to note that after Georgia's involvement in the Bologna process, the state focused on introducing international practices in the direction of higher education. The accompanying process of inclusion in the international space is the sharing of values, which first of all appeared on the example of Georgia after the reform of university entrance exams, through which the Georgian higher education system acquired values in the form of objectivity and impartiality. Georgia has taken steps and introduced quality assurance mechanisms taking into account international practices, which it implemented and still implements through the Quality Assurance Agency (National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement) as a regulatory organization. Finally, it can be said that international cooperation in the direction of any state policy (including the direction of higher education) is based on the sharing of value spectrum, on which any educational system should be based and is universal for the whole world.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the issue of international cooperation in general, through which transnational networks are created as a structural union. Values are the main basis of any network, including networks in the direction of higher education, on the basis of which quality assurance standards are created or common goals for the development of the higher education system are generally formed. The paper gives examples of a number of network associations that work in the direction of higher education policy, and Georgia, in the form of its representatives, whether it is a quality assurance agency or higher education institutions, is actively involved in the activities of these networks.

Any state policy is shaped by a specific approach that the state uses as a method of implementation. In this case, the paper presents a regulatory policy approach, regarding which there is still a discussion about how it should be implemented in relation to the autonomy of universities. The regulatory policy approach is somewhat different depending on the states, but its softness or rigidity still depends on the value situation of a specific state, which is fundamentally related to the form of regulation and its specific need.

Finally, one more important issue should be underlined, which clearly shows the structural changes in the educational system as a result of inclusion in international spaces and sharing of values through international cooperation. As a case study, the example of Georgia was taken, and specifically the reform of university entrance exams, which was a concomitant process of Georgia's inclusion in the Bologna process, and reorganized the educational field on a new value spectrum, which is agreed upon by a large part of the world and is universal for the rational functioning of any system.

Discussion questions for the session:

1. International cooperation with shared values - how free are states in planning state policies in the direction of higher education?
2. Should the European Higher Education Area work more on the enhancement of more principle oriented and value driven standards in the member countries?
3. What specificities at the country level could become obstacles, taking into account the political and other type of background of different member countries?

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Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 22 July 2022 to eqaf@eua.eu. The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.