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Inovație în administrație
Programul Operațional
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Democratisation, Marketisation and Changing Power Relations

- A review of the academic literature on quality assurance in higher education-

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'We'll need some pigeons.'

'Pigeons? Right'.

'Today'.

'Comrade Sandu is making an inspection today'.

(...)

'We found some pigeons to throw in the air'.

'White ones'.

'Make them white'.

Amintiri din Epoca de Aur (Tales from the Golden Age)

1. Introduction

The Romanian television series 'Tales from the Golden Age' (2009) portrays legends from the 'golden age' of communism. The series turns the propaganda of the last 15 years of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime into dark comedy by showing folk tales of survival during the mid-1980s. One of the tales recounts a legendary inspection of a village in preparation of a foreign state-visit. The whole village is nervous for the preparation and receives detailed instructions from two inspectors. They are to put up the right banners with the right slogans, prepare inordinate amounts of food and have white pigeons ready to fly when the guests arrive. Even if these are not available, other birds shall be made to fly as white pigeons. In a comical sequence of events, the inspectors end up getting drunk with the villagers, and finally both inspectors and villagers find themselves in unstoppable merry-go-round. They are forced to wait for the foreign delegation to be untangled.

It is not impossible to draw a parallel between the folk tale and current debates about quality assurance in Romanian higher education. Quality assurance is clearly connected to foreign expectations, while foreign 'experts', in turn, have a hard time to untangle the relations between administration, inspection and universities. This research project (realising that it is funded by an international organisation) is aimed at piercing through exactly that complexity, however. It addresses the research question ***'to what extent is internal quality assurance in Romanian higher education fit for purpose?'*** In answering this question, it will try not to fall into the trap of confusing folk-tales for reality. Rather, it will try to disentangle the meanings and operations of quality assurance in (theoretically driven) empirical research. This is by no means an easy task, and this – perhaps rather lengthy - literature review tries to be a first step in conceptualising the issues at hand.

A secondary objective of this literature review is more practical. It tries to address some gaps in the academic literature with a view to publishing the results of the project in a scientific journal. Indeed, little work has been published on quality assurance in Romania, at least in the English language. While some work has been dedicated to 'Central and Eastern Europe' as a region (Schwarz and Westerheijden, 2007, Dobbins and Knill, 2009, Kwiek, 2008), these overviews are usually built on rather far-stretched assumptions about the commonality between the countries in the post-communist space (Scott, 2002). Moreover, when Romania has been included in these overviews, only scant attention has been paid to the empirical functioning of quality assurance (Beju, 1993, Tomusk, 2000, Temple and Billing, 2003).



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The main argument presented here is that quality assurance has a political history and, as such, it is a highly contested field. Importantly, it is the technique of this instrument, rather than the general philosophy of higher education, that is the object of political contestation (Lascoumes and Le Gales, 2007). This has led to a complex vocabulary of 'newspeak' around the issue including words such as 'audits', 'performance', 'standard-setting', 'accreditation', etc. that can in themselves be rather meaningless (Harvey and Green, 1993). As such, the literature will try to sketch an overview over both the political history of quality assurance and the particular techniques that are employed.

The review will start by sketching the 'big debates' in the literature. It will present three main approaches that alternatively approach quality assurance as '**democratisation**', as '**market-making**' and as '**governmentality**'. These approaches all emphasise different aspects of quality assurance, leading to different questions about its functioning. Informed by these debates, the review will continue by surveying the existing work on the **political history** of quality assurance in Romania. The story will pay particular attention to the dynamic interplay between foreign 'experts' and local élites. Finally, the literature review will present an overview over different **techniques** of doing quality assurance. The objective will be to present a method to map out the different systems of internal quality assurance that may be in operation in Romania.

2. The academic debate on quality assurance

It may help (or not) that the topic of quality assurance has been widely discussed over the last two decades. This has resulted in several contrasting approaches to understand the rise of quality assurance in European higher education. Broadly, three approaches are most dominant, namely (1) a view of quality assurance as a tool for 'democratisation' of higher education governance, (2) a more critical analysis of quality assurance as a 'market-making' tool that reflects a broader 'neo-liberalisation' of the university sector and (3) an approach that sees quality assurance as a mode of 'governmentality'. While these approaches may seem to overlap at certain points, an attempt will be made here to contrast them as sharply as possible. In turn, this may sharpen our understanding of why the topic is subject to such fierce debate.

1. Quality assurance as 'democratisation'

The idea of quality assurance as a force to 'democratise' the governance of higher education is most prominent in the field of 'higher education studies'. This approach usually separates 'quality assurance' from a long list of alternative control instruments, such as 'quality audits', 'quality control', 'accreditation' or 'quality management'. **Compared to these other policy instruments, quality assurance is the 'softer variant that allows a conversation about quality by 'empowering' various 'stakeholders' to have a say about what goes on in the university.** In this view, '[q]uality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered' (Harvey and Green, 1993, p. 19). In other words, it is about (re-)assuring the 'public' (however defined) that quality is an ongoing concern of the governance of higher education.

This strand of literature contributes three important understandings of the rise of quality assurance in universities. **First, (monopolistic) power of academics over their profession is seen as out-dated.** While the status of academics as a special authority was relatively commonplace before the 1960s, this has been under attack both culturally and politically ever since (Tapper and Salter, 2000). Both the political left and the right have laid out strong arguments for democratisation. As a result, academics have been forced to share their power, whether that is with community members or with customers. As quality assurance is



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Proiect cofinanțat din Fondul Social European, prin Programul Operațional "Dezvoltarea Capacității Administrative", în perioada 2007-2013 relatively neutral to the form this power-sharing takes, they have been particularly popular to achieve this aim (Little and Williams, 2010).

Second, there has been a long line of argument that universities have neglected to teach properly (Parker, 2008). The division between these two tasks has become particularly acute in the era of mass higher education, in which many more social groups have enrolled in universities (Trow, 1973, Scott, 1995, Tapper and Palfreyman, 2010). The teaching load has not only increased in size, but has also become more complex. Contemporary students may have very diverse wishes about their professors. As such, quality assurance has been constructed as a tool to measure and articulate these wishes.

Third, there has been a long-standing argument that rising public costs of higher education have to be matched by a different distribution of powers (Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994, Dill and Beerkens, 2010). In effect, quality assurance allows the state to get a say in what goes on inside universities. The overriding goal is that this will provide accountability for the increased investments in education, and to 'assure' voters that their money is spent efficiently and effectively.

While powerful in public discourse, the literature on the potential democratisation of higher education through quality assurance often runs into empirical difficulties. For instance, the role of students is typically more approached as that of a consumer, than as that of an equal partner as implied in a democratic discourse (Little and Williams, 2010). As such, it can be questioned whether the participative discourse is more than a veneer for market-like reforms. Moreover, the notion of quality assurance as 'democratisation' sits uneasily with the technocratic language that surrounds the topic. These topics are the subject of another approach, namely that of quality assurance as an instrument of market-making.

2. Quality assurance as an instrument of market-making

The view of quality assurance as a tool for 'market-making' is present in a variety of fields, including economics, public administration and sociology. As such, quality assurance is associated with the general transformation of higher education into a private-sector service that can be bought and sold on the market. **This strand of literature argues that quality assurance leads to a transformation of academics into 'producers' and of students and the business into 'consumers'** (Apple, 2005). The development of quality assurance is an essential step in this transformation, as it allows for an articulation of 'voice' instead of the alternative consumer option of 'exit' (Hirschmann, 1970). Importantly, 'voice' is seen to benefit both 'producers' and 'consumers' in the market. The (simplified) example given by Hirschmann (1970) is that parents have an incentive to remove their children from a public school that is declining in quality. Yet, if all quality-sensitive parents leave, the school has no idea what was wrong, which will enter into a vicious circle of quality reduction. Both the children left at the school and the school itself will suffer from this lack of information.

It is in the idea of market-making that 'quality assurance' becomes very much associated with the idea of 'fitness for purpose' (Harvey and Green, 1993). As 'fitness for purpose' is value-neutral, it is almost entirely concerned with the process of measuring and demonstrating how a certain goal is being reached. This is particularly useful within markets, where companies search for a niche for their product but still want to demonstrate that their product is being made through standardised processes. As survival of a university becomes dependent on its market niche, quality assurance is an essential tool to figure out whether the demand in this niche is being satisfied.



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The view of quality assurance as an instrument for 'market-making' is embedded in a new philosophy of the public sector. This was most notably in the 'New Public Management' that aimed at importing private sector management techniques into the art of public administration (Hood, 1995). The reforms carried out under this header changed the role of the state from a 'positive' to a 'regulatory state' (Majone, 1997) that would take a hands-off approach to service delivery. Indeed, the state would 're-invent' itself and following the slogan 'from steering from rowing' (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). ***In higher education, this meant that it exchanged an increased managerial autonomy for increased standards on the quality of the output*** (Maassen and Van Vught, 1988) Quality assurance would be a key instrument to ensure the three E's of 'efficiency, economy and effectiveness' as well as 'Value for Money' (Pollitt, 1987). The measurement of these values would be done at the level of outcomes, rather than at the level of inputs. This is in slight contrast to the 'democratic' view of quality assurance that underscored the importance of spending taxes wisely from publicly defined objectives. Indeed, the market-view saw was more interested in quality as a question of returns of investment.

Another opposition to the 'democratisation' literature is that 'market-making' is explicitly aimed at depoliticising the university. Markets are guided by independent regulators who have specialised knowledge, not by politicians who follow the whims of voters (Majone, 1997). The off-loading of political responsibilities to 'quality assurance agencies' has been based on exactly such arguments. Agencies were a 'buffer' between politicians and universities, and would understand the sector better than administrators (Westerheijden, 2007). As a result, political discussions tend to concentrate on the functioning of accountability procedures, rather than on the responsibilities of ministers or universities per se (Power, 1994). In other words, it may rather difficult for a democratic system to control quality assurance than may be expected by the advocates of democratisation through quality assurance (Flinders, 2008).

The literature on market-making also faces some empirical problems, however. For instance, the global marketplace for higher education seems to be more driven by rankings and league tables than by quality assurance (Marginson, 2006). Moreover, the specific manifestation of 'new public management' in universities is more complex than pure marketization would imply (Bleiklie, 1998). The approach does make some important contributions, however. For instance, the literature tracks the import of ideas about quality assurance initially pioneered in the world of business such as 'Total Quality Management' or the ISO-9000 standard into the world of universities (Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker, 2010). This is relevant, as multiple models of quality assurance are being used in universities around the world. These themes have been taken up in another strand of literature, namely that of quality assurance as 'governmentality'.

3. Quality assurance as 'governmentality'

The literature on quality assurance as governmentality is mostly present in sociology and public administration, and amounts to ***a sociological critique of quality assurance practices*** (i.e. not of general principles). The term 'governmentality' is a neologism coined by Foucault, contracting the terms 'government' and 'mentality' (Burchell et al., 1991). This approach is perhaps best summarised at a research programme that aims at understanding the shared ways of thinking between the state and its subjects. Importantly, the focus of this research programme is not the general philosophy of the state, but rather the specific power relations embedded in an instrument of governance and their impact on the life of citizens (Rose, 2004). Indeed, what disturbed Foucault about the neo-liberal state was 'the idea of a kind of power which takes freedom itself and the 'soul of the citizen', the life and life-conduct of the ethically free subject, as in some sense the correlative object of its own suasive capacity' (Gordon, 1991, p. 5). In other words, the literature on 'governmentality' tries to problematise the persuasion of citizens that power relations are in their own interest.



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There are two main themes here that resonate with the literature on quality assurance. **A first is the changing self-conception of academics and university leaders alike, who seem to conform to quality assurance procedures.** Shore and Wright, for instance, have argued that quality assurance 'has become a vehicle for changing the way people relate to the workplace, to authority, to each other and, most importantly, to themselves' (Shore and Wright, 1999, p. 559). As quality assurance requires academics to review themselves (through self-evaluation, peer-review, etc.), considerable effort has to be made to convince this group of people that this is in their best interest. Similarly, the primary responsibility for quality assurance is with universities, rather than the state. To achieve this, quality assurance is removed from direct political influence; the state speaks of itself as one 'client' among others (Marginson, 1997). Paradoxically, this has not removed government from the picture. Rather, the government is still nominally in control, and has to respond to any crisis in the system by adding more layers of accountability.

Indeed, the **second theme that is addressed in the 'governmentality' literature is the layering of accountability within and on top of universities.** The starting point is the argument by Power (1996, p. 15) that audit is the 'control of control, where what is being assured is the quality of control systems rather than the quality of first order operations'. As a consequence of this, the need for more accountability is never satisfied: in order to review the activities of academics, audit requires another audit, which in turn is based on an audit trail, etc.. This may explain why some authors recently expressed their concern about the different levels of quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area:

'higher education institutions themselves check whether they have internal quality assurance mechanisms; national/regional quality assurance agencies check whether higher education institutions meet the criteria (either by programme or institutional accreditation); and, subsequently, European organisations monitor the quality assurance agencies. Moreover, at the ministerial meeting in Leuven (2009), a 'fourth layer' was introduced: EQAR should be externally evaluated' (Huisman and Westerheijden, 2010, p. 65).

Whereas the governmentality literature has a lot of potential to explain the rise and proliferation of quality assurance mechanisms, it may have its weaknesses as well. **Importantly, it tends to be rather fatalistic in nature, attributing little faith in the political realm to curb excessive auditing practices.** This theme has recently surfaced in a literature that calls for a debate about the democratic reviews of regulation (Flinders, 2008). Moreover, it has little to say about the differences between types of audit, and whether some may actually be more 'light-touch' or matching with the professional self-identity of academics than others. As such, even if it raises many interesting questions, it remains one perspective on quality assurance amongst others.

The implications of these three perspectives

It should be noted that the three approaches sketched above present 'ideal-types' of quality assurance systems. Indeed, there is no country or a higher education institution where these approaches match the current practices. As such, these approaches should be seen as avenues for investigation by raising key questions about the rise and practice of quality assurance. The following questions could be inferred that are particularly relevant for an investigation of quality assurance in Romanian higher education:

1. *How has the introduction of quality assurance in Romanian universities been legitimised?*
2. *Who is in control of quality assurance? Which different groups are involved and what role do they play?*



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3. Which approach is most useful to understand the rise of quality assurance in Romania?
4. What role has quality assurance played in regulating or creating a market for higher education? Is there a difference in approach to public and private universities?
5. To what extent are university leaders, managers, academics and students convinced of the value of quality assurance? Is there resistance to quality assurance and how is this expressed?
6. How does institutional quality assurance relate to other accountability mechanisms? Is there a proliferation of these mechanisms?

3. The rise of quality assurance in political historical context

It is important to realise that quality assurance neither is a Romanian invention, nor has it been imported from a specific foreign context. It is therefore hard to speak of a specific 'Romanian' project of quality assurance. Indeed, there has been a dynamic between importing and translating foreign ideas that in which the interaction between foreign 'experts' and local élites plays a key role. This is addressed in the literature on '**policy transfer**' and the role of '**transnational élite networks**'. As analysts of policy transfer have noted, **it matters who disseminates these ideas, how these ideas are constructed and who translates these ideas into practices** (Marsh and Dolowitz, 2000, Evans, 2009). In the case of quality assurance, an important role is being played by expert or élite networks of policy-makers who meet their foreign counterparts and develop a shared purpose (Stone, 2001).

Romania was the first country of the 'East' to engage with the policy of quality assurance in the early 1990s (Tomusk, 2000, p. 176). After the revolution, the provision of higher education was liberalised and new private institutions quickly mushroomed. Like in other countries in Eastern Europe, the 'massification' of enrolment and 'privatisation' went hand in hand (Kwiek, 2008). The new policy-makers were relatively quick to respond, however, and organised a series of seminars with foreign experts. Of particular importance was a World Bank project that prioritised the development of quality assurance and accreditation in the country (1994). After the consultations, the government decided that an accreditation scheme would be most befitting the new challenge of ridding Romanian higher education from the 'bad' programmes and (later) 'bad' institutions (Beju, 1993). The explicit aims of the first scheme were rather broad, including the improvement of quality standards, solving the legal status of private institutions (by letting them follow quality standards) as well as promote 'internationalisation' by following western policy practices (ibid, p. 113).

To this end, Romania took the 'Dutch' model of quality assurance as its example, but gave this system a local flavour (Tomusk, 2000). The Dutch system of quality assurance had been created in the mid-1980s after considerable public debate about the relationship between universities and the state. This resulted in a grand bargain that exchanged university autonomy for a public evaluation scheme: a sort of 'Janus-Head' that gave the universities a semi-autonomous position towards the state (Maassen and Van Vught, 1988). Whereas the Dutch universities used their autonomy to establish an hegemony over the new evaluation scheme, Romanian higher education went down another path, however, namely that of **strict state controls**. A pseudo-independent agency was created, the CNEAA, which was to evaluate all public and private universities on the basis of a long list of quality standards (Beju, 1993).

The result of the first scheme was that it functioned as a sharp axe towards private institutions and as a blunt pocket knife towards public institutions (Tomusk, 2000). In effect, a university that fulfilled all the bureaucratic criteria gained a lot of autonomy (and had to do practically nothing to improve its standards of teaching), while those who did not comply were simply removed from the scene. In other words, the



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Finally, in 2005, the government decided to establish a new quality assurance agency, **ARACIS**, by ministerial ordinance, rather than by parliamentary law (ARACIS, 2009). The aim of ARACIS was to be more active in quality-improvement, rather than simply developing long checklists. Moreover, it was to have a 'holistic' approach to quality, in cooperation with an agency that would evaluate pre-university education (ibid, p. 4).

This reflected a change in foreign involvement as well as a shift in local actors. In 1999, Romania had signed the Bologna declaration that started to promote a more improvement-oriented view of quality assurance. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) had been established as part of this process, advocating for European standards in quality assurance. In 2005 (the same year that ARACIS was created), a document was negotiated between ENQA, the the European University Association, the European Students' Union (ESU) and Eurash¹ that created a set of European standards and guidelines on higher education (Bologna Process, 2005).

Meanwhile, the European University Association (EUA) promoted a specific view of quality assurance. It developed the notion of a 'quality culture' that aimed to 'ensure a grass-roots acceptance, to develop a compact within the academic community through effective community building, as well as a change in values, attitude and behaviour within an institution' (EUA, 2006, p. 6). It involved several Romanian universities in its European projects. In 2011, the EUA was even invited to carry out a review of all 90 universities in Romania.

The different views of quality assurance of these organisations reflect in different engagements with these topics. After only a few years of operation, ARACIS invited first the EUA, then ESU and finally ENQA to carry out three successive reviews of its operations on the basis of these standards and guidelines (EUA, 2008, ESU, 2008, ENQA, 2009). All these reports put a different emphasis on the meanings and methods of quality assurance, sometimes in line with the theoretical debate outlined above. Yet, all these reviews emphasise the important task of ARACIS as challenging established social and professional relations in Romanian higher education. This is not an easy task: two authors recently argued that for this reason, 'quality assurance seems particularly problematic in the re-contextualization of the Bologna Process in Romania' (Wodak and Fairclough, 2010, p. 36).

It should be noted that this overview still lacks empirical information on certain time periods and on the role of certain foreign and local actors (for instance, on the role of UNESCO's institute CEPES). Moreover, it remains to be seen how universities have exactly absorbed the idea of quality assurance in their governance structures. As such, a number of important questions remain open:

1. *What drives the difference between private and public institutions in the debate on quality assurance?*

¹ An organisation representing the interests of non-university higher education institutions.



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2. *To what extent is quality assurance in Romania a way to mediate the relation between the state and the university?*
3. *In what other ways is this relation mediated?*
4. *Which (foreign) models are leading for Romanian quality assurance?*

4. The technical dimensions of quality assurance

The guiding principles of the recent quality assurance scheme are laid down in a document called the 'European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area' (Bologna Process, 2005). This document was written and negotiated by four organisations, namely the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European University Association (EUA), the European Students' Union and Eurashe (a network of non-university higher education institutions) with the participation of the European Commission.

The 'European Standards and Guidelines' make a distinction between 'internal' quality assurance and 'external' quality assurance. Whereas 'internal quality assurance' refers to quality assurance within universities, 'external quality assurance' refers to quality assurance carried out by quasi-autonomous governmental agencies. Indeed, this reflects a compromise between two guiding principles that (1) 'providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance', yet that (2) 'the interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education need to be safeguarded' (Bologna Process, 2005, p. 14). In line with the ideas of EUA cited earlier, these forms of quality assurance aim to promote a 'quality culture' in which everyone in the system feels responsible for the quality of the service that is provided.

Even though the 'European Standards and Guidelines' separate 'internal' from 'external' quality assurance, the basic mechanism is rather the same. Following the broader template of public and private sector 'audits' (Power, 1997), an external quality assurance system looks more or less like this (Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994, Sursock, 2011):

- A report is written by the university to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the institution (the 'self-evaluation report');
- The external agency appoints a panel of 'peers', 'stakeholders' or 'foreign experts' to visit the institution and evaluate how the system works;
- The panel writes a report with recommendations for future improvement as well as on whether it is satisfied with what it found in the institution;
- The report is published, leading to a public debate or a public decision on whether standards have been maintained.

It is not so easy to summarise practices of internal quality assurance, however. There is a variety of 'internal' quality assurance systems in operation, such as 'Total Quality Management' (TQM), the ISO-9001:2000 standard, the 'EFQM' model or the 'Plan-Do-Check-Act' ('PDCA') model (Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker, 2010). Driven by this diversity, useful classifications have been developed that distinguish different approaches based on their aims and methods. For instance, Brennan and Shah (2000, p. 14) classify different approaches to institutional quality assurance within four categories (see Table 1)



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1. Academic	Subject focus - knowledge and curricula Professorial authority Quality varies vary across institution
2. Managerial	Institutional focus - policies and procedures Managerial authority Quality values invariant across institution
3. Pedagogic	People focus - skills and competencies Staff developers/educationalist influence Quality varies invariant across institution
4. Employment focus	Output focus - graduate standards/learning outcomes Employment/professional authority Quality values both variant and invariant across institution

Table 1 – Four different perspectives on institutional quality assurance . Based on a review of quality assurance systems in 14 different countries (Brennan and Shah, 2000, p. 14).

Although it could be doubted whether these categories are mutually exclusive, the usefulness of this classification is that it associates different models of quality assurance with different types of authority and thus includes a consideration of power relations in the university. Moreover, it associates these different models with different sets of values and expectations about quality assurance in the institution.

An alternative way of looking at control systems is provided in the work of Hood et al (2004). Following cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, Hood argues that forms of control and regulation can be mapped on the dimensions of 'grid and 'group'. Briefly, whereas 'grid' indicates the level at which 'our lives are circumscribed by conventions or rules', 'group' measures the level at which our lives are 'constrained by group choice, by binding the individual into a collective body' (Hood, 1998, p. 8). This leads to four ideal-types of public management and four associated methods of control (see Table 2). Broadly, '*hierarchism*' refers to hierarchical forms of control based on centralized standards. '*Fatalism or chancism*' refers to random processes of control that are relatively hard to find in modern administration, such as random inspections. '*Egalitarianism or Groupism*' is closely associated with the idea of democratisation, and puts the community (i.e. the academic staff and students) in charge of control systems. Finally, '*Individualism or Choicism*' is the more market-like control scheme based on competition between people.

	High Group	Low Group
High Grid	<i>Hierarchism</i> ('Oversight') Examples: Centralised quality standards, government-imposed procedures	<i>Fatalism or Chancism</i> (‘Contrived Randomness’) Examples: Randomised inspections, risk analyses
Low Grid	<i>Egalitarianism or Groupism</i> (‘Mutuality’) Examples: Peer-review mechanisms, self-controlled promotion mechanisms	<i>Individualism or Choicism</i> (‘Competition’) Examples: rankings or league tables, open competition for academic positions

Table 2: An alternative perspectives on institutional quality assurance based on the cultural theory of Mary Douglas (Hood et al., 2004)



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While there is some overlap between these different schemes, the techniques categorised here are slightly more exclusive (a promotion scheme cannot be both egalitarian and competitive for instance). On the other hand, Hood et al (ibid) argue that it is quite common to find different types of control mechanisms operating in parallel to each other (particularly common are combinations of 'hierarchism' and 'individualism or choicism').

Questions:

1. *What are the instruments of quality measurement?*
2. *What is the most useful way to classify these instruments?*
3. *Which other control instruments does IQA have to compete with?*
4. *Who has designed these instruments? How have they travelled from expert networks?*
5. *Who pays for IQA and how much money is involved?*

5. Conclusion

This literature review has aimed to present an overview over the state of the art in the academic literature on quality assurance. It has aimed to make clear that the issue of quality assurance is by no means straightforward. The discourse of quality assurance is often cloaked in normative discourse of democratisation and is embedded within far-reaching reforms of governance, particularly with the rise of a quasi-market in education. As such, it seems to change the power relations in academia, as well provide a new perspective on professional (and student) identities. These topics can provide many questions to guide the investigation.

Although the academic literature raise many interesting issues, the question of how quality assurance functions in Romania is above all an empirical one. The review has therefore also aimed to present the politico-historical context in which quality assurance was introduced in Romanian universities. This history shows that it is rather unlikely to find a linear implementation of initial policy ideas within the governance of universities. The topic is too contested between different types of universities, and different international actors have emphasised different models of quality assurance. In turn, this informs the technical discussion of quality assurance, and the challenge of untangling 'external' from 'internal' quality assurance. Perhaps, like in the folk-tales from the golden age, this may prove a bigger challenge than anticipated.

Maybe this will be more straightforward than the academic literature portrays it to be. Indeed, much of the academic controversy may reflect the fact that it is the academic profession itself that has been the object of scrutiny. But however the source of these debates, they do raise a number of interesting questions for any research project on quality assurance. Coming back to the research question of this project, if there is one thing that has been made clear, it is that the literature requires us to unpack the notions 'quality assurance', 'fitness for purpose' and 'performance'. Moreover, it requires the project to move beyond desk-research and investigate the actual context in which quality assurance operates. As such, the research project seems to be on track by moving into a phase of empirical research on how quality assurance is constructed within Romanian universities.



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