

**Teaching to Clients: Quality Assurance in
Higher Education and the Construction of the
Invisible Student at Philipps-Universität
Marburg and Universidad Centroamericana in
Managua**

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Abstract

Universities around the world have embarked on reforms that aim at connecting them to the market. This trend has been described as “academic capitalism”. An element that appears in close association to it is quality assurance. Both trends share the same discourses, aims, and processes. They rely on similar key concepts and are justified through the same set of arguments. Quality assurance provides a technology that supports the ideals of competitiveness, efficiency, continuous improvement and transparency, all of which are fundamental values in academic capitalism.

I analyse quality assurance as a specific expression of the “audit culture”, which calls for organisations to implement processes of “control of control” that replace trust and are applied with the purpose of proving accountability through “rituals of verification” that make sure organisations’ internal mechanisms of control remain in place. In the academic context, quality assurance is introduced in two ways that intertwine in practice: on the one hand it is a carefully defined and standardised process, and on the other hand it is a never-ending all-encompassing culture that defines a proper state of mind for academics. Two “rituals of verification” from the quality assurance regime emerge as very important in developing “subjectivation” in university teachers: teacher evaluation and teacher training. Both generate ‘truths’ derived from a classification of students’ opinions using pre-established categories taken from the fields of management and pedagogy.

The existing critique on the “audit culture” and “academic capitalism” has lost force because quality assurance’s descriptions of today’s higher education students as possessing an enhanced “consumer consciousness” have permeated critical analyses of higher education reforms, in which this key assumption remains unchallenged. Therefore, responding to a need for empirical explorations of students in quality assurance regimes, this work aims to fill a gap by presenting an “on the ground” study of quality assurance based on two cases: Universidad Centroamericana in Managua, Nicaragua, and Philipps-Universität Marburg in Germany. In spite of their marked differences, which I describe in detail, these two institutions actively participate in “academic capitalism” and quality assurance, have developed very similar quality assurance structures and an almost identical ‘talk of quality’. The study focuses on the practice of teacher evaluation as a “ritual of verification” that is especially significant because it

requires the direct participation of students. Through this practice, students are encouraged to adopt the client identity while simultaneously their opinions become data for reputation and risk management in their university.

The data obtained through my fieldwork revealed clear contradictions between the 'talk of quality' and the students' own discourses on quality. The students' descriptions of quality teachers dealt mainly with aspects of the teacher's personality, his or her relationship with the students and the emotional impact he or she produced on the student. Their descriptions of good teaching appear more compatible with "gift economy" interactions than with "commodity economy" exchanges. In addition, dominant notions about knowledge appear as a major element through which teachers are judged by their students. The comparison between the two universities revealed that, contrary to standardised notions of good teaching, and a definition of quality as a summation of criteria, students' perceptions are rooted in specific and local student cultures that include very unique notions on quality teaching, course importance, and student life. Furthermore, the interviewees did not consider the teacher evaluation questionnaire as an undeniably useful tool. Students' descriptions revealed their answers depend on their personal strategy as higher education students, on how the course is perceived to fit – or not – in this strategy, on the 'type' of course in question, on how the teacher 'fits' the course, and on how he/she compares to other teachers.

While a central message in the 'talk of quality' is that students are clients and need to be treated in that way, the students interviewed in both universities flatly reject this notion. However, teacher evaluation filters their opinions about their teachers and their courses, making the responses poured – often carelessly – on the evaluation questionnaire subsequently emerge as those of a client with specific and clear demands and a "consumer consciousness". Thus, quality assurance emerges as an effective "tyranny of transparency" that fetishizes the classroom session and invisibilises the students and their practices of "college management" and "professor management", key strategies used by them to adapt the university's choices to their own preferences, often distant to those of the learning experience the university aims to provide.

Letter from Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers, February 06, 1955: "My quarters in the faculty club are pleasant, and they take good care of you here. Everything very comfortable but not luxurious. Luxury is for the students and the Board of Trustees. The faculty isn't spoiled. The students are the donors of the future and therefore considerably more important than the professors. That isn't fundamentally any different in the East; but you don't notice it there. I'm enclosing a questionnaire that the students here are encouraged to fill out about their professors. There are similar things in the East, but I haven't seen anything like this yet. You can really see from this how easily a democracy can turn into an ochlocracy." (Kohler & Saner, 1992, p. 251, letter 162)

Letter from Karl Jaspers to Hanna Arendt, February 18, 1955: "The questionnaire you sent me is a remarkable document indeed. I'll show it to a lot of other people. Do you know Golo Mann's new book on the American mind?" (Kohler & Saner, 1992, p. 253, letter 163)

Letter from Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers, March 26, 1955: "My lectures and seminars are actually going very well. The students are satisfied, at any rate, and I'm drawing a lot of them from other departments, particularly from history. But philosophers, too, and even theoretical physicists. [...] I'm having the beginners' seminar read your *Geistige Situation der Zeit* and *Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*. The students enjoy the reading a lot once they've got over their initial shock and realize that they can understand it perfectly well if they just exert themselves a little. But there are 80 students in this beginning seminar, and I sometimes feel like a circus director in the ring". (Kohler & Saner, 1992. p. 256, letter 165).

Letter from Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers, February 21, 1959: "Under the pressure of progressive education, which has reached Princeton too, of course, the danger is that 'not too much' becomes 'nothing at all' [referring to student workload]. This is the first place in my American experience where class differences simply cannot be overlooked, especially as evidenced between professors, who are mere employees, and the gentlemen students, who are about to mature into alumni and become the future trustees of the university" (Kohler & Saner, 1992, p. 363, letter 236).

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I. Introduction

For the last twenty years universities around the world have embarked in significant reforms in terms of organisational functioning and governance, funding schemes, decision making processes, and adoption of new roles and responsibilities. Despite the sense of novelty imbued on the changes, the reforms in Europe and Latin America have consisted basically in enforcing the application of models and “best practices” initiated years before in the United States and Great Britain. As a result of this exercise in emulation, universities from quite dissimilar contexts now display substantial similarities at the policy and organisational levels. They also embrace the idea that constant upgrading is necessary, that competition in the rankings encourages improvement, that an escalation in tuition fees is inevitable, and that programmes must constantly be adapted to ever changing requirements from social ‘reality’. Universities seem to have been convinced by the discourse of the reforms, of having remained outside of society for long, or of being permanently under the risk of falling out of touch if they do not undertake specific procedures to become connected.

Several authors have identified these transformations as forces for the commercialisation of higher education or the application of neoliberal practices in higher education. The scenario described is one in which the state has relinquished control of the universities to the market forces, while students and teachers are caught in the middle of commercialisation forces. This critique highlights how the “knowledge society” has encouraged turning science and knowledge into a commodity, and to do so, has promoted significant transformations in the way research and teaching are organised in universities. Alongside the “knowledge society”, concepts on good governance and New Public Management have also permeated public perceptions on higher education, especially in Europe. Consequently, universities nowadays must fulfil several different expectations at once. They must be producers of ‘useful knowledge’ – especially technology –, they must produce entrepreneurial citizens – fit for today’s economy – and they must function according to standards of transparency, efficiency and “value for money”. It has been pointed out that that the introduction of accountability regimes in universities signalled the erosion of the public’s traditional trust in universities (see: Trow, 1996).

While most of the available critique on higher education transformations is focused on American and European universities – and its earliest followers –, and identifies these reforms with strategies from elitist higher education systems in rich countries, or as impositions

stemming from neoliberal governments in Europe and Latin American, the theory of Academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) describes how the main transformations in higher education, far from being imposed from the outside, are also actively encouraged from within universities through strategies and transformations that are deployed to become more closely connected to the economy. The “intermediating networks” that continue to stir these reforms include the active participation of abundant numbers of academics. The Bologna Process is championed by academics, institutional accreditation systems controlled by States are directly conducted and overviewed by academics, knowledge created by academics is also spread through “circuits of knowledge” created also by academics. In short, university reforms and quality assurance systems are led and expanded mainly by academics.

Hence, what constitutes the main element in the current trends in higher education is not how elitist a university is or wants to be, how technological and innovative it is, or how high in the rankings it is placed. The essential aspect that brings together universities from different contexts into one way of functioning is the set of practices that are being developed by academics in an effort to ‘connect’ the institution to the economy. And these practices are not limited to the obviously commercial (i.e. patenting, copyrighting, creating spin-offs, charging high tuition fees, prioritising research that can be packaged and commercialised, etc.), they include attempts to connect the university to the market through teaching, students and alumni.

Thus, understanding academics’ involvement in the reforms, and how they are expressed concretely inside universities, is a fundamental step in comprehending their success and the way their implementation has spread. In this discussion I cite key studies that have delved with what occurs inside a university when a managerial quality assurance system is established. They reveal conflicts and a redistribution of power, emphasis on superficial performative elements, waste of time, loss of autonomy for institutions, widening of the gap between prestigious institutions – mostly in the Anglo-Saxon world – and the rest who struggle to obtain recognition. Researchers also have discussed how disparities affect some areas of knowledge, determine the course of research through market priorities, drive up costs for the students, and exploit teachers. Similar structures and logics can be found in universities around the world, both in industrialised countries with dynamic economies and poor struggling nations, both in public as well as in private universities, low cost institutions that cater for the masses and expensive elite universities.

The underlying issue is the widespread applicability of the recent reforms, which alongside notions of competitiveness and entrepreneurialism, drive the idea of student-centred education, prefer clients over students, and impose evaluation and training processes for teachers in the name of quality. Thus, a very important element that I identify as part of academic capitalism – and that is deployed through the same mechanisms – is quality assurance, a now globalised practice in higher education institutions. As an instance of the “audit culture” (Power, 1997, 2010; Strathern, 2000a), quality assurance has come to signify good government in universities. Its “rituals of verification” (Power, 1997) are now hegemonic and widespread practices. Issues of quality – and in fact, any other problem related to higher education nowadays – are only discussed through the framework of quality assurance, which pretends to be apolitical – quality assurance experts claim that “verdicts are based solely on quality criteria, never on political considerations” (Hämäläinen et al., 2001, p. 7) – has a discourse that could be characterised as populist (increasing enrolment and diminishing drop-out rates), and is decidedly neo-liberal (promoting entrepreneurship and competitiveness). Several ideas have become common sense among university managerial circles: for example, that higher education should always grow in coverage, that higher education generates economic development in a country, that it has the potential to be a social equalizer, that it should become more homogeneous or “internationally equivalent”, that teachers have to be constantly monitored and professionalised, and that students now approach higher education like clients.

The phenomenon of quality assurance has created a technology in the practices of evaluation and accreditation, which are being applied in rich and poor universities, big or small, prestigious or unknown, ‘internationalised’ or local, in rich or poor countries. This technology largely ignores evident differences of context and culture that emerge, and focuses on creating “virtual” (Miller, 1998) similarities that establish a “tyranny of transparency” (Strathern, 2000c) that, instead of revealing, conceals important issues from the teaching/learning experience, fetishizing the classroom session.

Through quality assurance, universities present themselves to the public – and to each other – through a common language and common goals. The language of quality assurance, which I define as the ‘talk of quality’, describes quality as a summation of continuously changing and externally defined criteria that an institution must fulfil in order to be positively perceived by the public. This ‘talk of quality’ seeps into everyday decisions and transactions, generates alliances or competition, and continuously reinforces an imagined hierarchy of universities. Given the pervasiveness of this discourse, its visibility and

repetitiveness, but above all, its use in day to day “rituals of verification” in which teachers and students are directly involved, to analyse higher education transformations it is not enough to look at policies, funding schemes, numbers of staff and students, facilities, research production or ranking achievements. It is essential to analyse quality assurance practices and its discourse, as they are applied in specific contexts. The need to conquer the public’s trust is at the centre of this phenomenon, as well as a strategy to govern the higher education teacher.

One of the most relevant elements in the ‘talk of quality’ is the re-labelling of students as clients (see, for example: OECD, 1998), a fixed description of higher education students as individuals who know what is best for their education, want to demand it, want all their needs to be fulfilled, make precise calculations when they choose a university and a programme, demand increasing amounts of information about universities, can judge their teachers in a way that can aid their improvement, and want to judge their teachers. As a result, even academics who have contributed critical analyses on higher education have not even attempted to place doubts on the hegemony of the client identity among students. Thus, students are often described as having a “consumer consciousness” (Ritzer, 1998), or are mainly letting themselves be seduced by consumption as a main approach to higher education (see: Bauman, 2009; Alvesson, 2013).

In order to observe whether this is true I focused my attention on higher education students’ shared approaches to quality in higher education, their descriptions of good teaching, and their views on teacher evaluation. A review of research on higher education student culture suggested that students’ understandings of higher education, and their interactions with the university and their teachers, are a result of very specific shared perspectives constructed by each group’s common experiences. Therefore, an analysis of student culture would be the best way to obtain insights on their approaches to teacher evaluation, quality assurance’s “ritual of verification” that relies on their participation. The empirical analysis focused on the comparison of two instrumental case studies represented by two universities: Universidad Centroamericana in Nicaragua, and Philipps-Universität Marburg in Germany. Belonging to two obviously dissimilar contexts and histories, and having developed markedly different ‘student cultures’, the comparison also revealed, nevertheless, substantial similarities in terms of their application of quality assurance. The strategy followed for data collection was individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups with undergraduate students at both universities, a mix of observations (during lectures and seminars at Marburg and during teacher evaluation), and a mix of semi-structured and unstructured interviews with teachers and quality experts at both universities.

The aim of the empirical exploration was to understand how teacher evaluation questionnaires define quality in teaching and teachers at UCA and Marburg; what are the key elements in students' discourses on quality in teaching and teachers at both universities; and finally, to uncover what is being invisibilised about students and student culture at both universities as a result of the adoption of the quality assurance regime and its definition of students as clients.

The analysis revealed that the 'talk of quality' is present in both universities, displaying almost identical concepts and notions and supporting the development of specialised managerial capacity. Evaluation and accreditation processes are conducted in both universities and promote the enforcement of other "rituals of verification", specifically teacher evaluation, which constitute a technology (Foucault, 1988) for the subjectification of teachers, whose effects have been described by several researchers. A fixed notion of good teaching has been defined in both universities through specific indicators. The results from each application of the process generate 'truths' about teachers supported by neutral sounding pedagogical concepts. Alongside the constant evaluation of teaching, both universities have also launched teacher training programmes and incentive – and punishment – systems tied to evaluation results. The transformation of students into clients emerges as a necessity for this technology to function.

In order to present teacher evaluation as a simple and effective guiding tool to better teaching, an honest feedback from students, the questionnaire relies on assumptions about students' responses as clients genuinely concerned with filling it in the intended way. The empirical analysis revealed that instead, students at both universities have their own criteria for judging teaching, which instead of relying on standardised and specific indicators, like those of the questionnaire, relies on shared ideas about how teachers make them feel, how they relate to them, how they perceive the course in question, and how they define knowledge in general or university life. Students also approach the answering of the questionnaire – which they largely perceive as a power tool applied by the management – from their own strategies of "college management" and "professor management" (Nathan, 2005), which allows them to shape the university's choices to their own schemes.

As evidenced by the empirical analysis, the result of the student-centred approach of quality assurance, which relies on the idea of the student as a demanding client and the teacher as a service provider, far from producing an improved teaching/learning experience, produces a management-centred higher education in which important elements are concealed by the same process that means to reveal them.

II. Global trends in higher education: The regime of quality assurance

“Like German life in general, German academic life is becoming Americanised in very important respects” (Weber, 1974, p. 56).

When discussing the latest reforms in higher education there is a risk of assuming that we are witnessing a novelty, a moment in time in which universities are being forced to betray their essence and transform into organisations that have more in common with businesses or corporations than with schools or centres for the creation of knowledge. There certainly is, as I will present in the following discussion, a sense of bereavement among some scholars discussing recent transformations that have forced universities to leave behind long-held values and ways of functioning. There is also a certain degree of disappointment among teachers struggling to find genuine interest or dedication in their students, and coping with increasing research and teaching demands and misunderstandings about the nature of their work. However, many of the issues under criticism that are promoted in the latest reforms are far from being new phenomena. It is not the first time that university administrators and policy makers try to push changes without educational justifications to support them (Barrow, 1990). It is not the first time that universities face a scarcity of resources (see, for example, Tuchman, 2009, p. 189). Neither is it the first time that students have been granted choosing power over teachers with direct impact on their employment possibilities.¹ It is also not the first time in history in which universities function like private enterprises. The fact is that they did not start as public institutions; many of the first universities in Europe were owned by religious orders or were private organisations. Universities, from the beginning were also connected to the market and even whole disciplines were created with what could be considered as utilitarian reasons, as is the case of Anthropology in Great Britain during colonial times (Kuper, 1996). It is also not the first time in the history of universities that the curricula is market-oriented, making the production of graduates for the job market, and research for industry or practical

¹ This was the case in the first European universities, which began as “private corporations of teachers and their pupils”. In the University of Bologna, founded in 1088, the students hired and fired the professors with their own money during its initial years (Wade, 2014).

purposes its most important goals (Collini, 2012, p. 53). Therefore, many observations made about universities today, both in policies as in the academic critique, are not unique of the times.

It is not safe to say that universities are now more or less elitist than before, that they are more or less connected to the market, that they have better or worse teachers, or that their contributions to society are fewer or greater. Furthermore, neither are worries about quality and lowering standards new. The deep concern with quality is certainly not a phenomenon brought about by the onset of quality assurance regimes. When the massification of higher education became apparent in the United States at the beginning of the 1980s, it was described as a challenge to the academic ethic and as damaging to the relations between teachers and students, isolating one group from the other, promoting laxity in teaching standards and listlessness in students (Shils, 1983, pp. 12-13). A report by the International Council on the Future of the University included the observation that the mass university “isolates the intellectually serious and highly talented students” (p. 15). Half a century ago, in 1955 and 1956, a team of American Sociologists from the celebrated Chicago School of Sociology conducted a profound study on student culture at the University of Kansas Medical School. It included participant observation with students as well as structured interviews with staff and students. The researchers mentioned that: “Among the problems common to educators and the professions nowadays is concern over the quality and the performance of those who apply and are admitted to colleges and the professional schools. It was the frequent expression of this concern by teachers of medicine and administrators of medical institutions that got us into the study which we here report” (Becker, Geer, Hughes & Strauss, 1961, p. 9). It was argued that some teachers also believed that the training of medical students had become poorer in those times (p. 9).

Of all the novelty sounding elements that dominate the academic landscape in current times, there is, however, one that can boast of real newness: quality assurance processes (with their emphasis on managerial audit processes and a standardising and compatible kind of pedagogy). Quality assurance is the product of a dominant perspective on universities and their function in society. This perspective is skewed towards a focus on the economic functions of universities but at the same time – and most importantly – it is a restless and continuously expanding perspective. It is restless because it is based on the idea that there is no climax in the process of achieving quality. It is continuously expanding because it perceives quality as the result of a summation bound to grow indefinitely. As a result, in the practice universities are kept in agitated states of self-observation and external revelation, and

expected to cover a wide array of responsibilities which often prove incompatible between them or unachievable.

Another characteristic of quality assurance is that it can be interpreted as a symptom of distrust towards universities and as an imposition for them to be able to fulfil expanding and increasingly unforeseeable expectations from society. Shore (2010) considers that the neoliberal reforms initiated during the 1980s in developed countries generated uncertainty about the role of the university in society. His main concern is the inevitable contradictions, and stressful situation generated by expectations that governments currently place on higher education. He describes a limit scenario in which the university faces a serious identity crisis:

This is not the death of the traditional liberal idea of the university so much as a shift to a new multi-layered conception in which universities are now expected to serve a plethora of different functions, social and symbolic as well as economic and political. Government no longer conceptualises universities primarily as sites for reproducing national culture, or educating people for citizenship or equipping individuals with a broad, critical liberal education. Rather, it expects universities to produce all of these plus its agenda for enhancing economic importance, its focus on commercialisation of knowledge, and its goals for social inclusion. The question is whether this multi-layered conception creates institutions which function in a balanced, healthy way, or whether it leads to fragmentation, loss of identity and something akin to the concept of schizophrenia (Shore, 2010, p.19).

Evidently, Shore (2010) perceives this new attitude towards universities as a source of serious consequences for the institution. Finding an interesting analogy in psychopathology, he states that the “over-loading” of responsibilities on the university produces what he calls the “Schizophrenic” or the “Multiple Personality Disorder University” (2010, p.20). For Shore:

it is not so much that a new ethic of commercialisation or performativity has come to supplant the traditional liberal/Humboldtian idea of the University; rather, what we are witnessing is a competition between contrasting visions of the university, which are driving academic activity in different – and increasingly contradictory – directions. In the contemporary neoliberalised multiversity, it seems, conflicting institutional visions and managerial agendas are producing increasingly schizophrenic academic subjects (p.28).

Perhaps the complexity of grasping and monitoring all of these responsibilities placed on the university *and the teachers* has granted such relevance to quality assurance systems, which when applied, have the capacity of transforming organisations in important ways. I consider that more than the existence of these “contrasting visions of the university”, it is the practice of bringing them into concretion that has schizophrenia inducing effects. It could be further argued, after all, that contrasting visions of the university might have existed also in

the past. But the symptoms developed in the university – and its members – as they struggle to fulfil these increasing list of expectations placed on them, can be traced to practices of quality assurance.

Among these symptoms, it can be said that as an organisation the university has become increasingly similar to a corporation, imbricated with managerial planning and decision-making strategies. And university teachers have become increasingly managed workers. Staff in leadership positions are expected to act as CEOs who concentrate decision-making processes that are in tune with the times, and those who are not in managerial positions are supposed to act like subordinate workers with ‘team spirit’ and ‘openness to change’. This sharp distribution of power in the university has been discussed by academics. In fact, since the onset of the debates over quality, and over the establishment of quality assessment systems, these were identified by some academics as a plain power struggle. Barnett claimed that “[t]he debate over quality in higher education should be seen for what it is: a power struggle where the use of terms reflects a jockeying for position in the attempt to impose definitions of higher education” (1992, p. 6). The new identities imposed on academics – as managers and managed workers – cannot be underestimated as capable of producing unsettling effects. In addition, quality assurance places academics in both roles, in a situation of constant testing. Every decision taken and performance recorded is seen as capable of either enhancing or undermining the constantly tested institution’s reputation. For the sake of reputation, universities are expected to become transparent, always open to external audit.

Competition is another ingredient that should be added to the above. Universities should be in constant competition to establish a position for themselves based on reputation. What adds digits to this reputation index is usually externally defined and calculated an economic perspective. Hence, nowadays regardless of the characteristics of the productive sector in a country –or region– in which a university is inserted, the latter is expected to provide, above all, usable technology. This adds an internal dimension to competition. Research whose purpose cannot be defined in practical terms is discouraged, and this extends to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. All courses should make clear how they teach skills for the workplace, and the public should be provided with employability data for an institution’s or programme’s alumni. The political leadership and policy makers expect universities to be sources of innovation, focusing enthusiastically on technological and business fields, deemed nowadays secure sources of revenue and productivity. Academics are primarily expected to respond to specific needs, turning themselves into providers of results that can be inserted in an externally defined agenda. According to the Diagnostic and

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), schizophrenia is characterised by delusions and hallucinations. In the following sections I will describe how a wide array of elements from the wider landscape become embedded in quality assurance processes that aim to produce real changes in universities but succeed, especially, in creating the delusion or hallucination of their existence.

1. The wider context: The knowledge society and the commercialisation of higher education

Science is often described as a commodity, and universities as institutions that should produce and successfully commercialise it for the sake of their country's economic growth. The expectations placed on universities today are encased in narratives about the 'knowledge economy' or 'knowledge society'. These narratives infuse a sense of duty to the idea of using of knowledge for the creation of wealth. Regardless of the characteristics of a given university or the context in which it is situated, its academics are thus encouraged to assess their contribution and position in the 'knowledge society' as an inspiration and guide for action. The way science is understood – mainly as technological inventions and useful knowledge – and the role it is expected to have in our society – mainly as a motor for the economy – determines greatly the public role granted to universities and their perceived contribution. In this framework, a university is said to be an asset to society if and when it is producing marketable knowledge and highly employable professionals. Some analysts point out that science has been commoditised and higher education has been commercialised, that there has been a "corporate takeover" (Giroux, 2009) of higher education.

There is a connection in time between the move towards the commercialisation of higher education, which became clear in the 1980s, and the trend described by Gibbons (1985) of treating science as a commodity, which began in the 1960s and 70s in several industrialised countries (Salomon, 1985, p. 82). The commoditisation of science occurs when its value is derived "from its utility in relation to production or some other social process" (Gibbons, 1985, p. 16), the search of truth is not its objective, but the search of practical results (Salomon, 1985, p. 95). It is also very expensive and, as a result, "measured in the same way as any other commodity which has to pay off in terms of applications, profits and returns" (p. 95). This kind of science is also increasingly bureaucratised and "scientific priorities are determined less by free enquiry among scientists and more by the needs of the particular bureaucracy" (Gibbons,

1985, p. 13). The leaders of the scientific community cease to be those identified as the greatest contributors to the development of their subjects. Instead, science is led by institutional leaders, increasingly important because of their role in organising, promoting and defending institutional interests (pp.10-11). They tend to promote science as an instrument or tool “oriented towards utility” and regarded as a limited resource that needs to be rationally planned (p. 13).

The state’s support of this perspective reflects “the national and competitive character of policies whose object is to secure for the nations concerned a more direct contribution by science and technology to their power and influence, their competitiveness from an economic standpoint, their independence at the political and military level” (Salomon, 1985, p. 79). In line with this, some universities have entered a collaboration with the military industrial complex promoted by the state and intensely rewarded in the current incentive system devised as part of the knowledge society. Giroux (2007) describes how the corporatisation of universities in the United States has placed them under the service of dominant military and business policies, posing a real threat to democracy in the country. For Krejsler, in the current situation universities have been stripped from their authority to speak about the truth because they have failed to keep knowledge production independent from private interests, inevitably getting “embroiled in the ongoing needs of society’s power-holders to reproduce legitimacy” (2006, p. 217). In this sense, science has become a commodity largely because it can be used as a means for power at a macro-level, where a state uses it to impose itself over other states, and where dominant groups of power use it to stay in place. But the commoditised version of science is also a means of power at the internal level of the university, a power imposed over scientists themselves.

Evidently, the commoditisation of science could not have occurred in a scenario separated from the university. It has been so embedded in the university that Gibbons considers it not only a threat to the relationship of the university to society but also to the internal academic community. The concept of research and development (R&D, as it is commonly called) is a fixture in higher education policies nowadays. It further reinforces this understanding of science within academic circles. The accompanying assumption that universities are “locked in combat”, competing just as states strive for economic competitiveness, also damages “the intrinsically cooperative nature of all science and scholarship” (Collini, 2012, p. 17).

Academics have repeatedly criticised the knowledge society policies’ focus on utility, relevance, impact, efficiency, and the short term values of science, as well as their partiality

towards technology, which has led to a decreasing support for basic fundamental research and an increase in the external definition of the contents of research. However, their complaints evidently did not slow down the trend. To this day academics discuss how utilitarian concepts of science can have a negative impact on the development of science itself and introduce confounding elements to researchers' work. For example, research proposals are valued through externally defined concepts of relevance, and a focus on impact. Uncertainty regarding a research projects' benefits and beneficiaries is not tolerated by financial supporters. Consequently, as Strathern (2014) points out, in the face of uncertainty and the unforeseeable – both natural qualities of research – the research proposal becomes a promise in which people have to “hype up” their claims in order to fulfil the requisite of impact. But eliminating the risk of a lack of impact generates a new risk, that of the promise. Furthermore, another effect of using this standardised administrative model to define the impact and utility of a research project is that different discipline cultures are not respected, undermining academic autonomy as well (Callewaert, 1997, p.198).

The change from what Gibbons calls “mode one knowledge production”, in which knowledge is mainly produced in universities and organized around disciplines, towards the preference for a “mode two knowledge production”, in which knowledge production is transdisciplinary and linked closely to application and use (Gibbons, 1994) has accompanied the university transformations serving as a background and as a legitimising discourse in which the policies become embedded. However, notwithstanding the science-based discourse, it can be argued that science itself has not taken centre stage at all in the university reforms. As Collini points out, what has been at the centre of changes in the last decades of university reforms are “the ways universities are administered, financed, and overseen by their host societies. Public debate overwhelmingly concentrates on these latter aspects, partly just because they are readily intelligible and discussable in ways that the central intellectual activities are not” (Collini, 2012, p.38). The purpose of the new regime's rules and procedures is encouraging higher education teachers and researchers to behave in competitive ways.

‘Knowledge economy’ discourses include ideas about profit and competition between universities that, in turn, require competitive behaviour between academics. Major attention is placed on encouraging competitiveness and continuous improvement. The appeal university rankings enjoy, and most importantly, the way they are regarded as evidence of a university's quality or lack of it, are indicative of the perceived importance of competition. Furthermore, with the acceptance of competition and rankings comes an increase in the

relevance of university managers, who find in rankings a useful tool and very specific guide for their work (Tuchman, 2009, p. 120).

In this context, the regime of quality assurance comes in to play a very useful role for managers. It arrives as a substitute for academics' judgments. Quality assurance procedures offer a clear connection to specific aspects of competition through their objective measurements in the form of indicators, and so are introduced as a better foundation for decision-making. As Stefan Collini states, behind the acceptance of rankings is a:

growing distrust of reasoned argument, now often seen as either a cloak for special interests or a form of elitist arrogance, and the substitution in its place of any kind of indicator that can plausibly be reduced to numerical terms. The latter possess the aura of both precision and objectivity..." (Collini, 2012, p.17).

Quality assurance practices, which involve constant measurement, are also seen as providing a needed "check upon idleness, incompetence, and corruption" among academics (Collini, 2012, p.108), problems often brought up by policy makers introducing them. This has particular significance considering that these policies were launched in a time when academics were enduring sharp increases in student populations, which were already generating special difficulties and imbalances in their work environment (Salomon, 1985, pp. 82-86). Thus, recalling Shore's (2010) description of the schizophrenic state of academia, this is where the delusions and hallucinations enter the scene. As Collini states, "the processes of 'assurance' do not actually achieve these ends: they merely indicate how carefully a statement about the 'aims and objectives' of a course is drawn up and scrutinized" and even in their most detailed forms "tell us nothing of value about what actually happened and provide no reassurance that education was taking place" (Collini, 2012, p.108). Evidently, a trend that initiated as a recognition of the importance of research and the impact that knowledge can have on the economy and society became fundamentally a regime designed to control academics.

2. Higher education reforms in the Knowledge Society: Resisting but collaborating

“It is also noticeable that universities are increasingly being expected to be instruments of ‘social mobility’, as society’s bad conscience about entrenched inequalities seeks solace from misleading metaphors about ‘level playing-fields’ that allow it to pretend that expanded recruitment to higher education can be a substitute for real structural change to the distribution of wealth in society” (Collini, 2012, p.92).

As part of the spread of the Knowledge Society, during the last decades academic workers have witnessed the consolidation of important reforms in higher education institutions. In a framework that sees universities as members of national or regional “higher education systems” and “innovation systems” (Llisterri & Pietrobelli, 2011), each university has its own geographical area in which it can, and should, have an influence in accelerating productivity and economic growth. Universities with a nation-wide relevance are considered members of a nationally bounded system, and should be overtly tuned into the economic goals and strategies defined for the nation. For smaller universities it is considered that perhaps their influence cannot be nation-wide but is indeed important within a given region. In the case of prestigious universities, mostly located in developed countries, their outputs are considered to be of transnational influence. The important questions for experts in “innovation systems” are whether universities are well embedded in their region of influence and collaborating smoothly with the productive sector, contributing through the production of knowledge that can be packaged and sold (see, as a typical example, applied to the Nicaraguan case: Bellanger & Amador, 2011).

These analyses² observe the ways in which universities can be generators of wealth through the production and commercialisation of usable knowledge in the form of patents or new technology that can be put to use by the productive sector within a short time. They are based on the credence that more investment in education generates more economic development in a country. The amount of universities from a country that have acquired a respectable place in the rankings is observed and presented as evidence of certain countries’ recent economic growth. Since the satisfaction of university students and the level of pedagogical professionalization of the teaching staff has also been introduced into these

² Training on university management and the commercialisation of research in Latin America and Europe is widely supported by UNESCO through the Columbus association. In its website it is possible to obtain numerous examples on this perspective on universities and research. The production of experts on this subject is shared through special courses with member universities, targeting especially university managers. See: <http://www.columbus-web.org/en/>

analyses and rankings, teaching/learning has been absorbed into these measurements of competition. Rankings that take into account the quality of teaching and the 'student experience', urge for the development of teacher evaluation and training centres for teachers as a way of guaranteeing 'student satisfaction' which, in turn, will improve the institution's position in the rankings and therefore, its competitiveness.

This framework for analysing universities is promoted by the OECD, the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and many other organisations and groups that obtain funding from them. They have used their power to fund special programmes, meetings, resolutions and policies that promote this culture of competition and commercialisation. These organisations have come to be perceived in many spaces as experts in education and the networks they support this view on higher education as the only possible one.

This view has advanced noticeably and become hegemonic in many latitudes. A discourse analysis of official documents and speeches from the United States revealed that "the official rhetoric on higher education in that country emphasizes free enterprise, accountability, individual choice, and consumption formulated within the neoliberal market doctrine" (Suspitsyna, 2012, p.64). These official policies and documents on higher education only take into account citizens – particularly teachers, students and their parents – as consumers. In addition, the curriculum has become clearly market-oriented in many universities where, as a result, instruction on citizenship and democracy is marginalized. The clear consequence of this is that students are not being prepared for engaged citizenship (p.50). But although the 'Knowledge Society' rhetoric can be found at a global scale, it does not exhibit the same level of strength or purity as in the United States or Great Britain. There are countries and universities in which this rhetoric coexists with proclamations of higher education as being a public good. Some European states, for example, still subsidise higher education completely or almost completely. This is also the case in Latin American countries with strong public higher education systems. The neoliberal market rhetoric many times is toned down with statements about social justice, public good and equal opportunities.

On the other hand, a pattern does emerge at a global scale consisting on the application of managerial strategies to render universities more controllable and externally visible. Special schemes place universities under continuous scrutiny and give them new responsibilities that respond directly to notions of the Knowledge Economy or the Knowledge

Society³. As stated above, to fulfil the public's expectations universities should produce short term solutions to economic problems, but it is also fundamental that their actions be specifically detailed and made visible to a society that is no longer prepared to assume that they are providing a public good and in the best possible way. This trend has produced thorough reforms that vary slightly according to the specific context in which they are applied. The reforms consist mainly on facilitating – encouraging or enforcing – the application of a set of now widespread managerial practices that are trusted to guarantee quality.

Students surface as relevant actors in these reforms. For this purpose they are, however, given a new identity: that of clients, customers or consumers. The three labels are used indistinctly in documents. This new identity portrays students as people who are constantly choosing and demanding. They choose between several available universities that, in turn, should strive to attract them by moulding their offers to fit their needs. The new client identity also indicates that students make specific demands to their university and leave if it does not respond to their interests. This client behaviour and consumer choice, it is thought, feeds a competition that progressively improves quality in the whole system. A common message directed at academics is that there is a growing pool of clients and it is only the university's fault if it cannot attract them or if it loses them to the competition. The market logic is at the heart of this reasoning, as well as a striking change in the identity and role imagined for higher education students. The following passage from the OECD – significantly published one year before the birth of the Bologna Process in Europe – conveys the spirit of the reforms:

How should tertiary education better respond to the interests and choices of “clients”, students foremost among them? While countries differ in the levels, sectors and settings in which the demands for post-schooling education are met, all are now endeavouring to meet them. In all countries, participation rates have increased, drawing in ever wider segments of the population, notably mature-age students and women. There is growing competition and choice; “drop-out” in this respect may be less an indication of student performance than of student choice to leave, because they find that the programmes and teaching are poorly suited to their particular needs, interests and backgrounds. It will be important to better understand the implications of demand and choice in tertiary education, and useful to monitor country experiences with policies which are seeking to promote greater responsiveness to meet those demands (OECD, 1998, p. 3, cursive in the original).

³ Peters, Britez and Weber (2010) identify three policy eras in education policy, all closely knit into wider socio-economical trends (the Keynesian welfare-state era, the neoliberal paradigm era, and the knowledge economy era) and point out how in each of these periods, education has been perceived as having different functions.

The OECD also grants an important role to other social actors, considered as ‘stakeholders’, who universities should also try to satisfy by tending to their needs: “Educational policy needs to take account of several key perspectives: those of the clients – the students – and those of the stakeholders who include employers, social partners, and various economic and social actors with a vital interest in the outcomes of tertiary education” (OECD, 1998, p.9).

The stance of the OECD is relevant because notwithstanding its economically oriented nature, this organisation has positioned itself as a relevant producer of information and advice in the educational arena. It is in charge of the prominent PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) Report, and also produces other sought-after quantitative and comparative data on education, as well as policy proposals on schools, skills beyond school, innovation in education, and the links between labour markets, education and research⁴.

A few years later, an important step was taken to facilitate and encourage the role of higher education in the economy, further cementing the consideration of students as clients and universities as providers: in 2002 the World Trade Organization (WTO) included higher education as a commercial service regulated by GATS (Suave, 2002). This ostensibly unstoppable advance of the idea of higher education as a commodity and students as its clients has, however, awakened some cries of resistance. Some higher education organisations openly challenged this, among them the Association of European Universities (CRE), the *Unión de Universidades de América Latina* (UDUAL), and the *Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano* (CSUCA). This opposition from academics, who consider that higher education should not be defined as a commercial service, has proven ineffective. The promoters of the client label have responded with some disdain. The OECD concedes that the term client is frowned upon by some quarters “as a perverse concession to the consumer society” (OECD, 1998, p. 15). The same acknowledgement has been expressed by experts in education, implying also that a refusal to accept the term is almost irrational: “Some educators object to calling learners, parents, and community members ‘clients’ or ‘customers’. Regardless of the terms one finds comfortable, educators do have clients and customers” (Kaufman, 1995, p. 6).

I explain the weakness of the resistance to the commercialisation of higher education – with its repositioning of students as clients and universities as providers – in a fundamental

⁴ Information on the OECD proposals, data, and initiatives on education can be found at: <http://www.oecd.org/education/>

contradiction in the actions of the opposing groups. Notwithstanding their vocal opposition to the blatant commercialisation of higher education, they simultaneously promote key practices that place universities in the road towards this commercialisation. They turn, in this manner, into important collaborators. The reforms and tools that universities have embraced in the name of quality turn them into institutions readily controlled by the market logic. In the following paragraphs I will describe the main practices that introduce market values in the university's core in the guise of quality assurance at the service of students/clients.

The notion that universities need to adapt to the current context of competition, declining resources and continuously changing societal needs by creating management structures that promote competition and entrepreneurialism is widely spread (see, for example, Sporn, 1999). Success is considered a matter of adaptation, and failure becomes the destiny of universities who stubbornly refuse to 'adapt'. In this sense, reforms are but a helping hand for old-fashioned higher education institutions that need to renovate and change. Universities in developing countries receive help to achieve the goal of attaining a greater likeness to universities of the most prestigious and modern sort. In this order, the promotion of quality assurance by institutions from overseas also attains a lustre of cooperation for development.

Consistent with the logic of competition described above – openly sponsored by prestigious international organisations – higher education institutions have endured a wave of reforms that began in the 1980's in the United States and took force in the 1990's in Europe, spreading all over the globe in the following decades. The trend continues to expand in all continents, engaging both public and private universities. The reforms consist mainly in transforming managerial aspects of decision making and control in universities, and often specific efforts are directed to establishing permanent evidence-based quality control processes. The reforms have created new ways of organising universities mostly through the creation of new offices staffed with managerial personnel and the creation of new governmental dependencies devoted to supervising or leading the actions to be taken. The calling is for transforming universities into quality-controlled, effective and efficient organisations. In spite of some significant indications of resistance – of which I will offer some examples in upcoming chapters –, presently these trends enjoy a firm legitimacy anchored in the neoliberal context. They sediment themselves in important political projects, such as the European Union, and find key financial supporters in multilateral organisations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, willing to award loans or grants for the support of quality control initiatives and their resulting proposals for change: the creation

of policies that define new responsibilities and procedures, and the organizational re-structuration of universities and entire so-called 'higher education systems'.

For many agencies, the link between education and development means that promoting quality assurance processes in universities is equivalent to promoting efficient routes to development in poor countries. In harmony with the OECD, the European Union, and the WTO is the World Bank, playing a big role in shaping educational policy, especially in Latin America. Evidently, the Bank intends to have a direct influence on the education systems of the countries to which it lends. It is one of the strongest supporters of the idea that a population needs to obtain larger quantities of citizens educated to the highest level in order to produce growth. It is also a strong supporter of the development of quality assurance in higher education.

Significantly, critics of the World Bank's policies on education state that while the Bank presents itself as an authority in the subject, this supposed expertise is merely based on their own previous publications and inadequately analysed pilot projects (Klees, Samoff & Stromquist, 2012). Education is described by the Bank as a service and an issue for technical management and governance. For education, the Bank proposes a solution that fits all countries. When discussing its problems it emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability in the system, and promotes its adequacy for the labour market and the global economy. Notably, both elements are comprised in the quality assurance discourse.

Its quality agenda has also included encouraging decentralisation, counteracting in this way the power of traditional groups of interest such as teachers or student unions, in influencing educational policy (Coraggio, 1997, pp. 23-24). The Bank expects the financing of higher education to increasingly be achieved through private resources (p. 24), encouraging also that universities should compete with each other for access to public funds, as this competition would generate innovation and efficiency in educational institutions. In contrast, for the Bank, reducing the number of students per teacher or increasing the salary of teachers, do not contribute efficiently in increasing learning (p. 25). Coraggio points out that, due to its economic bias, the World Bank makes a fundamental mistake in its analysis of education. It ignores essential aspects of educational reality because it identifies the educational system with the market system, the school with the enterprise, parents with service demanders, the

learning process with the making of products⁵. The Bank accuses developing countries of having problems in their educational systems because of inadequate investment or planning.

Analysts point out that whereas the Bank uses a positive and optimistic discourse of human rights and happiness, its actions focus on promoting privatisation and an increased role of the private sector in education. In its support of privatisation, technocracy, and the deprofessionalisation of teachers, the Bank largely ignores the ways in which unfairness and injustice are perpetuated in the education system. Its policies also ignore what happens in the classroom during the learning process, focusing instead on what they consider to be inputs, outputs, and the system as a whole (Klees, Samoff & Stromquist, 2012). For Torres and Schugurensky, its technical language does not take into account “historical analysis of the social context of education, the political dynamics, or issues of power” (2002, p.439). It can also be argued that the World Bank has also encouraged the adoption of quality assurance systems to the point of being almost an imposition. This is the case of Chile, where the launching of the pilot project of quality assurance with funds of the World Bank can be interpreted as a strategy of forum avoidance (Dickhaus, 2010, p.262).

The role of multilaterals is presented to developing countries as completely benign; as a generous option in favour of the inclusion of poor countries into the global scenario, helping them not to be left behind. This has strengthened the leadership of European countries in the promotion of quality assurance regimes overseas, and the recognition of UNESCO as an authority in the matter of quality assurance. Like the World Bank, UNESCO has in fact, “a strong selectivity which privileges the interests of the major exporting countries in a global service-based economy” (Hartmann, 2010, p. 316).

After decades of work and funding to strengthen these reforms for the improvement of quality, it is impossible to tell if higher education has indeed become better. We do seem to talk about quality more than about anything else, describing what it should be, going into details about how it is presented, but people seem to be more confused than ever about what quality really is. Perhaps we are spending more time defining quality, defending it, disguising the lack of it, or creating the illusion of it, than really working on it. Hence, a clear result is the

⁵ *Para encuadrar la realidad educativa en su modelo económico, y poder así aplicarle sus teoremas generales, el Banco ha hecho una identificación (que es más que una analogía) entre sistema educativo y sistema de mercado, entre escuela y empresa, entre padre de familia y demandante de servicios, entre relaciones pedagógicas y relaciones de insumo-producto, entre aprendizaje y producto, haciendo abstracción de aspectos esenciales propios de la realidad educativa* (Coraggio, 1997, p.26)

development of a 'talk of quality'⁶ used to express two main ideas that are constantly reiterated: that in order to guarantee quality universities must embrace continuous change inspired by new managerial tendencies; and that being committed to quality involves a rejection of values considered out-dated and far removed from modern society because they are rooted in an 'ivory tower' past⁷. A system is put in place that helps to display elements and present them as indicators of quality, while it effectively plays down other issues that arguably also constitute quality and probably to a greater degree. The 'talk of quality' creates and reinforces stereotypical images of universities and academics. Thus, universities can either be ivory towers or connected to society, global and internationalised or local, first class or low reputation. The professor can be arrogant, outstanding, selfish, or student-centred. The student can be satisfied or not, a client with needs or just a student. This 'talk of quality' is embedded in a set of practices that can now be found in universities all over the world:

- **Evaluation and accreditation processes:** Considered as straightforward methods for guaranteeing quality, failure to engage seriously risks a university's reputation. While in some countries accreditation is officially optional – although socially imposed –, in others it is required by law. The practices of evaluation and accreditation are at the top of this list because they have become the most important source of pressure for the implementation of all the following practices.
- **Use of managerial planning practices:** Originally practices that belonged to the private, industrial sector, these managerial decision-making and controlling processes are now extensively practiced in universities. The mission statement is described as an ultimate guide for a university's actions, and as such, is thoroughly examined in many accreditation processes. It is thought to condense, in a brief paragraph, the purpose of the university and its aims. Strategic plans describe precise objectives through the use of, mainly quantitative, indicators. The creation of strategic plans often involves the use of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analyses, market surveys, benchmarking, impact and risk analyses, and their goals are periodically revised. Evaluation processes also

⁶ Here I play on Teresa Caldeira's (2000) concept "talk of crime" which represents a set of discourses through which the experience of being a victim or potential victim of crime is explained while at the same time social discrimination is reinforced as well as the disembedded design of the city of São Paulo, Brazil. In this case, the "talk of quality" reinforces the need that every higher education institution has to develop and apply quality assurance processes, while it keeps the discussion within the regime's framework.

⁷ Often it is said that, contrary to the university's elitist past, nowadays higher education should be open to everyone. The other idea being openly rejected is that professors are knowledgeable individuals with authority to decide what to do research on and what to teach.

produce plans that feed the institution's strategic plan. Consequently, many evaluation documents follow a strategic plan format.

- **Proliferation of data bases and other evidence trails:** The managerial way of functioning creates an incessant need of information. This is also encouraged by accreditation agencies. Universities should prove that they keep a record of everything they do and produce in order to demonstrate interest, transparency, and the veracity of any claim about their impact in society.
- **Creation of offices for the promotion of innovations for the market, the commercialisation of technology, and the protection of intellectual property:** Universities may function with understaffed faculties but they tend to find the necessary resources to create these kinds of offices and hire middle managers to work in them full-time. In contrast to spending on hiring new Faculty positions, this is considered an investment that will later attract private funds to the university and for the benefit of everyone in the institution. In addition, their activities are labelled as 'extension' and 'impact', which are highly valued for accreditation and ranking purposes.
- **Modification of degree programs in favour of international comparability and equivalence:** Universities seek to geographically increase the validity of their degrees as a way of attracting more students. This includes the possibility of creating joint degree programs involving universities in different countries or even continents.
- **Modification of course contents to include more professionalizing subjects and specific training in demand by employers:** When updating curricula, it is considered a duty to consult employers about the kinds of knowledge, abilities and competencies that should be taught to the future professionals to make them desirable employees. This is also taken into account by agencies during accreditation processes.
- **Competition for positions in rankings:** Universities are increasingly making decisions and planning according to what is taken into account by the rankings, or can guarantee their permanence or advancement towards a higher placing. In turn, universities that cannot compete successfully in these rankings often opt to seek collaborations with those in more privileged positions in an attempt to gain reputation by association. In addition, alternative or secondary rankings are created for those universities who cannot enter into the most prestigious lists.

There are currently more than twenty different global rankings and more than forty recognised regional or national rankings.

- **Fostering competition between academics for research funding:** The competition between institutions goes hand in hand with the competition between individual academics. The success of a researcher in attracting funds translates into the portrayal of a program or department as successful.
- **Professionalization of teaching through investment in pedagogy courses:** Teacher training is considered instrumental for guaranteeing student satisfaction, which is reflected in teaching indicators used in rankings and observed by accreditation agencies. The way students perceive their teachers, how satisfied they feel, becomes fundamental for a university's reputation and competitiveness in the system.
- **Application of student-teacher evaluation questionnaires:** It is argued that these questionnaires reveal honest and detailed feedback useful for teachers to improve their teaching skills. In most cases the quantitative results from these questionnaires feed an incentive system that aims at encouraging student-satisfying performance by teachers in the classroom.

3. Accreditation and evaluation: The driving processes

As mentioned above, in the era of the 'Knowledge Society', it is not science what we find at the centre of new strategies for higher education, a set of managerial practices is what nowadays defines activities and drives decisions in universities. The conjoined processes of evaluation and accreditation are the most significant because they are instrumental for the enforcement of the rest of the practices, which appear as ramifications or products of the former. For example, the decision to create technology transfer offices in some universities is, more often than not, a result of the inclusion of indicators on the impact of research in society in the list of standards promoted by accreditation agencies and rankings. Another example is the writing mission statements. While it is hard to think of a university professor who effectively finds

inspiration and guidance in these⁸, or to imagine a student interested in reading it, they are effectively highlighted as a fundamental evidence of quality by managers and accreditation agencies. In Central America, agencies state that during the peer evaluators' visit they might actually test students of a university to see if they know the mission statement by heart.

Evaluation and accreditation processes convince university managers about the need to develop the rest of the practices detailed in the previous section. Perhaps the persuasiveness of evaluation and accreditation relies on how hazily they are defined by their proponents. According to experts, although they share some elements, and in spite of the fact that "accreditation involves evaluating procedures and evaluations may (or may not) have an accrediting function" (Hämäläinen, Haakstad, Kangasniemi, Lindeberg & Sjölund, 2001, p.8), evaluation and accreditation are different processes, developed for very different purposes. They insist evaluation is meant to be an internal process developed as a tool to diagnose problems and plan strategies accordingly. It is portrayed as the common sense way in which any institution should be managed, and a failsafe way for managers who need to make informed and justified decisions. Evaluation and its results do not need to be made public. On the other hand, accreditation is a process that certifies the quality of a university or a program based on its fulfilment of a set of pre-defined standards. The process is generally conducted by a specialized external agency and is the result of an evaluation process. By turning the other practices – detailed in the previous section's list – into standards, accreditation makes them become compulsory in nature.

Experts reiterate the differences and similarities between evaluation and accreditation perhaps as a way of convincing of the necessity of enduring the latter by linking it to the essential goodness and bonhomie of the former. Evaluation is defined as an internal process that is employed to "assess to what extent a programme or an institution is meeting the level of quality set by the programme planners or the institutions *themselves*" (Hämäläinen, 2001, p. 7, my emphasis), it may refer to a standard, but can also do so partially or not at all (p.8). In this sense, evaluation comes across almost as a secular retreat for the members of an institution, who come together for a process of self-examination and discovery. On the other hand, accreditation is about whether standards are met in a course, program or institution. By standards they can mean minimum standards or standards of excellence externally defined.

⁸ "One only needs to think of the empty, portentous prose of that representative genre of our time, the 'mission statement'. The message of most of these dreary documents can be summarized as 'We aim to achieve whatever general goals are currently approved of' " (Collini, 2012, p. 89).

Experts state that accreditation is about benchmarking (p. 7), a procedure that has been imported from business circles and consists of comparing an institution's performance with the best practices of the best companies in the industry. Briefly, it is said that while accreditation "has a very limited objective (the yes/no verdict), evaluations usually have a broad set of purposes (for example, SWOT-analysis, goal oriented, fitness for purpose, quality enhancement, organisational learning, strategic recommendations)" (p.8). In general terms, while accreditation is presented as a test that can result in failure, the internal nature of evaluation and the emphasis stressed on its usefulness portrays it as an unthreatening process that can only produce opportune advice. The role standards play in accreditation, which is not the same for the case of evaluation, is identified by experts as a conclusive difference between the two processes. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that the managerial practices included in evaluation processes – as the SWOT-analysis and fitness for purpose assessments – involve a very clear exercise of comparison that gives it almost as much power to control decisions – the power of the examination – as accreditation's use of standards.

Accreditation processes have been vested with all the qualities of the exam. When experts define it they tend to highlight its formality, that it is external and cyclical and that it grants status, but above all, they hail it as a necessity in the current context. Practical reasons – and a natural reaction to the current situation of deregulation of the public sector – are cited as support for the emergence and application of practices of accreditation. "Accreditation and standardisation are tools to make a differentiated and complex environment more easy and transparent. Information and co-ordination will contribute to an overview of the field for different groups, such as students, parents, teachers and employers" (The European University Association, 2001, p. 14). Coupled with the notion that universities should generate information about themselves is the idea that students should use it and apply their "power of demand" in improving the system. Schade (2007, p.187) describes this logic very clearly:

The background to the concept of a definition of minimum standards that have to be met by individual programmes is the idea that institutions can develop profiles which extend beyond these minimum standards and can be steered and controlled by the principle of customers' power of demand. In order to allow this principle to unfold, it is necessary to make sure first that the potential customers have that power of demand. This calls for transparency, i.e., customers must be able to obtain information about the quality of the programmes, products and services on offer and compare these. A first step towards such transparency is the establishment of minimum qualities through accreditation.

This focus on transparency and the availability of information for students and employers is found at all levels; in Europe it constitutes one of the main purposes for the Bologna Process' expansion. A key element of quality assurance – found in both Europe and

Central America – that is linked to the importance of transparency, is its underscoring of the role of “stakeholders” in decision making. Quality assurance regimes attempt to prevent universities from making important decisions in isolation. Universities should demonstrate that they conducted proper consultations so “the interests of students and other stakeholders such as labour market representatives [are] at the forefront of external quality assurance processes” (ENQA, 2009, p. 15). Quality assurance, thus, is presented as a process that connects universities to their society, saving students from the negative consequences that studying in an isolated ‘ivory tower’ could have on their future careers. Accreditation agencies in Europe and Central America analyse if an institution officially includes the participation of “students and other stakeholders” (p. 16) in their quality assurance activities.

Another element at the heart of quality assurance is a redefinition of the roles of students and teachers. In the case of teachers, a proven expertise in the subject they teach is not enough to be regarded as good professionals. It is established that teachers should provide evidence of teaching excellence. Institutions should make sure that teachers can transmit their knowledge effectively and adapt their practice to different contexts and changing needs. Three practices are highly endorsed by quality assurance: the development of a system to obtain feedback from students on teachers’ performance, the provision of training for the development of teaching skills, and the removal of teachers who appear as ineffective according to students’ opinions:

Teachers are the single most important learning resource available to most students. It is important that those who teach have a full knowledge and understanding of the subject they are teaching, have the necessary skills and experience to transmit their knowledge and understanding effectively to students in a range of teaching contexts, and can access feedback on their own performance. Institutions should ensure that their staff recruitment and appointment procedures include a means of making certain that all new staff have at least the minimum necessary level of competence. Teaching staff should be given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity and should be encouraged to value their skills. Institutions should provide poor teachers with opportunities to improve their skills to an acceptable level and *should have the means to remove them from their teaching duties if they continue to be demonstrably ineffective* (ENQA, 2009, p. 18, my emphasis).

Regarding students, the way they are defined in quality assurance is remarkably different. While the emphasis on teachers is placed on their performance and on the need to introduce them to the logic of continuous improvement, which implies to never settle on a given condition even if it appears to be satisfactory and to always be open to criticism and modification, in the case of students the emphasis is placed on the fulfilment of their needs. Quality assurance systems do not talk about students having to adapt to different kinds of

teachers and teaching styles. They talk about students who have needs, and who know very well what these needs are. They come to higher education with their needs in mind to receive and make use of what a university can offer in terms of support. Teachers are a “learning resource” among others – notably of a material nature – that should be available to them:

In addition to their teachers, students rely on a range of resources to assist their learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries or computing facilities to human support in the form of tutors, counsellors, and other advisers. Learning resources and other support mechanisms should be readily accessible to students, designed with their needs in mind and responsive to feedback from those who use the services provided. Institutions should routinely monitor, review and improve the effectiveness of the support services available to their students (ENQA, 2009, p.18).

Evidently, and in spite of repeated claims to the contrary, the role given to students is of a passive nature. Quality assurance places students in a passive position as individuals with needs that can be fulfilled if the university duly asks for them to be identified. Students are receivers; their opinions are taken into account by the system, not their actions. The student has to say if his or her expectations are being met by the university, and specifically by the teachers, independently of what he or she does or does not do.

Because it is presented as a need – or as the proper way of functioning – quality assurance, especially accreditation, can be compulsory in practice without even being so by law. For example, in the United States accreditation is presented as a voluntary process. However, its voluntariness fades when one considers that it is also a condition for the attainment of public funds and grants, and for the attraction of students and faculty (The European University Association, 2001, p. 16; Eaton, 2006). In the following pages I will describe evaluation and accreditation processes in more detail, focusing then on the cases of Europe and Central America. These practices, which are the concretion of the ‘audit culture’ in universities, will constitute the context of my analysis.

3.1. Evaluation and Accreditation in Europe

Managerial reforms in higher education started in Western Europe around 1984, mainly in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands and followed closely by Belgium, Denmark, Finland, and Norway (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002, p. 363) – other sources include France in the list of pioneer countries (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, pp. 5-6). Many researchers agree that these

reforms were little more than a copy of American practices – initiated as variations of Total Quality Management – which included emphasising strong leadership in key managerial figures, creating governing boards, establishing quality and accountability systems, and developing performance-based budgeting (see, for example, Rhoades & Sporn, 2002; and Sporn, 2003, p.32). These reforms spread all over the continent after 1989 with the fall of communist regimes and following trends which already had a long tradition – some say of more than one hundred years (Eaton, 2006) – in the United States (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007). Even though most universities were overwhelmed and ill-prepared for the new demands (Sporn, 2003, p.36), in little more than a decade – from 1990 to 2003 – the institutionalisation of accreditation and evaluation grew quickly in Europe, going from less than half of the countries to all but one (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007, p. 9).

Hämäläinen et al. (2001, p. 3) use the terms “quality assurance scheme” or “quality assurance system” to denote both accreditation and evaluation systems, and to differentiate these from systems of approval that do not include formal evaluative elements, which still exist in some European countries. While evaluation schemes are “institutionalised and systematically implemented activities regarding the measurement, analysis and/or development of quality for institutions, degrees-types and/or programmes that are carried out at the supra-institutional level”, they do not lead to approval processes (p.3), while accreditation schemes are evaluation schemes – also institutionalised and systematically implemented – that do “end in a formal summary judgement that leads to formal approval processes regarding the respective institution, degree type and/or programme” (p.2). Regarding “systems of approval”, the authors identify three types:

- Approval of institutions, degree types, programmes: “To grant the ‘right to exist within the system’ (or, respectively, to reject the ‘right to exist’) to an institution, degree-type, programme (e.g. charter, licence, accreditation). The approval can be carried out by several organisations or one organisation and is granted by one or more organisation(s) at the supra-institutional level” (p.2).
- Approval outside the accreditation scheme: “All major approval schemes of higher education institutions, degree types and programmes that are not part of the accreditation scheme” (pp.2-3).
- Other evaluation schemes: “Other types of ratings / measurements of quality that do not fulfil the criteria of the definition of evaluation schemes, such as institution-based evaluation” (p.3).

Although the improvement of quality is officially the main purpose for accreditation and evaluation processes to take place, experts also cite other reasons for the dissemination and importance of accreditation processes in Europe. In some countries, the call for accountability in all public institutions becomes the main driving force, emphasising the need for the university to also secure the public's trust (Hämäläinen et al., 2001, p. 14; Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p. 13). Another element that calls for accreditation is the need for the international recognition of specific programmes or of a country's degrees (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p. 13), which goes hand in hand with the highly regarded element of student mobility that is said to correspond with the transnational nature of the labour market (Hämäläinen et al., 2001, pp. 15). This is closely related to the call for accreditation to tackle the problem of the rise of the "Business of Borderless Education", of a dubious quality but able to attract students, and very difficult to control (p.16). Another driving force is precisely the proliferation of accreditation systems in the USA and Europe, as well as the existence of transnational accreditation systems which become recognisable labels and translate into the desired international recognition (p.17).

Although accreditation has been implemented in Europe through the same general recipe defined by its promoters, it has followed very different specific aims and purposes. Experts have concluded that it does not follow a common general approach. It can vary a lot in terms of structure, methods, and types of evaluation processes it relies on (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p. 11). For example, while in most Nordic countries it followed "the desire to expand open access and equal opportunity for mass higher education by creating new regional colleges and new study programmes as counterparts to the large traditional universities", in countries like Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, the process was seen as a solution for the perceived low efficiency of the system (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p. 6). In Central and Eastern European countries the introduction of quality assurance policies was seen as a useful tool to eradicate Marxist-Leninist content from curricula, as a way of rapidly expanding the system, and as a mechanism to pave the way to the higher education market. State controlled accreditation was also seen as a way of assuring a minimum quality control in a scenario of extreme decentralisation of higher education systems (Westerheijden & Sorensen, 1999).

It has also been mentioned that instead of being driven by a desire to show accountability to society, in reality accreditation ends up being driven by a desire to comply with standards caused by a pressure to uniformitise (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p. 13-

14), not an expressed aim of the process. Furthermore, the possibility of acquiring private accreditation – mainly from international agencies – is also a significant aspect. Since this remains voluntary and not linked to the authorities, it “does not alter [a university’s] formal status”. Nevertheless, since it “may enhance a unit’s reputation” (Hämäläinen et al., 2001, p. 9), private international accreditation can be perceived as a very desirable acquisition in the European context.

Accreditation systems apply to all states in the European Higher Education Area but vary in several aspects. Schwarz and Westerheijden (2007b, pp. 18-24) offer us a detailed overview of accreditation practices in the Area. This allows us to see the different ways in which the states have approached these processes. It appears evident that accreditation schemes will take the form that better combines with the local higher education tradition or cultural ideals. There is not one way in which accreditation functions and, as the following list shows, in Europe there are more differences than similarities regarding accreditation processes. After reviewing Schwarz and Westerheijden’s descriptions only two aspects can be found in which accreditation shows no variations across the states:

- The accreditation concludes with a published report.
- Private accreditation is rarely considered as important as governmental accreditation, it happens only in some programmes, as in the case of MBAs (Master of Business Administration) (2007b, p.31).

On the other hand, the following list helps to visualise how diversely accreditation functions in several important aspects:

- Officially, in the European Higher Education Area, accreditation schemes should be applied to all higher education institutions, all programmes and to both bachelor and master levels, less often to doctorate level. However, there exist interesting differences between countries. For example, in the case of Germany, this applies to bachelor and master programmes, but not to the traditional *Diplom* scheme.
- Professional accreditation schemes apply only to their own field and are voluntary in most countries, while in others – as in the case of Great Britain – they are obligatory for disciplines in which graduates need them to have access to the labour market.
- In most countries the accreditation process focuses on the programmes. However, in some countries it is based on the institution. In terms of tendency, Schwarz and Westerheijden point out, citing Hämäläinen et al. (2001, pp. 12, 10) that it is very likely

that programme accreditation will be substituted with institutional accreditation in the future due to the costly nature of the former.

- While traditional approval systems measured input factors (for example, number of teachers, quantity of funding), accreditation and evaluation, on the other hand, focuses on input, process and output (graduates). However, according to Schwarz and Westerheijden (2007b, p.12), there are still traditionally oriented accreditation systems that focus on inputs.
- It is established in all countries that the body in charge of the direct control over the accreditation process and of defining the criteria and standards to be applied, should be independent from the government as well as from the higher education institutions. The degree of separateness from the state, however, varies from one country to another. For the experts, the German *Akkreditierungsrat* is the example of furthest separation, while the Czech Accreditation Commission is an example of very little distance between the government and the accreditation agency.
- The evaluation process attached to an accreditation process always involves the visit of an external team of mainly academics. In most cases, the composition of these teams depends on the accreditation agency. In the case of Germany they can belong to independent organisations recognized by the *Akkreditierungsrat*.
- The validity period of the accreditation varies between two and ten years. It can vary between the countries but also within them, as in the case of professional accreditation in the United Kingdom. Schwarz and Westerheijden (p. 22) believe that these frequencies may well be subjected to change in the future since most accreditation schemes have only gone through one cycle.
- There is variation in Europe regarding who covers the costs of accreditation processes. In some countries it is the government who covers all costs while in others the higher education institutions cover marginal costs.
- Only in systems where students were traditionally considered as participating equals they have been so within accreditation schemes. Hence, in almost all countries students are absent from the process. As Schwarz and Westerheijden explain “in most accreditation schemes the state and the academic oligarchy seem to be the only parties involved. [...] One exception is provided by the German *Akkreditierungsrat*, which counts representatives of stakeholders in its governing board (five representatives of professions and two students among the 17 members; there also is a ‘students’ accreditation pool’). Another is the Hungarian HAC, which counts two

student representatives among its non-voting members” (Schwarz & Westerheijden, p.21).

- Discussions on accreditation in Western Europe vary from rejection in Denmark, to rapid introduction in Germany (pp.34-35).
- According to the experts, in some European countries accreditation and the Bologna process were not high in the agenda, or seemed to be important only to those directly involved (this is the case of Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Germany, Ireland, and especially the UK) (p.35), while in other countries it was a very important issue from the beginning.

3.2. The Bologna Process and quality assurance

The expansion in the implementation of evaluation and accreditation processes in Europe has undoubtedly been encouraged and facilitated by the Bologna Process. This initiative involves 47 states that together form the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The European Commission is considered a member like the rest of the states, and the following organisations are considered consultative members: the Council of Europe, UNESCO, EUA, ESU, EURASHE, ENQA, Education International and BUSINESSEUROPE. Every two or three years there are Ministerial Conferences where progress is assessed and new plans are agreed.

The Bologna Declaration, signed in 1999, coincided in time with the liberalisation of international higher education markets. This context, therefore, moulded the priorities of the project. The topics of interest included governance, quality, mobility and diversity (Kehm, Huisman & Stensaker, 2009). The action lines that have been implemented and closely monitored by this group are:

1. The implementation in the European Higher Education Area of a degree structure based on three cycles defined by specific numbers of ECTS credits based, in turn, on calculations of student workloads and learning outcomes. This comes hand in hand with the adoption of the EHEA qualification frameworks as a basic model for national qualification frameworks, the aim of this being the encouragement of mobility (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009, p.5).
2. The assurance of quality using the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in higher education (ESG), developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) together with the European Students’

Union, the European University Association and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education. These standards are implemented by higher education institutions and accreditation agencies, which have grown in numbers in the last years (p.6).

3. Establishing coherent recognition of qualifications within and between countries (p.7).
4. The promotion of policies on the social dimension, employability, lifelong learning, mobility, and the global dimension of the Bologna Process. The social dimension stresses the need to promote equitable access and completion of higher education. Employability focuses on “empowering” students to “seize opportunities in the labour market”, which means anything from obtaining and maintaining employment, to becoming self-employed or “mov[ing] around” in the labour market (p.9). The promotion of lifelong learning involves the idea that education should be “flexible, diverse and available at different times and places” as well as “being pursued throughout life”. For its proponents, lifelong learning “empowers” citizens to deal better with the current labour market (p.11). The promotion of mobility is considered important because it is considered to have both an economic value resulting from the creation of a “mobile labour force”, as well as a cultural and personal value (p.14). The global dimension of the Bologna Process is about increasing the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area in the world with the main purpose of attracting increasing amounts of foreign students to all the member countries.

Bologna Process documents stress the importance of all the aspects mentioned above. But a central objective is clear: Europe should be able to visibly show the quality of its higher education to the world in order to compete successfully in an expanding international student market. The homogenisation of the degree structure, the recognition of qualifications, and the promotion of policies (on the social dimension, employability, lifelong learning and mobility) translate into visible indicators of quality that serve the final purpose: an increased attractiveness of the EHEA at a global scale. The following passage clearly conveys this message:

The external dimension of the Bologna Process is also about positioning the EHEA in the global world of higher education. By 2020, the role competition plays in higher education will have grown substantially on account of the increase in investments and in innovation in many parts of the world. There is talk of an international race in terms of investments in research and in innovation given their strategic importance for

economic development and competitiveness. The EHEA will have to position itself vis-à-vis its competitors, and the EHEA should aim at becoming the most creative and innovative region in a global setting (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009, p.13).

The competition also involves the capacity of universities to generate and maintain direct links with the market in order to generate funds for themselves. This trend can be found not only in the private, for profit, sector of higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p.292). In 2008 the Higher Education-Business Forum met for the first time, and the European Commissioner explained: “Europe has been too weak for too long in bringing the worlds of university academia and business enterprise together, to achieve successful commercial exploitation of academic excellence” (Europa, 2008). In line with this, experts on internationalisation often cite earning money as a key motive for the development of internationalisation projects in universities (see, for example, Tapsir & Rahman, 2012, p. 175).

This key issue in the Bologna Process resonates within individual states. In Germany there appears to be an anxiety in some circles as to how the country’s higher education system measures up internationally, particularly with respect to leading European countries. One aspect in which the leading countries compete (and the Bologna Process intends to improve) is their capacity to attract international students. A connection is commonly made between the prestige of a higher education system and its attractiveness for students from abroad. Hence, internationalisation is always painted as a positive quality. It is always thought to be convenient to increase it, a task that should be shared by universities and the state⁹. In a study that compares the internationalisation of British and German universities it is highlighted that, while British universities compete to attract international students mainly because they represent an economic incentive due to the higher fees they pay, in Germany that is not the case because of the low fees and lack of differentiation between national and international

⁹ There is abundant encouragement for universities to increase their score in internationalisation by attracting a larger quantity of international students. Policy documents often provide data on the amounts and percentages of international students that different countries are attracting. In this way, countries that appear to be less attractive for international students can compare themselves with the most popular and be compelled to devise strategies to increase their attractiveness. Countries keep their own records on international students, trying to monitor fluctuations and explain any decrease in their numbers. The United Kingdom provides official statistics on foreign students, saying that in 2012-2013 around 18% of all higher education students in the UK came from other countries (Higher Education Statistics Agency – HESA, 2015). The market language used by the OECD is remarkable. They present statistics on “international education market shares” showing that the United States has the first place in the percentage of foreign students enrolled in the country. The United Kingdom comes in second place and Germany in third place. In addition to the market language that encourages countries to compete for a market share, the OECD also states that “international students increasingly select their study destination based on the quality of education offered, as perceived from a wide array of information on, and rankings of, higher education programmes now available” (OECD, 2013, p. 308).

students in terms of tuition costs. Another salient difference is that while UK universities are encouraged to engage in competitive strategies, this is not the case in Germany, where universities are more inclined toward cooperation type approaches. The study concludes that “national models of capitalism are articulated in the internationalisation of universities” (Graf, 2008, p. 52). While the UK system is based more on market coordination, the German system appeared to be based more on strategic interactions. In the current situation, according to the author, the German state appears to “ ‘push’ universities to catch up with internationalisation”, while the British universities are being “ ‘pulled’ more directly by market forces” (p.52). The author supports the idea that Germany should “compete” in the internationalisation market, and to do so properly it must adapt to certain international standards. However, he also warns against configuring the system towards the Anglo-Saxon model, claiming that it would create dysfunctionalities (p.54).

Both the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declarations contain statements on raising “the attractive potential of our systems”, increasing “the international competitiveness of the European systems of higher education” and ensuring “a worldwide degree of attraction” (Zgaga, 2006, p. iv). Zgaga points out what he considers are three key points in an external dimension strategy for the Bologna Process: The first issue, which he considers urgent, is “[i]mproving information on the EHEA and promoting its image in a wider world” (p. viii). The second aspect proposed focuses on attractiveness, competition and competitiveness. In his own words:

“Competition among European countries – and other world countries – as well as among individual higher education institutions is needed to strengthen the quality of higher education, research and teaching potentials in order to broaden access and to promote flexible learning paths, to attract more international students, to make higher education more efficient, etc. Only this kind of competition could lead to an enhanced competitiveness of the EHEA as such. On the other hand, highly competitive European higher education could substantially contribute to the competitiveness of the European economy, trade, and centres of excellence as the point where academic, economic and political interests should coincide (p. ix).

Lastly, he mentions the importance of cooperation, both within the European Union and with countries in other areas of the world. This includes the recognition of qualifications and the facilitation of mobility.

Bologna Process promoters argue that since its creation in 1999, the initiative has produced very clear positive results. It is said to have “modernized” Europe’s higher education, achieved greater “compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education” due to the adoption of the three cycle-structure and qualification frameworks based on learning

outcomes, and strengthened quality by having developed quality assurance guidelines and a European register for quality assurance agencies (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009, p. 27). Now, the European Higher Education Area extends to 27 states. Based on the outcomes of the Bologna Process one can conclude that it certainly has been the European Union's main tool for promoting the spread of quality assurance processes based on external evaluation among its member countries. Although this practice had already been jump-started in 1994 with the Pilot Project, which conducted evaluation exercises in selected programmes from each member country (Management Group, 1995), the initiative became permanent with the creation of the "European Network of Quality Assessment Agencies (ENQA)" in 2000, just a year after the Bologna Process initiated. It can be argued, once again, that quality assurance is the issue that brings all the other aspects together as a means towards the ends. Quality can be presented as an indisputable justification for any kind of reform. In the name of quality all the other processes can easily be introduced. Issues of governance are geared towards the assurance of quality, and issues like mobility and diversity become aspects that depict quality. But quality, in turn, is only a means, as what remains as the final goal is the positioning of the European universities in the global higher education market.

3.3. Evaluation and Accreditation in Germany: A Wave of Reforms

In Germany accreditation and evaluation are conceptualized in the same way as in the rest of Europe, and are also formally defined as having totally different purposes. As Schade (2007) describes, referring to Germany, evaluation is mainly "an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of an institution, department or faculty", while accreditation "contribute[s] to improving and ensuring the quality of teaching and research by basing the review process on previously and externally defined standards and gives a study programme the right to exist". Again, conceptually, evaluation is portrayed as a benign and useful process for a university's staff, while accreditation clearly represents a normalising external gaze. Schade, like other experts in the matter, insists on the differences in aims of both procedures, and states that they are not closely linked because "there are different owners of the procedures" (p. 191), meaning that the ownership of an evaluation process lies with the members of a university, whereas an accreditation process falls out of their hands. However, she also explains that in practice they tend to be treated as one process, and separating them as it is meant to be would have a very

high economic cost and would also create a quality assurance system with two separate parts “one for comparability and the other for quality improvement” (p. 191).

While quality assurance managerial processes initiated in Western Europe around 1984 (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, pp. 5-6), Germany is considered a “newcomer” in the field of accreditation in Europe, having started to apply evaluation procedures in the mid-1990s (Schade, 2007, p. 180; Rhoades & Sporn, 2002) – when the German Conference of Rectors and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Culture launched two quality assurance projects to develop indicators for the measurement of performance (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002, p. 364) – and to accredit graduate degrees in 1998 (Hämäläinen, 2001, p. 16), when policies were established by the government. The arguments found in the literature to justify the implementation of the new managerial tools and explain their approval are the ‘massification’¹⁰ of higher education and the challenges it presented for central control, accompanied with the neoliberal trends of deregulation and budgetary limits (van Vught, 1994). The introduction of the reforms in Germany was seen as a special achievement that prevailed in spite of its antagonism with the national academic culture. The Bologna Process is hailed as a timely source of external pressure:

Internal politics were among the main driving forces in Germany. The federal system with shared responsibility of higher education between the states (*Länder*) and the federal level (*Bund*) made the higher education system extremely resistant to change. The Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations may thus be interpreted as creating external pressure to overcome internal inertia (van der Wende & Westerheijden, 2001, cited in Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p.35).

As an imported practice, the accreditation process in Germany follows the general tendency found in other countries. It functions through accreditation agencies that are, in turn, accredited by a general council, the *Akkreditierungsrat*, compounded of “four representatives from higher education institutions, four representatives of the *Länder*, five practitioners, two international experts and two students” (Schade, 2007, p. 181). The *Akkreditierungsrat* in Germany has the responsibility of “organising the system of quality assurance in learning and teaching through accreditation”. Its purpose is “to contribute to the development in the quality of teaching and learning in Germany” but significantly its purpose, at the same time, is “to cooperate in the realisation of the European Higher Education Area”

¹⁰ The massification of higher education was the result of expanding enrolment in universities but also of the labelling as universities of institutions that were formerly not recognised as such (Shore & Wright, 1999).

(Accreditation Council, 2014), guaranteeing equivalence and comparability, in tone with the Bologna Process.

Clearly in line with the way accreditation processes are conducted elsewhere, the following is the official description that the *Akkreditierungsrat* offers for the German accreditation system:

The accreditation process is made up of several stages and is based on the peer review principle. When a Higher Education Institution submits an application for the accreditation of a study programme to an agency that they have chosen, the relevant Agency deploys an evaluation group whose composition must be a reflection not just of the specialist content focus of the study programme but also of its specific profile. In each case the evaluation group is made up of representatives of Higher Education Institutions, i.e. teachers and students, and of representatives of the profession. The evaluation of the study programme is carried out in accordance with the given Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes by the Accreditation Council and, as a rule, includes an on-site visit of the institution by the evaluators. On the basis of the assessment report drawn up by the evaluation group, and in accordance with the decision regulations provided by the Accreditation Council, the responsible Accreditation Commission from the Agency decides either to grant an accreditation for the relevant study programme, to grant an accreditation with conditions, to abandon the process or to reject the accreditation (Accreditation Council, 2013).

Furthermore, following the general trend, an accreditation in Germany lasts/or is valid between three and five years, and for a maximum of seven years. However, in contrast with other European countries, the *Akkreditierungsrat* is not allowed by law to impose any sanctions on agencies when they do not comply with directives or standards (Schade, 2007, p.186). A total of 10 agencies were accredited by the *Akkreditierungsrat* as of June 2015:

- AAQ Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance
- ACQUIN Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
- AHPGS Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Health and Social Sciences
- AKAST Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Study Programmes
- AQ Austria Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria
- AQAS Agency for Quality Assurance by Accreditation of Study Programmes
- ASIIN Accreditation Agency for Degree Programmes in Engineering, Informatics/Computer Science, the Natural Sciences and Mathematics
- evalag evaluation agency Baden-Württemberg
- FIBAA Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation
- ZEvA Central Evaluation- and Accreditation Agency Hannover

As seen by experts in quality assurance, these agencies are meant to be in competition with each other in terms of pricing and services, but also in terms of the 'product' they offer by providing special quality seals with international recognition (Schade, 2007, pp.186-187). Hence, the system is based on the coalition of interests of the universities and the agencies. Currently, an increase in the number of accredited programmes is considered highly desirable, and so the tendency is evidently towards an increase. For example, in the state of Hessen, up to March, 2nd, 2015 there was a total of 752 accredited programmes in higher education institutions of all types (*Universitäten, Fachhochschulen, and Kunst und Musikhochschulen*). Just four months later, this amount had increased to 766 (Akkreditierungsrat, 2015).

The *Akkreditierungsrat* also allows the possibility of a "system accreditation", which is the accreditation of the whole of a higher education institution's internal quality assurance system. When an institution obtains a system accreditation it means that all programmes that pass through its accredited system become automatically accredited. Perhaps because of its greater practicality in comparison with the programme accreditation, this modality shows a growing tendency in the country. While in January 2014, there were 17 Systems accredited in Germany, up to June 2015 there were 34, and 23 institutions in process (Accreditation Council, 2015).

In accordance with the notion that students should also "own" accreditation processes, in 2000 the *Akkreditierungsrat* promoted the creation of a Students' Accreditation Pool, in order to include the participation of students in accreditation processes¹¹. On 20.12.2006, a follow-up was given by the *Akkreditierungsrat*, promoting this initiative further by encouraging cooperation between the accreditation agencies and the Students' Accreditation Pool, and by encouraging the financial support of the latter¹². Information on this *Studentischer Akkreditierungspool* can be found at their official Website¹³, where it was

¹¹ This is in line with ENQA's official statement that students should participate in quality assurance activities (ENQA, 2009, p. 17).

¹² *"Die weitere Ausgestaltung der Beteiligung von Studierenden im Akkreditierungssystem soll vor diesem Hintergrund die folgenden Punkte umfassen: 1. Der Akkreditierungsrat wird einen Prozess moderieren, in dem zwischen dem Studentischen Pool und den Agenturen geeignete und belastbare Kooperationsstrukturen geschaffen werden. 2. Der Akkreditierungsrat wird den Studentischen Akkreditierungspool bei der Gewinnung ausreichender finanzieller Mittel unterstützen, um so sicherzustellen, dass auch bei einer steigenden Verfahrenszahl ausreichend viele studentische GutachterInnen zur Verfügung stehen. Die Agenturen werden gebeten, sich daran im Rahmen ihrer Möglichkeiten zu beteiligen."*

¹³ <https://www.studentischer-pool.de/>

reported that by the end of 2014, there were 301 active members, 66% men and 34% women. They also report that 88% of them come from universities and 12% from *Fachhochschulen*. Further information about the student members is not yet available, however, a report mentions that in 2015 they will have more details about their members, such as the *Fachbereich* (faculty) they belong to (Studentischer Akkreditierungspool, 2014). A member of this pool should be a part of the commission conducting an accreditation process. Officially, the student does the same kind of work as the rest of the peer evaluators: they read the institution's report in advance and in some cases write a brief assessment, they participate in the on-site visit and are invited to ask questions to staff, teachers and students or visit the installations to take a look at any particular space they desire, and finally they can discuss their impressions with the rest of the evaluators before the final report is written (Studentischer Akkreditierungspool, 2014).

A clarification should be made at this point: the introduction of accreditation processes in Germany should not be seen as the general initiation in the country of concern for quality assurance in higher education. Nevertheless, it does represent a significant and thorough change in perspective regarding quality control. Before the reforms, quality assurance in teaching was conducted through "ex-ante control (quantitative specification and approval of examination regulations by the state)" (Schade, 2007, p. 180). With the introduction of the new trends, other European countries started conducting "ex-post control on the basis of evaluation results". In that context, a change in Germany from ex-ante to ex-post control was seen as inevitable, as a way of "following the international development" and as a result of "growing quality assurance awareness" (p. 180). Clearly, the external pressure towards the implementation of quality assurance processes in Germany should not be underestimated. The impact of standardised testing, particularly PISA, was a considerable mobiliser (see Pongratz, 2006). The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study is in line with objectives expressed by the OECD, the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF, which are interested in the implementation of private sector managerial processes in the public sector, and the introduction of business principles in education and research institutions (2006, p.472).

In sum, when discussing the introduction of evaluation and accreditation processes in Germany, three issues emerge as significant: 1. That even though the introduction of quality assessment through evaluation and accreditation is portrayed as the result of growing awareness of the importance of quality assurance, this was in fact not the beginning of quality assessment in universities, but instead a radical change of perspective regarding the moment

in which quality should be “measured”; 2. That evaluation and accreditation have been enforced mainly as part of the European Union’s Bologna Process¹⁴; and 3. That quality *per se* is not the main justification behind the establishment of quality assessment through evaluation and accreditation, as issues of competitiveness and international prestige were and are also used to justify their introduction.

3.4. Evaluation and Accreditation in Central America: A Long Regional History

In Central America – possibly as a result of the United States’ political influence in the area – there has been a regional discussion about quality assurance since the 1960’s within the *Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA)* (Tünnermann Bernheim, 2008, p.316). The emphasis was placed on the need to make a regional effort in the assurance of quality in higher education. These discussions led to the creation of the *Sistema de Carreras y Postgrados Regionales (SICAR)* in 1962, and the *Sistema Centroamericano de Evaluación y Acreditación de la Educación Superior (SICEVAES)* much later in 1998 (p. 316). Therefore, 1998 is the year in which accreditation processes were officially initiated in Central America, and in that year the CSUCA established norms and procedures for Central American accreditation.

Among the objectives of the SICEVAES was the promotion of a “culture of quality” in Central American universities (p.317), and encouraging both self-evaluation and external evaluation. But as in the case of Europe, quality itself was not the only item in the quality

¹⁴ This external pressure has indeed faced resistance in Germany and other countries in the European Union. In the case of Germany, Dr. Barbara Wehr, Professor of Romance Philology at Mainz University, quit from her position at the university as a protest against the Bologna Reforms, which she considered a policy mistake by the university (“*hochschulpolitischen Fehler*”) that would produce a loss of academic self-determination (“*Verlust der akademischen Selbstbestimmung*”), as well as a diminished possibility for students to choose courses based on their interests, and to have time to think and learn or to participate in semesters abroad. She considered as a serious issue the pressure of the credit point system (Schmidt, 2011). Furthermore, the ESNA Bulletin from May 2012 was dedicated to critical reflections on the Bologna Process and the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Bucharest. In the issue features prominently Professor Stefan Kühl from the University of Bielefeld’s Institute of Sociology, author of the book “The Sudoku Effect: Universities in a vicious cycle of bureaucracy”. He mainly points out at how the application of ECTS credits is “a European planning nightmare of an unknown scale” (Brömme, 2012, p.7). It has also been stated that New Public Management is completely incompatible with the self-government via committees – which is the traditional way of administration in German universities and has been accused of being inefficient – and that the Bachelor and Master programmes simply exceed teaching capacities (Liesner, 2006, p. 484).

agenda, “internationalisation” was also an important aim. Regional integration was a fundamental idea of the SICEVAES, just as it was the main purpose behind the creation of the SICAR in 1962. These organisations also worked towards the assurance of regional mobility of professionals. In addition, in the current scenario it is also argued that strengthening accreditation has a protecting effect in the region from low quality international providers of higher education. Tünnermann Bernheim mentions the danger of Central America not being prepared to face the risk that the current transnationalisation of higher education services can represent for quality. He mentions that Central America’s national and regional accreditation systems should be able to accredit foreign providers who offer normal, distance or virtual programmes. He mentions the high risk of being sold low quality virtual courses, as well as the danger posed by the presence of foreign accrediting agencies that merely sell accreditation especially directed to foreign providers (Tünnermann Bernheim, 2008, p.315), implying a modality with less demanding requirements.

Tünnermann Bernheim echoes the European vision described above. He argues that a regional focus in accreditation is positive because of two reasons: the international community will look upon it with more trust and respect, and it coincides with a vision of Central America as a region with common identity instead of a conglomerate of small nations to deal with separately, as it has traditionally been (2008, p.335).

In accordance with the regional view that underscored the launch of accreditation processes in the isthmus, in 2004 the CSUCA created the *Consejo Centroamericano de Acreditación (CCA)*¹⁵ as a “second level” accrediting organism with its main office located in Costa Rica. The CCA does not accredit directly programmes or institutions, it accredits accrediting agencies that operate in each country or the whole region. Both the public and private academic sectors are members of the CCA, and both the government and private sectors have representation (Tünnermann Bernheim, 2008, p. 330). Its members are eleven professionals and one outstanding student. Seven of the professionals are designated each one to represent one of the Central American countries. Four of the professionals are designated at a regional level, and each one represents one of the following sectors: academic-public, academic-private, governmental and professional. A student, who is designated by the council itself and previously proposed by the recognised student associations in each country, is also a regional member (pp. 330-331).

¹⁵ Nicaragua has a *Comisión Nacional de Enlace* that works with the CCA.

The CCA has established itself as the legitimate reference for accreditation processes in Central America. It is a member of the *Red Iberoamericana para la Acreditación (RIACES)* and takes part in its Board of Directors. It has been approved by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in High Education (INQAAHE), and has received technical assistance from the *Consejo para la Acreditación de la Educación Superior (COPAES)*, Mexico's second level accrediting organism, from the German *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD)* and the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK)¹⁶, all of which have helped to finance some of their activities. (Tünnermann Bernheim, 2008, p.334). The CCA recognises the following regional accreditation agencies (Consejo Centroamericano de Acreditación de la Educación Superior, 2015):

- **The *Agencia Centroamericana de Acreditación de Arquitectura y de Ingeniería (ACAAI)***: It was created in 2006 and is accredited by the CCA. Fostering the mobility of Engineers and Architects within the Central American region was the driving force for its creation. Its headquarters are located in Panama at the *Universidad Tecnológica de Panamá*. It has a Council and an Executive Director, and relies on a mix of academics and professionals. This agency, which grants accreditation at a Central American level, has accredited undergraduate programmes in a total of nine Central American universities.¹⁷ In Nicaragua the Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería (UNI) has two undergraduate programmes accredited: electronics and chemistry. It began functioning officially the 4th of July of 2006, and currently 50 institutions have membership.¹⁸ In sum, in almost nine years of existence, only nine institutions (five private and four public) –out of 50 possible– possess accredited programmes from ACAAI. Following the internationalisation trend, the agency has signed collaboration agreements with the Mexican agency CACEI, the American ABET, and the German *Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik e.V. (ASIIN)* to embark in different types of cooperation for sharing information and training about accreditation processes and quality assessment, and promoting quality together, but also with the idea of future accreditation of international or binational programmes. It also has agreements with

¹⁶ German Rectors' Conference.

¹⁷ There is no clear tendency regarding which type of university seeks accreditation from ACAI. While in El Salvador the accreditations are in two private universities, in Guatemala two private and one public university, and in Honduras one private university, on the other hand, in Panama, Nicaragua and Costa Rica the accreditations are in one public university in each country.

¹⁸ Information is available in: <http://acaai.org.gt/>

professional associations from El Salvador, Costa Rica, Central America, the agency Greater Caribbean Regional Engineering Accreditation System, the *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria de Panamá* (CONEAUPA), the CNEA in Nicaragua, and the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) from the USA for the interchange of experiences, training of members, and information exchange.

- **The *Agencia de Acreditación Centroamericana de la Educación Superior en el Sector Agroalimentario y de Recursos Naturales (ACESAR)***: It was created in June 2005 and has located its Executive Management in Guatemala. Its main office rotates between all the Central American countries. It initiated accreditation processes in 2008, and in 2013 had completed five accreditation processes, which represents just 5% of the possible programmes to be accredited by this agency in the region. It has signed cooperation agreements with COMEAA, a Mexican agency.
- **The *Agencia Centroamericana de Acreditación de Postgrado (ACAP)***: It was created in 2006 and has an Executive Director and main offices in Honduras. In 2007 the ACAP signed an agreement with the registered German accreditation agency ASIIN (Accreditation Agency for Degree Programmes in Engineering, Informatics/Computer Science, the Natural Sciences and Mathematics), and in 2013 with the *Comités Interinstitucionales para la Evaluación de la Educación Superior (CIEES)* from Mexico. It has accredited the following programmes: four masters in Guatemala: two in the Universidad de San Carlos, two in the Universidad Mariano Gálvez; one master in the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras; in Costa Rica the Programa Regional de Posgrado of the Universidad de Costa Rica with two masters and a doctoral programme, a master from the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica; and in Panamá seven master programs from two public universities.
- **The *Asociación de Universidades Privadas de Centroamérica (AUPRICA)***: It was created in 1990 by 16 private universities from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Currently, 43 private universities are members of AUPRICA¹⁹, displaying a

¹⁹ Currently there are eight member universities from Nicaragua: Keiser University Latin American Campus, Universidad Thomas More (UTM), Universidad Católica Redemptoris Mater (UNICA), Universidad del Valle (UNIVALLE), Universidad de Ciencias Comerciales (UCC), Universidad Evangélica Nicaragüense (UENIC-MLK), Universidad Americana (UAM), and Universidad Iberoamericana de Ciencia y Tecnología (UNICIT).

very heterogeneous mixture of institutions. For example, from Nicaragua, there is the “Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios por Internet”. AUPRICA has an Accreditation Committee, and with the collaboration of The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) of the United States of America, and a special supervision by an expert from Pittsburg University, designed the *Sistema Centroamericano de Acreditación Universitaria (SICAU)*, which was applied and tested between 1991 and 1996. Later, AUPRICA suspended the SICAU and created the *Sistema de Acreditación Académica de Centro América y Panamá (SIACAP)* in 2013, a regional independent accrediting organism (AUPRICA, 2014a, 2014b). The SIACAP is still in its initial stages, and there are still no accreditations.

With the exception of Guatemala and Belize, the rest of the Central American countries have developed in recent years their own national evaluation and accreditation systems. The pioneer countries were El Salvador and Costa Rica, and the latest country to follow the trend is Honduras. At the national level, the CCA has recognized the following organisms (Consejo Centroamericano de Acreditación de la Educación Superior, 2015):

- In El Salvador: *Comisión Nacional de Acreditación (CdA)*
- In Nicaragua: *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación (CNEA)*
- In Costa Rica: *Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior (SINAES)*
- In Panamá: *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria de Panamá (CONEAUPA)*
- In Honduras: *Sistema Hondureño de Acreditación de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (SCHACES)*, still in process of creation.

To sum up, the panorama of accreditation systems in Central America has the following characteristics:

Country	Organism that created the system	Name of the system	Year: approval/ initiated functions	Members	Type of accreditation and duration	Funding
Costa Rica	Consejo Nacional de Rectores (CONARE)	Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior	1999/1999	Has a council of eight members; 14 universities are members and 4 are associated.	Accredits programmes and institutions. Accreditation is voluntary	Contributions from public and private universities, donations and self-

		(SINAES)			and lasts four years.	generated income
El Salvador	Ministerio de Educación (MINED)	Comisión de Acreditación de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (CdA)	1997/2000	Seven members chosen by the MINED and the Consejo de Educación Superior (CES). It is presided by the Minister of Education and other members are from the Universidad de El Salvador and four private universities.	Accredits programmes and institutions. Accreditation is voluntary but there are fiscal incentives; it lasts five years.	Funding from the MINED.
Guatemala	The Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC) regulates itself; the private universities are regulated by the Consejo de la Enseñanza Privada Superior (CEPS)	The CEPS is in the process of creating a <i>Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Privada Superior (SINADEPS)</i> .		The CEPS's members are chosen: 40 % by the USAC's Consejo Superior Universitario, 40% by the Rectors of the private universities, and 20% by the Presidents of the professional associations.		
Honduras	Consejo de Educación Superior (CES)	Approved in 2014 the plan to implement the Sistema Hondureño de Acreditación de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (SHACES)				
Nicaragua	Asamblea Nacional de Nicaragua	Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación (CNEA)	2011/2012	It has four members elected by the National Assembly	Accredits institutions. Accreditation is compulsory and lasts seven years.	Public funds.

Panamá	Consejo de Rectores de Panamá	Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria de Panamá (CONEAUPA)	2006/2007-2010	14 members	Initially accredits institutions initially and then will accredit programmes. Accreditation is compulsory.	
<p>Information based on: Consejo Centroamericano de Acreditación de la Educación Superior (2015); Comisión de Acreditación de la Calidad de la Educación Superior. República de El Salvador (2014); Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior (2014); Consejo de Enseñanza Privada Superior (2014); Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria de Panamá (2014); Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación - CNEA (2014a); Tünnermann Bernheim (2008, pp. 320-327); and Alvarenga (2014).</p>						

3.5. The Bologna Process in Central America

As mentioned previously, the European Union impinged an internationalisation agenda in the Bologna Process. As a result, the very European Bologna Process arrived with a strong step in tropical territories. The idea of strengthening the links between European universities and universities from other regions became concrete in the case of Latin America in the shape of the ALFA Tuning Latin America Project. This was initiated in 2003 as an extension of the original Tuning project that gave shape to the European Higher Education Area where it involved more than 135 universities since 2001. The project aims at helping Latin American universities to emulate the European effort of having more comparable and convergent degree programmes, developing a focus on competences, more transparent educational structures and a better recognition of qualifications, and creating networks and links between European and Latin American universities (Tuning Latin America Project, 2014). The Tuning project is clearly about promoting the idea of Europe being a central figure in the global scene of higher education and the knowledge society, and having inevitable, but also important to promote, influence on the periphery (Beneitone et al., 2007).

Alongside this direct emulation of the Bologna Process, there has been no lack of funding from the European Union for other initiatives that strengthen the effort of the Tuning Project or follow similar lines. The best example is the ALCUE NET Project (Latin America, Caribbean and European Union Network on Research and Innovation), which tries to reach

similar objectives expressed by the Tuning Project but through research collaborations. The project started in 2013 and will conclude in 2017, having a budget almost entirely covered by the European Union²⁰. Its objectives are stated as follows:

The ALCUE NET objective is to establish a bi-regional European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-CELAC) platform bringing together actors involved in R&I orientation, funding and implementation, as well as other relevant stakeholders from the public and private sector and the civil society, in an effort to support the international Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) dimension of the Europe 2020 Strategy and Innovation Union Flagship Initiative. It will do so by promoting bi-regional and bilateral partnerships for jointly societal challenges, working to develop the attractiveness of Europe in the world, and by promoting the establishment of a level-playing field in Research and Innovation (ALCUE NET, 2014).

The Project's European members are: Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Portugal and Spain. Costa Rica and Panama are the Central American countries with official partnership in the Consortium. However, other countries also participate as members of the ALCUE Common Area of Higher Education²¹. Nicaragua is one of them, and as such, there are seven contact persons in the country, localized at the CONICYT, the Ministry of Energy and Mines, and the National University of Engineering²².

There is a clear effort from the European countries to persuade their Latin-American counter-parts to adopt their goals, concepts, and framework to define what a quality higher education is. It can be argued that this hegemonic project is on the long run a way of reinforcing the dominant status of the donor countries. The recipients are merely expected to follow cue while they enable the dominant partners' internationalisation strategies.

3.6. Evaluation and Accreditation in Nicaragua

Concrete moves towards the establishment of accreditation processes in the country began in 2006 with the creation of the *Ley No. 582, Ley General de Educación* (General Education Law), which generated a lot of controversy and discontent among academics, and was the precursor of the accreditation law. According to Tünnermann Bernheim (2008), the particular dispositions most criticized by the academic sectors were:

²⁰ With a total cost of 4.290.000 Euros and an EU Contribution of 3.750.000 Euros.

²¹ For the list of participants see: <http://alcuenet.eu/index.php>

²² For a complete list of contact points see: European Commission (2014).

- The Law considers legitimate that, for evaluation and accreditation purposes, two or more institutions join material or academic capacities in order to guarantee compliance with the quality standards established by the system. This is perceived as an obvious window for low quality, private “garage universities” to cheat by claiming they possess capacities they do not.
- The five members of the *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación (CNEA)* will be elected by the National Assembly from a group proposed by the public and private universities, the President of the Republic, representatives of the National Assembly and legally constituted professional associations. The National Assembly will also elect the President and Vice-President of the CNEA.
- The CNEA will present annual reports to the National Assembly. This is perceived to carry the risk of politicising the accrediting organism, which will likely make decisions based on political criteria in favour of a ruling party (Tünnermann Bernheim, 2008, p. 237).

The initial resistance towards this proposal may also have stemmed from the fact that it introduced a new balance of power, undermining the traditional control that the National Council of Universities (*Consejo Nacional de Universidades - CNU*) had over all decisions regarding higher education institutions. Considering that Law No. 89 “*Ley de Autonomía de las Instituciones de Educación Superior*” stated in 1990 that the CNU is the organism in charge of coordinating and advising universities and technical institutes, of distributing the budget between universities (fixed by the Law as not lower than 6% of the national budget), of approving the creation of new universities, and of approving or cancelling individual programmes (Asamblea Nacional, 1990, Arts. 55-61), the fact that it was not granted the responsibility to organise the evaluation and accreditation processes is a very significant blow to its authority.

Five years after the approval of Law No. 582, in 2011, the National Assembly launched the national accreditation system with the approval of Law No. 704 “*Ley Creadora del Sistema Nacional para el Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación y Reguladora del Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación*”. The law established that all higher education institutions, both public and private, in the country, have to gradually develop evaluation and accreditation processes. The main objectives of the Law are the promotion of a “quality culture” and “evaluation culture” in the system and continuous improvement in all institutions and programmes. The Law also aims to guarantee, for the Nicaraguan public, that the higher

education institutions have quality, and –as in the European case– generate information for students, employers, parents, the State, and other education institutions. Following the international trend, evaluation and accreditation are considered different processes with different aims. Evaluation is considered an internal process owned by the members of an institution and conducted with the purpose of improving in efficiency and academic excellence. On the other hand, accreditation is an official certification given by the State to an institution or a programme (Asamblea Nacional, 2011, Art. 6).

The Law also mentions in detail the functioning of the CNEA. Its team is formed by a President, a Vice-president and three members (one of them a Secretary), all elected by the National Assembly for periods of five years. Aiding the CNEA there will also be a “*Secretaría técnica*” and “*Comisiones Nacionales de Evaluación y Acreditación*”. The Law establishes the mechanics for the evaluation and accreditation processes that the 57 Nicaraguan universities initiated in 2012. Following this, all higher education institutions are required by law to conduct evaluation and accreditation processes, and must also possess an internal system of quality assurance; its precise organisation and functioning is determined by each institution. After consultation with the education institutions, the CNEA defined the criteria and indicators to be used in the evaluation process that each institution had to initiate when the CNEA indicated it, and must complete within a period of two years. A second round of self-evaluation will follow the conclusion of an improvement plan stemmed from the first evaluation. The CNEA will also follow up the evaluation and improvement plans in each institution, giving them advice and technical guidance. The CNEA also participates directly during the evaluation process, as they coordinate the National Registry of Peer Evaluators. These peer evaluators visit the institutions and write a report that is presented to CNEA. The evaluators’ report should be followed by the improvement plan, which the institution must present to CNEA, and follow then with annual updates on its progress.

According to the Law, if an institution does not conduct a self-evaluation process, if it gives false declarations in its report, or commits bribery, the CNEA will report it to the National Assembly, very possibly leading to the closing of a private university, or to possible sanctions to a public university, to be decided by the National Assembly.

Once again, in practice evaluation and accreditation become linked, as is the case in Europe. Both processes will be conducted under the supervision of the CNEA. The evaluation process will be developed in three rounds. The first two rounds will conclude with the production of improvement plans. After the completion of the second improvement plan, the CNEA will order a third round of evaluation, this time with the purpose of accreditation. Every

moment will involve external peer evaluators who will follow the manuals and regulations defined by CNEA.

In contrast with the German case, where programme accreditation is more common than institutional accreditation, in Nicaragua the CNEA is currently only conducting institutional accreditation. Its aims are not the programmes, but the institutions. Until after the first round of institutional accreditation is completed, within approximately ten years after it was initiated, will the CNEA allow the institutions to apply for accreditation of individual programmes. Meanwhile, nevertheless, institutions can pursue accreditation of programmes with private agencies if they wish so, but only from those approved by the CNEA. It is not known which accreditation agencies will be approved, however. Until now, an official agreement has been announced with the *Agencia Centroamericana de Acreditación de Programas de Arquitectura e Ingeniería (ACAAI)*, signed on April 10th 2014 (CNEA, 2014c, p.2).

Evidently, after a controversial start, the CNEA has been able to find collaborators among academics. In the registry of peer evaluators, there are 131 registered members²³, an amount that can safely cover the required visits to all the institutions during the initial stage. The salary for the peer evaluators has also been officially established and announced in *La Gaceta* (Asamblea Nacional, 2014) with precision. It is established that the peer evaluators receive each the equivalent of 800 dollars when three or less institutions which they have evaluated have concluded their internal evaluation processes, when the number is four or more the peer receives the equivalent of 900 dollars. A daily allowance is also set in C\$1,250.00, which increases to C\$1,500.00 for visits to institutions located in the Autonomous Caribbean Regions or in the Department of *Río San Juan*. For an evaluation the CNEA assigns between three and six peers for a visit of no more than five days (a minimum of days is not said). According to the law, an institution is allowed to impugn or refuse a peer without having to explain the reasons. As an incentive for the process, the Law states that the government will support accredited institutions in obtaining national and international credit to finance their development. Nevertheless, what is meant by “support” is not specified.

Significantly, while evaluation in Europe is officially described as an internal issue over which the State should not have direct control, in Nicaragua it is closely monitored and directed by the State through the CNEA. While in Germany there are several accreditation agencies approved by the *Akkreditierungsrat*, and the tendency is to grow, in Nicaragua, the State created the only official agency which is a public institution. This difference is striking

²³ The list can be consulted at: <http://www.cnea.edu.ni/Pares.php?pagina=1>.

considering that the majority of universities in Europe are public, while the majority of universities in Central America are private. Accreditation in Germany and Nicaragua is producing clear opposite trends in this sense: while in Germany the State is relinquishing direct control over quality assurance in universities, passing it on to non-governmental institutions specialised in accreditation, in Nicaragua the State is taking these actions firmly under its wing. On the other hand, in a similar way to the European way, evaluation and accreditation are treated as very different processes only in theory. In practice, these two are linked together and monitored by the CNEA. A strong emphasis is placed on the “culture of quality” that is derived from a system that is capable of continuously providing relevant information about the different functions of the university (teaching, research, extension and management) (CNEA, 2014d).

Since the initiation of the process, every step the universities have taken in compliance has been tracked and announced by the CNEA to all the academic community. A horse race could be pictured, in which one can easily know how each competitor is positioned.²⁴ The president of the CNEA announced in July 2015 that all of the 56 universities in the country had conducted their evaluation process and now have three years to work on what they promised in their improvement plans. According to the President of the CNEA, the universities mostly have to invest to improve their infrastructure and implement teacher

²⁴ The CNEA has officially announced the reception of the improvement plan (a result of the first round of evaluation) from Universidad de Managua (UdeM), handed over on 11.12.2014. Other universities presented their ‘Final Institutional Self-evaluation Report’: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN-León) on 16.05.2014, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN-Managua) on 04.07.2014, Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Medicina Oriental Japón Nicaragua (IESMO-JN) on 06.08.2014, Universidad Nicaragüense de Ciencia y Tecnología (UCYT) on 07.08.2014, Universidad Jean Jacques Rousseau (UNIJJAR) on 22.08.2014, Universidad LA ANUNCIATA on 24.09.2014, Centro Superior de Estudios Militares “José Dolores Estrada Vado” (CSEM) on 24.09.2014, Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) on 30.09.2014, Universidad Thomas More on 30.09.2014, Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense (URACCAN) on 28.10.2014, Universidad Paulo Freire on 30.10.2014, Universidad Evangélica de Nicaragua (UNADENIC) on 19.11.2014, Universidad del Norte de Nicaragua (UNN) on 01.12.2014, Universidad Cristiana Autónoma de Nicaragua (UCAN) on 13.12.2014, and Universidad de Occidente (UDO) on 11.12.2014. It was announced that the following universities have made an “official” presentation of their “Institutional Evaluation Project”: Universidad Técnica de Comercio (UTC) on 28.11.2013, Universidad de las Américas (ULAM) on 11.2013, Universidad Católica Inmaculada Concepción de la Arquidiócesis de Managua (UCICAM) on 30.04.2014, Universidad Internacional de Agricultura y Ganadería de Rivas (UNIAG, formerly known as Escuela Internacional de Agricultura y Ganadería de Rivas, became a university on 28.03.2014) on 17.06.2014, Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales (UCEM) on 02.07.2014, Universidad Rubén Darío on 22.07.2014, and American College on 17.11.2014. It was announced that on 24.11.2014 the Universidad de Oriente Medio (USTOM) did a formal presentation on the progress of their Institutional Self-Evaluation Process, another university which did a presentation on the progress of their evaluation process was Universidad Iberoamericana de Ciencia y Tecnología (UNICIT) on 09.07.2014. With less detail about dates, the CNEA informed that by March 2014, 44 universities presented their evaluation projects and so were officially conducting internal self-evaluation processes. (CNEA, 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2014e; 2014f; 2014g).

training in order to make sure that all teachers have a degree that is superior to the degree programme in which they teach. In addition, he stated that the peer evaluators can suggest changes in the improvement plans defined by the universities, and that they will remain in the universities for three months (Castillo Bermúdez, 2015).

In contrast with the German case, in Nicaragua the accreditation is not only compulsory, but in the case of failure it carries potentially negative consequences. According to the Law, institutions that obtain a partial accreditation will be granted a period of one year to prepare themselves for a process of external evaluation. If this is favourable, the institution receives an accreditation. If not, it is denied accreditation and the institution or programme can apply to begin a new accreditation process but until after three years have passed. The Law also mentions the possibility of closure for private universities and sanctions for public universities²⁵. Nevertheless, Law 704 reprises the controversial aspects allowed in Law 582 that received strong criticism. As a result, it is not clear whether the accreditation process will be able to solve the precise problem that justified its creation: the proliferation of low quality private universities in the country, poignantly referred to as “garage universities”.

²⁵ The Law states that when an institution refuses to develop an evaluation process and improvement plan, it will be presumed deficient: *“Una institución de educación superior incurrirá en presunción de insuficiencia para garantizar la calidad educativa en los casos siguientes: 1. Cuando no realizare su Proceso de Autoevaluación o Plan de Mejora, en los plazos establecidos. 2. Cuando se comprobare que de forma deliberada ha sido presentada información falsa en los procesos de autoevaluación o cuando se comprobare que se ha cometido o intentado cometer soborno”* (Asamblea Nacional, 2011, Art. 27). The Law states that this situation will be made public by the CNEA: *“Corresponde al CNEA declarar el estado de presunción de insuficiencia para garantizar la calidad educativa de una institución. Dicha situación el CNEA la hará pública. Cuando se tratare de una institución privada, cuya personalidad jurídica haya sido otorgada por la Asamblea Nacional, se le pondrá en conocimiento de tal situación y si ésta cancela la personalidad jurídica se le comunicará al Departamento de Registro y Control de Asociaciones del Ministerio de Gobernación a fin de que se proceda a la cancelación de la inscripción y la liquidación de la misma. Cuando se trate de una Institución de carácter público, lo comunicará a la Asamblea Nacional, la que determinará las medidas que correspondan. En cada caso se deberán implementar las acciones necesarias para salvaguardar los derechos de los estudiantes, profesores y trabajadores de la institución”* (Asamblea Nacional, 2011, Art. 28). In case an institution obtains partially satisfactory results, the Law gives the possibility of obtaining a provisional accreditation: *“Si la institución sometida al proceso cumple parcialmente con los criterios, estándares, e indicadores, se le otorgará acreditación provisional por un año. Al final de dicho plazo se efectuará otro proceso de evaluación externa y de resultar favorable, se le otorgará Certificado de acreditación válido por siete años. Si el resultado de la evaluación externa no fuere favorable se denegará la acreditación, pudiendo la institución o programa interesado someterse a otro proceso de acreditación hasta pasado un período de tres años”* (Asamblea Nacional, 2011, Art. 37). In art. 94 it says: *“Al concluir la ejecución del primer plan de mejora, en un plazo de tres años las instituciones de Educación Superior deberán haber alcanzado el mínimo establecido en el artículo 10 de esta ley. En aquellos casos que no lo logren, el CNEA declarará el estado de insuficiencia para mantener la calidad educativa y solicitará a la Asamblea Nacional para que se proceda a la cancelación de la personalidad jurídica”* (Asamblea Nacional, 2011, Art. 94).

In an interview with *El Nuevo Diario* newspaper, the President of the CNEA, Orlando Mayorga, appears unconcerned about the so-called “garage universities”, saying that he does not like the term because many universities that currently own big buildings and enjoy a certain prestige, started out in houses, with very few staff and students²⁶ (Jarquín, 2013). Confirming what the Law says, Mayorga states that any university that does not initiate its evaluation process will be denounced to the National Assembly, which can suspend their legal personality. He insists that the Law provides enough time to reflect and prevent the closure of universities. At the moment, the universities have five years to develop their first round of evaluation and improvement plan. The President of the CNEA states that thanks to the accreditation process, the concept of “garage university” will disappear because the institutions will develop a will to improve. He insists that, contrary to what happened in El Salvador when they created the accreditation system, in the case of Nicaragua, no university should fear being forced to close²⁷ (Jarquín, 2013). He does, however, imply that it will be difficult for new universities to be created, as they will all have to meet the CNEA’s standards and will not have time to slowly improve their conditions²⁸ (2013). Remarkably, in this perspective quality is a matter of time and willingness. Quality in a university, for this expert, is guaranteed by giving enough time for an institution to conduct repeated evaluation processes to achieve accreditation.

3.7. Problems and limitations of evaluation and accreditation

The trend of quality assurance described above has lasted and expanded for more than twenty years. A growing number of universities continue to adopt the reforms required for the implementation of quality assurance and, once adopted, universities do not abandon the practice. Universities in Europe are still actively trying to fulfil the aims of the Bologna Process,

²⁶ “...muchas que hoy tienen grandes instalaciones y cuentan con cierto prestigio comenzaron en casas, con poco personal y estudiantes”.

²⁷ “Imagínese, el concepto de universidades de garaje va a desaparecer porque las universidades van a poner los pies sobre la tierra con sus comisiones de autoevaluación y van a decir ‘esta es mi condición y tengo que mejorar tales cosas’. Aquí no va a pasar lo que pasó en El Salvador, que de la noche a la mañana desaparecieron más del 50 por ciento de las universidades.”

²⁸ “La ley establece que deberán someterse al proceso institucional entre el primero y el quinto año después de su autorización... esto sí es duro. No van a hacer proceso de autoevaluación con fines de mejora, sino que va a ser directo (el proceso de acreditación), eso significa que ellos debieron haber cumplido los mínimos (de calidad) que establece la ley en el artículo 10. Si no hacen lo correcto, como dice la ley, no van a correr mucho, tres años y desaparecen. El que haga una universidad ahora sabe que es un asunto serio.”

while a growing number of universities in Central America are enthusiastically conducting evaluation processes and seeking accreditations. Both regions work to develop an effective internationalisation strategy, in accordance with the Bologna Process and the Tuning Project, and have activated a diversity of managerial reforms to help them achieve connections with the industrial sector, and attract students with an employment-focused discourse that vibrates with the spirit of the reforms. Both regions have also made the same deviation from what quality assurance manuals instruct about evaluation and accreditation being separate exercises with different purposes. As described above, in both regions evaluation and accreditation are separate in the theory but they are very much linked in the practice²⁹, suggesting that even though evaluation processes are defined as useful and positive for the institutions, universities do not seem to conduct them out of their own initiative. Instead, their application is enforced – sometimes by law and sometimes through an incentive system – by imbricating them with accreditation processes.

What can be asseverated is that quality assurance is no longer a novel experiment being put to the test. Experts in quality assurance in many countries have seen the reforms being implemented and the results they produce. Admittedly, they have themselves identified several problems and limitations of quality assurance. But the critique presented by quality assurance experts has not slowed down the expansion of the trend. There are no attempts of breaking the fashion and opting for an alternative to quality assurance. Minor adjustments to processes – such as the growing tendency in Germany to pursue institutional accreditation that can substitute the more time-consuming individual programme accreditation³⁰, or the Nicaraguan approach of conducting three enforced rounds of evaluation in preparation for the final accreditation process, with the purpose of diminishing the risk of non-accreditation for the least satisfactory institutions – are just strategies to achieve better or smoother applications of the process.

Even though the critique coming from within quality assurance circles does not seem to have an impact, and in the first instance does not really aim at being critical of the paradigm, it is important to take it into account. Some discuss the ineffectiveness of the reforms on core issues they were meant to improve. Others identify unwanted and even negative effects. These observations are interesting because they showcase a supposed self-criticism but result in strengthening quality assurance by producing even stronger calls for its

²⁹ Even ENQA, in its guidelines, groups these processes together: “The term “quality assurance” in this report includes processes such as evaluation, accreditation and audit” (2009, p. 6).

³⁰ This idea was supported by the Austrian, German and Swiss Rectors’ Conferences with the purpose of making accreditation a less time-consuming, bureaucratic and costly (Zervakis, 2012, p. 212).

implementation. After citing the problems identified by quality assurance promoters themselves, I will talk about a weakness of quality assurance that is never mentioned. Totally overlooked in the documents is that in spite of their alleged thoroughness, quality assurance practices leave certain problems that strongly affect quality practically untouched or ignored. In that sense, quality assurance fails to be what it claims to be in essence: an instrument to improve visibility, a mechanism to reveal what remains hidden. In the following sections I will mention first the weaknesses and problems that have been identified by quality assurance experts themselves, and then in a following segment I will describe the problems and limitations that quality assurance appears to ignore or is unable to grasp when dealing with quality in higher education.

a. Ineffectiveness: no increase in information, no solution of problems, and no application of standards

A basic aim of quality assurance, often used to justify the introduction of new practices, is that it guarantees a better communication between higher education institutions and the public. Quality assurance is presented as the antidote to the isolated “ivory tower” and as the promoter of transparency in higher education. The reforms extol the participation of other “stakeholders”³¹ in the processes of quality assurance, arguing that an isolated university is not able to respond to society’s demands. Policy makers repeatedly insist that it is necessary to make stakeholders’ roles “real” and “provide these groups with an adequate level of information” (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009, p. 6). However, it seems that the processes designed for assuring communication between these actors and the universities have not achieved their goal. Society does not seem to be better informed about universities than they were before. Not even the central and most notorious aspects of the reforms have been easily recognised by the ‘stakeholders’. For example, in Germany, in the year 2000 researchers reported that Bachelor and Master degrees were still not well-known by personnel managers in companies (List, 2000 quoted in Schade, 2007, p. 177). This was two years after the new degrees were introduced and just one year before the first Bachelor graduates would enter the labour market. In 2007, “labour market acceptance of [these different degrees was] still not

³¹ ENQA (2009) establishes that quality assessment processes should “include a role for students and other stakeholders” (p.16).

clear [making] difficult for students to decide whether to enrol in the new programmes” (Schade, 2007, p. 193).

This permanent state of ‘disinformation’ appears to apply also to students. Schwarz and Westerheijden also refer to information but imply that making it available is not enough for the results intended: that students choose universities based on available evidence of their higher quality. In reality there is no real indication of students making more informed choices: “Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that for prospective students in well-provided public higher education systems such as in North-Western Europe, other arguments were more important in their choice than perceived quality differences (e.g. where did friends go to study, distance from the parents’ home)” (2007b, pp. 29-30).

It has also been pointed out how quality assurance processes can fall short of being the dynamic force for desired change they pretend to be. On the one hand, a feeling of superficiality seems to be attached to evaluation and accreditation process. In the words of Schwarz and Westerheijden: “routine, bureaucratisation and window dressing are dangers lurking behind” (2007b, p. 32). On the other hand, in spite of their superficiality, quality assurance processes can acquire a greater importance than the problems themselves. As Schwarz and Westerheijden also point out, quality assurance has found itself in a paradox in which it is not taken seriously if it does not have real consequences, but if it does have real consequences its results become more important than quality itself (2007b, p. 30). It has also been claimed that obtaining an accreditation can become in practice more important than meeting students’ needs (see, for example, Neufeld, 2012). While quality assurance was presented by its promoters as a way of solving urgent problems, such as unequal access to higher education, elevated dropout rates, or graduate unemployment (all prominently appearing in the justification of the implementation of the reforms), their solution has been elusive for evaluation and accreditation. The following statements appeared in a recent report by the European Commission:

The evidence from quality assurance agencies suggests that their role in widening access is extremely limited, and that a focus on access and admissions is far from being the norm. While quality assurance agencies may examine some issues related to admissions systems, they generally do not do so from a perspective of ensuring that the system is fit for the purpose of widening access. Instead agencies tend to check only that the admissions process is coherent with programme requirements. No agency claimed to look at the differing impact of admissions systems on different types or profiles of students (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014, p.10).

Although around half of the higher education systems claim to use data on retention and dropout in their quality assurance processes, there is little evidence that such information is followed up in an attempt to understand and address the underlying causes of dropout. Similarly to access and admissions, the role of quality assurance agencies is a limited one, with the rates of dropout seen purely as indicators of the success and viability of programmes and/or institutions (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014, p. 11).

There are, however, limitations to the way in which quality assurance agencies consider information on graduates. In particular, there is no evidence of any country or agency systematically analysing employment opportunities in relation to the social profiles of graduates. It is therefore impossible to know whether factors such as socio-economic disadvantage or ethnicity – which are known to have an impact on access and completion of higher education – may also have an impact on employment after graduation (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014, p.11).

Additionally, although quality assurance is based on the concept of minimum standards, which in practice involves assuring key elements in universities are homogenised in spite of contextual differences³², the efforts to standardise quality are inevitably confronted with diversity. As a result, the reforms have encountered conditions that cannot easily be dealt with, namely that as it expands to more countries it encounters increasing diversity in pedagogies, institutions, students, expectations and missions (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009, p. 6). This is something the system is plainly not prepared to deal with.

b. Unwanted and negative effects

Bologna Process reports also include observations about how the achievement of some goals has produced unwanted effects. Some of these critical observations even seem to contradict what other documents present as desirable traits. For example, the increase in internationalisation is said to also give rise to “growing commercialisation and competition”, both implied as undesirable for higher education. It is said that quality assurance increases bureaucracy and costs, something that needs to be “prevented” (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009, p. 6). Diversity is sometimes mentioned as something that still has to be learned to “handle” (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009, p. 6), especially tricky when it encounters the

³² For example, to abide by standards a university must possess properly licensed software, no pirate copies. It should also possess specific equipment in laboratories and specific dimensions for these facilities to be considered minimally adequate. Both of these examples involve standards which are applied by accreditation agencies in Central America even though they are unattainable for most universities in the region because of financial reasons.

application of standards, but it is also mentioned as a positive aspect of higher education than can be lost as an effect of quality assurance:

Pressure to uniformitise may ensue from methodical issues associated with the predefined criteria necessary in accreditation. They would lead to greater homogeneity instead of the diversity of approaches and competencies needed in the present-day 'massified' higher education systems and in the emerging knowledge economy (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p. 14.)

Curiously, while quality assurance is presented as a strategy for universities to be in tune with rapid changes, accreditation is also feared by experts to be continuously obsolete, not challenging enough, and even unfavourable for innovation:

Besides, adaptation of published criteria is a time-consuming process, so that accreditation continuously runs the risk of falling behind the state of the art. Then again, accreditation criteria tend to be a compromise between the participants in the decision-making process of the accreditation organisation, leading to the criteria being a *communis opinio*, but not challenging for the development of the best programmes or units. Finally, as accreditation judgements are based on passing threshold criteria, they would tend to discourage innovation and quality improvement (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p. 14.)

As mentioned previously, quality assurance processes were also introduced as a way of transforming degree systems into more comparable, and therefore more understandable, schemes for both national and international students. This is apparently not happening³³ and instead, a new layer of complexity – courtesy of quality assurance – has been added to the system, amounting to an even greater need for information. Guy Haug who, as Principal Advisor to the European University Association (EUA) was involved in launching and developing the Bologna process, states that while trying to solve the problem of Europe's "jungle of degrees", the Bologna process is leading it towards an equally daunting "jungle of quality assurance systems and agencies" (2003). This could be the result of having presented accreditation as added value, and as having a branding effect that can attract students,

³³ Haug (1999) states that due to persisting variations in study duration between disciplines, as well as between systems, there is "not much ground to conclude that European higher education systems are converging towards 3 main levels of qualifications earned after 3, 5 and 8 years of study" (1999). More than ten years after this affirmation, there is still considerable variation in degree durations in Europe. For example, Master programmes mostly last four semesters, but they can also last two semesters or three. In addition, there are cases in which their duration varies according to a student's previous training or previous performance. In sum, the Bologna Process insistence on uniformity in degree durations has not obtained the full expected results (see, for example, Davis, 2009, p. 33).

particularly important when funds are tied to student enrolment. This phenomenon, which instead of more information for the students is potentially generating more confusion, is also described by Schwarz and Westerheijden (2007b):

Study programmes or higher education institutions may distinguish themselves by choosing one or another type of accreditation, and in principle the 'end users' would then know more about the qualities of the institution than when only a single quality 'kite mark' were available. However, in the developing practice among business schools, which seem keen on accumulating as many accreditations as they can (in a different meaning of a 'multiple accreditation system') it becomes unclear what the marketing message to potential customers will be from sporting a whole set of accreditations – although these schools are best placed to know about marketing... (p. 17).

It is evident that the ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) is also concerned about the problem presented by the proliferation of accreditation agencies that seems to have been triggered:

Therefore, this report has as a major proposal the creation of a register of recognised external quality assurance agencies operating in higher education within Europe. This proposal is in essence a response to expectations that there is likely soon to be an increase of quality assurance bodies keen to make a profit from the value of a recognition or accreditation label. Experience elsewhere has shown that it is difficult to control such enterprises, but Europe has a possibly unique opportunity to exercise practical management of this new market, not in order to protect the interests of already established agencies, but to make sure that the benefits of quality assurance are not diminished by the activities of disreputable practitioners (ENQA, 2009, p. 27).

Handled as a marketing strategy, accreditations end up being collected as desirable possessions in spite of the process' elevated costs. This is another negative effect of the consolidation of a quality assurance regime. Researchers have observed "evaluation fatigue" caused by multiple accreditation efforts, and by the co-existence of national accreditation schemes with those led by professions and voluntary ones (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p. 16). It is worth to look at the situation in the United States to try to envisage the scenario that might develop in Europe and Central America. There currently are six regional agencies for institutional accreditation, five national accreditors, and around 70 professional or specialised accreditation agencies. In some fields, as in Business Administration and Teacher Training, there are two agencies of which any interested programme can choose one. There are even specialised accreditation agencies for religious – four different ones – and for private

institutions. Programme level accreditation is also applied compulsorily to programmes that have organised professions, like Law, Medicine, or Business Administration. They do not apply to “pure” academic professions like Sociology (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, pp.25-26). Furthermore, specialised accreditation is usually pursued when an institution already has institutional accreditation, and its emphasis is professional rather than academic.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) publishes an international directory of accreditation agencies. In its latest update, from 2007, it included 467 quality assurance bodies, accreditation bodies and Ministries of Education in 175 countries³⁴. This means there are almost three times as many accrediting organisms than countries in the list. Furthermore, it is possible to find a list of 188 unrecognised accreditation agencies, which operate in many different countries, granting accreditations under names that sound as serious and official as the names of the recognised agencies – such as “Accreditation Council for Distance Education” or “American Association of Schools”. How would a student know that these agencies are not recognised? This avalanche of accreditation agencies are a vital element in the business of “accreditation mills”, which currently sell hundreds of thousands of degrees of all kinds. They collaborate with fake universities to lure clients by granting them fake accreditations that seem real. As a result of this practice, it has been claimed that in the United States more than half of all PhDs granted every year are fake (Ezell & Bear, 2012). Surely, for a student trying to seek guidance in accreditation when choosing a university, this “jungle” may appear as an inapprehensible Amazon that offers them very little in terms of information and reassurance.

This visibly out of control situation of accreditation is seldom mentioned as a potential problem for quality. The multiplicity of agencies exist because they have a space to operate. Part of the success for accreditation activities – both recognised and unrecognised – lies on the rotund product that accreditation offers: reputation. An ethnographic study of accreditation in Mexico illustrates the way international accreditation – almost always from the United States³⁵ – is perceived and enacted in Latin America. The study did not aim specifically at being critical of quality assurance processes, yet the main findings of this qualitative study reveal that while quality is officially acknowledged as the motivation to pursue an international accreditation, “reputational value is the central motivation to pursue U.S. accreditation given that, through accreditation, the institution in Mexico became

³⁴ Directory is available at: http://www.chea.org/intdb/international_directory.asp

³⁵ American accreditation agencies review universities in 95 countries outside the United States (Eaton, 2006, p. 3). It could be said that the United States provides the most sought-after accreditations in the world.

connected to internationally recognized universities". The genuine aim was to develop "quality by association" for the Mexican university.

Another negative effect that emerges is a consequence of having evaluation and accreditation linked together in practice which, as mentioned above, is the case both in Europe and Central America. For Schwarz and Westerheijden, this association annuls the positive effects that evaluation is supposed to have: "The accreditation scheme is sometimes portrayed as an addition on top of evaluation, i.e. as if they are complementary. It is not clear, however, if the knowledge that an evaluation process will be used for accreditation purposes will not lead to strategic behaviour (e.g. trying to hide weaknesses from accreditors instead of discussing them with peers). If that happened, accreditation would be interfering with the evaluation scheme" (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b, p.16).

3.8. Quality assurance: A limited perspective of higher education

As detailed in the previous section, the promoters of quality assurance systems – evaluation and accreditation – have not been closed to critique. They have themselves pointed out key elements in which quality assurance has fallen short of offering solutions or even created new problems or reinforced existing ones. Consistent with their view of constant evaluation as a healthy practice, quality assurance promoters also evaluate the results of their initiatives, make adjustments and adaptations. As presented above, some official reports and documents written by promoters of quality assurance do contain critical observations. However, quality assessment is still hegemonic in these discussions, regarded by the authors as the only or best possible strategy to guarantee quality in higher education. All the critiques conclude by suggesting more control and incentives, more enforcement, or very specific adjustments to the processes so that the main apparatus of quality assurance keeps being enforced.

The negative effects generated by the application of quality assurance processes and their role as a driving force in higher education have been pointed out by scholars from the social sciences, pedagogy and economics. But in spite of the available critique in scholarly publications as well as in the mass media, in spite of the resistance and difficulties encountered in its implementation, the trend is growing and actively being promoted in a wide range of contexts. Quality assurance is closely linked with wider socio-economic trends, as some have pointed out, and specifically with neoliberal forms of governance. Universities are

not the only type of organisations in which these systems are applied. Audit processes aimed at externally revealing what usually remains hidden within organisations are also applied – with evidently limited success, as well – to hospitals, banks, corporations, and civil society organisations. However, in the particular case of universities, a fundamental aspect to take into account is that what is allegedly being audited is the quality of the teaching/learning experience. In so doing, significant adjustments have been applied to the process in order to reveal something that is clearly difficult to measure, compare, and express quantitatively.

Perhaps because of this evident difficulty, quality assurance has modified important aspects and concepts of education in order to adjust them to its framework. The most important modifications are how it defines teachers and students, particularly students. Keeping in mind that quality assurance processes are allegedly developed mainly for the sake of students, to place them at the “centre”, and to take their perspectives into account for all decision-making processes, it is especially remarkable that the framework has found the need to re-label them as clients or customers. The label ‘student’ and the kind of relationships this kind of subject has with teachers and universities simply did not suit quality assurance processes. At the root of quality assurance is, thus, an incapacity to adapt itself to the categories used by the members of the university to relate to each other. Therefore, it is necessary to explore this aspect of quality assurance in detail. Why does quality assurance need to transform students into clients? What impact does this have on teachers, students and student culture? To explore this I will present in the following chapter a literature review of critical studies on higher education and quality assurance, and then focus specifically on what these tell us about higher education students in quality assurance regimes. Afterwards, applying elements from these theoretical contributions, I will explore two specific cases in which quality assurance processes have been implemented and actively involved students: Universidad Centroamericana in Nicaragua and Philipps-Universität, Marburg in Germany.

III. Critical perspectives on quality assurance

“Is it fair to judge the current state of undergraduate education as one might evaluate a consumer product, and ask for demonstrable improvements in quality? Or is the experience of college more like the writing of poetry and the practice of architecture, activities that normally defy such judgments, at least over periods of 50 or 100 years?”
(Bok, 2006, p. 30).

The wave of reforms driving universities towards the acquisition of new organisational structures, policies and practices, and the speed and compulsory nature of these transformations has awakened critique from academics mainly from the United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, regions that have pioneered these transformations or experienced them for a longer time. Some critique has focused on wider cultural and economic trends and their impact on universities. Sometimes quality assurance is not specifically discussed in these contributions, but they examine issues closely associated because they constitute central elements of its logic, or represent trends in which quality assurance is inserted. These analyses of higher education from a broader perspective help us to situate the phenomenon of quality assurance in a wider context and understand the motivations behind its inception. Other authors have focused on specific practices initiated or reinforced by quality assurance – such as teacher evaluation and teacher training – and their effect on university teachers. The different contributions that are found in the literature help us understand how to approach the study of quality assurance by explaining how quality assurance spread until it acquired a global presence in higher education, what it is and how it affects universities. I will present a brief review of these studies and then define the approach to quality assurance that I will apply in this analysis.

First of all, it is important to bear in mind that a common set of principles underlie quality assurance processes in both Europe and Central America. They are detailed in policies at the highest level, shared by accreditation agencies, championed by quality assurance offices within universities, and repeatedly communicated to the public. These principles represent the essence of any quality assurance system, and have effectively travelled across different contexts. Regarding its repeatedly successful experiences of insertion, Dickhaus (2010) offers an examination of quality assurance’s adaptability and reveals how together with the application of these common principles also lies a capacity to modify its messages and

purposes in fundamental ways. She explains how in Chile and South Africa these regimes became a generally accepted regulatory policy even though they started, in both cases, as a highly contested managerial tool. Her comparison between these two very different national contexts reveals how “a variety of meanings were attached to QA [quality assurance], and interests of different actors accommodated” (p. 258), which led it to become a “hegemonic tool for re-organising higher education”. According to Dickhaus (2010), the universities that welcomed the new regime of quality assurance were the ones –both public and private – that were already prestigious and influential, and saw the opportunity as a way of acquiring well deserved “quality labels” (p.261). However, the introduction of quality assurance faced political opposition from conservative sectors. But a shift in the discourse towards a focus on the international scale generated their acceptance of the reforms (p. 262). Ideas present in the discourse were about market transparency, participation in globalisation, massification in higher education, a “level playing field” for all universities, the “knowledge society”, consumer protection, and “value for money”; and included accounts of successful reforms in other countries, as well as references to the circumstances of great differences in quality between universities (pp. 262-263). In contrast to the Chilean case, in South Africa national ownership was a stronger and more legitimate idea than international influence (p.265). Present in both countries were discussions about the effects of massification (particularly since the creation of private institutions during the 90s) and the problem of highly disparate levels of quality co-existing in the system. Dickhaus concludes that meanings attached to quality assurance can be patently contradictory – for example, presenting quality assurance as democratic as well as a tool for the market and competition; local as well as international – which is precisely what allows it to incorporate different interests and ultimately build consensus through strategies of “discursive framing, re-scaling and coalition building” (p. 266).

Another explanation for quality assurance’s capacity to mould itself and be applied to different contexts is that it is often presented as much more than a set of processes that institutions should apply; it is regarded as a new mentality that academics should acquire, a new culture to embrace. As such, quality assurance is difficult to grasp and situate in a defined moment; it seeps in through a variety of sources, hardly depending on a punctual programme or policy. Higher education teachers and staff are encouraged to accept that quality assurance never ends and requires a constant commitment. Quality assurance is in essence continuous and permanent. Experts require that universities develop a “strategy for [quality’s] continuous enhancement” (ENQA, 2009, p. 7) because quality demands “continuously trying to do a better job” (p. 22); “it should be continuous and ‘not once in a lifetime’ “(p.22). As evidenced by the

following phrases, for its promoters, quality assurance is, in fact, a new culture that institutions should acquire:

- It requires developing among university staff “a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work” (p. 8).
- Institutions should “secure the implied quality culture” (p.11).
- Institutions should guarantee the “development of internal quality cultures” (p. 13) and the “encouragement of a culture of quality “(p. 14).
- Institutions should “also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work” (p.16).

Characterised as a new paradigm of how universities should function, it is considered natural that at the beginning it should be hard to accept. Experts claim that university workers should strive to change their way of thinking and embrace a permanent struggle to do so: “What is proposed in the internal quality assurance standards will be challenging for some higher education institutions, especially where there is a new and developing tradition of quality assurance or where the focus on students’ needs and their preparation to enter the employment market is not embedded in the institutional culture”(ENQA, 2009, p.33). Making quality assurance a continuous, never-ending process is also allegedly about enabling the adaptation of the university to the rapidly changing characteristics of modern society: “effective quality assurance activities [...] ensure that programmes are well-designed, regularly monitored and periodically reviewed, thereby securing their continuing relevance and currency” (p.17).

Conceptualised as a culture, quality assurance ceases to be just a process, it is never-ending, and its limits are diffuse. In that way, it becomes all-encompassing of the university experience. As a culture it also pretends to represent a set of practices and beliefs that are supposed to be shared by all proper universities. Here resides greatly quality assurance’s power. By stating that the environment is changing and offering itself as a tool for adaptation to this constant change, it becomes itself the main source of change. As Tuchman observed in her ethnography about an American university, universities create through these common managerial trends an environment to which they end up having to adapt. They adapt to this environment even more so than to the changing economic or technical challenges that stem

from their surrounding environment (2009, p. 38). Still, underneath this is an acceptance – resigned or enthusiastic – of the notion that we are in times of rapid and endless change.

Zygmunt Bauman's view of education in the liquid modern setting helps us to explain this penchant for continuous change and improvement, which is what quality assurance claims to facilitate. Reflecting on the challenges faced by education in the "liquid-modern" society, Bauman (2009) states that the "knowledge package" is strongly affected by today's penchant for the instant-use and instant-disposal of things (p.159), and by the erratic and unpredictable nature of change. In a society of consumers, in which "solidity is resented as a threat" and "flexibility is the politically correct term for spinelessness" [...] "romanticizing unsteadiness and inconsistency is therefore the 'right' (the only reasonable?) strategy to follow" (2009, p.157). This context in which things are made for "one off enjoyment" (p.159) produces, for Bauman, a logical preference for a kind of knowledge that is also designed to be used and then disposed of.

This seemingly ephemeral nature of educational experiences coexists, nonetheless, with the pressure to load them with pronounced importance. Alvesson's (2013) concept of 'grandiosity' can be used to describe this inclination to seek visibility and dedicate special efforts to the obtainment of symbols of superiority, which quality assurance evidently facilitates. He defines grandiosity as "attempts to give yourself, your occupational group/organization, or even the society in which you live, a positive – if somewhat superficial – well-polished and status-enhancing image". In this dynamic, "issues of substance (practices or tangible results) are marginalized. Grandiosity involves representing or loading phenomena such that they appear as attractive as possible within a framework of what seems to be reasonable" (2013, p. 8). Grandiosity is about giving phenomena exaggerated meaning that can "generate attractiveness, success, and distance from the paltriness and mediocrity of everyday life". The resulting exaggerations are not considered to be obviously misleading (pp. 8-9).

Alvesson's (2013) concept of 'grandiosity', together with Bauman's description of knowledge as something that now is perceived as having just a temporary value, come together usefully to describe the quality assurance practices applied by universities around the world. Accreditation and rankings have a quality of ostensible temporality – they always come with an expiration date, a fixed time of validity – but are simultaneously loaded with grandiosity – they are widely publicised and are granted status-enhancing meanings. In that sense, quality assurance practices could be considered as "illusion tricks", which Alvesson defines as "pseudo-events, pseudo-actions, and pseudo-structures" that "focus less on a

substantial practice or quality (behaviour, results) than on signalling what is positive, impressive, and fascinating – or is at least legitimate and anticipated” (p. 15). Pseudo-structures are symbolic but intend to be substantive and capable of tangible results (p. 18). Alvesson offers examples of pseudo-structures in universities, and they all belong to the kinds of practices promoted by the Bologna Process in Europe and regimes of quality assurance in different regions of the world:

Examples of pseudo-structures might be many quality-assurance projects, committees, leadership programmes, many political ‘reforms’, organizational changes, and so on. There are examples of a wide spectrum of quality-assurance activities in higher education. Programme evaluations and mandatory courses in pedagogy, or PhD supervision – sometimes strongly disliked by most people forced to participate but heralded as proof of quality and commitment to teaching by university management – are two examples that look good, although in many cases, such activities can be irrelevant or even counterproductive, other than performing a legitimizing function (2013, p. 18).

These pseudo-structures belong to a context in which higher education products are perceived as having to be constantly consumed. However, even though their value is not supposed to last for a long time, they are supposed to have a potent impact on its consumer.

The penchant for a continuous consumption of education, described by Bauman, and the exaggerated importance vested on each educational experience, described by Alvesson, are fundamental characteristics of what has been called the ‘massification’ of higher education. For Alvesson, this phenomenon is a result of the ideology of educational fundamentalism (2013, p. 73), which promotes its “almost mindless quantitative expansion” (p.74). Not only does the number of individuals participating in higher education should be continuously increasing, but those who have gained access once should be returning for an indefinite amount of times. Although an analysis of the situation may indicate that the massification of higher education leads to serious quality problems, these are almost dismissed with educational fundamentalist arguments that suggest higher education is “a way of increasing economic growth, making the population intelligent, and solving all kinds of problems. The good society – the knowledge society – is supposed to be accomplished by expanding the university sector and persuading more and more young people into an ever-widening spectrum of education” (p. 74).³⁶ Students return continuously to higher education

³⁶ For Alvesson, educational fundamentalism, currently a widespread phenomenon, is characterized by the following basic assumptions and the resultant policies and practices:

- Education is something good, and its consequences should be described in positive terms.
- Education and its expansion are crucial for economic growth. Greater investment in higher education has a clear payoff in terms of economic growth.
- There are also clear benefits from the individual viewpoint from investment in education.

propelled by the fact that “relative rather than absolute education” is what gives hopes for a good entry into the job market (p. 88). Hence, the concept of the knowledge society, widely used to support the enforcement of the latest reforms, is for Alvesson, quite grandiose when compared to the actual labour market, where the majority of jobs available do not require university level education (p. 83).

The incongruence between the grandiose knowledge society discourse and the job market reality is concealed by the drive for the constant consumption and disposal of higher education. For any professional there is always a new certification to obtain or a new skill to master that might eventually lead him or her to a desired position in the job market. It can be argued that the concept of life-long learning, currently very prominent in higher education policy, brings the grandiose and the ephemeral together. The university is responsible of providing an offer that is both status-enhancing and flexible enough for repeated consumption. As such, it becomes a valuable instrument of control of the population (for Tuschling and Engemann (2006) clearly so in the case of the European Union) as the provider of a constant offer of life-long learning that individuals should “voluntarily” consume.

The continual consumption of higher education is encouraged by “educational fundamentalism”, but also by the availability of a diverse and elaborate smorgasbord of prestige symbols to acquire. In a framework of “grandiosity”, quality assurance systems encourage both the widening consumption of higher education and the visible and official categorisation of universities and programmes. Essentially, the system aims to generate two main groups of universities: accredited and non-accredited. Nevertheless, the system has also created a myriad of university sub-categories according to the type of accreditation they acquire. For example, as seen in the previous chapter, an international accreditation with a foreign agency – especially if it is American – places a university in a better light than one who lacks it. An accreditation that has a national validity appears inferior to an accreditation that has a transnational value. This allows for the existence of groups of universities acting as closed networks of members that distinguish themselves from non-members. The emphasis on

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- You can't get too much education – the more education the better. The higher the proportion of the population that can be classified as well-educated, the better the society.
 - Human beings can be formed – education institutions create the right kind of people.
 - The ability to perform at work is primarily achieved as a result of education.
 - Certain people may be defined as poorly educated. We should ensure that they can benefit from initiatives to remedy this negative situation.
 - Education is the solution to a great many problems, from unemployment to international competitive capability.
 - As much education as possible must be upgraded/relabelled as higher education (2013, pp. 75-76).

continuous improvement, a continuous renewal that allows for the possibility of accessing each time more rotund symbols of prestige “illusion tricks” explain why quality assurance’s basic practices are designed to be cyclical, and why they are created to be complementary to visible symbols of prestige, such as league tables.

Quality assurance, thus, reinforces the clear categorisation established by ranking systems, while rankings themselves also possess different categories. Most universities cannot aspire to appear in the most prestigious lists, some will appear in less prestigious international rankings or in local rankings, while others will simply not appear in any ranking at all. The effects of this practice – which can be considered as a plain competition for distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), or as strategies to reproduce social class (Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Stevens, 2007) – can be devastating for universities at the bottom of the prestige ladder and, of course, for their students and teachers. Increasingly, funding and collaboration opportunities are conditioned to the possession of an accreditation, or are simply more accessible for universities in better ranking positions.

Rankings are often presented as an almost benevolent opportunity for universities that have been ‘obscure’ for a long time, as in the case of Asian universities, to become visible in the Western Hemisphere (Downing, 2012). The idea is that, in spite of their recognised flaws and of their reinforcement of the global at the expense of the local, rankings constitute a fair playing field in which Western and non-Western universities can compete for prestige and prospective students. This position does not acknowledge its reinforcement of Western normative power. In fact, rankings reinforce the standards and criteria that keep top ranked institutions at the top (Westerheijden, 1999) and a Western bias that intensifies inequalities and creates tensions with internal accountability policies in Asian universities (Vidovich, 2009). In the few cases in which this seems to be contradicted and official recognition is vested on an Asian university, rankings appear not to be enough in changing students’ perceptions. For example, the official recognition that some Asian universities have acquired with their debut in coveted positions in the rankings cannot hide the fact that international students still prefer to enrol in American and European universities over the Asian. In spite of the funds and efforts dedicated to the attraction of international students in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and China, the great majority of their foreign students come from Asia itself; very few arrive from Western countries (Ka Ho Mok, 2012). In contrast, universities in the Western world do attract considerable amounts of students from all regions of the planet. They also succeed in creating campuses in Africa, Asia and South America that enjoy healthy student recruitment figures

(Sexton, 2012) and advantages for the creation of internationalised study programmes that earn further points for them in the rankings.

Rankings may also discourage international teaching collaborations, especially between institutions with dissimilar scores. It has been claimed that teaching criteria are greatly absent from rankings, but another problem is that seemingly straightforward criteria can mean very different things in different cultures. One example is the indicator of teaching contact hours. A given amount may seem adequate in a system that encourages independent study, and very inadequate and an indicator of low quality or neglect in a different learning culture (Hughes, 2012). As a result, rankings encourage a categorisation of universities that instead categorises some learning cultures as superior to others.

Rankings are not perceived in the same way nor dealt with in the same way by academics. For example, a study that explored response to rankings in law schools in the United States revealed that reactions differ widely from one institution to another, as well as in time, and they range from ignoring the rankings to publicly opposing them, from renegotiating their terms to manipulating statistics for an institution's benefit. Academics complained that because of the rankings they had been forced to start focusing on "indicators rather than on underlying qualities", a clear dismissal of rankings as superficial. Some felt a very strong pressure to conform "while others embraced their fourth-tier status as a testament of their commitments, reinterpreting the stigma of rankings as an honorable sacrifice" (Sauder & Nelson Espeland, 2009, p.78). In sum, for these researchers, rankings are "a zero-sum affair that encourages meticulous scrutiny, distrust, innovation in gaming techniques, and pressure for conformity" (p.79). The authors claim that their "internalization is fostered by the anxiety that rankings produce, by their allure for the administrators who try to manipulate them³⁷, and by the resistance they provoke" (p.63). The emerging picture is one in

³⁷ Other researchers have also discussed how university managers develop strategies exclusively designed to enhance their institution's ratings. These strategies include the manipulation of data with the purpose of raising particular scores. This is the case with "yield rates", which represent the proportion of accepted applicants who finally enrol at a university. A yield rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who choose to enrol at a university, by the number of offers of acceptance and multiplying this by one hundred. A high yield rate is considered to indicate a greater interest in enrolling at a particular university (Ehrenberg, 2003). Some schools turn to shunning top graduates in order to boost their yield rates, weeding out those least likely to enrol. That is, those who have high possibilities of accepting an offer from a more prestigious university (Golden, 2002). Another example of data manipulation in the United States involves making SAT scores optional for applicants to a university. As a result, the institution's acceptance rate and the average SAT score are both increased. This happens because it raises the number of applicants while only students with high SAT scores submit their test scores (Yablon, 2001).

which this widely promoted practice for the identification of quality and the generation of an accepted hierarchy of universities certainly does not enjoy the unreserved acceptance of academics.

Policy documents on quality assurance – especially those that associate it with internationalisation – also contribute to the reinforcement of a hierarchy of universities. They abound in terms like “entrepreneurial university”³⁸, “innovative university”, “internationalised university”, “transnational university”, or “Global Network University” in documents (see, for example, European Commission & OECD, 2012; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013) and academic publications destined to advice policy-makers (see, for example, Stiasny & Gore, 2012). Universities strive to acquire these kinds of labels which communicate that they have become members of a superior – more prestigious – group. These labels are added together to create categories of universities that remain stable. An interesting description, from a Latin American perspective, of the kind of categorisation of universities that emerges is presented by Leite (2010). This depiction helps us apprehend why this is a system that ultimately produces exclusion. Most universities will never be considered among the ranks of the most coveted type, the “World Class University”, as Leite calls it:

On the one side we find traditional universities transformed into ‘Hybrid Universities’ under the effects of hegemonic thinking, which superimpose market criteria on strictly academic criteria, and on the other ‘Global Universities’ which will be strengthened in the canons of globalisation regulated by international accreditation agencies or by WTO and GATS, and by the cosmopolitan visibility of the international rankings. These two university models or their variations might be seen as forming the parameters for the partially globalised and underdeveloped world or for the emerging countries that are facing the need to be global. But these two ‘new’ models may have to survive alongside a third one, the model of the ‘World Class University’, an institution for the developed globalised world where the resources are abundant, students and faculty can demonstrate ‘excellence’ and the management and governance are favourable (supportive regulatory framework, autonomy, leadership, academic freedom) (Leite, 2010, p. 223).

Indeed there is encouragement for universities to compete for ranking positions but, paradoxically, this competition is only fierce between universities occupying the lower strata of the highly stratified global field of higher education, between universities that aspire to obtain a higher status, and between those institutions that are teaching oriented. In contrast, elite

³⁸ The now classic works by Clark (1998a, 1998b) and Etzkowitz (2000, 2003, 2007) are widely recognised and cited as fundamental texts in special programmes designed to promote university transformations towards more “adaptive institutions”. These projects obtain support from the European Commission and the OECD (2012), diverse international cooperation organisations, multilaterals and governmental initiatives (see, for example, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013).

institutions from the United States and the United Kingdom possess a solid reputation that grants them sound stability (Marginson, 2006). For Marginson, these research universities enjoy a status as producers of “positional goods” that provide prestige and higher income, and this status not only rests on their research performance but also on student selectivity. They have a demand that exceeds supply and they limit their expansion as a way of conserving their status. On the other hand, mass institutions do foster a continuous expansion. There are also intermediate institutions that stand between these two poles. The global competition has fostered: “(1) the emergence of a world-wide positional market of elite US/UK universities; and (2) the rapid development of a commercial mass market led by UK and Australian universities” (p.1).

Overall, contrary to what promoters of competition in higher education believe – essentially that competition is a driving force for improvement in higher education as a whole – Marginson describes a system that reinforces the current distribution of prestige while it distributes uneven shares of pressure:

[T]he overall outcome of global competition has been that while elite English-speaking institutions have been insulated from the full force of global competition by the seller-dominated dynamics of positional goods, and affluent students from middle level emerging nations (though not all students from those nations) have secured expanding opportunities via full fee places, capacity in poorer developing nations has been retarded. National and global competition in higher education will always produce globally stratified outcomes unless modified by policy action that is coordinated across borders (Marginson, 2006, p.36).

Quality assurance is, of course, not the initiator of this active categorisation of universities. However, it does promote the illusion that universities can progress from one category to another by following its recommendations³⁹. The sense of possibility that it conveys, especially for the universities in least favourable positions, facilitates the spread of quality assurance and its adoption in different contexts, especially those who figure they need it the most. Tellingly, the leaders in quality assurance trends are not elite universities, but the unknown and less selective institutions (Westerheijden, 1999). This issue is not pointed out when academics are invited to take notice of the rankings and the quality seals offered by accreditation schemes, and to believe that their university should and can aspire to them. The option of not wanting to compete in the rankings, nor accepting the hierarchy they promote, is eliminated. There is no alternative to competition.

³⁹ While the language of evaluation and accreditation schemes tends to be a positive one of ‘continuous improvement’ and presents itself as a source of new opportunities and greater financial security for universities, it has been argued that, in fact, these constitute as processes of exclusion and selection (see, for example, Höhne, 2006).

I have presented key points found in analyses on higher education reforms and quality assurance. It has been found through empirical studies that even though quality assurance carries a fixed set of messages, it is a highly adaptive to different contexts because it is loaded with meanings that are accepted by dominant groups in each case (Dickhaus, 2010). Another important element that gives power to quality assurance is that it is not presented as a process, but rather as a culture or state of mind, and as such, it is endless and all-encompassing. Quality assurance also constitutes the ideal strategy for condensing two coexisting tendencies in higher education: the penchant for constant consumption and disposal of the knowledge package (Bauman, 2009) that gives an ephemeral value to educational products, with the attraction of grandiosity (Alvesson, 2013), which is the tendency to load educational events with exaggerated and unrealistic importance. Quality assurance is also loaded with an optimistic message, giving universities a sense of possibility as competitors in a prestige race that quality assurance is, at the same time, reinforcing so as to keep the dominant in the best places. In the following section I will take a step closer to analyse in more detail another characteristic of quality assurance, which makes it all the more attractive as a tool for university's to navigate the liquid, grandiose, ranked and competitive world of higher education: its stress on the visibility of quality and of quality assurance itself.

1. Quality assurance: Visibility, measurement and performativity

“Thus, there will be situations in which the best tactic for defending the humanities in the face of real or simulated scepticism may be to say: ‘See, this is what we do: terrific, isn’t it?’ If the response from the sober-suited self-styled administrative realists around the table is to say that they don’t see that it’s terrific at all, it may, paradoxically, be better to let the discussion degenerate into a version of the pantomime exchange ‘Oh yes it is/Oh no it isn’t’, rather than to try to re-describe the value of the activity in terms drawn from a different, instrumental world of discourse”
(Collini, 2012, pp.84-85).

Most aspects of evaluation and accreditation processes involve a limited group of first-hand participants. Not all the academics of an institution become directly implicated, and even less so the students. A complete accreditation process can be undertaken with a very limited participation of staff and an even less significant participation of students. Most of the time only academics with managerial responsibilities in a programme have the duty to collect evidence and data required by an accreditation agency, and arrange it all together in one

document. The document is probably read – and most likely not in its entirety – by a small group of people. This reality is in total contrast with the efforts placed on the generation of visible cues around quality assurance. Conferences, press releases, ceremonies, brochures and websites are dedicated to show how reforms and processes are taking place with quality assurance as their main purpose. The efforts dedicated to making quality assurance processes visible to society can be observed in Europe as well as in Central America; in Germany, where higher education is predominantly public, and in Nicaragua, where most universities are private.

In Europe, most of the Bologna Process' stated aims could in fact be invisible to external eyes and even to students. It can be argued that the most recognisable impact has been the introduction of comparable first and second cycle degrees: Bachelor and Master. In Germany this implied the recent removal of the *Diplom* through an amendment to the federal law of higher education in 1998, allowing both universities and *Fachhochschulen* to offer the new types of degrees (Haug, 1999). Bologna Process documents called for this restructuration as a response to the realisation that in Europe, and especially in Austria, Denmark and Germany, students were taking longer to graduate than what the official programmes were said to last. The reasons given to back the decision to shorten enrolment duration –through the new degree structure and the shortening of grants– where mainly economic but also, according to Schade (2007, pp. 180-181), to increase the flexibility of study opportunities, improve the international compatibility of German degrees, and increase the number of international students seeking study places in Germany. Therefore, the alteration in degree structure could be understood as a strategy to make visible Germany's disposition to create a more effective and compatible system. Apparently, encouraging students to complete their *Diplom* in a shorter time would not have been considered effective enough. Likewise, stating that German universities have been open to international students at least since 1926, one year after the foundation of the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (DAAD), would not have been enough to demonstrate the country's commitment to 'internationalise'.

In Central America accreditation processes involve extensive communication campaigns that aim at informing students about the meaning of accreditation as a seal of quality that adds value to their degree. The notion of universities acquiring a superior status as members of a recognised group is also present in these messages, and shared through the media. The seal of approval of an accreditation is supposed to officially distinguish a group of universities from others that will remain as unreliable "garage universities". In this sense, the value of accreditation and other quality assurance processes resides in that they can become

visible signs used for students to differentiate the good providers from the rest in the dense higher education market. An explanation of how accreditation agencies work, who are its members and how an accreditation is obtained is not as available as the resulting symbol of recognition. The official approval of universities, formerly granted by different governmental dependencies – in the case of Nicaragua by the National Council of Universities (*Consejo Nacional de Universidades - CNU*) – which became insufficient upon the arrival of quality assurance, never enjoyed or required much visibility.

Perhaps because of its inclination for visibility, quality assurance is also about registering and measuring performance. Several critical analyses of quality assurance have characterised it as being based on performativity, and hence inclined to superficiality. Some scholars argue that the management of teaching promotes a superficial theory of learning based on performance (Lee & Manathunga, 2010). It has also been stated that an institutional stress on performativity, evidenced by the emergence of an emphasis on measured outputs: on strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits has replaced the traditional professional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 313). The new focus is placed on processes instead of content; on numbers instead of arguments. Ostensibly, processes and numbers talk more than substance and words in the measurement of quality.

Indeed, quality assurance experts go into menial detail about the way in which quality assurance should be applied in practice. There is no shortage of manuals on quality audit, evaluation and accreditation. The processes are clear and carefully standardised (see, for example: CNEA, 2011 and ACQUIN, 2009). There is a certain way to conduct an evaluation, to write an evaluation report for an accreditation agency, to do strategic planning, to build indicators, and to generate evidence. On the other hand, quality itself appears as a slippery concept in quality assurance literature (see, for example, Neave, 1994), where very different definitions are used without stating the reason behind the selection of a particular approach. In addition, the concept is often applied without an acknowledgement of how a particular perspective can conceal important aspects of the reality it intends to portray (Frazer, 1992). It is also common to find very broad definitions in the literature, comprising of very different elements, such as Harvey and Green's (1993), which includes: excellence and meeting of standards, consistency, fitness of purpose, value for money and transformation of the students by giving them the ability and empowerment to make good decisions. Broad definitions such as this one are common in accreditation manuals. Promoters of quality assurance do not focus on defining the concept of quality with as much precision as the processes they promote. The

tendency is for the concept to absorb as much elements as it can in order to be all-encompassing of university life. Lists of indicators seem to endlessly grow in an effort to prevent leaving anything unattended. The conceptual limitations of quality assurance are ignored in comparison to the profuse interest directed towards its application.

With its emphasis on the measurement of outputs and the verification of procedures, accreditation is portrayed as a very strict and meticulous process that can accurately reveal both the strong points and the weaknesses of a program or institution and in some cases, as in Central America, can even eradicate low quality institutions from the scene or rescue institutions from a path to mediocrity.⁴⁰ In reality, it is hard to demonstrate the promised effects with data. Quite the opposite could also be happening. A paper based on Finnish universities points out that the pressure to fulfil commercial as well as scientific indicators constantly being measured in quality assurance processes has led academics to lower the standards of their work (Häyrynen-Alestalo & Peltola, 2006, p. 276). Many times accreditation adapts its indicators to the realities of mass higher education institutions, lowering previously set standards agreed by agencies. And still another possibility is that universities have learned to confound the evaluation system by successfully disguising key aspects. Indeed, Power states that since quality audit is about management processes, practices and procedures of manufacture, not the product itself, it “can provide assurance that the system works well even when substantive performance is poor (1997, p. 60).

Perhaps the best way of analysing this is to look at the experience of those who have applied these processes for the longest time. It is stimulating, therefore, to look at the case of the United States, where several states have altered accreditation practices in order to prevent institutions from failing to obtain an accreditation, especially in the case of the private for-profit institutions. “In so doing, they accept hiring practices that de-center full-time faculty – the states affirm lack of faculty involvement in shared governance as well as universities with

⁴⁰ This aspect is particularly poignant in Latin America because of the rapid growth of the higher education system in many countries. For example, there were eight universities in Chile in the 1970s (two public and six private) (Dickhaus, 2010). Today, it is hard to be certain about the total number of universities existing in the country. Some sources mention 18 public and 61 private (Altillo.Com El Portal de los Estudiantes, 2014). Other sources say there are 59 universities: 25 of which receive state funds – 16 public and 9 private – and 34 which do not (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación- CNA Chile, 2014). Still, other sources mention 15 public and 27 private universities (Universia Chile, 2014). In short, Chile’s case exemplifies the Latin American higher education boom, and its sharp lean towards the private sector. It also hints at the system’s lack of control or formality regarding the creation of new universities and their official acceptance.

no libraries and little face-to-face instruction” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 1996, pp. 21-22). The same situation can also be identified in Nicaragua, as described in the previous chapter. Another example is the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) applied to universities in Great Britain, which has been criticised as costly, time-consuming and full of irrationalities and absurdities. As a result, it has been pointed out that universities come up with “tricks” and absurdly inflated claims, to avoid reducing their ratings (Callinicos, 2006, pp. 17-18).

For Shore (2010), the emphasis on performativity affects academics by producing the opposite of what is meant to produce. While it is said to promote transparency, academics become dedicated to the production of fabrications. The fabrications are a response to the contradictions generated in the current “schizophrenic” university, which ends up producing “schizophrenic academic subjects”. To explore this notion, Shore analysed the understanding of the current reforms among academics by conducting an ethnographic study in New Zealand – one of the pioneer countries in the introduction of New Public Management –, which included observations and interviews to reveal academics’ points of view and reactions regarding the institutional changes they experienced. Combining contradictory goals proves to be a very difficult task. Shore found that the natural result of increasingly loading responsibilities on the university has been a rise in workload for academics, which, together with the audit culture that is established, has eroded traditional relationships of trust and professionalism among faculty (2010, pp.26-27).

Shore’s findings on the exploitative situation of academic workers can be supported with results from several other studies. One study points out that academic work has traditionally been perceived as not stressful mainly because it enjoyed work stability (Thorsen, 1996). However, data shows that casual, short-term contracts are now very common among academic staff. In the United States temporary teaching staff went from 22% in 1970 to around 50% in 1997 (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.18; DiGiacomo, 2005), and up to 70% in 2007 (American Association of University Professors, 2007). It is easy to find the connection between the discourse of continuous improvement and adaptation and the unrestrained possession of a volatile work force.

In addition to increasing work instability, academics also deal with stressful quantities of work. Thorsen (1996) found that stress is not linked to the nature or type of work academics do, but to the amount of it. The workload that many academics have is perceived by them as overwhelming. Significantly, in this particular study conducted in Canada, the job that teachers reported as least stressful was teaching and time spent with students, and the most stressful was research (Thorsen, 1996), an activity that during the first half of the 1990s – when the

study was conducted – was being subjected to more audit control and measurements of productivity than teaching. Academics reported that they had more tasks continuously being added to their responsibilities, which together with the fact that traditional scholarly work is time consuming, gave them the sense that they had little control over their workplace (p.473). Although this study was conducted in 1996, it was pointed out that “increases in class size, static budgets and imposed forms of review and accountability all contribute to the potential for an increase in negative stress” (p.473). We could safely assume that this trend was maintained or increased in the following years.

Several other studies from different countries also discuss the tendency of increased stress in academic work. A study on New Zealand academics focuses essentially on the increasing quantity of work and stress levels (Chalmers, 1998). A paper by a British academic reflected on what he calls the “embodied struggles of an academic at a university that is permeated by an audit culture” (Sparkes, 2007, p. 421), highlighting the complexities of navigating academic quality-assessed life and the possibility of describing its destructive effects. Another study tried to pinpoint the extent and sources of stress in university staff in a Quebec University, and alarmingly found that 40% of university workers reported psychological distress stemming mainly from “work overload, the relationship with one’s superior, and participation in decision making” (Biron, Brun & Ivers, 2008, p. 511). This study is significant because it adds two other features brought about by quality assessment trends, as both the relationship with superiors and the participation in decision making are aspects which become mediated through quality assessment processes.

Another effect of the current situation, which arguably also generates stress on university staff, is that it places some fields of knowledge in the path towards disappearance, or at least to a diminished status and uncertain future. The impact of this situation can be wide for the dynamics of academic life and in unforeseeable ways. It has been observed that what can be easily measured is emphasised over what cannot, and as a result some disciplines become prominent while others are undervalued (see, for example: Rhoades & Sporn, 2002). Finnish academics, for example, display very different attitudes towards quality assurance and its market orientation depending on the academic field they belong to: some show a concentration on scientific excellence coupled with feelings of uneasiness towards the market, while others display a pragmatic approach that, nevertheless, undermines their scientific goals (Häyrynen-Alestalo & Peltola, 2006, p. 276). There is a current emphasis on products – as the desired outcome of research – which does not comprehend products that consist of ideas, generating a discrimination of academic fields that do not produce tangible products

(Häyrynen-Alestalo & Peltola, 2006, p. 277; see also Rhoades & Sporn, 2002). On the other hand, certain fields of knowledge enjoy greater wealth to support their research, salaries, and work conditions, both through the larger availability of public grants and private funding, but also from greater abundance of fee-paying students. Hence, the current situation translates into a “disfavour” or “institutional de-emphasis” of the humanities (Taylor, Cantwell & Slaughter, 2013).

This state of affairs is commented by academics in disfavoured areas, and the oblivion is evident in Humanities Faculty premises – even more so when compared to technological Faculty buildings. A study based on the American context confirmed this anecdotal perception (Taylor, Cantwell & Slaughter, 2013). The authors describe the American universities as being embedded in “quasi-markets”. These include public and private funds, and what turns them into “quasi-markets” is that they are created by policy makers instead of spontaneous *laissez-faire* exchange, have rewards systems that reflect policy priorities instead of economic efficiency, and hence although they promote competition, some institutions have better access to rewards due to their belonging in particular sectors, or engaging in activities valued by the policy makers (p. 676, 678). Since the humanities are not targeted by policy makers, the researchers found that private universities decreased the share of doctoral degrees in those fields as they increased their revenues from federal grants and contracts. Nevertheless, this was not the case in public institutions, where state grants are not linked to students’ selected majors (p.698). The authors state, however, that a further study could be done focusing on expenditures, which could reveal the validity of the proposition that the humanities may be cross-subsidizing other fields as most of the time students are required to pay the same amount for tuition than students in costlier fields (pp.700-701). However, innovation and competition discourses do not allow university managers to see their potential for revenue generation (p.701), and hence place them in an unfavourable light. Collini makes an observation that might help us understand why the humanities are not able to insert themselves successfully in the current context. He claims that:

the goal of work in the humanities, in particular, is better described as ‘understanding’ than as ‘knowledge’. One of the consequences of insisting on that distinction is the recognition that whereas knowledge is seen as in some sense objective, ‘out there’, a pile or hoard that exists whether anyone is tending it or not and which any suitably energetic person can climb to the top of, understanding is a human activity that depends in part upon the qualities of the understander (2012, p.77).

Collini further describes why this characteristic means the humanities cannot be submitted to measurement:

A further practical implication of this line of argument is that at all levels the model of assessment in the humanities has to be judgement not measurement, and judgement cannot, without loss and distortion, be rendered in quantitative terms nor can its grounds ever be made wholly 'transparent' (to use another of the current Edspeak buzzwords). This last suggestion can seem particularly unpalatable when viewed from the perspective of those who are judged adversely: the student whose work has been failed, the colleague who has unsuccessfully applied for promotion, the department which has been ranked lower than it expected in the scramble for funds, and so on (2012, pp.78-79).

Quality assurance's reliance on indicators as the most reliable evidence constitutes one of its weaknesses. As shown in several studies, indicators many times fail to reveal what they claim to. A good example is the expansion of higher education. The indicator observed conveys the idea that a growing access to higher education automatically means better opportunities for the youth in question and for the economy and labour market in general. However, massification policies, according to Keep and Mayhew, rest on "evidence that is, at best, incomplete, and at worst, weak or contradictory" (2004, p.310). This possibility is never considered in the policy papers on which quality in higher education is defined. An analysis of the situation, based on the case of Great Britain reveals that it is not clear that the consequences of these policies of expansion are positive (p.311). Keep and Mayhew examined two beliefs that underlie current reforms: 1. That higher education is necessary to improve economic performance; and 2. That it will increase the access to better jobs for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The researchers found that, as a consequence of the expansion, the vocational system will likely suffer damage, a highly undesirable effect due to the fact that the economy includes many jobs with educational requirements that are below the degree level. They found that it could also lead to a decline in social mobility, and that the labour-market for people without degrees could worsen (Keep & Mayhew, 2004, p.298). Massification has also been described as really just the inclusion of courses of study that formerly were outside of the university because of their technical nature. The result of this is a diminishing quality in technical training. As Callewaert says, "by trying to embrace all possible qualifications and employment functions both practical and theoretical competence is destroyed" (1997, p. 185).

Another notable example of the vagueness of performance indicators is the issue of 'employability'. The responsibility of employment for graduates is increasingly expected to be shared by universities, and is used as an indicator of the quality of a programme, seriously

taken into account during an accreditation process. Because of the practice of registering these indicators, universities are increasingly expected to track issues that escape their own possibilities of control. For example, in the United States universities should record “how many graduates remain in the state or how many are employed (and at what average salary) a year after graduation (Bok, 2006, p. 326). When graduates of a programme are failing to get jobs and the university is not aware of it and/or not implementing ways to help them, it is considered a serious failure in quality. This perspective of the problem of unemployment or underemployment totally fails to acknowledge its complexity.

Furthermore, since the possession of a higher education degree is described as a smart investment, assumptions about the ties between higher education and employability are seldom questioned or explored in detail. As Schade claims: “The factors that facilitate or hamper transition from higher education to work are complex and difficult to identify (for more information on this, see Kehm, 1999), so they have to be interpreted with caution”. In addition, “the significantly lower number of unemployed amongst academics should not, for example, hide the fact that they can increasingly be found in underqualified jobs, in temporary work, or are avoiding unemployment by entering continuing qualification programmes” (Schade, 2007, p.178). Policies that encourage life-long learning or continuous improvement are perhaps contributing to further complicate the analysis of the links between higher education and employment. For Alvesson, encouraging continuing education may be about “pushing unemployment into the future [...] or down the hierarchy (to those with a shorter education)” (p. 85), and about turning the university into “hidden welfare system”, a “parking garage for young people” (Alvesson, 2013, pp. 85-96). Coincidentally, a study based on British Labour Force Survey data found that there is “a growing grey area where it is no longer clear what is and what is not a graduate job, or whether a graduate job produces more than average pay” (Brynin, 2012, p.291). The study also found that “the increase in graduations has led to a substantial increase in poorly paid graduate employment in non-manual work. The graduate explosion is associated with an increased entry into non-manual work, but more specifically into low-paid non-manual work” (p. 293). The author concludes that while it is true that a degree is now a prerequisite for getting a ‘good’ job, many graduates end up earning non-graduate pay. For Brynin, these graduates are effectively paying the price for the expansion of higher education encouraged by the government.

Moving on, the emphasis on performativity also creates situations in which the achievement of some goals could come at the cost of sacrificing other important aspects. For

example, enhancing mobility and internationalisation could encourage a diminution in the workload that would otherwise have not been considered necessary:

The original expectation was that the creation of a single space of education would give mobility a further boost. This does not seem to have happened yet. With regard to intra-European short term programme mobility (Erasmus type mobility) the introduction of a two-tier degree system is sometimes pointed at as an obstacle to student mobility. It is therefore recommended that stronger curricular efforts are made to devise study programmes with adequate workload and to integrate opportunities for mobility in the structure of all programmes (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009, p. 14).

In addition, while the student-centred learning discourse implies that students are picking and choosing universities and programmes according to what they offer to them, the concealed fact is that their choice is limited to some universities and programmes. As stated before, quality assurance processes actually reinforce the existence of a group of elite universities that remain selective in their admission of students. Instead of widening access, the system allows some universities to keep very high selection standards while others are forced to lower them to turn the promise of massification into a reality. As Bok states, the few most prestigious universities are not too bound by student opinion and have more freedom to decide what to teach, while those without prestige must respond to prospective students' desires in order to secure enough applicants (Bok, 2006, pp. 307-308).

Several other real problems are left untouched by quality assurance processes. For example, in favour of internationalisation and mobility, employability, and student satisfaction, quality assurance processes turn their back on the problems generated by the unequal funding of universities and programmes. The insecurity of the academic career is an important issue for young doctors or doctoral students who see very limited opportunities for making a living as university lecturers or professors. The difference in salary between disciplines has been documented⁴¹. The cost of access to scientific journals, which quadrupled between 1988 and 2002 (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002, p. 442) and remains out of reach for most universities, the deteriorating infrastructure of universities or certain areas within universities, the insufficient infrastructure for the amount of students in many universities as well as the high student-teacher ratio (both conditions evident even in accredited programmes), and the escalating costs for students, are among some of the issues that deeply concern academics and students but do not receive the proper attention.

⁴¹ At least in the United States, academics in the humanities earn lower salaries than faculty in areas such as law, science and medicine (Hearn, 1999).

Recalling what was discussed in the first section of this chapter, quality assurance is highly adaptable and imposes a fixed set of values and procedures to different contexts by inserting itself not as a process, but as a culture to be embraced by responsible academics. As such, quality assurance is continuous and never-ending. It facilitates the “liquid society’s” inclination for constant consumption and disposal of education, while at the same time, the fleeting value of educational products is also given an inflated significance through “grandiose” symbols such as special accreditations or rankings. Quality assurance, thus, encourages the continuous consumption of higher education in the current context of massification. To function, it relies on visibility and on the measurement of performance, not substance, and because of this it has been described as superficial and vague by several critics. In addition, its reliance on indicators makes it essentially blind to the complexity of problems it aims to solve.

The aforementioned characteristics of quality assurance are its most significant, yet in order to comprehend the way it is inserted in universities, as well as how and to what degree it modifies the way the organisation function, I will focus on the way quality assurance works in the every-day life of academics: based on the implementation of specific managerial structures and processes. The processes have been reviewed by the promoters themselves, who have pointed at issues that need improvement or correction, such as what was mentioned in the previous chapter in the section on problems and limitations of evaluation and accreditation. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that, in spite of this critique, experts on quality in higher education still consider that the implementation of quality assurance processes supports universities and improves the way academics do their work (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007a). Among academic administrative circles today, it is generally agreed that they are the best strategy for the promotion of quality in higher education. Management has become more than a tool. It has become a framework for thought instead of processes to be applied. The reliance on indicators remains strong in spite of claims about their unintended effects and limited capacity to reflect social aspects (Power, 2004), examples of which I presented above. The managerial structures on which quality assurance relies sustain the “culture of evaluation” or “culture of quality” that quality assurance promotes. Quality experts and managers talk about culture or cultural change repeatedly without having, as Tuchman argues, any social sciences background or ever having to define these concepts (2009, p.26). Nonetheless, quality assurance has greatly succeeded in introducing itself as a basic framework, as higher education problems nowadays are discussed mainly using its concepts and notions. Strategies do not stray away from its proposed structure. As discussed above, when promoters evaluate the reforms they point at difficulties encountered, at areas in which

they have been ineffective or even accept they have obtained unintended negative effects. However, it is never considered that there exist problems in higher education that the quality assurance framework ignores or simply cannot grasp. By not acknowledging the limits of this framework, quality assurance experts do not realise that this regime can actually disguise or ignore problems that remain outside of its vision.

While policy papers and political initiatives use the framework of quality assurance to define problems in higher education, academic contributions offer us tools to develop a critique of the framework itself, the specific practices it promotes, and their effects on universities, teachers, and students. Academics in different countries have defined the new regime as a total contrast with long-held core values that were fundamental in higher education institutions for many years. It is argued that quality assurance is a turn away from Humboldtian values towards those of marketing and efficiency (Krejsler, 2006). Often the reforms have been described as a turn away from democracy and traditional decision-making strategies unique to universities (Tuchman, 2009). It is said that instead they favour accountability and its managerial processes (Carney, 2006), which bestow power on managers as they withdraw it from academics (see, for example, Tuchman, 2009). For example, quality assurance encourages university managers to justify certain decisions based on the intention of moving a university to a better ranking position (Tuchman, 2009, p. 173), claiming to have consulted teachers when the process was done in a very superficial way (p. 160), rejecting any criticism from staff towards the institution (p. 156), increasing centralisation (p. 163), and making decisions that can boost their own managerial careers (pp. 154-163). Thus, my analysis will first focus on theories that analyse the changes that quality assurance and related phenomena have produced on universities as organisations. Two poignant questions emerge: How does quality assurance insert itself in a diversity of higher education institutions in spite of the negative effects it also carries for institutions and individual teachers? How do students fit in this frame? To answer these questions we must look at the general context in which quality assurance practices are inserted. In other words, they do not “travel” alone but instead are part of a package. The key point in understanding their imperviousness to the existing critique lies in analysing the global context in which they have thrived.

Some studies have focused on the commercialisation of higher education as a key trend of which quality assessment is an epiphenomenon. They explain essentially how the transformations involving the insertion of universities in the market create internal changes in universities and describe their consequences. Relevant among these analyses is the theory of academic capitalism. Other theories focus on the way institutions apply decision making, and

how this is central in shaping the institutions and mediating and transforming power relations. In this group I include the audit culture and governmentality studies. Both help us understand how neoliberalism works at the micro level in the institutions, and the role particular actors, such as university administrators, academics and students, acquire. The work produced through the application of these theories reveals the persuasive capacity of quality assurance, the ease with which it is applied in different contexts, and the way in which it gains adepts and supporters, and takes over decision making processes in a university. Through the lenses of these theories we can better explain how a practice that evidently concentrates on performativity is able to effectively make teachers feel controlled, stir fierce competition between universities, encourage commercialisation practices, and promote an accepted and respected “pecking order” (Callinicos, 2006) of universities and academics. These theories can help us understand the particular context in which quality assurance makes sense and flourishes. After observing what they reveal we can then focus on the student experience in the quality assurance regime.

2. Academic capitalism and the spread of quality assurance

“But vacuity is now rendered more vacuous still by the requirement that the ‘excellent’ must become ‘yet more excellent’ on pain of being exposed as complacent or backward-looking or something equally scandalous” (Collini, 2012, p.109).

Quality assurance has travelled hand in hand with other transformations occurring in universities. It can be associated especially with reforms that have aimed at connecting universities with the market. This trend of making special efforts to connect higher education to the market and the economic growth of a country or region has been described as marketization, commercialisation, McDonaldization or commodification of higher education. Quality assurance emerges as a necessary tool for the attainment of the much sought connection of universities to the economy. Therefore, quality assurance cannot be explored without first understanding its connections to this wider phenomenon of commercialisation of higher education.

As described previously, quality assurance systems are greatly based on encouraging competition. Interestingly while policies in Europe were incentivised with comparisons of European universities mainly to their American counterparts, when competitiveness discourses were introduced in the United States they included the notion that the country’s

higher education system was facing strong competition from Germany and Japan (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012, p. 590; Bruno, 2009). A spiral of competition – and imitation⁴² – has been put in place, initiated in the United States and driven into other parts of the world through the implementation of special policies. These policies imply that the degree of success in competition refers to how well a university – or a group of universities within an area – is able to commercialise its programmes. It is assumed that there is a correlation between a university's capacity to compete and its quality. In Europe, the competitiveness discourse present in Bologna Process documents and in most policy papers is about making Europe the “most competitive region in the world”. Universities are repeatedly accused of not fulfilling their role: “European universities have enormous potential, but this potential is not fully harnessed and put to work effectively to underpin Europe's drive for more growth and more jobs” (European Commission, 2006). The message slips from quality to competitiveness⁴³, it oscillates from one aim to the other, and in so doing, seamlessly imbricates the call for quality with the language of competition and commercialisation.

The phenomenon of the commercialisation of higher education has been described in depth by Slaughter, Rhoades and Cantwell in several works based mainly on the case of the United States, and taking advantage of hindsight in a country that has been encouraging competitiveness for a longer time than in Europe or Latin America. The results of these studies

⁴² Applying institutional theory Rhoades and Sporn (2002) explored to what extent and through what processes have concepts of quality assurance and strategic management been borrowed from the United States and applied in Europe. States have developed a coercive role (as sources of coercive isomorphism) by setting desirable practices into policy and legislation. Aside, the authors underscore the importance of U.S. companies in Europe as a source of “mimetic isomorphism”, offering models for quality management perceived as successful practices to imitate. U.S. academics, in turn, through professional mechanisms – mainly conferences, associations, and journals – that became sources of normative isomorphism, turned the United States into a model of quality assurance to be followed by Europe (p. 383). However, there are important key differences between the United States and Europe in the way quality assurance and its purposes have been understood at the policy level: “In the U.S., quality assurance can best be understood historically and internally as a process that is regionally and state based, and institution based, through self-study, peer driven processes of assuring minimal standards. At the state level there is a minimalist interpretation of standards, with a focus more on efficiency than on quality. That has encouraged strategic management processes at the institutional level in which quality is a less important consideration than potential productivity. By contrast, quality assurance in the European context is more focused on standardization to prepare for unification, to ensure that higher education systems are relatively equivalent. It has more powerful meaning at the national than at the institutional level. In some regards, with performance contracts, quality assurance is gaining more significance in Europe in resource allocation to institutions than it has in the U.S. Yet at the institutional level the meaning of quality assurance is relatively minimalist, focusing on teaching evaluations and instruction in study programs. It has not been particularly linked to or subordinated to a powerful strategic management process at the institutional level.” (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002, p.382).

⁴³ Most of the time, when documents refer to competitiveness of Europe in the higher education market, they mention specifically the European Union as being engaged in competition with the United States (See, for example, European Commission, 2006).

are not taken into account in policy documents that promote competitiveness. Many assumptions about the positive effects of commercialisation and competitiveness are clearly contradicted in these studies.

Slaughter and Rhoades (1996) conducted a longitudinal analysis of data and legislation that promoted competitiveness in research and development in the United States from the 1980s to the 1990s. They observed how scientists' work in the laboratory suffers an impact when funds are directed to increasing competitiveness, affecting the whole university instead of just the areas dedicated to science and technology. The study revealed how fostering competitiveness raises inequality. For instance, while the salary of faculty working in fields that could engage in commercialisation rose dramatically, faculty unable – or unwilling – to connect their research to the market, did not prosper (p.329). An overall effect of a system focused on competitiveness is an increasing divide between science and engineering on the one hand, and the arts and letters on the other, making it difficult for academics to perceive the university as a community (Slaughter & Rhoades, 1996, p.331). Very significantly, the authors also found that, contrary to what policy-makers state and some university members assume, funding for research is not increased when it is perceived to be contributing to the economy.

It has also been difficult for American academics to embrace the values of competitiveness and commercialisation in their daily work. Slaughter and Rhoades (2010) analysed professors' copyright ethics, values, and practices by comparing policy documents and interviews with academics. They found that while institutions did promote intellectual property and increase the practice of copyrighting, not all science and engineering professors at U.S. universities (according to the authors, the most marketised in the world) embraced the values of entrepreneurialism and intellectual property. Some of them expressed total refusal of these, others opted for personal interpretations of policies that they found did not fit with the institutions' interests (p.269), and some, appealing to what they considered higher values, argued in favour of open access in the name of science (p.283). The study revealed how teachers have to deal with contradictions between the ethics and values of the academic capitalism system –with an emphasis on products, markets, and profits – and those distinctive of the research/grants publications system (p.290).

The commercialisation of higher education, as analysed by these authors, is not just the result of policies, of moves from the private sector, or of student choice. The mechanisms through which this occurs have been explained in detail in the theory of academic capitalism

which I will discuss below. These mechanisms, I will argue, can also be applied to the spread of quality assurance systems.

2.1. The Theory of Academic Capitalism

The theory of academic capitalism was originally described by Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie (1997) and further developed with the collaboration of Gary Rhoades (2004). The authors proposed the theory to explain how universities have transformed themselves to become more closely connected to the economy. They explain the ways in which universities have become integrated into the 'knowledge society' or 'information society' by acquiring new roles and responsibilities. Its proponents do not conclude simply that the university has become "corporatized". Instead, they identify "groups of actors – faculty, students, administrators, and academic professionals – as using a variety of state resources to create new circuits of knowledge that link higher education institutions to the new economy" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.1). The result is a "shift from a public good knowledge/learning regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime" (p.8). And although the latter has not completely replaced the former, and the two regimes coexist (p. 29), the boundaries between the public and private sector are increasingly blurred.

In this view, universities are not defencelessly being affected by external forces; they are actively seeking those connections with the economy. Different groups of actors – including managers, faculty and students – within the university have important roles in the transformations taking place, which have an impact on the academic profession and faculty employment. These actors make investments and develop marketing and consumption behaviours that constitute the "academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime", whose most significant characteristics are: "its global scope, its treatment of knowledge as raw material, its non-Fordist production processes, and its need for educated workers and consumers" (p.16).

For Slaughter and Rhoades, the dominance and importance of the academic profession is put into question in today's universities. Academics are no longer the most important members of staff in universities full of managers dedicated to technology transfer, information producing and processing, quality control, and so forth. As Rhoades (1998) points

out, academics are increasingly managed professionals. The existence of managerial staff and offices shows:

the internal embeddedness of profit-oriented activities as a point of reorganization (and new investment) by higher education institutions to develop their own capacity (and to hire new types of professionals) to market products created by faculty and develop commercializable products outside of (though connected to) conventional academic structures and individual faculty members (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.11).

In the academic capitalism regime, knowledge privatisation and profit are valued more than the public's good. There is "little separation between science and commercial activity" and discoveries are valued when they produce "high-technology products for a knowledge economy" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 29). It becomes evident that academic capitalism and quality assurance share common views of higher education. Therefore, the mechanisms that facilitate the connections of the university with the market also carry the elements of quality assurance and insert them in universities at the same time that the academic capitalist regime is developed. By taking note of these mechanisms it is also possible to understand the mechanisms that promote quality assurance, as they are embedded in the same fabric.

In short, following the theory of academic capitalism, universities become 'marketised' through the development of the following characteristics:

"New circuits of knowledge that link state agencies, corporations and universities in entrepreneurial research endeavours are developed. *New funding streams* support these knowledge constellations and *interstitial organizations* emerge to facilitate the new knowledge circuits. *Intermediating networks* between public, non-profit and private sectors are initiated by actors from the various sectors to stabilize the new circuits of knowledge and organizations that facilitate entrepreneurial activity on the part of universities. At the same time, universities build extended *managerial capacity* that enables them to function as economic actors. *Narratives, discourses and social technologies* that justify and normalize these changes are developed, elaborated and articulated by all the players, and deployed via social technologies" (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012, pp.587-588).

Quality assurance concepts and structures can be traced in each of the above characteristics. In the following paragraphs I will discuss each one of them and their link to quality assurance and practices closely associated to it.

Abundant literature, encompassing academic publications as well as reports, manuals and conferences, constitute the *new circuits of knowledge*. These are selectively promoted through several components of the Bologna Process, in the case of Europe, which has included training and generation of awareness among groups of academics in different countries of the

EHEA and abroad. The actors involved have developed a common language and understanding. Details on how to develop quality assurance practices are shared, and quantitative data are provided to support the demands for universities to adopt these practices. “Successful cases” prove the points and “best practices” are used as guidelines. This kind of literature feeds the policies that promote academic capitalism⁴⁴.

Interstitial organizations are those that emerge within existing areas of the university, they use and spread the narratives and discourses of competitiveness, and promote the commercialisation of research. They create new careers and rewards (pp.591-592). One example of an interstitial organizations is the technology transfer office, now introduced as a necessary addition in many universities. Accreditation agencies can also be classified as interstitial organizations for their role in directing universities towards adopting competitive behaviours and the commercialization of research. They have also created – and sustain – the career of quality experts and generate reward systems to actively encourage academic performance that links universities to the market through research, or that contributes to positioning the university in the student market, and the students in the labour market.

For Slaughter and Cantwell *intermediating networks* promote relations between universities and other sectors, and are mostly comprised of “business elites, middle to high ranking government officials, and/or professionals with advanced degrees. They usually see advantage from rearranging the traditional, distinct sectors of state, non-profits and for-profits to create new opportunities configured in a neoliberal frame” (2012, p.589; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The Bologna Process constitutes, par excellence, a transnational intermediating network that links governments, corporations and academics in Europe and abroad in order to facilitate entrepreneurial initiatives.

Slaughter and Cantwell describe the existence of *narratives* on human capital (stronger in the U.S.), competitiveness, and the neoliberal market, circulating among intermediating networks, universities and policy groups. These narratives remain strong even if there is weak evidence to sustain what they claim. One good example presented by Slaughter and Cantwell is the issue of patents. As they explain, “revenues for patents are represented as contributing substantially to university general funds, and successful innovations based on academic discoveries are presented as an enticement for industry to contribute more funding to academic R&D. However, patents have not provided substantial revenue streams for most

⁴⁴ Michael Power coincides with Slaughter when he proposes the concept of “networks of knowledge”, which he identifies as “newly powerful non-state global carriers of knowledge, consisting of an academic clergy, consultants, professional associations, and related meta-organizations” (2010, p. 190).

universities, and industry contributions to academic R&D have fallen off” (2012, p.596)⁴⁵. Indeed, only a very small group of universities in the United States have seen earnings from patents and none have been able to fund a significant part of their research expenditure with licensing income, many have even registered negative earnings (p.597). The data also shows that the greatest funding for this technology research comes from public sources. According to the authors, in 2012 “the federal government account[ed] for about 63% of academic R&D, and institutions about 19%. At its peak, industry contributed 7–8% of funding for academic R&D, and currently is down to about 3–5%” (p.597). The failure to make money from patents is also true in Great Britain, where it is also a fact that only a very small number of universities are obtaining considerable income from commercialising intellectual property rights (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p. 251). Perhaps if one wants to look for the real beneficiaries of this trend, it is only necessary to point at the new managers and staff of the technology transfer offices, whose job market has expanded⁴⁶. The narratives skip all information that disproves what they promote and portray universities that do not follow the trend as old-fashioned, isolated, elitist, slow-changing or change-averse institutions that need to be pressed and forced to “catch-up”⁴⁷.

Academic capitalism’s fostering of competitiveness in higher education has several effects, according to the authors. One of them is the uneven development of institutions that are already well-positioned over those who are not, of fields of knowledge that can easily connect to the market over those that do not, and of faculty salaries of those academics willing to follow the line over those who are not (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012, pp.601-602). This is where *social technologies* play an important part. In the shape of quality assurance processes – evaluation and accreditation – they encourage individuals to accept competition and funding inequalities. In the shape of rankings, they encourage individuals to focus on the aspects that enhance competitiveness.

⁴⁵ R&D stands for research and development.

⁴⁶ At least in relation to that of traditional academics (Shore, 2010, p.27).

⁴⁷ About German universities appearing in contemporary political discourse as old-fashioned, sluggish, inadequate, and not competitive or unfit for international competition, see Liesner (2006, p. 483).

2.2. Imported from the USA: Academic capitalism in Europe and Latin America

Although it is inspired and focused on the American case, the theory of academic capitalism helps us understand why these trends have spread to universities in different parts of the world independently of whether a higher education system is predominantly public or privately funded. Universities rich and poor, in industrialised as well as in poor countries, display the characteristics described by the proponents of the theory of academic capitalism. Having a modest or even precarious budget, a limited infrastructure, menial research production, or humble publication records has not kept universities from intermingling in *circuits of knowledge*, gaining access to *new funding streams*, creating *interstitial organizations*, enthusiastically interacting with *intermediating networks*, impressively developing extended *managerial capacity*, and adopting *narratives, discourses and social technologies* to normalise the changes.

All of the above developments emerge regardless of whether a university is privately or publicly funded, big or small, old or new, global or local, prestigious or practically unknown, elitist or 'massified', highly technological or mainly dedicated to the humanities. The reforms are made compatible with any particular situation and characteristics. For this reason, the drive for academic capitalism is strong in Central America as well as in Europe, two strikingly different contexts. A relevant role is played by intermediating networks and interstitial organisations; they create and expand the necessary circuits of knowledge, generate specially created new funding streams and stimulate the generation of managerial capacity and the use of narratives and development of social technologies.

Slaughter and Cantwell analysed the European case and found that "the European Commission is reverse engineering Anglo-American higher education models to reconstruct technologies of governance in uniquely European contexts that embed competition in nation-state initiatives" (2012, p.583). The trend is justified with claims that it will bring prosperity to European society⁴⁸. It is evident that the European Union plays an important role in Europe by fostering circuits of knowledge and funding streams that promote academic capitalism. Another example of an intermediating network is the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER), which was a space where American managerial models were directly presented as examples for Europe (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002, p. 373) in the onset of quality

⁴⁸ The fact that high paying jobs are unevenly generated in the knowledge economy is overlooked (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012, p.584).

assurance regimes. Nowadays, the Bologna Process is perhaps the most important intermediating network that is generating knowledge, managing funds, narratives and technologies to be applied in member countries' higher education systems. Promoting the internationalisation of European universities is a fundamental aspect of these transformations, particularly as an indicator of competitiveness. Therefore, the spread of the Bologna Process as an intermediating network to areas outside of Europe was an expected strategical step.

In the case of German universities, these have followed the trend of developing technology transfer centres, centres of innovation and technology parks. The German Center for Research and Innovation was created in 2010 by the German government with the purpose of internationalising science and research, and it specifically aims at fostering collaborative projects with North America. Among its goals it states it wants to “present Germany to the North American market as a land of research and innovation”. It also pretends to “enhance the dialogue between academia and industry” (*Deutsches Wissenschafts-und Innovationshaus*, 2015). As an *intermediating network* it brings together the public sector, industrial and academic associations. Through the organisation of special events and specific funding programmes for its partners⁴⁹ and researchers it promotes specific knowledge circuits that spread across universities, private enterprises and the state. Universities, in turn, create their own interstitial organisations in the form of internationalisation and technology transfer offices. One example is the *Transferzentrum Mittelhessen (TZM)*, created in 1991 and operated by the *Philipps-Universität Marburg* together with the *Technischen Hochschule Mittelhessen* and the *Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen*. This centre aims at supporting researchers who are interested in commercialising their research findings. Researchers are also assisted in obtaining patenting advice and access to *TransMIT Gesellschaft für Technologietransfer mbH*, a platform that was created in 1996 and specialises in marketing research products from universities⁵⁰. The idea behind the establishment of these offices is that researchers are producing valuable knowledge but they need assistance (from the TZM experts), and training (offered by the *TransMIT-Akademie* courses and events) to effectively commercialise it. Currently, there are 165 TransMIT centres in Germany, actively reproducing the training and assistance offer for researchers in different universities. The areas in which they specialise are:

⁴⁹ Its partners include: Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH), Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK), Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), German Council of Science and Humanities (WR), German Rectors' Conference (HRK), German Research Foundation (DFG), Helmholtz Association, Leibniz Association, Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, and The German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. Find out more at:

<http://www.germaninnovation.org/about-us/gcri-partner-institutions#sthash.eJoGphkX.dpuf>

⁵⁰ For more information see: <http://www.uni-marburg.de/forschung/transfer>

Medicine and Medical technology; Biotechnology, chemistry and pharmacy; Technology; Communications, media and literature; Corporate governance and management; and Information and communication technology⁵¹. Every time research results are successfully transferred to the market, the event is publicised by the TransMIT centre in charge within the network and in the media for the wider public's knowledge.

The popularity and attractiveness of the idea of commercialising research produced in advanced and dynamic technological environments is plain to understand. However, the commercialisation of higher education is not a phenomenon that only universities in the First World, or of a certain kind, experience. As stated above, there is an interest in both the United States and Europe to spread the networks that carry the structures and discourses of academic capitalism to other parts of the world. At the same time, higher education systems in developing countries – even the poorest ones – have taken their own steps towards facilitating these connections and strategies of emulation. In this process, institutions external to universities also become involved. In the case of Central America, key driving forces for academic capitalism exist in the form of intermediating networks like the Tuning Project previously described, a sort of extension from the Bologna Process. Espinoza Figueroa (2010) describes Bologna and Tuning as hegemonic tools that guarantee the positioning of Europe as a normative power in Latin American higher education. She presents the political discursive logic of the Bologna Process as a Eurocentric hegemony that sells its model as egalitarian and participatory, obtaining the possibility of increasing Europe's normative power. Focused on the case of Chile and Mexico, she shows how the Bologna Process was perceived by academics as an opportunity to increase their institutions' internationalisation, while in practice it imposed a view of knowledge as having to be managed and used (p. 255). The European Union, acting as the "persuader", and the Latin American countries being the "persuaded" (p. 254) become open to Europe's "pedagogic soft power" (p. 255) and dutifully tried to embrace the whole package of the Bologna Process, which ends up acting as a key intermediating network for academic capitalist values.

The Bologna Process was launched in Europe in 1999 and merely three years later, in 2002, it arrived in Chile (Espinoza Figueroa, 2010, p. 251). Evidently Europe was promoting its project overseas before it had seen any results, and before it had even been established in all its member countries. While its original closing year was 2010 – in 2009 the Bologna Process was extended until 2020 (Zervakis, 2012, p. 208) –, even today, less than five years to its

⁵¹ For detailed information consult: https://www.transmit.de/geschaeftsbereiche/transmit-zentren?hs_id=1

conclusion, it is still too soon to really assess the long standing results of the Bologna Process in Europe, at least to an extent that justifies its promotion overseas as a model to follow. The image that arrives overseas is of the European community once again collaborating in seamless ways towards the attainment of common and democratic goals. In the documents produced by exporters of the Bologna Process to Latin America, the resistance it has encountered at home is never mentioned, cleverly omitted. However, there are plenty of detailed discussions about good practices and managerial strategies. For Espinoza Figueroa, with the Bologna process came a new culture for planning and assessing higher education projects, evaluation culture, planning models and ideas that encouraged the State to “act like a manager of a private business” (p.252). While the Bologna Process included in its official discourse used to promote the project in Europe, the idea of positioning the EHEA as the “most competitive” in the higher education market, this was brazenly omitted from the discourse used when the project was promoted in Latin America. The Tuning Project talks about Bologna as an opportunity to promote “excellence, effectiveness, and transparency”, but remarkably, the words “competitiveness” and “attractiveness” of the EHEA are dropped from the canvas (Tuning Latin America Project, 2014).

The Bologna Process, nonetheless, is not the only vehicle for academic capitalist and quality assurance notions to travel to Central America. Some academics have created local branches of intermediating networks that lean more towards the American system. For example, there are now Science Academies in 16 Latin American Countries – five in Central America – including Nicaragua⁵². There are also punctual projects promoted by multilaterals and the World Bank. They all share common knowledge circuits in quality assurance processes, cooperation for development projects, and multilateral programmes. Thanks to these, the spirit of academic capitalism – with its central values of commercialisation, competitiveness and internationalisation – is strongly present in countries like Nicaragua. As a result of all the movement at the macro level, universities have internally developed interstitial organisations, such as technology transfer offices, internationalisation offices and accreditation agencies, which intermingle with the intermediating networks, share the knowledge and narratives that promote academic capitalism, boost the managerial capacity and help to develop the necessary social technologies that pave the way for academic capitalism and quality assurance.

One example of how a concept promoted by academic capitalism becomes embedded in quality assurance discourses is the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR as it is commonly called), which has been present in circuits of knowledge that have adapted

⁵² For more information consult: <http://www.ianas.org/index.php/ianas-home>

the concept to the university context. It has been integrated in quality assurance regimes as an indicator of quality, becoming part of the university's extension activities. For its promotion in universities, corporate social responsibility recruits *new funding streams*, and creates *interstitial organizations* and *intermediating networks*. For example, the association of Jesuit universities in Latin America decided to promote a brand of corporate social responsibility adapted to universities. They call it university social responsibility (CSR became USR). All programmes and activities that could be located under this umbrella were promoted and then successfully presented as an asset in processes of evaluation⁵³. The discussion about corporate social responsibility shared in this circuit of knowledge excludes all critique that reveals the paradox it represents and that has been described as a "tenuous union of a left-progressive support for human rights, the environment, etc. with a right neoliberal market logic" (Shanahan & Khagram, 2006, p.199).

Accreditation processes themselves clearly act as intermediating networks that also promote the political position of the accrediting party. American accreditations are sought in Latin America as the ultimate seal of quality. Achieving American standards is considered a sure way of guaranteeing quality students deserve. However, complying with American standards becomes a very challenging endeavour for any Latin American institution. An ethnographic study based in a Mexican case found that these standards where, nevertheless, "construed as fair". The result is that the process and the accreditor were thus legitimised, suggesting that "U.S. accreditation may be approached as an exercise of global position taking" (Blanco Ramírez, 2015, p.361) as it is a strategy for universities that belong to the group of "invisible" global south institutions, to position themselves, by association, within the group of well-known global north universities (pp. 370-371). Perhaps the Bologna Process is Europe's answer to American international accreditation agencies operating in Latin America's higher education circles in an effort of expanding their area of influence and recognition.

In the specific case of Nicaragua, the call to transform universities towards entrepreneurial and quality controlled institutions has been packaged in two ways. On the one hand, it is presented as inevitable, something that universities in the First World have been doing for some time and if Nicaraguan universities do not imitate they will face

⁵³ This was certainly the case at UCA in Managua. The university's corporate social responsibility was highlighted as a strong point by the evaluators who conducted the first institutional evaluation exercise. They even suggested that this practiced should be imitated by the rest of the universities in the country (see: Universia, 2014).

consequences⁵⁴. Simultaneously, there is a reassuring message of possibility, which implies that as long as the universities do this they will be in the good track, which only takes a good project to kick-start. These messages are delivered within the framework of cooperation projects promoted by particular First World universities. For example, the Swedish Chalmers University of Technology coordinated a four year project (from 2007 to 2010) with the ten CNU (Council of Nicaraguan Universities) universities. The name of the project was “The Entrepreneurial University” (*Programa Universidad Emprendedora – PUE*) and aimed at transforming all CNU universities into institutions that were connected to the country’s productive sector, that developed a managerial capacity to identify and sell research products, and that became more innovative, as a result. The project included the active participation of members of the Nicaraguan private enterprise council COSEP (*Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada*) and entrepreneurs from important Nicaraguan companies. Important outcomes of this project were the development of copyright and patent policies in all participating universities, the development of research agendas that took into account input from local industry and societal needs, the publication of two books: one about “successful cases” and one about the internal developments obtained in the universities as a result of the project, and the creation of technology transfer offices in most universities as well as the creation of a “technological park” and a governmental office dedicated to the promotion of innovations created in universities that could become business ventures (see: Alemán & Scheinberg, 2011; see also: Alemán, Norgren, Reyes & Scheinberg, 2010). Also, thanks to a scholarship fund included in the project, five young Nicaraguans got the opportunity of enrolling in Master programmes at Chalmers University to specialise on entrepreneurship, innovation, research management, and related topics.

The call for the entrepreneurial university is supported by academic literature. Its main proponent, Clark (1983, 1998a), argues that universities can – and indeed should – become entrepreneurial to thrive in the current context without harming core academic values. Linked to the message of needing to turn universities into “entrepreneurial” institutions was a strong focus in the workshops on the organisational culture in the university, exploring individual participants’ attitudes on general topics such as change and team work. The project encouraged the development of incentive systems that rewarded the commercialisation of research products, relations between academics and business actors, as well as attitudes and ethics of the “entrepreneurial culture”. Workshops were dedicated to

⁵⁴ As Torres and Schugurensky (2002) claim, often in spaces that bring together universities and the private sector the participation of faculty is promoted by using fear, presenting the absence of competitiveness as a threat to their living standards (p.437).

“open the participants’ minds” so they could afterwards open the minds of the rest of the universities’ staff.

Another project that followed the same lines was promoted by the Spanish *Universidad Politécnica de Valencia*. The CESAR (*Contribución de la Educación Superior de América Latina a las Relaciones con el Entorno Socioeconómico*) project involved several universities from the network of Jesuit universities in Latin America (*AUSJAL- Asociación de Universidades Confiadas a la Compañía de Jesús en América Latina*), among them UCA, who worked together from 2011 to 2013. The project, which had the European Commission as its main funder, aimed at generating better knowledge on the participating countries’ “innovation systems” and a better insertion of the participating universities in these systems through the commercialisation of research products. The promoters belonged to INGENIO (*Instituto de Gestión de la Innovación y del Conocimiento*), an institute specialised in the management and commercialisation of research produced by academics at the *Universidad de Valencia*. The CESAR project constituted an intermediating network and a new funding stream to develop academic capitalism in the participating institutions. Each institution conducted a diagnosis of the impact of their university’s research in their particular country or region’s “innovation system”⁵⁵. A strategy was then developed to improve this impact. The most important results of the project were the creation of technology transfer offices in each of the participating universities (this included funds to cover the salary of new middle managers), the publication of studies on the countries’ “national innovation systems”, and the creation of a “*Catálogo de Capacidades de Transferencia de Conocimiento*”, a catalogue that details the research that is being done in the university and its possible uses in the market or the public sector, its aim being to bring researchers closer to their research result’s possible users, opening the possibility of private funding and new applications. But another significant result of the project is undoubtedly the reinforcement of the position of the project’s promoters as experts in areas of great recognition within academic capitalism. New academic publications legitimised the institute’s expertise, elevated its members’ profiles as experts in the field, and strengthen the academic careers and employment opportunities of their Third World colleagues (see: Jiménez Sáez & Almarío Mayor, 2011 and 2012).

⁵⁵ The concepts of “national innovation system” and “regional innovation system” are widely used by the Inter-American Development Bank in studies commissioned to strengthen the higher education sector. See, for example, Llisterri and Pietrobelli (2011).

The Nicaraguan government's council for science (CONICYT) participated in many projects and, together with foreign councils of science, also promoted punctual initiatives to reinforce academic capitalism. Special prizes for innovations and "patentable" inventions were created. Information and training was also provided. The Mexican council for science (CONACYT), through an initiative facilitated by AUSJAL, gave an on-line course to UCA academics – as well as academics from AUSJAL universities in other countries – that promoted the commercialisation of research products as well as the transformation and reinforcement of managerial capacity within the universities. Much of the discussion was based on Boyer (1990), Etzkowitz (1994), Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, (1996), and Etzkowitz, Webster and Healey (1998). These authors call for the need of "translating" research into products and enterprises, claiming that not only do universities need to be able to fund their research through much needed private funds, but that there is also a duty that every university has of sharing the responsibility to strengthen their country's or region's economic growth. They also call for an urgent re-structuration of the university as an organisation.

The situation proposed is presented as attractive and convenient for all those involved. It is also vested with legitimacy. Theories and trends that support academic capitalism are introduced in courses that rely on major published material, as well as on material published by those involved in teaching the courses, generally members of intermediating networks and, as Slaughter and Cantwell (2012) identify them, they come from the "business elites, middle to high ranking government officials, and/or professionals with advanced degrees" who have permanent jobs in interstitial organisations or are hired as experts in the specific projects. The field of university management is a very prominent one. These experts mainly present case studies to prove the points, or macro-economic data in which correlations are underlined to show that investment in higher education, technological research and innovation produce economic growth. Countries like Brazil in Latin America or the 'Asian Tigers' are commonly mentioned in this training. Studies that disprove these claims are not presented even though they exist. For example, it has been shown that income generated from university research in the European Union and the United States has been very limited (for a good review see: Geuna & Muscio, 2009; see also Powers, 2003; data are also presented by Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012). Nevertheless, the promoters of these changes in Third World universities present a scenario in which European universities have become rich from selling their innovations to transnational corporations through licensing and spin-offs.

Another expert profusely cited in these knowledge circuits is the celebrated Ernest Boyer, who served as Chancellor of the State University of New York, United States

Commissioner of Education, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and most importantly, produced the highly influencing work “Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate”, which challenged the classical views of faculty priorities and discussed the true meaning of scholarship (Boyer, 1990). He identified four kinds of scholarship to which university staff should be devoted: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. This originally served as a guiding source to define the evaluation of university teachers in the United States. The influence continues because later on the “Boyer typology” was exported to the developing world. In Latin America, highly influencing organisations like the Mexican CONACYT promoted this typology as a backdrop for research management in universities. This concept also underlies evaluation and accreditation processes in the region. Boyer’s view of strategically managing the work of academics to obtain better research results and foster the capacity of researchers who are able to produce innovative results is discussed in detail. Nonetheless, Boyer also warned against the rise in marketing practices in American universities, saying that they show more interest in attracting students than in serving them (Boyer, 1987, p. 22), but this is not mentioned by the course facilitators.

A key idea in these projects, strongly supported by the literature they use, is that a decisive issue in achieving change is to have proper organisational leaders who guide the university staff through the necessary changes and are able to convert everyone, or almost everyone, in the university to cooperate with the entrepreneurial strategy, competitive practices and commercialisation of research. This is why the projects always involve special training for organisational leaders, most of them with managerial positions, as well as a provision of funds to hire more managerial staff. They also include a focused effort on the development of policies and practices that function as social technologies that normalise academic capitalism among university staff. For example, among the first aims of these projects are the creation of research agendas, and research and intellectual property policies that include strong incentives for the generation of applicable science.

Strengthening the managerial capacity of a university is seen in a very positive light. There is a clear proliferation of managerial jobs in universities (Blackmore, 2009; Rhoades & Sporn, 2002). New positions are created and then imitated by other universities. The “managerial turn” (Power, 2010) has shown its variations according to the particular context. The United States was also the leader of this trend, which was later followed by Europe and other parts of the world. A study conducted in 198 universities in the United States showed that the universities in the U.S. are administratively “bloated”, with a much greater growth of administrative staff over academic staff in a period of 14 years. From 1993 to 2007 the number

of full time administrators per 100 students grew by 39 %, while the number of academic staff only grew by 18 % (Goldwater Institute, 2010). This trend can be perceived at Philipps-Universität in Germany as well as at UCA in Nicaragua⁵⁶. However, the impact cannot be fully appreciated through quantitative data alone. When the growth of administrative staff does not seem to be significantly larger, one could still argue that the impact of hiring one more professor in a department could be greater for the quality of learning than opening a new office (which in many cases is not even accessed by students, such as is the case of technology transfer offices).

Even though Germany was a late-comer in the trend there has already been a growth in administrative university management in the country. An empirical study that included all German universities concluded that indeed new categories of administrative management positions have been created in the last years: degree program development, quality assurance of teaching and research, research management, career services, continuing education, international affairs, marketing, public relations, and knowledge and technology transfer are some examples. This new kind of managerial staff interface between academics, administration and university leadership; they are not part of the routine administration but neither are they academic staff. The authors of the study consider them as a new kind of professional group (Krücken, Blümel, & Kloke, 2013, p.422). In terms of this non-academic staff, positions in clerical work – which used to be of great support for professors and lecturers – have decreased while higher level management positions have increased. Nevertheless, the study reveals that the case of Germany is different from that of other countries in Europe and the United States because there has not been an increase in non-academic staff as compared to academic staff. Hence, in Germany, even though there has been a “managerial turn”, academics have retained control over the basic processes going on in the universities, with the new managerial staff perceiving themselves as having only a supporting role. However, “The

⁵⁶ An estimation using data from 2013 in the case of UCA and the Winter Semester 2014-2015 in the case of Philipps-Universität Marburg, shows that UCA has 123 full-time professors and 706 part-time lecturers for a total of 9,430 students (8,787 undergraduate and 643 graduate). While the teaching staff reaches a total of 829, the administrative staff amounts to 540. In the case of Marburg there are 358 full-time professors and 2,299 part-time lecturers for a total of 34,748 students. While the teaching staff reaches a total of 2,657, the administrative staff reaches a total of 1,794. In the case of UCA this gives a teacher/student ratio of 11.38 and an administrative staff/student ratio of 17.46. In Marburg the teacher/student ratio appears to be of 13.08 while the administrative staff/student ratio is of 19.37. In both cases the administrative staff is more numerous than the full-time teaching staff. In the case of UCA, while the budget for administrative salaries amounted to 61.43% of the total budget in 2008 and increased to 64.77% in 2012, the budget for teacher salaries in those same years went from 38.57% of the budget to 35.23%. Hence, while the tendency in administrative salaries tended to increase, in the case of teaching salaries it decreased. (Sources: for Marburg <http://www.uni-marburg.de/profil/statistik/daten>; for UCA: Universidad Centroamericana, 2014a).

number of permanently employed and state-funded academics in German universities decreased compared to overall growth, this in spite of the continuously rising numbers of students and an increase in individual and organizational tasks and missions” (p.436).

The result of this “managerial turn” might be what Krücken and Meier (2006, p.244) have identified as a very significant change in the history of the university. These authors point out that even though there has never been one style of being a university – and they present the cases of Germany, France, Great Britain and the United States as examples of very different traditions and ways of functioning – significantly, universities have always been considered unique, different from other organisations. The uniqueness of the system of higher education and of the university as a specific type of organisation has been challenged by the latest reforms. For Krücken and Meier (2006, p.247), four characteristics show this transformation: accountability, the definition of goals, the elaboration of formal structures, and the rise of the management profession. All of these characteristics can be identified in the trend of academic capitalism.

2.3. Quality assurance and academic capitalism: two passengers, one train

When looking at the latest transformations in higher education in the case of Europe and Latin America, and particularly in the cases of Germany and Nicaragua, the key elements that constitute academic capitalism (new circuits of knowledge, new funding streams, interstitial organizations, intermediating networks, extended managerial capacity, new narratives, discourses and social technologies) are readily identified. The *new circuits of knowledge* are present in the form of publications and congresses dedicated to the sharing of information and know-how on entrepreneurialism, internationalisation and competitiveness, all of which are believed to require the functioning of strong quality assurance regimes. Likewise, quality assurance offers the possibility of measuring how the university stands in these issues, and then sharing this evidence with the public. Research that links the state, private corporations and universities is presented as ideal, and information that supports the need for university reforms abounds. Academic publications as well as special reports commissioned by agencies to consultants, and conferences where this material is also shared, constitute these new circuits of knowledge, which are mainly dedicated to: entrepreneurship, innovation, research and development, higher education systems, internationalisation, quality assurance and

accreditation, research administration, copyrighting and patenting, licencing and spin-offs, types of scholarship in academia, and the university's "new mission".

These topics are well known in Europe as well as in Latin America because their diffusion has been strongly supported with *new funding streams* in the form of direct government and private investment, as in the German case, or funding from international cooperation – and some public funding –, as in the case of Nicaragua. The funds have not only facilitated the spread of the knowledge, it has also fostered the creation of *interstitial organisations*, such as the technology transfer offices in both Germany and Nicaragua or the national science academies that have now emerged in several developing countries. As interstitial organisations I also classified the evaluation and accreditation offices because they also contribute to the diffusion of the new knowledge both internally and externally. They have been recipients of new funding streams dedicated to boost competitiveness, and represent the university in international circles where knowledge is disseminated. Evaluation and accreditation offices encourage the transformation of curricula to make them more compatible with the values of academic capitalism. They are also key driving forces for the development of managerial capacities that are detected as lacking in evaluation results⁵⁷.

Intermediating networks are a very relevant part of the system. Among these are the Bologna Process and corporate groups who help to fund technological applications of academic research in the European case. In Germany a strong intermediating network is the *Deutsches Wissenschafts-und Innovationshaus*. In the case of Latin America, the national councils of science (for example, CONACYT in Mexico, CONYCET in Argentina, and CONICYT in Nicaragua) actively develop the function of intermediating and promoting relations between universities and private sectors and foster the new circuits of knowledge. The role of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank in funding these initiatives is very important. They create and disseminate knowledge, as well as support and participate directly in intermediating networks. In Nicaragua several projects promoted by international groups constituted by European universities, European governments, and the European Union itself through schemes associated to the Bologna Process, have played a very significant role. It is evident that universities in both countries have worked on extending their *managerial capacity* through the creation of new offices and functions that facilitated the transformation of

⁵⁷ For example, accreditation agencies require data that were not traditionally recorded by many universities, such as alumni employability rates, application of results of thesis projects, collaborations between programmes and external actors. As a result, evaluation processes often reveal the need to create new offices or hire personnel in charge of recording the data. Another example is that frequently evaluation processes detect the need to provide new services to students that also require the introduction of new middle managers and bureaucratic processes in the university.

researchers' work into products that can contribute to the economy, and researchers themselves into possible business partners. These offices work to help the university become – or at least be perceived as – an attractive partner in economic transactions.

In sum, the theory of academic capitalism explains how universities have adopted organisational characteristics and functions to become more connected to the market. It provides us with an account of the types of actions that encourage universities to become more competitive and entrepreneurial. Universities have access to new *circuits of knowledge* that promote reforms, have gained access to *new funding streams* that support them, have created *interstitial organizations*, participated in *intermediating networks*, and have developed the required extended *managerial capacity*. All the key characteristics are present in both German and Nicaraguan universities, indicating that despite their different conditions, both countries have seen a development of academic capitalism. The role of corporate foundations and supranational institutions in intermediating networks, where they come in contact with universities, and also as sources of funding for the reforms in higher education is of great importance. As Torres and Schugurensky (2002) state, “a great deal of contemporary university restructuring is largely the result of the conscious effort of specific interest groups to adapt the university to the new era of flexible accumulation” (p.434). For them, these interest groups are mainly exogenous and exercise pressure on universities at a national and international level. However, under the lens of the theory of academic capitalism, a different picture emerges. The exogenous interest groups are members of networks where academics also participate, thus it cannot be claimed that the reforms are merely a matter of the university being under pressure to reluctantly accept all the reforms. Academic capitalism is not just the result of transformations in funding patterns for universities, as this is evidently not the factor that determines if, how or when academic capitalism is introduced in a university. Significantly, the new “institutional common sense” is shared among groups within universities, while the resistance from some sectors of academia has been futile. For this reason, it is the *narratives, discourses and social technologies* of academic capitalism that I will further examine to understand these transformations and their effects in universities. For their study I will apply the frameworks of audit culture and governmentality theories, and use them to explore how actors in universities relate to each other through managerial processes imposed by quality assurance, and how these managerial processes generate new subjectivities, truths and power relations.

3. What is quality assurance? The audit culture in higher education

“We tend these days to be highly suspicious of the notion of judgement, fearing that it too easily masks prejudice, snobbery, or even favouritism. By contrast, we trust measurement because it seems to be public, objective, and even democratic” (Collini, 2012, pp.138-139).

“The academic profession is sustained by what is essentially voluntary labour: one of the several idiocies of the audit culture increasingly ruling universities is that it will liquidate this huge fund of good will” (Collini, 2012, p.151).

The *narratives, discourses* and *social technologies* that support academic capitalism also sustain quality assurance regimes. As described above, it is through the same mechanisms that both trends ‘travel’ and become inserted in universities of very different types and conditions. In the same way, discourses on competitiveness, innovation and continuous improvement, for example, are shared by academic capitalism and quality assurance. Social technologies based on measurement, comparison and competition are also shared by both phenomena. To take one step closer in my observation of quality assurance I will apply the framework of the “audit culture”, proposed by Power (1997, 2003). This allows for a closer understanding of its main characteristics, described in the beginning of this chapter: its capacity to flexibly adapt to different contexts (Dickhaus, 2010); its presentation as a culture and therefore endless and all-encompassing; its usefulness in condensing two diverting tendencies in today’s approach to education: constant consumption and disposal (Bauman, 2009) that gives it an ephemeral value, with the tendency to load each achievement and event with grandiose meaning (Alvesson, 2013); its capacity to intensify inequalities in the higher education arena while conveying a sense of possibility to those with the least advantages; and its emphasis on visibility.

The “audit culture”, a basis for Neo-liberal governance, is at the root of the above cited characteristics of quality assurance. It calls for organisations to implement processes of “control of control” that replace trust and are implemented with the purpose of proving and enforcing their accountability through “rituals of verification” that make sure organisations’ internal mechanisms of control remain in place (Power, 1997). Managers in the “audit culture” know that being open to audit sends a positive message to society because transparency has become “the outward sign of integrity” and management “an idiom of regulation and

organisation” (Strathern, 2000a, p. 2). In fact, the sole purpose of being open to audit is about showing that internal controls are put in place and are strong, and if they are found to be weak, the weakness itself is not a problem if it has voluntarily been disclosed (Power, 2010, p. 161). Legitimacy depends on being open to audit more than on its results (Power, 1997). Thus, even organisations with financial difficulties, or those at risk of not achieving the sought-after recognition, implement audit processes (Miller, 1998). As Power states, “the kind of knowledge produced by internal control and risk management is central to a characterization of organizational virtue, virtue which is manifested in audit, inspection, and evaluation systems” (2010, p. 161). Thus, the audit culture provides a meaning of what good government is – centred on the idea of transparency –, as well as a set of clearly defined practices to achieve it – the processes of control and inspection (Strathern, 2000a, p. 2).

But achieving transparency is as attractive as it is problematic. Quality assurance generates the illusion that “organisations work better when they are explicit” (Strathern, 1995, p. 25). It is an illusion because, as Strathern states, an institution “cannot make explicit what works by being implicit” (p. 26). What she stresses here is that “creativity and new relations of knowledge production” are the product of “actor-to-actor exchanges, hence, knowledge is embedded in people’s relations with one another” (p.27). Audit’s emphasis on transparency, instead, forces organisations to “double the abstractions”, making visible only what can be “technologically embodied”, and as a result, “undervalu[ing] the organisation that is already concretely embodied in people’s relations with one another” (p.26). Since activities and knowledge creation in higher education institutions depend on relations, Strathern considers the idea of measuring output against input – fundamental in quality audit – as wrong because these involve activities of a different scale (p.29). To illustrate this, she gives the example of a book. It reproduces some of the creativity that went into writing it by generating ideas in the reader, however, readers generate their own responses by what they bring to the reading (p.29). This consideration can also be applied to the classroom: arguably, what students obtain from a class session can be independent of what has gone into its preparation. Furthermore, for Strathern, “the reproduction of knowledge is a *complex, heterogeneous and non-linear process that involves concrete as well as abstract relations*. And there can be no procedures for success; or rather, the procedures are not the success” (p.30). With this she provides an argument against the pretention that the quality of teaching/learning can be registered through an audit process, and in addition, the information recorded be presented as practices to imitate and reproduce.

Audit processes' disembodiedness from social relations, pointed out by Strathern (1995) and others (see, for example, Miller, 1998 or Corsín-Jiménez, 2005) is, nevertheless, presented as a positive quality, an opportunity to take the nuisance of the political out of decision-making processes (see, for example, Hämäläinen et al., 2001). Precisely because of its self-portrayal as independent of social exchanges between individuals, the audit culture has become an important enabling element in neoliberal reforms in universities, prompting a change of focus from political problems towards procedural and performative issues. In this sense, it could be classified as a "political technology" that removes political aspects of the problem of quality in higher education and filters the discussion through the neutral scientific language (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 196) of management – with its indicators, standards and good practices – and pedagogy – with its emphasis on clear, motivating and effective teaching, for example. It is evident how current discussions on quality follow this tendency, focusing on the need to establish systems of quality control that follow established neutral procedures. It becomes clear why quality assurance goes hand in hand with academic capitalism, evading political discussions and focusing on processes that enhance entrepreneurialism, competition, efficiency and effectiveness. As Shore and Wright (1997) state, "this masking of the political under the cloak of neutrality is a key feature of modern power" (p. 7).

Notwithstanding the available critique, mainly from academic circles, the "audit culture" has had more supporters than detractors. Audit processes have swiftly been adapted to a myriad of different organisations; originally applied in the financial world and corporations, they crossed over to public institutions, to hospitals and schools. This flexibility is also evident in the way quality assurance processes have become adapted to the different realities of universities in the world. The "culture of quality" or "culture of evaluation" that is repeatedly described in quality assurance documents as a most desirable new attitude in university staff is no other than the acceptance of the audit culture's premises. Audit culture is also about continuous change, consumption and disposal, as well as visibility, all of them fundamental features of quality assurance processes.

Quality assurance, like all audit processes, is based on management. An overload of administrative work makes it expensive and time consuming⁵⁸, as well as coercive (Wright,

⁵⁸ For example, accreditation costs in Germany vary depending on the subject and accreditation agency chosen, but they can range from 8,000 to 15,000 Euros per programme. In the case of a medium-sized university – with an offer of 60 to 100 degree programmes – accreditation could cost up to one million Euros or more, which according to some estimates can represent ten percent of an institution's budget. This additional cost is not provided by the State in charge of funding the universities. The practice of

2002, p. 121). In all cases audit imposes a concept of quality that is instrumental (Tuchman, 2009) and compatible with its 'rituals of verification', meant to prove and enforce the accountability of organisations by making sure their internal mechanisms of control remain in place (Power, 1997). As stated above, what is not auditable simply does not count. The teaching/learning process has to be made auditable to be taken into account. As a result, "the curriculum's merits are today measured in terms of finite, tangible, transferable and, above all, marketable skills" (Shore & Wright, 2000, p. 73). Measurable skills or the amount of hours that students spend in class acquire relevance because they can be quantified (Shore & Roberts, 1995). The teacher's merits consist of those that can be controlled through evaluation questionnaires, such as delivering clear explanations, following the syllabus, appearing to achieve pre-planned objectives, attentively answering questions, and grading in a way perceived as fair by students. All of these notions appear as indicators of quality in a course or programme. As Power states, key variables used in rankings – and I would add, in evaluation and accreditation processes – are "valued primarily for their simplicity, additivity and comparativity" (2010, p. 142). Data is also preferred when it seems precise even if it is not so relevant (p.167). The resulting images, says Power, are comforting because they communicate the possibility of controlling what is uncontrollable, even if in practice they are of limited use (p. 167).

Teacher evaluation questionnaires create, above all, the illusion that teachers' work is being controlled and monitored, and that students are expressing their opinions as it is meant to be in the student-centred education. Whether the saved data is useless, incoherent, incorrect, or consists of information the teacher already knew is not important. For Power, these control practices are about "signalling virtues of self-discipline and control" and also about "signalling an absence of vice" (p. 169). The recorded information, which supposedly reveals the presence or absence of quality, but whose virtue consists fundamentally on the

accrediting several programmes at once ('cluster accreditations' or institutional accreditation) has become popular as a way of reducing the burden of accreditation costs (Kehm, 2013, p. 3), as well as for the purpose of simplifying the process and reducing administrative work load.

In Latin America, although cost estimations are not readily available – and even less so in the case of countries like Nicaragua, which do not have a long trajectory in accreditation processes – it has also been stated that programme accreditation is financially and operationally unsustainable in the long run, and institutional accreditation is perceived as a better option for being less costly (Pires & Lemaitre, 2008, p. 305).

In the case of countries that have pioneered the quality assurance reforms, the costs are better recorded and also show to be even higher. For example, it was estimated a decade ago that the cost of quality assurance in England was around £250 million per annum, at that time equivalent to the cost of five universities (Wright, 2002, p. 120). In the United States, accreditation agencies – which are funded mainly through annual fees and accreditation review fees paid by accredited institutions and programs, and occasionally by sponsorships and special public and private initiatives – spent an estimate of \$70 million in 2004-2005 (Eaton, 2006, p. 6).

fact that it can be recorded, is required as a product of teacher evaluation questionnaires, one of the most significant “rituals of verification” in the university scene. Through these rituals – also evaluation and accreditation processes –, universities present themselves as transparent and accountable to society. Their concepts and practices constitute the audit culture in universities, a global phenomenon easily adapted to different types of universities in a diversity of contexts.

The audit culture has a direct impact on the members of an organisation, particularly employees. Because it is about the control of control (Power, 1997), audit re-organises bureaucracies to make institutions more “auditable”, and turns individuals into governable subjects that are meant to internalise its “normative framework” (Shore & Wright, 1999, p. 566). Moreover, continuous assessment is conducted to assure continuous improvement regardless of whether the results of an initial phase of audit were positive or not. The notion of continuous improvement generates a situation in which “reintegration” or “closure” is never achieved (Macdonald, 2002, p. 249) and the organisation is kept in an “increasingly warm climate” (Macdonald, 2002, p. 251) in which elements like effectiveness are increased but also only within a narrowly defined framework (p. 253), for which management is increasingly needed. For Graham, in the case of higher education this is only logical if “what is at issue is not educational attainment, but customer satisfaction” (2005, p. 79).

This constant drive to ever increasing levels of effectiveness, efficiency, and improvements – only within a carefully defined framework – characterises both academic capitalism and quality assurance. Universities in the academic capitalist regime, organised through the audit culture promoted by quality assurance, walk towards the same direction and use the same discourse even if they achieve disparate results. They may attain dissimilar levels and types of connections to the market, they may achieve different levels of success in entrepreneurial terms, and very different levels of prestige and scores in league tables, but they all take the “managerial turn” with “increased emphasis on systems of control, senior management responsibility and ‘naturally’ enforced cultures of compliance” (Power, 2010, p. 41). These cultures of compliance are based on the said “rituals of verification” – specifically, evaluation and accreditation processes, and teacher evaluation – and internally, the emphasis on compliance is unequally distributed, directed essentially to teachers.

Suggestively, in contrast with how quality assurance processes have been embraced by managerial staff in universities, the reaction among academics is not monolithic. Teaching staff are neither the main promoters of accreditation processes nor the most enthusiastic advocates of quality assurance and rankings. However, they do end up collaborating in its basic

practises as providers of data or participants in its “rituals of verification”. The reason behind this might be that evaluation and accreditation processes are officially described as participative, requiring input from several, if not all, of the staff of a programme under scrutiny (in effect, also from students). This participatory quality, however, does not apply to the process of decision making. An ethnographic study that followed closely a Mexican institution pursuing an American accreditation revealed that the process “established a complex division of labor in which members of the academic staff are necessary yet distanced from decision making” (Blanco Ramírez, 2015, p.361).

The emphasis on compliance is paired with a discouragement of discussion. The kind of participation promoted in quality assurance is not based on nurturing dialogue; it is based on the participants willing to become a data source for the system. Rituals of verification produce a record of desirable and measurable aspects of lecturers’ performance. As a result, these acquire the highest relevance, and the practice of recording this receives a constant effort. For example, in quality assurance the mere use of technologies of information and communication can be considered indicative of teaching quality (Strathern, 1997), regarded as “empowering” of teachers and students, as well as enabling teacher-student contact through long distance learning. As Strathern argues, “useful improvements thus do duty as ‘proof’ of improvement” (Strathern, 1997, p. 317). Quality assurance processes do not admit a dialogue in which the value of a “useful improvement” can be discussed. In the particular case of online learning – the use of virtual courses or of virtual components in courses – quality assurance takes an entirely positive portrayal that does not take into account the contentions of some experts that suggest, for example: that not all courses are suited to online learning; that there are not enough studies that include “rigorous third-party evaluations” and comparative data to prove the benefits of online learning and its applicability to different contexts; that many university teachers are reluctant to teach standardised online courses they do not feel they “own”; and that the cost-effectiveness of online courses has not been proven, especially taking into account the rejection that standardisation seems to awaken (Bowen, 2013, pp. 46-61). Furthermore, a comparative quantitative study by the OECD shows that, contrary to what is commonly argued, investing on information and communication technologies does not enhance reading, mathematics and science skills (OECD, 2015). But having in-depth discussions about the convenience of following a prevalent trend is not appreciated in the audit culture. What is encouraged by quality assurance is the continuous adoption of useful, visible and recordable improvements.

Furthermore, quality assurance and its rituals of verification are inserted in a regime of “risk management”, which is about “uni-directional forms of disclosure and transparency over dialogue” (Power, 2010, p. 17). What is important is whether a set of defined indicators is being monitored, not what the indicators actually mean or whether they apply to all cases. Through control processes, universities, like all other organisations in the audit culture and risk management era, “show *how* they govern themselves rather than *what* they do. The former can be presented in ready-made standardized and managerial forms, whereas the latter, the content of risk management, cannot” (Power, 2010, p. 95). As a result, university decision making structures have fallen victim of “administrative positivism” (Power, 2010, p. 96). Power identifies the “positive knowledge of the accountant and process engineer” as being now “organizationally and culturally ascendant”. In the case of higher education it is the knowledge of the quality experts, the professionals and agencies who define the standards, and managers in charge of quality control and evaluation, which have acquired this utmost relevance. The higher education teachers’ knowledge and experience is, therefore, not considered as equally valid for the purposes of quality assurance.

The expansion of risk management “reflects an increase in social *expectations* about the decidability and management of dangers and opportunities” (Power, 2010, p. 5). This can be applied clearly to the case of higher education. It is expected that universities wisely manage the risk that the investment of time and money represents for a higher education student and his or her parents. Namely, the risk of having paid for obtaining a degree should be “insured” as to the value it will have in the labour market when it is finally obtained. Having become enmeshed in this trend, like other organisations, universities have become both “processors of uncertainty” and “producers of risk” (p. 9). Through internal control systems organisations are “turned inside out and made into responsible actors” (p. 41), which drives them to adopt “organisational defensiveness” (p. 11, p. 144) to strive to avoid being perceived as not having done everything to reduce risk. Universities, for example, need to show that they have designed curricula after properly consulting future employers, or that they have done the necessary efforts to increase the geographical value of the degrees they issue. The idea is that students perceive the university as an institution that has done everything it can to reduce the risk of students and alumni. The fact is that in the “risk management” era, public perceptions of risk are themselves a source of risk (p. 21), and so this has generated a shift from risk analysis to risk governance (Power, 2010, p. 21; Power, 2003). Students’ – prospective, current, and alumni – perceptions of risk about studying in a particular institution, thus, become a driving force for decision-making in the university.

3.1. Academics talk: Quality assurance as a set of inadequate practices and ideas

To talk about quality assurance one must also mention that several of its practices and core concepts have been much criticised from within academia by scholars, who speaking as teachers, have pronounced themselves against establishing the audit culture in education because of the way it affects their work. It has been argued that very few academics are willing to publicly say they actually believe it is about improving quality (Shore & Wright, 1999, p. 568). The critique can be grouped according to its focus. Some mention the effects on teachers, others on students, others on the relationship between teacher and student, and others on the inadequacy of quality assurance to depict what really happens in the classroom. Moreover, several articles include two or more of the above points of critique.

In Great Britain, as quality audit was applied to the higher education system during the early 90s, there was great discontent expressed by the Association of University Teachers saying that the exercises were unfair, made them engage in an undesired competition and policing, and were punitive rather than encouraging (Association of University Teachers, 1993). Another common observation is that teachers feel increasingly exploited by the amount of work the new quality audit systems demand, and that the amount devoted to administration is now greater than that devoted to teaching and to research. In the case of Britain, this was described by Court (1994), saying that “administration consumes an average of 18 hours a week - an hour more than for all forms of teaching, and 7 hours a week more than for personal research” (p. 14).

There are also numerous publications concerning the ways in which the latest reforms have made an impact on academic identity. The general notion is that the new system does not capture the complexity of academic work. The impact of academics being managed in an intensified work environment, and increasingly managed research productivity, where teaching is also managed towards the preferred pedagogies, the use of technology, and towards ideals of customer satisfaction, generates a situation of competing and contradictory demands in terms of how to use time, what orientation to follow, and what to focus on (White, 2012, p.46). White concludes that the current situation has detrimental effects on the academics’ health as well as on their research. For her, audit, managerialism, and performativity have had the effect of diminishing the autonomy of academics and universities

(p.53). Teaching is perceived as good if it conforms to the current approach, which stresses efficiency and technology. The fact that many teachers are made to attend compulsory courses to improve teaching, and then are made to justify and design their courses based on those performative demands, encourages them to believe the assessment of these standards is the most important aspect of teaching (p.59).

As a result of the constant management of their work, teachers often face tense working environments. Several articles contain teachers' descriptions of what it feels like to be under the regime of quality audit, saying that many academics feel controlled, "gagged" (Holligan, 2010, p. 292; Collini, 2008; Corbyn, Bode & Gunkel, 2010), and talk about losing agency (Holligan, 2010). Others have described a plunge into a sense of desperation and high levels of stress that pours into the personal life and cannot easily be described (Sparkes, 2007). Another author, from the Netherlands, compared the New Public Management to the kind of totalitarian government found in the Communist states because of its resistance to criticism, and its hermetic and self-referential nature (Lorenz, 2012, p. 601). He argues that performance-related pay brings about a deprofessionalization of academics that has negative consequence on their motivation (p.613).

Lorenz (2012) also mentions that teachers have developed cynicism and hypocrisy regarding the application of quality assurance procedures (p.620). A contribution from Australia, focused on the negative effects of audit culture on Adult Basic Education (ABE) through a study that included a survey and focus groups with teachers (Black, 2010), coincides in many ways with Lorenz (2012). The author claims that ABE teachers experience many tensions because of contradiction between the compliance requirements of audit, and their professional judgements, which stem from their experience. As a solution, the teachers have adopted a strategy in which they make a minimal compliance to the demands of audit, as they introduce their own philosophy and practice in the spaces where they can do so, a practice the author calls "working the interstices". Some of them opt to comply with the audit procedures just to please the auditors and at the expense of increasing their workload in order to serve the best interest of their students; they definitely do not engage in audit with the beliefs and convictions with which it is intended (p.22). Horrocks (2006, p. 9) also describes a situation created by audit in which it is more important to fulfil an administrative role than a scholarly role for a person's academic career (p.9). The reforms, claims the author, have created two different cultures: one of the scholar (who is both teacher and researcher) and one of the administrator (who does not necessarily have a personal experience with research or teaching)

(Horrocks, 2006). Following similar findings from other studies, the result of this situation is that teachers are facing increasing stress in their work.

Even in the case of researchers who are not aiming at contributing critical analysis one can find many examples of inconformity with the system and methods of evaluation being applied as part of quality assurance practices. A study focused on technical issues of evaluating teaching performance, describes the practice of concentrating on quantifiable aspects of teaching rather than on the state of the art of the subject as leading to unfair results (Sarrico, Rosa, Teixeira & Cardoso, 2010, p.46). The authors add that peer evaluation of teaching is not as accepted as peer evaluation of research because it “easily turns into an indicator of reputation, rather than performance” (pp. 52-53) and prevents diversity and innovation in teaching. In their study, focused on European universities, the authors claim that it was very difficult to assess, and even more so to compare, the quality of teaching and research in the countries studied due to the “non existence of systematic and comparable” data regarding many fundamental indicators (p. 48). This same study concluded that the overflow of information, and its disintegrated nature –separating research, teaching and management – create a system in which very little can be useful, especially for the creation of improvement strategies (pp. 52-53).

Another study that did not aim at being critical was focused on university rankings and found no evidence that rankings contribute to institutional quality, and in fact, appear to have many negative effects (Shin, 2011, p.31). For instance, they reveal that it is the institutions and the students who pay for the main costs of releasing ranking reports, but who might be benefiting are the rankers and the media (p.32). Rankings do not address issues of size of institution –with larger universities having advantage over small ones that are equally productive, the disciplinary differences –some areas are underrepresented in citation indexes and institutions with greater orientation towards these areas suffer, and the differences and ambiguities in the way that weight is distributed between indicators – for example, some rankings give a disproportionately greater weight to reputation than to research and teaching – which generates very different results by the same institution from one ranking to another (pp. 8-9). Another critical observation made of the rankings was that teaching is under-represented in them, most of the time it is ignored, and when it is included –as in the QS Times Higher Education ‘World University Rankings – it is done so in a mediocre way. It has been recognised that generating teaching indicators is a very difficult task because of the huge differences that exist in teaching, and the difficulties in obtaining the data (Trigwell, 2011, p.165).

There are also numerous contributions that explore the way quality audit affects the relationship between teachers and students. Horrocks (2006, p. 5) reveals its negative effects on the relationship tutor/student brought about by managerial and corporate models of education that are focused on “attaining pre-defined learning outcomes”. Lorenz reflects on how quality audit does not understand that education is an “ongoing, reciprocal, and hierarchical” relationship, and simply re-defines it:

The fact that education costs money—and so in this respect resembles the purchase of products such as Coca-Cola and cornflakes—does not mean that education is an economic transaction between a buyer and seller, as the economic view of education claims. That is why this view of education is fundamentally wrong and why it has so many perverse consequences. Because this view represents education as a free and equal exchange between equally positioned buyers and sellers, the hierarchical relationship between teachers and those being taught disappears, and this suggests that the purchasers of education have a right to get what they have paid for. To make matters worse, because the customer is always right in the market, students in the education market are also always right (Lorenz, 2012, p.621).

A very interesting contribution about the creation of misunderstandings about the relationship between teachers and students is offered by Cooper (2004) from an anthropological point of view. He argues that the commoditisation of higher education seeks to portray education as part of a commodity economy, when in fact it has more characteristics that belong to the realm of a gift economy – as having thoroughly been described in anthropology in the classic works by Malinowski (1932), Mauss (1990), Sahlins (1972), and Strathern (1988) –, which can coexist with commodity economies. Exchanges in commodity economies are depersonalised and amoral. On the contrary, in gift economies, the exchange of goods creates and sustains social relationships. The giver acquires prestige, while the receiver acquires obligations to the giver. Since gift exchanging creates cycles, individuals who are recipients can also become givers. The identity of the giver extends in the gift. For Cooper, the relationship between teacher and student is full of moral obligations from both the teacher and the student (2004, p.8), requires effort and commitment from both parties, and requires time to develop. Cooper also states that the managerial way of describing teaching contradicts the experience of teaching and learning (p.9), as this depends fully on social interactions and relationships of gift exchange (p.9) that cannot be recorded or have not fully developed at a pre-determined point in time.

Student identity has also been the focus of analysis, particularly regarding how hegemonic the consumer identity has become. A study confirmed that, for higher education students, other commitments such as work have priority over study commitments (Rosh

White, 2007). It also found that students have a passive attitude towards their learning, placing the responsibility of their motivation and interest wholly on the teacher, who is supposed to appear very animated when he/she teaches. In addition, students seem to have very different notions of how much effort they put into an assignment, with a tendency to believe that the reason for low grades resided outside of their control. The students interviewed also believed that their rights as students were the responsibility of the teachers to fulfil. For the author, the “customer” identity is now present among students, and contrary to that of ‘learner’, it is an identity that promotes a disengaged position (p.603). As a result, the piece provides evidence of a commoditisation of the teaching/learning process.

An argument against the analogy of students as customers was proposed by a Dean of Academic and Student Affairs at an American university (James, 2001), who said the relationship between student and teacher is more complex than a retail transaction because the student must be active and produce, not just receive. Students are not customers because a customer is someone who demands a service that is satisfactory to him or herself, while his/her engagement is not necessary. James proposes a different analogy, that students could instead be compared to patients, who not always like what the doctor says, and not always do what the doctor advises. In order to be successful, doctors expect patients to engage in the process by following the doctor’s instructions. He insists in saying that any teacher would agree that “student as customer” is an analogy that falls short of the reality.

Finally, a growing number of academic contributions cast doubts on audit’s adequacy to analyse education. Some consider that quality audit is not able to understand or respect the practices they deem most important in the classroom because they can be elusive for the system to register (Salvio & Boldt, 2009), or that good teaching involves many elements that are hard to measure or simply cannot be measured (Gudeman, 1998). Others argue that for the new system good teaching is actually irrelevant because the attention is placed only on bureaucratic details that can then be monitored by the professional assessors (Johnson, 1994). There are calls for teachers to “challenge institutional controls disguised by the language of social justice and the scare tactics of cultural and economic crisis”, because quality assurance’s aim of standardisation actually hides discrimination (Salvio & Boldt, 2009, p.125), creates alienation between teachers and quality audit experts (Gudeman, 1998).

A recent study about perceptions of quality audit in England revealed that two thirds of the academics interviewed perceived audit as ineffective and bureaucratic (Cheng, 2010). Those who did consider audit as important argued that it creates awareness of the importance of good teaching, pointing at audit’s capacity to create cultural change. However, most of the

interviewees in this study also felt that quality audit is distant from their real academic work (p. 269). In addition, the teachers interviewed did not feel ownership or responsibility for the audit process. The author concludes that “the real impact on teaching quality appears slight when considering that the university has been spending large amounts of money and energy to prepare for the audit” (p.270). Another recent study found that current processes focused on measuring excellence and preferring interdisciplinary mode two type of knowledge can actually weaken disciplines like Sociology; Holmwood (2010) proposes this should be resisted before it is too late. This call to resistance had been made before on the grounds that managerial reforms have actually eroded democracy – which relies on debate – in order to establish a consumer oriented and individualistic system.

Apple (2004) coincides with the above, and claims that the effort of measuring everything in the classroom has threatened some of the best practices that had been developed by teachers, while the effects of the managerial reforms have proven to be negligible, negative, or just rhetorical. A main reason behind this feeling of estrangement between quality assurance systems and what they aim to analyse in the classroom lies on the way quality audit defines quality. Some authors have criticised the way quality is defined saying it is too narrow and limited to be able to reflect what real quality in higher education is (Filippakou, 2011). For the author, this “monolithic” view “results in exclusion and disaffection” (p. 15). In addition, quality assurance’s undemocratic characteristics surface in several contributions. It is said, for example, that while the participation of students and employers in quality assurance processes is declared important, and has been shown as active in debates promoted by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in Great Britain, the fact is that the interpretations of quality remain limited and controlled by the Agency, mainly that teaching and learning is about the transmission of skills, and that higher education is about promoting the economy (pp. 21-22). Only the dominant voices are heard and repeated in the quality assurance system. The voices of teachers who believe that a discipline can be studied for its own sake, even if it has no impact in the economy, and find no sense in trying to identify transferable skills in their discipline, are not heard. In addition, Filippakou found instances of the evaluation being used as an instrument of power and control by high ranking university managers, as well as by quality managers, to impose themselves on teachers (pp.23-24). The researcher also reveals that the oldest and most prestigious universities had more resistance to the implementation of the new system as they had nothing to win, while the newer universities did find appealing the opportunity of obtaining an official recognition that would help them attract students (p.24). Finally, Filippakou states that the way in which quality is

now defined and assessed necessarily plays down the role of the teacher and the student: “by increasing the degree of explicitness, the space of the teacher and learner is decreased (which in effect impedes their ability to influence the pedagogical process)” (p.25).

Other researchers have analysed the audit culture in schools in Australia, but their findings could also be applied to the university context to reveal why it is a system that reinforces the existing hierarchy of universities. For example, one recent study found that while audit ignores matters of context, these are very important and decisive on a school’s results in a quality assessment exercise. Schools identified as “particularly high performing” ... “are able to fashion a triumphant and outstanding identity” (Keddie, 2013 p.15). The prestige that an institution already has in their context means that instead of having to change their beliefs and dynamics, they just have to adopt the policy language. On the other hand, schools with low prestige did have to engage in new and many times damaging practices in order to perform in the best possible way in quality assurance exercises.

This was but a short sample of existing critical studies on quality assurances and its negative effects on teachers, students, and teaching. In spite of the existence of this literature, the idea of losing quality assurance is often coupled with the risk of losing transparency in higher education institutions. Therefore, in the following section I will discuss the issue of transparency in quality assurance, focusing on what it really achieves.

3.2. Quality assurance: The gouache effects of transparency

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the audit culture, in the shape of quality assurance, tries to turn teaching/learning into an auditable process, with the inevitable consequence of fabricating erroneous images of the process. This is done through “rituals of verification”, among which the evaluation questionnaire has a direct impact on teachers and students in higher education because it directly involves them and intermediates their relationship, transforming teaching “into a transaction which can be made auditable in isolation” (Power, 1997, p. 103). What emerges from this intention to reveal what cannot be made visible is that the audit culture intends to produce trust through the production of incomplete pictures of reality. It is based on “transparent information and real-time knowledge [that] keeps purifying itself by forever removing itself from its own conditions of existence” (Corsín-Jiménez, 2005, p. 74). Relationships that are important for the learning process, precisely between teacher and

students, are not reflected in indicators because, as Corsín-Jiménez suggests, “transparent information and real-time knowledge have no social life” (p. 74).

Blind to the student-teacher relationship, this perspective focuses on performance in order to make teaching visible and vulnerable to control or management. A teacher’s knowledge and expertise brought to the classroom becomes less relevant than his or her teaching strategies and the students’ perceptions of satisfaction because audit culture is not concerned with the quality of the “content and analytical rigour of an academic product. Rather [its] concern is with the ‘external’ mechanisms by which such products are valued – the reputation of researchers through the journals in which they publish or the success of teaching as it has an impact on students” (Strathern, 2000b, p. 279). As a result, academics are confronted with two differing ideas of professional self, the “independent scholar and inspiring teacher” – who can decide by him or herself what the students need – versus the “auditable, competitive performer” (Shore & Wright, 1999, p. 569) – who has to deliver what the administration considers to be fulfilling of students’ needs, based supposedly on what the students themselves say they need. Paradoxically, this resulting conflict is either invisible in this regime of visibility, or it is underestimated by its proponents. Accounts on the teaching profession under quality assurance regimes often reveal how, aside from managing their academic careers and organising their attention to students, teachers engage in practices that could be described as the management of quality assurance, i.e. behaviours and strategies that allow them to obtain successful results in the rituals of verification in which they participate.

In the previous section I also mentioned how the spread of quality assurance – in the form of evaluation and accreditation processes – turns universities into responsible actors in a regime of risk management. This situation in which an organisation becomes responsible for risk incites “organisational defensiveness”, in particular regarding its reputation. Universities are required to deal with numerous processes and organisations dedicated to the management of reputation. This places universities in a position in which they need to “defend” their reputation, which is constantly put to the test by ranking creators and accreditation agencies. One way of conducting this task is by internalising the way reputation is measured. For example, universities ‘feed’ information to ranking systems and, as Power states, internalise their indicators (2010, p. 140), and legitimise them in that way. Evaluation processes also become key mechanisms through which this convergence is conducted. Universities start using the indicators created by accreditation agencies. In turn, the agencies construct them with standards externally set and dominated by the wealthiest and better positioned universities in their sphere of influence. Thus, the practices involved in the

management of reputation “give to reputation a new governing and disciplinary power” (p. 141). In time, internal measures of performance converge with external measure of reputation (p. 141), and organisations do not contest the resulting public perceptions because they have already internalised them (p. 143). Evaluation questionnaires, for example, are connected to external measurements of reputation that take into account student satisfaction as an indicator of quality⁵⁹. Equally, the notion of the student as a client who can and must feel satisfied, who knows what he or she wants and needs, and the value of a teacher based on his or her ability to make students feel satisfied, have become internalised in the language of quality assurance, as part of a university’s task as a responsible actor.

As Power mentions, the efforts to manage reputation reach every corner of the organisation (2010, p. 129). A quick observation of the methodology of quality assurance processes reveals that reputation is not only managed in certain moments or by certain members in charge of processing its indicators. This turns reputation into a very powerful issue that, for Power, connects “distinct interests and practices in a constellation” that “energizes a new consciousness of threat” (p. 135). Hence, in the university, any unsatisfied student, badly rated course, or disliked teacher, could translate into a reputation problem with dire consequences for the survival, competitiveness or good development of the institution. The practice of making the teaching/learning experience transparent installs a gouache effect, were the observation of students, teachers, and the relationships between them are done through a muddy glass, instead of limpid crystal. With this in mind, we can observe the power of quality assurance systems in academia.

3.3. Quality assurance as a technology

The power of today’s penchant for standardised testing at the national level, taken to the realm of children and knowledge cannot be sufficiently underscored. In Europe, for example, the PISA results are ardently received. They can signify glory for some countries and utter humiliation for others. The impacts are not only felt at the highest governmental levels, but made to expand and have consequences for every citizen. Pongratz describes PISA as a “power stabilizer” that links techniques of political domination with “technologies of the self”, and explains “how the ‘discourse of self organization’ can be seen as the core of a governmental

⁵⁹ In the case of Germany, see for example: Schade (2007, p. 185).

strategy to assimilate education more thoroughly than ever before into a network of disciplinary procedures and ‘voluntary self-control’” (2006, p.471).

Quality assurance processes aim at developing two important conditions for the achievement of quality in an organisation: capacity for self-knowledge and openness to comparison. For example, as stated by the ENQA, “institutional self-knowledge is the starting point for effective quality assurance. It is important that institutions have the means of collecting and analysing information about their own activities. Without this they will not know what is working well and what needs attention, or the results of innovatory practices”⁶⁰ (ENQA, 2009, p. 19). Comparison, in turn, emerges as an integral aspect of acquiring self-knowledge. The ENQA considers that when a European university compares itself with others within and outside of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), it “allows them to extend the range of their self-knowledge and to access possible ways of improving their own performance” (2009, p. 19). Hence, in a quality assurance system the acquisition of a deeper level of self-knowledge is considered necessary for the generation of adequate information about a university required by students and society.⁶¹ Concretely, there are two processes that quality assurance systems demand universities to set up in order to prove that they can guarantee teaching quality: a teaching evaluation system, and a teacher training programme for the improvement of teaching abilities in its staff. In a way, teacher training is dependent on teacher evaluation; it emerges as the right remedy for a diagnosed problem. In turn, teacher evaluation appears as less daunting – and therefore, more acceptable – when coupled with the possibility of accessing training to improve students’ perceptions and as a result, evaluation scores. Perhaps resulting from their status as accepted “rituals of verification”, as well as from their possibility of producing numerical data (for example, evaluation scores and proportion of outstanding teachers versus proportion of deficient teachers; or number of teachers in teacher

⁶⁰ According to the ENQA: “The quality-related information systems required by individual institutions will depend to some extent on local circumstances, but it is at least expected to cover:

- student progression and success rates;
- employability of graduates;
- students’ satisfaction with their programmes;
- effectiveness of teachers;
- profile of the student population;
- learning resources available and their costs;
- the institution’s own key performance indicators” (ENQA, 2009, p. 19).

⁶¹ “In fulfilment of their public role, higher education institutions have a responsibility to provide information about the programmes they are offering, the intended learning outcomes of these, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, and the learning opportunities available to their students. Published information might also include the views and employment destinations of past students and the profile of the current student population. This information should be accurate, impartial, objective and readily accessible and should not be used simply as a marketing opportunity” (ENQA, 2009, p.19).

training), these practices are now widespread – although applied with differing mandatory levels – and considered in accreditation systems as a necessary proof of a university's commitment to its students⁶². Internally, teacher evaluation is presented as an offer for the teachers, a tool they can use for their own advantage, but at the same time it is connected to an incentive system or a punishment regime. Teacher training comes into play some times as an attractive possibility for professional actualization for career-conscious or beginner teachers, and sometimes as the necessary step for those who receive low evaluation scores. Thus, teacher evaluation – and teacher training – is a good example of a case in which “the distinction between mandated and voluntary norms is blurred” as well as the distinction “between managerial and regulatory process itself” (Power, 2010, p. 41). As Power explains, “control activities can be imagined both to be ‘compliant’ and to facilitate core business processes in an organization. This neoliberal compliance ideal anticipates a potential where the traditional ‘problem of compliance’ no longer exists because regulatory and business goals are perfectly aligned” (p. 41). In the case of a university, controlling teachers' performance in the classroom has become aligned with giving students a good education or guaranteeing a proper learning experience.

An essential part of controlling teachers is the creation of a series of truths about them that can classify their performance from deficient to outstanding, from boring to engaging, from unclear to clear. When discussing governmentality, Foucault originally focused on disciplines such as economics, psychiatry and penology, to uncover how, as “truth games” they were related to specific techniques used by human beings to understand themselves (1988, p. 18). Currently, in higher education quality assurance processes we can identify pedagogy – in its psychological emphasis – and management – in its auditing role – as key “truth games” used to make university teachers understand themselves in relation to what is considered quality teaching. As a result, problems of quality in education are turned into a matter of presence or lack of teaching skills, or as a problem of attitude of individual teachers towards students.

The way this affects teachers' has been described in several works using Foucault's theory of governmentality. Governmentality, as “the conduct of conduct” includes the government of others, which Foucault defines as subjectification, and the government of one's

⁶² See, for example, in the Nicaraguan case, the Guide for the institutional evaluation process designed by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Council (CNEA, 2011, p. 37). In the German case see, for example, Schade (2007, p. 190) on evaluation and accreditation procedures, and see also the reaccreditation report for the Master program in International Development Studies at the Philipps-Universität, Marburg (Fachbereich 02 Wirtschaftswissenschaften & Fachbereich 03 Gesellschaftswissenschaften und Philosophie, 2010, p. 7).

self, which he calls subjectivation, which involves the individual developing changes in him or herself in order to become a specific kind of subject. In the case of higher education teachers, it would mean modifying classroom performance in order to become an 'outstanding' teacher. For Foucault, technologies of the self "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). A self-government is promoted that becomes a key factor for the government to operate. In the neoliberal governmentality, individual freedom works as self-government (Rose, 1999). This is how quality audit, and particularly its "rituals of verification" work. Teacher evaluation and teacher training are technologies that encourage teachers to transform themselves into 'outstanding' teachers who can satisfy their students. The fact that these rituals are presented as a choice – although with varying levels of "freedom" – is key to the system. Applying this framework to quality assurance in higher education reveals that the "rituals of verification" of teacher evaluation and teacher training promote subjectivation in teachers. Pongratz states that the kind of freedom established by the new system "consists of the voluntary self-control and self-subjection to a permanent and comprehensive economic tribunal (put into practice by management consultants)" (2006, p.479).

Governmentality studies have also specifically been used to analyse core concepts in recent reforms such as life-long learning, student-centred pedagogy, the learning society, and the entrepreneurial university, as well as curricular reforms derived from these concepts. This has produced important critique of pedagogy, particularly of paradigms that support important educational reforms both from years ago to the most recent. Studying educational reforms from this perspective is important especially because they are promoted through a liberating or enabling discourse that counteracts any resistance they find. For example, the strong emphasis on student participation, present since the 1990's, is backed by the notion that it renders a democratic atmosphere, opposed to passively listening to lectures, which is considered as an alienating, discouraging and emotionally distancing situation. Participation is a basic aspect in today's description of what a good course should be like – regardless of what is being taught, whether the student wants to participate or not, whether it is an appropriate moment in the learning process, and so forth. It is a concept actively promoted by the audit culture and university reform policies. We find it in teacher evaluation sheets, as well as in teacher training, and even at the heart of the constructivist paradigm. However, observed through a governmentality approach, participation can be seen as a form of tyranny that

actually provides the necessary freedom for the existence of the neoliberal governmentality. For Quaghebeur (2006, p. 502), participants practicing freedom are governed in very specific ways that derive from the invitation to participate; they are “described and prescribed by practices of participation”.

Furthermore, while policies based on the mentioned concepts talk about democracy, better opportunities and less inequality, as Simons and Masschelein (2006) point out, neoliberal governmentality does not treat people as citizens but as “entrepreneurial selves and entrepreneurs of the self” who have needs, and in order to satisfy them produce goods or invest in themselves (p.419). From this point of view, educational reforms that follow a neoliberal governmentality promote crucial practices of subjectivation that encourage people to become a life-long learner, an international student, an innovative teacher, an entrepreneur, or a continuously improving professional in order to satisfy their individual needs. Two main practices or “rituals of verification” from the quality assurance regime emerge as very important in developing subjectification: teacher evaluation and teacher training. Both generate ‘truths’ derived from a classification of students’ opinions using categories from the fields of management and pedagogy, which will be discussed in the following section.

3.4. Teacher training and pedagogy’s ‘truths’: constructivism, student-centred learning, life-long learning and teacher reflectivity

The discussion about the need to professionalise teachers and modify their treatment and perceptions of students was not inaugurated by the Bologna Process or similar quality assurance system initiatives. See, for instance, the discussion by Ashby (1969) on the European case, or the discussion by Shils (1983) from the United States. In 1986, the Holmes Group – an organisation directed by Deans from several schools and colleges of education in the United States – was supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Ford Foundation, The Johnson Foundation, The United States Department of Education and The New York Times Foundation, to publish the report “Tomorrow’s teachers”. The central purpose of the document was to persuade – apparently, teachers themselves – of the importance of the professional development of teachers. As well as to induce teachers to show a special deference to their students as well as fulfil new obligations towards them. The report criticised

“naive views” that deem teaching as something simple that anyone can do, keeping it as a generally undervalued profession. Instead, the authors claimed that teaching should be seen as something that requires plenty of training and professionalising. However, while it pushes for an increased awareness of the importance of teacher training, the document also introduces the constructivist paradigm and places it at the heart of what constitutes the professionalization of teachers. In short, for the Holmes Group, the teacher of tomorrow is the constructivist teacher. The constructivist teacher is the one who understands that he or she participates with the children in the “construction of knowledge”, and sees the students as “active individuals who construct, modify and integrate ideas...” (The Holmes Group, 1986, p. 34)⁶³.

Clearly, at the heart of the document is an effort to give value to the teacher as a professional. Nonetheless, it simultaneously encourages teachers to change the way they do their work and seek new training. It talks directly to teachers when it explains that the problem is the belief in “one way teaching” and the false thought that it is a responsibility of the student to learn, that the teacher is only there to deliver. So the message for teachers is that they have an urgent need to professionalise, that regardless of how much practice they might have they should not only trust their experience – especially if the teacher in question used to be an outstanding student –, and that they have the responsibility for each of their students to learn.⁶⁴ This conception of teaching does not contemplate the fact that students do not learn only from their teachers. As it has been registered in ethnographic studies, students also learn from each other, outside of the classroom and without following special guidance (Becker, et al., 1961, p. 130). Stressing the link between a teacher’s performance in the classroom and the students’ learning undermines the important facet of student individual work and group collaboration. Furthermore, describing teachers as needing “academic and clinical learning” that can enable them to manage the relations in a classroom and give the learners the

⁶³ “If teaching is conceived as highly simple work, then any modestly educated person with average abilities can do it. But if teaching is conceived as a responsible and complex activity that is clearly related to both group learning and individual learner success including those children for whom learning is not easy and for whom lots of help at home is unavailable then teaching requires special selection and preparation. The case can be made, in fact, that the nation’s troubles with student learning in schools are closely tied to popular and excessively simple conceptions of teaching” (The Holmes Group, 1986).

⁶⁴ “Unfortunately, simple models of teaching are often most attractive to bright, studious individuals who took major responsibility for their own learning as students once they were pointed in the general direction by a ‘presenting’ teacher. Reasoning that it worked for them and will for others, some intellectually able teachers give only passing attention to learners and learning, insisting that to do otherwise would constitute ‘spoon-feeding’. Viewed in this simple lesson delivery fashion, teaching is something any intelligent person can do. This belief can ignore professional knowledge because it is easy for teachers’ lessons to have quality if they are independent of student learning. The Holmes Group rejects such simple views. It subscribes instead to a conception of fully competent professional teachers” (The Holmes Group, 1985, p. 35).

importance they deserve⁶⁵, downplays teachers' experience, as well as the role of independent learning and group characteristics.

Twenty six years later, in 2011, the Bologna Process in Europe promoted the same ideas expressed in the Holmes Group report under the name of student-centred learning. Constructivism is at the core of their definition:

Student-Centred Learning represents both a mindset and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach which is **broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning**. It is characterized by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking (National Team of Bologna Experts Malta, 2011, p. 18, my emphasis).

All the issues expressed by the Holmes Group are present above: the need for innovative teaching methods, bestowing students with a greater importance and central role, and the emphasis on skills and problem solving. In addition, just like in the 1980's this perspective is accredited with great capacity to improve quality in education. In Germany, for example, a result of the application of Bologna Process reforms –and credited for a reduction in student drop-out rates– is the spread of the student-centred perspective in universities that has focused attention on competence and learning outcomes. A shift from “imparting knowledge” to a new focus on “teaching methodical, social and personal skills” (Zervakis, 2012, p. 209) is hailed as a very positive development. Usually, advancement in this area is identified in the existence of official programmes, processes and networks dedicated to enforcing continuing and ongoing education for academic teachers (p. 214).

Significantly, in this perspective a good professor is one who monitors the particular needs of each of his or her students, teaches accordingly, and avoids imposing his or her perspective. A humble, unpretentious, almost self-effacing attitude, coupled with a

⁶⁵ “Competent teachers have knowledge, skill, and professional commitments that avoid the problems of the “bright person” versions of the teaching-learning process. The professional knowledge these teachers possess goes beyond a strong liberal education. It is not merely common sense, nor is it learned only through trial-and-error teaching or the experience of being a student. Rather, it includes academic and clinical learning that prepares one to manage both mastery of content and the complex social relations of the classroom in a way that fosters student learning as well as an attachment to learning. As professionals, these competent teachers would never breeze into a classroom, present a prefabricated lesson and breeze out again, claiming to have taught. Such a facile approach trivializes teaching, and sends the message that learners and learning are unimportant. True professionals would never participate in such a one-way process, for they know that teaching and learning are interactive” (The Holmes Group, 1985, p. 36).

democratic, participatory technique, is recommended to higher education teachers. The form of delivering the course is the focus of this training. Specific techniques are presented as solutions for lack of clarity or lack of motivation in a course; they are good practices to be imitated. Therefore, one of the salient characteristics of the kind of teacher training promoted is the emphasis placed on teaching methods. The roots of this apparent disregard for content could be the notion of the obsolescence of scientific findings that, as Gibbons points out, carries the risk of making us conclude “that ‘the best scientific opinion of the day’ will become ‘merely another opinion’ in the vast array of views that can be sought or bought on any matter of social relevance” (Gibbons, 1985, p.6). In the classroom, however, this perspective implies that the teacher is focusing on the students instead of on him or herself. It seems to imply that teachers can only be either student-centred or self-centred un-professional individuals who selfishly impose their views and interests on students.

Many documents have been produced that attempt to explain what student-centred learning is and why it is promoted by the Bologna Process. All of them mention the constructivist paradigm as being the core of their theoretical background (see, for example, Education International, European Students’ Union & Lifelong Learning Programme, 2010). Accordingly, ideas about student-centred learning and constructivism can be found in specific teacher training offers at universities. For example, they are present in the teacher training programme at *Philipps-Universität Marburg: Hochschuldidaktik Marburg Intern (HD-MIN)*, where a “good and modern teacher” is defined, among other things, as someone who is more student-oriented and less teacher-centred.⁶⁶ The language used by promoters of teacher

⁶⁶ The HD-MIN describes the characteristics of the ‘good and modern’ teacher in its web page (<http://www.uni-marburg.de/einrichtungen/hochschuldidaktik/hdmin/gutelehre>):

- *Verstärkte Studierendenorientierung, weniger Dozentenorientierung*
- *Stärkere Aktivierung der Studierenden (z.B. Methodenvielfalt, Moderationstechniken, kooperative Gruppenarbeit, Student-Response-Systeme, Erhöhung Selbststudienanteile)*
- *Erhöhung des eigenverantwortlichen und selbstgesteuerten Lernens (höhere Selbststudienanteile durch z.B. Projektarbeit, kooperatives Lernen, Forschendes Lernen, Problemorientiertes Lernen, Selbststudienphasen)*
- *Berücksichtigung der Heterogenität der Studierenden (Herkunft, Gender, Lernausgangslagen, Familienstatus, Berufstätigkeit, etc.)*
- *Förderung überfachlicher und berufsorientierender Elemente in der Lehre bzw. Verknüpfung dieser Elemente mit den Fachinhalten und zugleich Auswahl angemessener Hochschuldidaktik und Methodik (z.B. Service-Learning, außeruniversitäre Lernorte, Projekte in der Berufspraxis etc.)*
- *Verknüpfung von Forschung und Lehre in der Lehre (z.B. Forschendes Lernen, Beteiligung an Forschungsprojekten, Schreibprojekte)*
- *Lehrveranstaltungsplanung mit Constructive Alignment (Passung zwischen Lehrveranstaltungsdidaktik-Methodik und Prüfungsformen sowie angestrebten Lernergebnissen)*

training suggests there is conclusive evidence of teachers neglecting their students and habitually delivering inadequate classes, focused mainly on their own interests.

As discussed above, the quality assurance culture is paired with arguments about the need to professionalise teaching, a claim they say is backed by abundant pedagogical research. The trend can be traced back to pedagogical reforms in the United States at the turn of the 20th century, when these reforms were applied to schools. However, now they are firmly in place within universities with no accompanying reflection about the differences between teaching at primary school or high school, and teaching at the university level. Good practices in teaching are delineated independently of the age of the learner, or his/her level of education. The underlying assumption is that human beings have particular universal needs when it comes to learning. For example, an emphasis on participation, a positive and accepting environment, a constructive evaluation, a use of communication technologies, a good pedagogical mediation of texts, and altogether a student-centred focus, constitute good teaching at any level. Student-centred learning is considered as the latest paradigm in pedagogy, an indisputable improvement, a progressive approach that turns students into highly motivated, participant and constructivist learners (Education International, European Students' Union & Lifelong Learning Programme, 2010, pp. 14-15). Promoters of student-centred learning also state that it is not about turning the student into a customer because this implies passivity and the idea that education is an investment that should generate a profit.⁶⁷ This effort of distancing student-centred learning from the student/customer/client discourse, however, implies that the main difference between this pedagogic philosophy and the

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- *Angemessene Modernisierung von Hochschullehre durch (zunehmende) Einbindung von inhalts-, lernziel- und prüfungsadäquaten Elementen von Digitalisierungsdidaktik in Passung mit dem eigenen Lehrverständnis und Lehrstil*

⁶⁷ While SCL signifies a strong pedagogical advancement and a marked improvement in higher education students' educational experience, the notion, and concomitantly, the definition of SCL is at times also marred by consumer-related forms of higher education provision, with students being seen as 'customers' in the learning process rather than the 'participants' in the learning process.

Within this context, SCL can become more 'customer-centred' rather than participatory. This is particularly so where higher education is provided at the cost of high tuition fees. Indeed, the 'ideal type' of the paradigm of a student as a customer is diametrically opposed to the notion of a student as a constructivist learner. The student as a customer is a largely passive character who is driven by a rational action scheme, where profit needs to return on an investment. Instead, the student as a constructivist learner needs to be intrinsically motivated by a desire to learn and be open to challenge his or her own values and attitudes. While trends can clearly not be denied, the introduction of such customer related concepts into SCL as a pedagogical concept threatens to mar the notion of SCL in its true form and mislead academics, students and society as to the real benefits of this progressive approach to learning (Education International, European Students' Union & Lifelong Learning Programme, 2010, pp. 14-15).

consumer approach lies in the active role given to the student and on the controlled cost of higher education.

In any case, in the perspective of student-centred learning, the role of the teacher is that of an agent that guarantees the student's active participation and motivation. In practice, the fact is that far from encouraging an active role in students, student-centred learning sustains a certain cynical aura, evidently the result of the existence of teacher evaluation practices. As revealed in Tuchman's ethnography, some teachers describe how in teacher training they are taught "techniques that might help students to pay attention and *to believe that you care about them*" (2009, p. 151, emphasis mine). While some teachers embrace this approach, especially when they see their student ratings improve, others disapprove saying that these student-centred learning techniques are not about teaching, but about "looking like you care about your students" (p. 151; pp. 226-227). What is significant is that both student-centred learning – and the other pedagogical paradigms currently favoured – and teacher training coexist with teacher evaluation. In fact, they acquire relevance through each other and hence should not be observed as disconnected practices. Instead, it is safe to say that teacher training is designed today with teacher evaluation in mind.

At an organisational level, alongside the development of methods to assess teacher performance in the classroom from the students' perspective – through the creation of special offices with dedicated full-time staff, instruments and software to aid the process – universities have also developed special programmes dedicated to teacher training – also with the creation of offices staffed with specialists, material and methodologies – to aid teachers appearing to need this assistance after having obtained poor results in their evaluations. Pedagogy courses – often focused on teaching strategies, skills, and specific training on the use of technology for teaching – are regarded by the administration as a very useful and positive resource, capable of solving the problem of low quality in teaching by modifying teachers' practices in the classroom. It can be claimed that teacher training does not exist in isolation from teacher evaluation, its purposes often refer to not only how students learn better, but to how teachers can be better evaluated. There are interesting critiques of what is being promoted as teacher education. Some concentrate on the way teacher training is developed by the universities, pointing out at a lack of trust on teachers, and at an intention to govern them. Others point at the flaws in the research that backs up the content that is later selected for teacher training programmes. To this I will add the fact that in the quality assurance regime there is a mechanism of selection that includes some perspectives on teacher training and pedagogy while it effectively excludes others.

Some academics have complained that the emphasis on e-learning and methodologies has effectively replaced trust on university professors' natural teaching abilities. The "individual style and aura" of the professor is being replaced by a "more sober and rationalized image of academic teachers" (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p.241). Bullough Jr., in turn, points at the excesses of accountability and scientism in teacher training and even advises teachers to stand actively against it. He mentions they are based on the assumption that science equals "effective pathways" to quality teaching, and places the researcher as someone who accepts this equation and contributes towards its realisation (Bullough, Jr., 2014, p.188). This scientism is a specific "science *for* education" (citing Baez & Boyles, 2009, p. 5, *cursive in the original*), that privileges large scale random trials and is "associated with the quantification of human experience and performance for purposes of rating and ranking" (p.191). It is evident that in teacher training policies one finds what Bullough Jr. refers to as the "values of a strong scientism" (p.191). Furthermore, in the case of the United States, a former predilection for qualitative research in pedagogy migrated towards a focus on quantitative, randomised studies that often aimed at revealing the efficacy of particular programs. Hence, again, the objective of pedagogical strategies turn away from aiding the teacher towards aiding the quality assurance system to control the teacher.

Another major issue not sufficiently considered by promoters of teacher training in quality assurance regimes, is the fact that educational research, if placed under a careful scrutiny, does not reveal the straightforward picture depicted in policies. Marshall, for instance, claims that through a normalisation produced by examination procedures that classify individuals and reveal truths about them (1990, p. 26), educational research produces the clients neoliberalism needs (p. 13), as well as an obedient, docile and useful workforce (p. 15). There is an availability of critical analysis about educational research that suggests a cautious use of its findings. From the perspective of governmentality, student-centred learning, originally initiated as child-centred pedagogy⁶⁸, has been subject of critique since the 1980s. The idea of focusing on the student has been pointed out as subjectifying. In child-centred pedagogy a lot of aspects about the student are invisibilised, while the notion of the satisfied student is normalising instead of liberating (Walkerdine, 1984). Furthermore, in stark contrast with the trend of sharing and spreading "good practices" and teaching strategies that are encouraged to be imitated across different regions, educational research is context specific (Lundgren, 1997) and therefore, its results should not be so swiftly generalised as is the case in

⁶⁸ This is significant as what initially was applied to school children was directed at adults in higher education.

quality assurance regimes. Another important problem that has been pointed out is that educational research uses a language that lacks specificity (Lundgren, 1997, p. 234), which should cast doubts about how to interpret particular findings.

In addition, the public discourse about education plays a very significant role in the way educational research has developed. Quality assurance policies are not supported by a rich academic discussion on educational research. On the contrary, As Lundgren observes, “interest groups and individuals with access to media can have an influence that far outweighs the more systematic influence exerted by citizens via formal institutions like school boards (p. 1997, 235).” As Lundgren concludes, “research in education and research in psychology have provided terms and a language for governing education [...] At the same time this language has had its value more as a consequence of being a part of a general discourse about education, then being a specific scientific language. To create a scientific position in education is then not only a question on how to have a voice in the academic community, but how to have a public voice” (Lundgren, 1997, p. 235). As a consequence,

The language within education as a science will then to a great extent be formed by the public discourse about education. Educational research in order to be funded must be adjusted to the public discourse on education and will, by doing that, have a voice and thereby an influence on how education is perceived and controlled. This contextual dependence is much more than an epistemic drift. It is a dependence in which the scientific work will be governed by factors outside the immediate research context (Lundgren, 1997, p. 236).

Another significant issue to be considered about pedagogy is that some approaches define good teaching in a radically different way to how it is defined in quality assurance systems. Popkewitz, for example, far from focusing on techniques, clarity and uniformity, defines pedagogy as not just a way of giving information in a clear way or developing skills in students, nor as a capacity to motivate, or a capacity of the teacher to adapt the course and respond to the particular “needs” of the students, who are seeking, above all, “valuable”, “significant” or “pertinent” knowledge. For him, pedagogy is not just a set of techniques, he claims that “pedagogy is a process of translation that moves the ‘things’ of disciplinary practices from one space to another and is not merely one of replication that captures, for example, what scientists or historians do or know” (Popkewitz, 2010, p.413). For Popkewitz there is a “divorce” or separation between didactics and disciplinary knowledge. He argues that “the principles of didactics or the methods courses” of teacher education are drawn from educational psychologies that historically have little to do with the understanding of disciplinary knowledge. The psychologies of pedagogy are designed historically to govern who the child is and should be, whether that talk is about becoming a problem solver, a good

citizen, a lifelong learner, and so on” (p. 414). From this point of view, teacher training based on pedagogical paradigms that emphasise participation and constructivism, is far from liberating or democratising. It suggests the most valued pedagogical “truths” are so because they help in governing the teacher and the student.

Popkewitz (2010) also explains that psychology is used in pedagogy today as a common template for the teaching of different subjects. He points out that even though reforms talk about the importance of the teacher having a profound knowledge of their subject:

[W]hen policy and research are examined, the call for teachers to have more subject matter knowledge quickly morphs into the language of communication and constructivist psychologies whose unspoken norms and values embody salvation themes that are not drawn from the child’s merely learning science and mathematics more efficiently and effectively. The narratives of mathematics education, for example, are generated through concepts of psychology such as the child and the teachers as the lifelong learners. The narratives of pedagogical learning, when further examined, generate cultural theses about a mode of life that speaks of the lifelong learning of the child who has autonomy, self-responsibility, and problem solving in an uncertain world” (p. 415).

In sum, for Popkewitz, pedagogical research generates principles that are “related to political and social values that have little to do with pedagogy about learning disciplinary fields of knowledge” (2010, p. 415). Often disciplines are treated as “inert, unchanging, and ambiguous” through the use of words like “bodies” or “content” (p. 416) or as a unity in methods or episteme surrounding “facts” and “truths” (p. 418). The real focus of these “pedagogies of problem solving and participation” (p. 414), that grant “increased personal relevance and emotional accessibility”, is on governing the child through unexamined liberal ideals of democracy based on participation and lifelong learning, (pp. 415 - 416). Finally, Popkewitz proposes:

“leaving behind the pedagogical matrixes of psychology in the curriculum and the didactics (methods) of teacher education – *at least for the moment*. [...] until we have a way of thinking about the events that “make” history or physics, there are no adequate ways of thinking about how to order the problems, theories, and methods for constituting what counts as “learning”. [...] the distinctions and differentiations of psychology were installed as criteria through which principles were generated about what should be known and how that knowing was to proceed. Although questions of curriculum and didactics should be informed by psychology, they are not reducible to it!” (2010, p.420).

Dave Jones concurs with this view and states that teacher training has always been about ethical techniques, relegating issues of content in teaching to a secondary role (1990, p. 60). He describes this emphasis as a bio-political power strategy (p. 68). The need to guarantee

rigour in teacher training was supported by a sense of “regret about the humbleness of the teachers’ backgrounds” (pp. 60-61).

Teachers – as well as students – are also subjectified through the idea of engaging in life-long learning, very present in educational policy and reforms. As promoted by UNESCO, the OECD and the European Union, life-long learning focuses mainly on its economic advantages, its democratic function – also attributed to it – taking second place. However, the concept is also presented as an individual task, a duty or responsibility of the individual, not a right, and not a collective effort (Biesta, 2006). Popkewitz, Olsson and Petersson (2006), claim the idea of the life-long learner is a fundamental part of the learning society, in which it is used to make distinctions and make exclusions disguised in a language of inclusion. People are divided into those who aspire to a cosmopolitan ideal and become life-long learners, and those who are not learning. “The Learning Society is a governing practice and an effect of power. Its pedagogical individuality circulates to order, differentiate and divide who is and who is not the ‘reasonable’ cosmopolitan” (p. 446), guided by continual change (p. 432).

In light of the above it can be concluded that the relevant discussion in the case of quality assurance’s supporting ‘truths’, is not around educational science’s different approaches, their pros and cons. What is significant is that one approach, constructivism, has come to be preferred in teacher training programmes associated to quality assurance regimes. It is important to understand why. This paradigm is often coupled with ideals of life-long learning, and is also presented as a scientifically robust base for a fundamental aspect of the reforms, namely the call to make teachers ‘student-centred’. It can be argued that these schools of thought in pedagogy act as the quality assurance regime’s “psy-discipline” (Rose, 1996) and as such, train teachers to ‘freely’ monitor their performance and modify it in order to become adequate teachers. Teacher training courses inspired in these “psy-discipline” encourage teachers to consider their students’ opinions as a guide for self-modification. They urge them to learn how to satisfy students regardless of their intrinsic level of interest, cultural and social differences and/or particular needs. In line with this, teaching has been constructed as “learning management” (Pongratz, 2006, p. 478), a process whose success depends on the individual teacher’s capacity to perform adequately in any emerging situation.

3.5. Constructivism and reflective thinking: The prominent perspectives on education in the quality assurance regime

The promotion of the constructivist perspective as *sine qua non* for good teaching does not reflect the fact that it has been criticised and that there are other perspectives in education. As presented above, researchers have argued that in spite of its rhetoric, constructivism does not promote democracy and that it does not put into practice a politically neutral reform but a straightforward promotion of neoliberalism. It is also said to be based on a psychological focus that decontextualizes the learner from the social context. For example, it has been pointed out that in Spain education reforms based on constructivism coincided with neoliberal reforms from the 80s and 90s, and promoted the removal of the subject from the social context, disregarding important social questions (Rodríguez, 2011, p. 1060).

In addition, this approach has also been exposed as theoretically flawed. Meyer (2009) points out that “far from being a postepistemology, constructivism simply regresses to a pre-Renaissance mindset with theology replaced with a psychologism” (p.332). Although both Rodríguez and Meyer point out that constructivism has not caused traditional styles of teaching to disappear, and that certainly not all teachers agree with its views, what is important in this case is that academics in leading managerial positions or in charge of teacher training and teacher evaluation, are devoted to constructivism, which is now – together with teacher reflectivity and classroom innovation – hegemonic in teacher training programmes promoted by quality assurance. Meyer accuses constructivism of being a philosophy that does not include an appreciation of truth, it cannot distinguish what is knowledge from what is superstition or psychosis, as it just implies that knowledge is what persons have in their minds (2009).

Also, there is research on learning that has produced five different approaches to the explanation of how people learn: conceptual analysis, behavioural, constructivist, computational and connectionist. Clark (2005) states that research results have led to reject the first two approaches, and points out that constructivism fails to explain the empirical mechanisms of learning. Consequently, he suggests that instead of focusing on constructivism, we should be looking at the computational, and even better, at the connectionist approaches. For Clark, connectionism leads to the elimination of “folk psychology” as a basis of pedagogy, and replaces it with advances in cognitive science (Clark, 2005). I do not propose, though, that one perspective should be replaced by another one, which would, of course, have its own shortcomings. However, it is remarkable that the discussion among quality assurance experts,

and in educational reform policies, has remained fixated on constructivism. As Calgren (1997) states, teachers should be educated instead of trained. Educating them would mean to get them acquainted with theories and scientific work, while training is “transmitting a disposition to subordination and a reliance on authority” (p. 118). Teacher education would include, for example, discussions about the existence of different “sub-cultures” (Calgren, 1997) and perspectives or traditions in pedagogy. Teacher training is based on a prevailing discourse that Stickney (2006) identifies as focused on denouncing the survival of “antiquated” or “folk” pedagogies and putting them in contrast to pedagogies considered modern and based on new paradigms, even though they often do not even have practical foundations (Clark, 2005). This has an effect of steering teachers to embrace the new paradigm uncritically, or even, as Stickney puts it, to: “dissimulate compliance to the reform in order to evade surveillance within such disciplinary apparatuses as teacher training and regimes of inspection “(Stickney, 2006, p.327). Educators are not easily allowed to keep their tried and tested practices, at least not without facing consequences or tensions.

Teacher training programmes promoted by quality assurance do not present student-centred pedagogy, constructivism and the related concept of teacher reflectivity as one perspective among others. Calgren (1997) identifies, through a literature review, five different traditions in teacher education, each with its own set of beliefs: academic, social efficiency, developmentalist, social reconstructionist, and generic. To the generic tradition belongs the promotion of reflective thinking.⁶⁹

It can be argued that reflective thinking’s relevance in today’s teacher training programmes lies in its compatibility with the notion of good teaching promoted in quality assurance. Teacher reflectivity is presented as a tool that combines the encouragement of continuous improvement in teacher performance, and the possibility of guaranteeing student satisfaction. Consequently, this school of thought in pedagogy has easily intermingled with quality assurance practices. In quality assurance’s approach to good teaching the content of what a teacher teaches and/or the knowledge he or she possesses on a given topic does not receive as much attention as his or her perspective on teaching/learning, the way he or she teaches or how he or she prepares to teach or to continuously improve as a teacher. The improvement generated in the teacher by evaluation, it is argued, arises from the fact that its

⁶⁹ The academic tradition is focused on the subject-matter and its translation to the students. The social efficiency tradition underscores research on teaching as its base. The developmentalist tradition focuses on the natural development of the learner as the centre of teaching. The social reconstructionist tradition focuses on teaching as a political act and the generic tradition is based on reflective thinking (p. 119).

results facilitate reflectivity. Thus, at the heart of the justification behind the application of teacher evaluation questionnaires lies the concept of reflectivity, generally accepted as a good practice for teachers, and mentioned as a positive quality a person can have: the 'reflective teacher'.

Reflectivity is an old concept in pedagogic circles (see, for example, Dewey, 1933) that took force since the 1990s through the work of highly influential educational experts. Reflective practice encourages teachers to constantly question their work and its effect on their students in order to continuously adapt to their necessities, turning to strategies that work best with each particular group and moment, instead of merely aiming at controlling the class (Larrivee, 2000). For Hartman (2001a), reflectivity is teacher metacognition. She believes that for learning to occur it is not enough to have students using high-level thinking or metacognition. It is necessary that teachers use it too. With this she refers to teachers "thinking about what, why and how they teach in order to manage and regulate their teaching so that it meets the needs of their students" (Hartman, 2001b, p. 173). When teachers stop thinking just about the content they are going to teach and use metacognition, she argues, subjects that are generally perceived as difficult and can even develop "phobias" in students – such as science and mathematics– would cease to be so problematic. Teachers are taught that reflective practices will allow them to continuously learn from their mistakes and demonstrate real leadership in the classroom.

Furthermore, quality assurance systems do not delve on the complex history of the concept of reflectivity. Different conceptual orientations in teacher education have been identified, each with its own meaning of reflectivity (Calgren, 1997, p. 119). In turn, the content of the reflection involved in "teacher reflectivity" would also vary in accordance to each tradition's emphasis. Calgren found that "educating the reflective practitioner" has also been considered as a separate paradigm (see Doyle, 1990, cited in Calgren, 1997, p. 119). All in all, there is a rich diversity of perspectives on reflectivity and on teacher education as a whole. This is not evident in quality assurance discussions on good teaching and teacher training.

Whilst there is abundant literature that presents reflection as a positive and necessary practice, there is also an abundance of critique. Fendler (2003) summarises these in three main groups: 1. Some critics argue that reflective practices have not improved teachers' roles in schools; 2. Another line of critique argues that reflective practices reinforce and rationalise existing beliefs instead of challenging assumptions; 3. And a third line states that reflective practices provide instrumental analyses of teaching and ignore issues of social justice. Fendler contributes a valuable analysis of the term from a Foucaultian perspective, and

finds that reflection is in fact a technology of self-discipline and self-governance, making it “problematic because it is impossible to guarantee an uncompromised or unsocialized point of view” (2003, p.21). Fendler further comments on the impossibility of doing a real reflection: “Given that the notion of modern democratic governance is inseparable from self-discipline, it is impossible to draw a line between an authentic experience of reflection and what has already been socialized and disciplined.” (Fendler, 2003, p. 21). Furthermore, he states that reflection keeps teachers in a subservient position – being developed by experts and enforced by policy makers who do not listen to teachers when they design the guidelines –, he argues that

[A]n array of historical influences has contributed to complex meanings for reflection, and that common practices of reflection (journal writing and autobiographical narratives) may have unintended and undesirable political effects. When teacher education research provides elaborate programs for teaching teachers to be reflective practitioners, the implicit assumption is that teachers are not reflective unless they practice the specific techniques promoted by researchers. It is ironic that the rhetoric about reflective practitioners focuses on empowering teachers, but the requirements of learning to be reflective are based on the assumption that teachers are incapable of reflection without direction from expert authorities (Fendler, 2003, p.23).

Just as there are different perspectives on teacher reflectivity, ranging from encouraging to very cautious, there are also completely different approaches to teacher education itself. From different perspectives found in the literature, Calgren herself identifies three different sub-cultures within teacher education: “cultural conservatism”, “progressivism”, and “cultural radicalism” (1997, p.122). *Cultural conservatism* underscores subject knowledge and the teacher’s autonomy in relation to the National Curriculum. Content is considered more important than form, and while arousing interest in pupils is considered important, to “bring up children” is seen as a waste of time over the real responsibility of teaching. *Progressivism* is the culture that advocates “childcenteredness” and considers traditional teaching and school organisation as the root of the problem. Political and societal questions are ignored in this perspective. *Cultural radicalism* focuses on fostering “self-reliant future citizens” and considers that teachers have to be autonomous in order to take a position on social, religious, and political matters (pp. 123-125).

Calgren states that the three sub-cultures are complementary to each other because each one addresses a different aspect of teachers’ work and different dimensions of the transmission of knowledge. While cultural conservatism focuses on how to teach a subject, progressivism on aspects of organisation of school activities and children’s development, and cultural radicalism on educational, political and ethical issues in teaching (1997, p. 127). An

important question derives from here. Why has “progressivism” become the dominant subculture? 1. It includes an assumption of traditional school practices as inherently wrong, and “the root of all evil” (p.127); 2. It focuses on visible issues (school activities), and students at the centre (children’s development), which makes it absolutely compatible with audit culture.

Cultural conservatism	Emphasises knowledge transmission as such. The essence of the professions is the transmission of knowledge to students (p.127-128).
Progressivism	Knowledge transmission is a result of the work teachers do. It emphasizes that what teachers do is “develop activities in school in order to create a stimulating and helpful environment for learning” (p.128).
Cultural radicalism	Focuses on teachers’ work as “the upbringing of human beings”; knowledge transmission is a way to fulfil the teachers’ aim (p.128).

For Calgren, these conceptions are not inconsistent. It is wrong to conclude that “the transmission of subject matter excludes an interest in children or children’s learning” or that “a focus on forms and ways of acting excludes an interest in content” (1997, p.128). This misunderstanding reinforces the tensions between the subcultures and diminishes the complexity of teachers’ work both in theory and practice (p. 128). The issue in question is that quality assurance policies do not acknowledge these differences as a product of existent subcultures in teacher education. They have simply embraced one of the cultures – progressivism or a mixture between the developmentalist and generic traditions – and presented it as the only right one, while other approaches are portrayed merely as obsolete. This brings us to another important characteristic of teacher training. While student-centred education and the notion of the student as a client are indispensable ideas in the quality assurance regime and promoted through teacher training, ideas about teacher reflectivity are also at the centre. This also finds support in constructivist pedagogy.

Under the constructivist lens, a good teacher is one who flexibly guides students to “find multiple readings and continuous deconstruction to texts” as well as allowing them to “produce their own text” (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 166). Notably, in this definition of a good teacher the word ‘flexibly’ acquires relevance while the teacher’s expertise falls into a secondary role:

Professional knowledge becomes codified as pragmatic, partial, contingent knowledge that is productive in a teacher’s personal life in school. The professional “self” is an individual whose capabilities and skills are pragmatically bound to the

workplace. Competence is not in specific skills and knowledge but in capabilities. Teachers are to solve the immediate problems of their job and have a “knowledge-in action” which requires on-the-spot reflection. The teacher is someone who can work with high levels of flexibility in defining and resolving problems (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 106).

This indicates why, through this perspective, teacher training often aims at increasing “teacher reflection”.⁷⁰ Apparently, all it takes to be a good teacher is to have a particular disposition to students, knowledge, and problem solving, which can be achieved by becoming reflective. In the case of students, participation mechanisms become the precise mechanisms through which they are governed as these “assume a dual role of enabling the individual to articulate wants but at the same time for political rationalities to shape and fashion how subjectivities embody wants and needs” (p. 107). In this sense, Popkewitz concludes that contemporary discourses in the educational sciences, particularly constructivism:

construct new territories of governing through the mapping, classifying, documenting, and interpreting of the administration of individuals. While systemic school reform and post-modern educational discourses express different ideological stances, they utilize a similar image of the teacher and child that relate to the self-monitoring and self-motivated individual. Further, the populism inscribed in the redemptive culture also inscribes the academics as the authors of redemption (1997, p. 108).

Constructivist pedagogies shy away from discussing course content or political issues in teaching. They “emphasize how teachers and children are problem-solving individuals who ‘make’ knowledge and negotiate meaning” (Popkewitz, 1997, p.92). In this way, they claim to be empowering for those involved in the teaching/learning experience. Nevertheless, Popkewitz considers them as “interventional discourses to govern the teacher and child [...] through the principles of classification generated for action and participation” (p. 92). The ultimate purpose is to construct the “ ‘good’ worker, child, or citizen” through what Popkewitz calls a “culture of redemption” in which “pedagogy is to save the child for society and to rescue society through the child” (p.92). For Popkewitz, “the new operative metaphors of redemption of the teacher and child are ‘the participatory, constructivist teacher’ who works with flexible identities in multiple ‘communities’ ” (p. 100). This redemptive culture is at the core of the professionalisation project in teaching. Popkewitz explains these “pedagogies are to govern *the soul* through constructing an individuality that *participates and flexibly problem-solves* for pragmatic solutions to local, *community* projects. The local, communal and flexible identity replaces the social, fixed identities and universal norms embodied in previous reforms” (p. 102). A good exemplification of the above can be found in Knight, Smith and Sachs

⁷⁰ See, for example, the following works by experts who promote teacher reflection: Sparks-Langer and Colton (1991); Hatton and Smith (1995); Kane, Sandretto and Heath (2004); and Larrive (2000; 2008).

(1990), who based on their analysis of educational reform in Queensland, mention how pressure is exerted on teachers through claims about the whole of society depending on their work with students (p. 139). As they point out, actions are directed towards the improvement of education in the hope of changing society indirectly and through individuals participating in higher education. Applied to the current Bologna reforms and other academic capitalist driven initiatives, a concrete example is today's claims about students' employability, cosmopolitanism, or their acquisition of the proper entrepreneurial attitude as being dependent on their teachers' performance in the classroom. In the European case, the economic strength of the European Union and how it compares to the United States is often mentioned as being dependent on how the universities perform in the global competition. In the case of developing countries, it is often suggested that poverty, low productivity or a lagging economic growth are the result of low quality teaching in universities.

In conclusion, discussing constructivism as one school of thought among others, instead of the most advanced or most adequate, would allow teachers to freely combine their own accumulated experience with what they learn in pedagogy courses. Everyday problems they encounter, such as students' insufficient or fluctuating motivation, could be addressed in better ways if they were not required to use the constructivist paradigm as their only tool to enhance teaching. For example, addressing problems of student motivation – a strong point in today's systems of quality assurance – under the constructivist, reflective and student-centred perspective becomes a matter of teaching what students identify as significant for their future careers and personal development, instead of what the teacher as an expert considers interesting or important. These problems are also addressed through the application of participative methodologies that can actively engage the student. Moreover, teachers are instructed to adjust their course's methodology to the students' particular needs, constantly adapting their performance to students' responses using reflective practices. In sum, through the lens of student-centred education, the teacher carries the bulk of the responsibility for the students' motivation. The administration repeatedly asks students if a teacher and a class were motivating, while they train teachers on how to apply motivating strategies.

In contrast, the possibility of reviewing the latest research on motivation from across disciplines and perspectives would confirm to training teachers the complexity of the issue. The starting point could be to present student motivation as something that cannot be completely controlled by the teacher, in any situation and regardless of the group's attitudes and expectations. While motivation does affect cognition and can aid the learning process, research also shows that mental representations that people have of their goals – independent

of motivation – determine how hard they will work when faced with a challenge (Plaks, 2011, p. x). Research has also revealed how the use of extrinsic incentives in education may undermine intrinsic interest that students – or some of them – have to begin with. Hence, a system that cannot preserve students’ intrinsic interest may have a damaging effect in the long run (Lepper, Greene & Nisbett, 2011, p.102). Furthermore, the attempt to improve motivation with participatory exercises and group work should include an awareness of the possibility that they can reinforce social loafing. A number of studies have shown that this phenomenon – famously identified with Max Ringelmann’s rope-pulling experiments – is not limited to physical tasks. The effects that a group has on individuals’ efforts should be of interest to educators. Experts even consider it as a ‘social disease’ and point at the need to find ways of making groups intensify instead of diffuse individual responsibility when carrying out tasks (Latané, Williams & Harkins, 2011, p.340). In addition, it is also important to understand that motivation is not a guarantee that students will work in the best possible way for their learning process. Many times, as ethnographical studies have revealed, motivated students misdirect their efforts (Becker, et al., 1961, p.131; Nathan, 2005).

In sum, while good teaching is generally presented in quality assurance regimes as a set of proper strategies to be deployed in the classroom, through a virtual platform, or during the planning and design of any course or lesson, the reality in the classroom proves to be more complex. A good example is proposed by Collini and involves teaching the concept of constructivism to a group of students. An exercise in class could be done to explain the way knowledge has its limitations and is contingent. However, the understanding of this will most likely remain superficial. As Collini explains:

Education encourages the student to recognize the ways in which particular bits of knowledge are not fixed or eternal or universal or self-sufficient. That may be done about almost any subject-matter, though it can only be done through engagement with some *particular* subject-matter, not simply by ingesting a set of abstract propositions about the contingency of knowledge, and the more there already exists an elaborated and sophisticated tradition of enquiry in a particular area, the more demanding and rigorous will be the process of acquiring and revising understanding (2012, p.56).

What emerges from this brief exploration of the different perspectives, traditions and cultures in pedagogy and teacher training is that, contrary to the notions promoted by quality assurance about constructivism, student-centred learning, and teacher reflectivity being indispensable for proper teaching, there is an abundance of research and reflection among which these concepts are but one perspective or school of thought among others. The

fact is that teacher training, as promoted in the audit culture, is directed at securing teachers' acceptance of the chosen perspective as the only alternative, and to couple this acceptance with a perception that empirical expertise or experience in the classroom that might contradict these is inadequate. The characteristics of these concepts – namely, their emphasis on the continuous adaptation of the teacher and on loading more responsibility on the teacher than on the students – makes them clearly compatible with the values of quality assurance.

3.6. On evaluating teachers: Management in higher education

The sociologists of education, Ball and Popkewitz, applied Foucault's governmentality to the latest pedagogical reforms based on managerial concepts, and constructivism, reflectivity and student-centred pedagogy. Ball offers a critique of the managerial reforms in education, saying their neutrality is just apparent, as they aim to "control, classify and contain teachers' work towards the end of governmentality" (Ball, 1990a, p. 6). He considers management as a disciplinary technology, a form of bio-power that uses scientific categories and calculations to make individuals docile and pliable (p. 7). Management and pedagogy have provided the regime of quality assurance with the scientific categories needed. In the case of teachers, these categories can be observed clearly in the evaluation questionnaires. Academics, who were already being classified by a categorisation based on the impact of their scientific production in the market or in externally accepted measurements of relevance, are now also been classified based on the impact of their teaching on their students. Pedagogically speaking, a teacher can be classified as "reflective" or not, as "student-centred" or not, as a "life-long learner" or not. Management, in turn, has incorporated the categories provided by pedagogy and deployed them together with notions of continuous improvement and competitiveness in evaluation systems.

For Stephen Ball, management is a technology that has come to be seen as the only possibility for organisation in education. It now plays a key role in "reconstructing the work of teaching" by exerting power over teachers, excluding them from decision-making, intensifying their work, increasing control from above, imposing a top-down view as well as the interests of administrators, and gearing education towards an industrial and market logic of efficiency and competition in which teachers are there to be managed by specialists whose professional opinions prevail over those of teachers (1990b, pp. 153-157, 165; Tuchman, 2009, p. 26). To

this I would add that perhaps the most unsettling characteristic of quality assurance is that it is a top-down process that is not acknowledged as such. The 'talk of quality' describes a democratic process, backing this claim with mentions of its participative nature. In practice, quality assurance systems establish a mixture of "top-down institutional expectations" with "bottom-up delegation of responsibility". The situation generates tensions, conflicts and confusion in faculty members (Erickson & Wentworth, 2012, pp. 293-296).

Efficiency is treated as neutral and technical, while political and ideological issues are ignored by the managerial system (p. 154). For Ball, "management is, *par excellence*, what Foucault calls a 'moral technology' or a technology of power" (p. 156). Teachers' expertise is not what counts as legitimate judgement over the quality of a learning experience, as "the limits and possibilities of action and meaning are precisely determined by position and expertise in the management structure" (Ball 1990b, p. 157). The teachers in a quality assurance system become managed subjects who, if they oppose or question the control of managers, are considered a problem, stigmatised as irrational individuals (p. 158). Therefore, they also sometimes resist. This was illustrated in Gaye Tuchman's ethnographical study on an American university. She found how administrators criticised "recalcitrant professors" and saw them as hampering "progress" (2009, p. 26). As a result, many teachers resort to "ritual compliance", that is, to create an appearance of compliance in the eyes of managers, or to do the least possible in order to avoid getting in trouble while not taking the initiatives seriously (Tuchman, 2009, p. 109; see also Birnbaum, 2001; Lorenz, 2012; and Horrocks, 2006).

For Ball there is no question that the practice of appraisal that arose in the 1980's is about disciplining teachers. In order to apply quality control to teaching, teachers are made "calculable, describable, and comparable" through surveillance and tutelage (1990b, p. 159). A system is put in place that constitutes a technology of objectification based on ritual processes of appraisal (involving both student evaluations and sometimes personal confessions through self-evaluation questionnaires) and punishment (in the form of incentive systems that observe, incentivise, and shame). The process of evaluation becomes part of what are now accepted as good teaching practices. As Ball argues, this is how teachers are encouraged to accept appraisal as part of their responsibility as good and professional teachers, turning this into a process of subjectification in which the individual teachers work towards the modification of their own conduct (pp. 160-161). Through teachers' confessions and their acceptance of needing to improve and constantly acquire new skills, authority is vested on the managers who supervise the system and have the final saying about who improved and who did not. They decide who deserves a recognition, who deserves to be hired, who needs to be punished, who

needs a particular type of training and, most importantly, who has already been given enough chances to improve. In Foucault's terms, this practice of confession – required from teachers as well as students – is an act of avowal, “a verbal act through which the subject affirms who he is, binds himself to this truth, places himself in a relationship of dependence with regard to another, and modifies at the same time his relationship with himself” (Foucault, 2014, p. 13). It could be argued that in this exercise of avowal – that can be found in most teacher evaluation questionnaires – both teachers and students are encouraged to affirm their role as server and client but in a relationship of dependence to the management.

The teacher evaluation questionnaire is indeed an examination of the teacher, and as such, it has all the effects that Foucault described about examinations. It becomes a tool for the –continuous– classification of teachers, to make them governable and reveal who is docile; it aides in their subjectification, turning its results in a part of the identity of the teacher. It mobilises teachers towards teacher training, making them seek it as a free choice to aid the modification of themselves and their practice. This is in line with the current neoliberal governmentality, which as Rose (1996) explains, is about making choices, acquiring a lifestyle and investing in oneself in order to turn oneself into a project. Students, in turn, become the eyes of the management in the classroom, an essential part of a Panopticon (Foucault, 1977) and a continuous examination. The evaluation questionnaire is an examination, but it is also the most promoted instrument of reflection, or self-examination. As discussed above, teachers in training are taught how to apply reflective practices in their work. Although the reflective practices commonly introduced in teacher education are journals, autobiographies, and life histories, quality assurance has provided this other source of reflective practice, controlled, imposed and public.

Just as other tools that facilitate reflection, evaluation questionnaires generate considerable pressure and disempowerment for teachers. However, in the case of teacher evaluation, as used for quality assurance purposes, these tensions are magnified as the final purpose for their use is not merely the implementation of reflective practices in teachers, but the crude obtainment of positive scores from students evaluating teachers. As a result, the system is considered to fail if it is not producing the intended positive scores by providing data that teachers can use to make useful changes.

Academics have published results of empirical analyses that show how often teacher evaluation, as part of the quality assurance system, seems to generate uncertainty even among its promoters; it appears as imperfect and in need of much improvement. These experts would evidently not coincide with policy creators in thinking that teacher evaluations

are a straightforward matter. There are plenty of articles about the inaccuracy or inconsistency of teacher evaluation scores. Sometimes administrators complain about how these scores show almost no variation that could allow them to make differentiations between teachers and resort to assuming that “there is a difference between an 8.2 and an 8.5 and reify[ing] it”, and that “statistics have concrete social meanings” (Tuchman, 2009, pp. 132, 225-226).

Also symptomatic is the abundance of studies that aim at improving teacher evaluation with complementary processes or variations in its implementation. Often, in serious attempts at perfecting the practice, researchers recommend elaborate strategies encompassing a diversity of reflective practices that are said to complement for the weaknesses of the teacher evaluation questionnaire. For example, a recent study applied in an Australian university that expressively aimed at improving the strength of “quality statements around teaching and learning outcomes” for the “increasingly competitive” higher education sector, presented “an innovative and highly structured approach to gathering evidence of pedagogic practice from academic peer observers, students, and reflections on practice. Collating multiple perspectives on multiple instances of observed teaching a focused analysis is undertaken to provide an insight into development opportunities for a teaching culture and context” (Drew & Klopper, 2014, p. 349). In contrast to the highly detailed design of the observation apparatus proposed by the researchers, the conclusions of the study merely state that:

by adopting a structured teaching quality framework and a rigorous process to the application of peer observation data can be useful strategically beyond individual teacher development. The authors strongly recommend the value of this approach to enhancing the quality of teaching at both the individual teacher and at the organizational levels (p. 364).

The researchers in this project conducted, indeed, a very elaborate process. They started with a briefing to the observers about the learning objectives of the course, followed by a first observation by students and peers. This was then followed by a teacher reflection exercise, a second observer briefing, a second observation by students and peers, and another exercise of teacher reflection. At the end there was a collation, analysis and reporting of all the evidence (p.355). Students’ participation consisted of asking them to write a one-minute paper saying what they learned in the lesson, and respond 5 point Likert-scale questions identical to the ones used in the university’s teacher evaluation questionnaires. Thus, the amount of time and effort that the implementation of this “context sensitive” evaluation strategy would require is quite considerable, while student participation is still based on the categories compatible with the closed-questions questionnaire format.

From the above study emerges that evaluation questionnaires in quality assurance systems are used as a source of reflectivity for teachers, albeit flawed. Clues about their inadequacy can be found in several studies. One contribution focused on cruel remarks expressed by students on evaluation questionnaires. The authors analysed a sample of student evaluations from an American university and concluded that the presence of cruel remarks in them may be due to the anonymity of the process producing deindividuation (Lindahl & Unger, 2010), conducing students to morally disengage from the consequences of their actions. Abundant examples of students' cruelty in sharing opinions about their teachers can be found in other spaces that follow the logic of teacher evaluation, such as the web site "Rate my Professor" from the United States⁷¹. An example that also casts doubts on the potential of teacher evaluations to deliver what they promise comes from Latin America. A quantitative study based on teacher evaluation results from the Colombian *Universidad de Los Andes*, found a positive relation between grades and teacher scores in the teaching evaluation. The size of the class and the level of the course also affected the results of the evaluations, as well as the percentage of students who answered the questionnaire (Gaviria & Hoyos, 2008).

Another quantitative study found that individual students are not reliable evaluators because they are not consistent. They found that the highest evaluated courses did not coincide with their own perceptions of which were the best taught courses. Possible explanations the authors propose are that this might be due to the fact that students are forced to evaluate their teachers based on institutional criteria instead of on their own. Another explanation proposed was the tendency of students to rate their teachers based on their popularity instead of their teaching effectiveness; and another possibility suggested in the results was that students tended to better value courses with a topic or content they liked (Obenchain, Abernathy & Wiest, 2001). The main issue pointed out in this study is that we ignore what exactly the students are evaluating when they are asked to evaluate their teachers. The authors also invite us to wonder whether students "are able to evaluate teaching effectiveness based on their experience and expertise" (p.104). None of these issues are taken into account when a teacher evaluation system is set in place and encouraged by university managers, nor are they discussed with students when they are given the task to become evaluators and then presented with the results.

One aspect in which teachers have been evidently rendered governable is in the ways in which knowledge that stems from their own experience is relinquished in favour of what managerial truths say. Experienced teachers understand that learning and intellectual work

⁷¹ Available at: <http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/>.

can be unpredictable (Blackmore, 2009). They also know, through practice, that learning often requires time and particular conditions to become manifest. By evaluating teaching through indicators, audit presupposes that “immediate assimilability [is] the goal”, and ignores that “learning may manifest itself weeks, years, generations, after teaching, and may manifest itself in forms that do not look like the original at all” (Strathern, 2000c, p. 318). Indicators that stand for clarity in a lecturer’s performance have “the character of a time-less proposition”, and on the contrary, learning is “time-dependent”, and does not necessarily stem from clarity alone (p. 318). As a result, the focus on clarity in teaching may have an “oscillatory effect” that hides the real learning process, which depends and benefits from time. Indicators cannot capture aspects of learning such as “time-released knowledge or delayed-reaction comprehension” (Strathern, 1997, p. 320). Hence, a basic contradiction in the use of indicators for the evaluation of teaching is that they have a “time-less” logic but what they represent is time-dependent.

We observed how discussions about the complexity of the learning experience are often set aside perhaps because of the contradiction or inconvenience they represent to the practice of teaching evaluation and other quality assurance processes. Instead, what we find suggests that teacher training programmes aim at turning teachers into docile professionals. The preferred perspective on teacher education fits perfectly with the audit culture, which instead, would find too many complications if what was emphasised in teacher training was a complex and wider theoretical review of educational research that would underscore the academic’s experience as a teacher and expertise in his or her field of research. The aim is to focus on showing very concrete techniques whose application can later be monitored.

In the name of quality, the application of the combined techniques of teacher evaluation and teacher training contributes to maintain an effective system of control over university teachers, a governmentality that inspires their own submission to constant enhancement with the aid of the approved mechanisms. As a result of the development of quality assurance systems university management has been transformed into a profession (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p.243), while confidence on the capacity of academics to govern themselves has been lost (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p.242). Following the governing rationality of internal quality assurance, the university’s organisational life has become permeated with processes of control, and subjected to “administrative positivism”. What is said from a managerial framework – which, of course, has incorporated pedagogical concepts – acquires prevalence, and is more accepted than what a teacher can say from his or her own experience. Accreditation processes certify that a university or a program has put in place a quality control

system. The indicators checked include curriculum, research, facilities, and also teaching. The point in question is whether the institution can demonstrate that a system of control is defined and put in practice for the overview of every aspect of the work done in the university. This system should have clear steps and produce concrete information that can be accessed by those who are considered responsible to oversee the processes through a managerial standpoint. Key concepts – systems of truth – used in the audit culture as generators of new subjectivities in teachers emanate from two sources: pedagogy and management.

University managers contribute to generate a situation in which academics are neither totally dominated nor totally free. This “ongoing struggle within changing strategic spaces and power relations [is] the locus for the academic’s subject construction” (Krejsler, 2006, p.217). The continuous nature of this cycle of evaluation and training introduces teachers into a subjectivation strategy. It is not enough for a teacher to want to improve and remedy possible problems he or she encounters in teaching, this intention and the resulting improvement must be visible. By voluntarily being open to evaluation and then enrolling in specialised teaching courses that can certify their possession of specific skills, teachers follow what Tuschling and Engemann (2006, p. 464) describe as a characteristic of lifelong learning: self-assessment and self-profiling of the self, and the visible communication of new individual capacities. Official teacher training courses, as well as teacher evaluation questionnaires allow individual teachers to document their own life-course not knowing what can become an advantage and when (pp. 464-465). It can be concluded, thus, that evaluation and teacher training courses have become effective strategies of subjectivation for teachers in a neo-liberal regime. In fact, quality assurance is a clear example of how neoliberalism, as a form of governmentality, coexists with disciplinary and panoptic forms of power (Hamann, 2009). It defines good teaching and the good teacher, presenting these definitions as ideals to which teachers should aspire to. It enforces practices through robust managerial control that includes incentive systems and punishment. In a way, managers become sovereigns of the system. Finally, it applies panoptical strategies that use the eyes of the students in the classroom. The process through which the student’s collaboration is secured by the system of quality assurance will be discussed in the following chapter.

IV. Quality assurance and the construction of the client student

“I would hope the students I teach come away with certain kinds of dissatisfaction (including with themselves: a ‘satisfied’ student is nigh-on ineducable), and it matters more that they carry on wondering about the source of that dissatisfaction than whether they ‘liked’ the course or not” (Collini, 2012, p.185).

As outlined in the previous chapter, the transformations that universities have been through during the last thirty years have been analysed by several researchers. Some have described how the interactions between the market and universities have generated the trend of academic capitalism (Slaughter, Rhoades and Leslie), or how a culture of consumption and disposal has reached education (Bauman). Others have analysed how the audit culture – in the shape of quality assurance – has modified universities (Power and Strathern). Under the light of governmentality studies (Foucault and Popkewitz, among others) and the audit culture we see the mechanisms through which university teachers are subjectified, applying ‘truths’ from management and pedagogy. Often the main concern for those discussing higher education is the issue of costs. It has been argued that in the current context of escalating tuition fees, student centred learning risks becoming “customer-centred” (Education International, European Students’ Union & Lifelong Learning Programme, 2010, pp. 14-15), which implies that a university accommodates workload and requirements to the amount of work each student can and is willing to do. However, for the ‘transformation’ of students into clients, costs are not the main causal factor. In this chapter I will explore the reasons why students have to become clients to fit in the quality assurance framework, and the mechanisms through which they are given this new identity.

As presented above, there is a fair share of interesting discussions about how the latest higher education reforms affect teachers. On the other hand, there is not enough analysis about their effects on students. In this chapter I will focus on how students have been portrayed in the literature cited in the previous chapter, the assumptions that have been made about them, what has been taken into account and what has been missed. I will not delve into a distinction between the terms client and customer because both are liberally used in the documents and policies, and both words were alternately used by teachers as well as students during my fieldwork. Afterwards, I will present what ethnographic studies have revealed about

higher education students. Finally, I will propose a theoretical framework for analysing the effects that quality assurance processes have on higher education students.

As was also discussed above, the audit culture, in the shape of quality assurance, functions as a technology for the subjectification of teachers. Through its “rituals of verification”, university teachers learn they should want to become better teachers, they learn how to become student-centred, to perceive their students as clients, and what to do to satisfy their students. They also learn how to become life-long learners and reflective. Teacher evaluation makes teachers adopt a responsibility over the learning process of each of their students that filters out the institution’s and the student’s responsibility. The impact on learning that issues such as teachers’ working conditions, existing gender discrimination or racism in the classroom, class size or student culture, are all invisibilised. As a result, quality assurance eases the management of university teachers by making them believe they alone have the responsibility in making students feel satisfied with their education, and that they can always do so if they act in the proper way.

Another key element to keep in mind is that some elements of quality assurance processes are designed expressly to be visible to the students, and actively encourage their participation as a mixture of right and duty. Through the questionnaires students are given the right to be consulted, and simultaneously, they are given a duty to help the teacher to improve. Therefore, I suggest that quality assurance is also a technology directed at students; it constitutes the main mechanism through which they are encouraged to consider themselves as clients, aspire to seek feelings of satisfaction and believe that they can make – or have made – a convenient choice for their future careers.

To what extent and how the technology of quality assurance affects students has not been explored. Most of the research on higher education students tends to focus on policy issues, access, costs, investments, curricular changes, or the use of virtual education and its impact on students. When talking about students, most studies describe demographic characteristics of the student population or are based on opinion polls. In this, they completely coincide with quality experts who talk about higher education students in a very homogeneous way, rich in assumptions. Only very few researchers have tackled the subject of higher education student culture. They have revealed that higher education students are very heterogeneous groups that, nevertheless, share certain cultural characteristics that shape their perceptions on learning and their views on teachers. Both their differences as well as their similarities have a decisive impact on their learning experience. However, these complexities

are ignored perhaps because only a homogeneous image of students allows for the functioning of quality assurance's "rituals of verification", particularly teacher evaluation.

1. The student as a threat

Universities nowadays are supposed to visibly prove that they care for their students. This pleasing disposition should be evidently present in every action. They have to prove that when they make decisions they are keeping in mind their students' future employment as well as their current satisfaction in aspects ranging from intellectual to social activities and leisure. They should also prove that mediation is available between the students and the teachers, controlled by neutral third parties that are able to invert a traditional balance of power that used to fall in favour of the teacher and in detriment of the student. This seems to be all good news for the students. They rarely appear to be as part of any problem that faces higher education. However, in the quality assurance regime, students are in fact the greatest source of risk for the university.

An interesting insight can be derived from Power's (2010) theory on risk management. Universities apply quality assurance to aid their "risk management". In addition to internal actions, particularly the behaviour of teachers, a very important element to manage is students' opinions. In fact, the management of teachers is geared towards having an impact on students' opinions. In the current context, students – along with other "stakeholders" – are a threat in the eyes of the university management. As Power claims:

In risk management, the representation of stakeholders is emptied of moral content, and of any content in terms of the *rights* of individuals and groups external to an organization. Rather, the stakeholder becomes defined, represented, and instrumentalized as part of the expanded risk management mandate to process threats to the business (or project). In risk management thinking about stakeholders, the question is 'who might blame and thereby damage the organization?' Stakeholder perceptions, as proxies for society's expectations, must be taken seriously even if they are not accepted as true; false beliefs about the environmental and social impacts of corporate activity must be managed (Power, 2010, p. 138).

The above can be fully applied to the university environment. The student/client is referred to as another "stakeholder" of the university⁷² and therefore his or her opinions can

⁷² Sometimes students are referred to as stakeholders, as in the case of ENQA (2009) and some Bologna documents (see, for example, Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009). Other times they are referred to as

and should be managed. What the 'client' label suggests is that the student in the quality assurance regime is perceived as an "unpredictable consumer" (Power, 2010, p. 136) that represents a real and constant threat to the university as an organisation. Risk management generates a fear and organisational defensiveness towards the student, attitudes which the management try to impinge on teachers. Afraid of student's negative opinions, university managers want teachers to be cautious and preventive about this. Students are perceived as having the power to damage the reputation of the university, something that can easily be done through a participation in an opinion poll, in a ranking or accreditation exercise. Inevitably, students fall into "the dominant construction of the public within risk management [which] is hostile" (p. 200). Furthermore, as stated by Power (2010, p. 138), the veracity of their opinions, whether they are right or wrong, whether they make sense or not, is not important. Instead, what appears to be important is that quality assurance rituals allow the threat of a student's discontent to be directed at the teacher instead of at the institution, and in this way made more manageable in a quantitative, personalised and case by case basis. The institution, through the management, remains in appearance as a positive actor while the teacher absorbs the full risk of the blame.

Furthermore, in a context of quality audit and risk management, the practice of collecting students' opinions about their teachers through evaluation questionnaires is far from a strategy to empower them, as it is officially claimed, but instead a means to manage their opinions. The questionnaire is another strategy for bringing reputation under managerial control, a constant concern for organisations. Teacher evaluation also creates an illusion of being able to understand student motivations and desires as consumers. This can be compared with the effect produced by the earliest studies on advertisement in the United Kingdom. For Miller and Rose (1997) "they simultaneously rendered consumer choice in a free market intelligible in terms of a complex and hybrid array of individualized psychological factors, and suggested that these could be understood and engaged with in a calculated manner" (p.30). In addition, as the authors put it, this avalanche of consumer studies turned consumption and the consumer into a "legitimate and respectable object for knowledge" (p.30). This finds a parallel in the university, where the vast amount and accumulation of information about

clients but grouped together with other actors who receive the name of stakeholders, as in the case of the OECD (OECD, 1998) and Germany's *Akkreditierungsrat*, (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007b). Interestingly, this adds another layer of confusion to the status of students in quality assurance regimes. In official documents students appear sometimes as clients, other times as customers and/or as stakeholders. They are sometimes placed at the same level of importance as other groups considered stakeholders or clients (such as employers), or they are treated as a separate group with separate requirements.

teachers and student opinions is turning them into objects for knowledge. Through these acts of revealing and calculating students' supposed thoughts and judgements on their teachers two things may be achieved: students are turned into a controllable threat (one that is monitored in 'real time' and displaced from the organisation to the individual teacher), and are taught about what to consider important for their own pursue of personal goals and social acceptability.

This suggests that, like their teachers, students also fall in the position of managed individuals. Their input is sought in order to manage their opinions but also as a way of constructing their own perceptions. The questionnaire becomes a message for the student, which centres on telling them the university is willing to control its teachers for their good, that the university management always takes their side, and that they should help the management to successfully do it. At the same time, students are invited time and again to choose. Through their evaluation of teachers they can assert their choice of studying at a particular university, a certain programme or course, or with a teacher; or decide in what ways they want their teacher to improve. By presenting students with a set of possible choices, the evaluation questionnaire facilitates the management of their opinions, reducing the threat they represent.

2. Assumptions on higher education students

The reason why the threatening image of the student has penetrated and disseminated so well may reside in the fact that academics studying higher education reforms have not challenged quality assurance's dominant views on students. Frequently, documents include assumptions about student behaviours that have not been corroborated⁷³. Theories that denounce the commercialisation of higher education or the commoditisation of research do not contradict these assumptions, they take for granted that students embrace competitive practices and a market oriented mentality. For some researchers, at least "segments of the university, including faculty, administrators, and students, embrace market activity, while other segments are resistant (or neglected)" (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012, p.587). This might explain why, in the midst of criticism, the regime has still been able to flourish. Ambitious transformations

⁷³ For example, Schade assumes that higher education students in Germany are using the information generated by quality assurance processes, as customers, to make informed choices: "The expectation of more transparency has been met, however, since the *Akkreditierungsrat's* information on accredited programmes is increasingly used by 'customers' to make informed choices" (2007, p.193).

have been conducted under the assumption that they deliver what students want, essentially an education tailored to the job market both in form and content. It is clear these transformations have been imposed on academics who do not agree with them, but it is never considered whether this is also the case with groups of students also refuse them.

The critique of academic capitalism focuses on what universities do in their relationship with students, what they offer to them and what they tell them. They denounce that institutions see students as “targets for the extraction of revenue”, involving much more than their payment of tuition fees. It is said that universities have adopted “an economic, proprietary orientation to students [in which], the consumption versus the educational dimensions of a college education become increasingly emphasized” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.279). Universities use marketing in ways that serve their economic interests, they have a preference to attract economically privileged students – both from a wealthy background as well as professionals who return for graduate degrees – over others who remained underserved. They also market consumer capitalism to their students (pp. 279-304) through what Slaughter and Rhoades identify as “a (somewhat) hidden extracurricular course of instruction in consumption capitalism” and by turning them into technology savvy consumers of corporate products (2004, p.19). The authors here refer to the coupling of technology with education. In other words, students are led to encounter technology as a fundamental part of their education; having access to the latest technologies becomes equated to having access to a proper education.

To the above I would add another example in which universities market consumer capitalism to their students: the practice of requiring their participation in marketing research. For research on brands and perceptions of quality, researchers frequently conduct empirical studies with students as participants. In many of these studies, students are required to fill-in questionnaires that include the names of well-known brands listed together with hypothetical new products. This is the case in brand extension research. In one classic and often cited study from 1990, for example, 107 undergraduate business students from an American university participated by filling in questionnaires in which they shared their perceptions and evaluations of six real and very well-known brands and 20 hypothetical brand extensions. Significantly, the students had to participate in the study as part of a course requirement (see Aaker & Keller, 1990). This study also enlisted another 121 students for a second experiment. Another study, in 2006, was applied to 227 graduate business students in classroom settings (see Kalamas, Cleveland, Laroche & Laufer, 2006). Other studies also mention the participation of hundreds of – mainly business – undergraduate students completing questionnaires during class time in

order to help researchers understand consumer reactions to brands and brand extensions (Mao & Shanker Krishnan, 2006; Milberg, Sinn, & Goodstein, 2010). Innumerable examples of this practice can, of course, be found in the marketing literature, suggesting that, at least in some areas, it can be common practice to use the classroom as a convenient space to improve the science of selling products.

In addition to turning students into captive markets, and to forcing them to participate in marketing research, another way in which students are placed at the service of the market is as cheap or free labour. Internships place students in the position of low-cost or free labour for corporations. From this arrangement companies obtain the most advantage because they no longer have to invest in training programmes for new employees and test future personnel without incurring in costs (Perlin, 2012). In turn, the facilitation of internship placements by a university is presented as an advantage for students, portrayed as a lesson in real life – more valuable than classroom time – and an enablement of the proper and much needed entrepreneurial attitude. Internships become an apparent win-win-win situation. Arguably, there are sharp differences with respect to how much each part wins. In this arrangement, it is expected that students should have the greatest gratitude for the opportunity to enter the labour market.

Many messages available for students in the university emphasise market and prestige issues over access; and noninstructional services over educational (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.284). From the perspective of academic capitalism, when students enrol in a university they become captive markets, and when they graduate they are registered as “output/product, a contribution to the new economy” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.2). Hence, universities behave as marketers which “advertise education as a service and a life style” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.1), and accordingly, from this perspective students are seen as consumers who choose universities and majors based on their capacity to offer a secure return on their investment and on their closeness to the new economy (p.2).

But students are also described as defrauded consumers, passive, captive markets that are not better informed about a university but merely persuaded to buy (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 286; Giroux, 2007). They enter the picture in a very unfavourable position. The current promotion of costly expenditure in research and development – considered as an investment that can guarantee future and generous sources of income for the university – actively takes resources away from teaching while, paradoxically, students constitute a secure

source of income for the present⁷⁴. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) claim that a decrease in expenditures on teaching was due to an increase in expenditure on research, whereas Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) consider the decline of investment in education is due to an increased investment in “non-academic personnel and activities” (p.300), including managerial staff that, as stated before, has proliferated with the quality assurance regime. In the case of the United States, this unequal distribution of funds has been a trend for the last twenty-five years. Examples of academic services that have not received the same amount of financial support are advising and tutoring, hiring of new faculty, and reducing student/faculty ratios (Slaughter & Rhoades, pp.301-302), or increasing library holdings (Ehrenberg, 2003). Furthermore, Slaughter and Cantwell state that an unquestionable effect of the promotion of competitiveness is a steady increase in costs, which students have to absorb by paying higher fees that will not necessarily result in a better education for them. The paradox is clear: students have to finance elements that strengthen their university’s capacity to compete with other institutions but may have no impact – or can even undermine – their education. In Europe this competitive trend is creating the same effect. In spite of this being a context of greater public funding, the latest European reforms have included an agenda to market higher education to fee-paying students: “The Lisbon agreement calls for member countries to change funding formulas so that student fees represent a greater share of university revenues” (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012, p.599). As in the United States, in some European countries international students enter the picture as a sound financial alternative.

In addition to being made to pay for what they do not receive, and to pay steadily growing fees, students in the academic capitalism regime are also being given information – through intense marketing activities – that could be described as misleading and not for the students’ best interests (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.283). As Bauman states, in the liquid society university students stop being people to cultivate and become clients to seduce (Bauman, 2009, p.158). Evidently, universities are involved in that effort, they do not talk about their weaknesses or limitations, and as a result “imperfect consumer knowledge may derive from college and university marketing efforts that are aimed at influencing consumer choices” (Slaughter & Rhoades, p. 284). Universities find themselves in the same position as

⁷⁴ This has been a reality since the 1980s in the United States, where tuition fees paid by undergraduate students are the main source of income for universities (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 295). This is especially true in some fields, as in the case of Sociology, which during the 1970s enjoyed a golden era of abundant public funding for research that sharply declined in the following decade. Competition for students became fierce between Sociology departments, so much so that third world students were identified as a valuable and necessary input to the system (Park Turner & Turner, 1990, p. 194). Today, the competition for students remains intense and is coupled with the competition between programmes in the current commercialised context.

any business that is trying to sell a costly product. Marketing efforts are directed to convincing the buyer of the product's value, not of informing about its real qualities. A unique study, in which 48 American university 'view books' were analysed, revealed how universities engage in aggressive marketing. Their messages avoid important issues, such as the role of higher education in reinforcing democracy or the common good, or real social problems such as racism or gender discrimination. They also avoid giving key data such as tuition and other costs. Instead they create a fantastical image of college education, and focus disproportionately on campus beauty, student physical attractiveness, extracurricular activities, and fun. It was also revealed that students were enticed by conveying the message that everything would be centred on each individual student and his or her success and down playing the issue that individual work and effort, as well as a strong commitment, are also part of a good college education. Most universities refused to stay away from stereotypes and as a result view books seemed, on most cases, to be repeating themselves. The authors conclude that by avoiding discussions about the real purpose of higher education, view books portray college admission as a matter of selecting the most attractive offer, as a result commodifying college choice (Hartley & Morphew, 2008, p. 688).

Amplified coinciding with this view, Ritzer states that in the postmodern consumer society, the university is under pressure for being perceived as a "decrepit mode of consumption" that "does not do a very good job of allowing students to consume education" (Ritzer, 1998, p. 151). For Ritzer, the McUniversity is, in fact, the result of a forced adaptation of the university to a consumerist student culture and economic factors such as the decline of funding for higher education. According to him, the McUniversity is a more compact organisation that tries to lower its operation costs, and combines this with a major effort on attracting students through superficial, fun-focused offers, competing with other organisations with greater capacity to entice them. Indeed, in the United States this trend is clear. Universities consistently and increasingly spend money on the physical appearance of their campus in an effort to become more attractive to prospective students. The effort is not limited to renovating teaching spaces, it also includes the introduction of mall-like areas and modern sports grounds in campus, information technology and cable television in the dormitories (see Slaughter & Rhoades, pp. 298-299; Boyer, 1987; Rhoades, 1995; Collison, 1989; Tuchman, 2009). To do so, universities often enter in partnerships with private companies, including banks, which offer services for the student captive market, but also finance certain operations for the universities in exchange for direct access to students to offer them particular services (Slaughter & Rhoades, p.300). These expenses, in turn, contribute to

raising the cost of tuition, and limiting entrance to students from under-privileged backgrounds.

The McUniversity, described by Ritzer, tries to “script” professors – enforcing uniformity in lectures and ancillary materials – as a way of giving students “what they say they need and want, not what is part of some canon” (Ritzer, 1998, p. 158). What emerges in this view is that students are not asking for knowledge from their teachers, rather they are demanding standardised educational experiences, as well as value for money that can be guaranteed through a permanent adaptation of the university to the changing job market. In Bauman’s terms, students are seeking counsellors, not teachers (2009, p.162). Counsellors give people knowledge that is more like inspiration, they teach the ‘how-to’ kind of knowledge, and can help to reveal the inner riches the lie in the individual (pp.161-162). In fact, this idea is fundamental in the trend of lifelong-learning, where the individual enrolls in the continuous look-out for new, better, and more effective counsellors (p.162). Students, therefore, are not interested in acquiring knowledge, or anything permanent, they are searching for experiences that can reveal their potential to themselves and possible employers, and necessarily changing according to the circumstances that may appear. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) concur with this view, saying that the standardisation of teaching is done to allow for the possibility of education modules to be more interchangeable as well as those teaching them, turning the university into a more flexible organisation that can shift along with students’ desires and demands.

For Ritzer (1998) the issue is clear, “students (and often, more importantly, their parents) are increasingly approaching the university as consumers” (p. 151). He quotes articles and studies that confirm this consumerist orientation in students in the United States.⁷⁵ Ritzer’s perspective is based on serious assumptions about student culture. For example, he assumes that students always know what they want and actively demand it, that they will always prefer a modern and luxurious campus above other characteristics of a university, or that they do prefer “high tech” universities. Callinicos, in turn, mentions a practical issue that forces students to behave less like students and more like opportunistic consumers: the reality of the rise in fees has meant that students must increasingly work and as a result devote less time to their studies (2006). In turn, Bok argues that immersed in a competitive context, students “may well neglect other purposes of undergraduate education in their eagerness to

⁷⁵ See, for example, Levine (1993), who provides a list of services and conveniences that students claim they want from their university; and Plater (1995), who presents an issue of the journal *Change* with a text that aims at persuading academics to serenely accept the fact that students have become customers and need to be treated in that way.

take any course that promises to give them a competitive edge in the struggle for success and financial security” (2006, p. 282).

Alvesson also makes the assumption that students have become flexible – and defrauded – consumers when he explains mechanisms that form part of the culture of grandiosity. He mentions that universities develop “pseudo-events” that are “easy to grasp from the consumer viewpoint, but consumers fail to appreciate the pseudo aspect and accept them as genuinely important phenomena” (Alvesson, 2013, p. 16). He provides us with an interesting reflection about consumers that questions higher education quality assurance regimes’ emphasis on placing student opinions as guiding truths⁷⁶. Bok also considers that “if [students] are looking for anything, it is likely to be something that helps them find a job or reduce their college debts, not better courses in civic education, moral reasoning, or foreign cultures. What competition for students usually brings about are new vocational programs, merit scholarships, and tuition discounts...” (Bok, 2006, pp. 326-327). With this he assumes that because these kinds of decisions are claimed to have been reached through the consultation of students’ opinions, than they do reflect the latter. In addition, Bok argues that student and alumni satisfaction should not be interpreted as evidence of quality. He points out that:

“students are not infallible judges of their own learning, nor do they become so after they graduate. They can certainly recognize poor teaching, but, having experienced only their own college, they lack the comparative perspective to know whether they are receiving the best instruction – or even close to the best – that universities are capable of providing” (Bok, 2006, pp. 310-311).

Although Bok’s argument is convincing it may also lead us to conclude that students who have experienced different universities in different systems, and even different countries – as is the case for many nowadays – would be able to judge properly on quality issues. Is this a matter of how well informed or well experienced a student is in order for his or her opinion to be valid? Slaughter and Rhoades also reached the same conclusion as Ritzer, Bauman, Alvesson, and Bok, and believe that it is not clear whether students are in pursuit of quality education and may be more interested in consumer services and benefits that have little relation to educational quality or knowledge (2004, p. 302). The issue underscored here is

⁷⁶ “In his/her capacity as a central figure, the consumer is, however, highly controversial. Perhaps he/she is king, but is the monarch clever or stupid, directing actively or merely reacting passively? Is the consumer the incarnation of rationality: actively aware of his needs and wishes, capable of imposing efficiency and flexibility on various institutions as a result of his decisions in the marketplace and in quasi-markets? And can consumer choices overcome inefficiency and rigidity? Or is the consumer a typical example of amenability, a victim of power, manipulation, and limited rationality, permeated by illusions, wishful thinking with no sense of reality...” (Alvesson, 2013, p. 34).

whether we should disqualify or accept students' opinions as valid data for decision making. An interesting divergence from the stance presented in quality assurance policies emerges: while the policies advocate for the student's opinion as a guiding light for actions, these scholars seem to turn toward the opposite direction, they discredit this opinion based on the argument that students are no longer students, they are consumers.

Accordingly, other researchers assume that because the policies that turn students into clients exist, than students are most likely just passively following the trend, conceiving themselves as entrepreneurial customers and their teachers as service providers (see, for example, Liesner, 2006 and Pongratz, 2006, who describe the German case). Others claim that because protests are not massive or continuous, and actors in the university seem indolent and apathetic, there is a new kind of subjectivity already in place (Liesner, 2006, p. 493).

In sum, with the commoditisation discourse being so widespread, and with the conviction that it basically consists in giving students what they are demanding, it seems as if most if not all students, agree with the quality assurance regime. The critics of these reforms have failed to state that not only do these reforms, and some of their central notions, lack the full support of teachers, but they also encounter resistance from students.⁷⁷ By ignoring this,

⁷⁷ Some expressions of opposition to higher education reforms have in fact been quite visible. For example, in 2014 the International Student Movement organised a Global Week of Action from 17 to 22 November. It included protests and several activities to promote discussions around the slogan: "We are students; not customers". In Germany, there have been national education strikes at least since 2009, comprising of a diversity of actions. The main topic of the protests is to stand against the subjection of education to market forces, making it no longer a service for the common good and producing the escalation of tuition fees and privatisation (see: <http://www.bildungsstreik.net/>). In Great Britain, a strong wave of student protests took place in 2010 as a reaction to the higher education reforms. The latest reforms, in fact, produced the biggest student movement in Britain "for a generation" (Rees, 2011, p. 122). Students complained mainly against the escalation of tuition fees coupled with planned cuts to university budgets – especially for arts and humanities subjects –, but they also wanted vice-chancellors to "unite against threats to higher education" (Ismail, 2011, p. 127), indicating that these students had a sense that the conception of higher education was being modified in ways in which they did not agree. The student movement, both in Europe and the United states, vocally opposed "the way in which students are increasingly defined as consumers and as champions of 'choice' who use their 'buying power' to make an 'an investment' in their future by choosing the university that most appeals to them" (Kumar, 2011, p. 133). Students from low income families at the University of Limpopo in South Africa, also protested against reforms that depicted higher education as a market, advocated for an increase in tuition costs, altered their relations with staff, and perceived the student movement as a nuisance (Oxlund, 2010). Also, students from Germany, Austria, and Spain – supported by some members of Faculty – protested on the streets against the Bologna reforms in the autumn of 2009 (Anderson, 2008). The Bologna Process encountered resistance also in Greece, where the majority of academics expressed hostility to the quality assurance processes promoted by it. In this country the introduction of the reforms was also associated to the political dimension of embracing or rejecting the European policies (Stamoulas, 2006, p.437).

academics have themselves contributed to reinforce the sense of inevitability of the changes, the sensation that we are witnessing a transformation in the identity of university members, particularly students. It has become accepted that “student identities are flexible, defined and redefined by institutional market behaviors” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.2).

Researchers point out at students having a “consumer consciousness” evidenced by their practice of choosing universities and programmes on the basis of strategic calculations of investment and returns. And also in their expectations of obtaining a degree merely because they have paid for it. Although the rise in tuition fees, and added costs to higher education, can in fact have “heightened students’ and parents’ consumer consciousness about what they expect in terms of their educational experience and in terms of returns on investment in their human capital [...] reshaping student identity from that of learner to that of consumer” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p.12), this notion assumes a strong correlation between university costs and student identity. Should we expect, then, that lower costs in higher education produce a weaker “consumer consciousness” in students?

Evidently, quality assurance experts have re-named students as clients and successfully convinced academics of seeing them in that way. Pedagogy, as evidenced from the previous chapter’s discussion, has also contributed to turning students into clients. In the critical studies just described, the perception of students as consumers, or clients, oscillates between descriptions of them as savvy consumers and their portrayal as defenceless consumers who are being ‘scammed’ or mistreated: “in contrast to a market place defined by the metaphor of students as empowered consumers, the situation suggests a marketplace in which there are preferred, exploited, undervalued, and overlooked customers” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 295). In brief, since students are effectively labelled as consumers by the universities, they are perceived by these authors as just that: either partly responsible for the commercialisation of higher education because of their consumer choices, or victims that allow themselves to be seduced by crude marketing campaigns.

Nonetheless, how exactly are students interpreting the consumerist charged messages of higher education policies and media, and do they believe what is communicated in universities’ marketing strategies, are questions that have not been explored. Who is the student/client? What does he or she think about quality in a university and does she know what she wants, has he made a sound calculation of investment and return? Have all university students enrolled in a particular institution because they chose it carefully and after taking into

account all the available information? With what criteria do they evaluate a teacher or course? Students are portrayed as an easily fooled population, effortlessly swayed by information they read in brochures and newspapers, and then as simple and obedient ‘answering machines’ that fill-in evaluation questionnaires.

My main criticism of these portrayals of students is that instead of questioning basic assumptions about students made in quality assurance literature and policies, they reinforce them. I propose to enrich the critique on quality assurance and academic capitalism in higher education by adding an input from studies that have taken to analyse higher education student culture. This would counteract the homogeneous and passive view of higher education students, reveal that they are not devoid of a complex perception of these issues, and allow us to understand what appear to be their consumer oriented behaviour.

3. Student culture: Not just about academics, not merely calculations

Quality assurance systems in higher education rely on several key assumptions about student culture. Fundamentally, that students *know* what they want when they enrol in a university, that they *make informed and careful choices* when they select a university and always *prefer the most prestigious* institution they can enrol in, that they *know how* to judge their teachers, that they *want* to judge their teachers, and that they *want* to feel satisfied. This is accompanied by the belief that students benefit from a regime in which their teachers are rendered governable and where they are given a role in the production of examinations and confessions that sustain the system. The crucial importance that student culture has on learning in higher education is overlooked, as well as the possible tensions that the “culture of quality” might generate with a group of students’ specific shared values and beliefs. The audit culture, with its selection of managerial and compatible pedagogical concepts, has helped in developing a blind spot when it comes to cultural and sociological aspects of teaching/learning, reducing most issues to a matter of putting in practice tools or strategies.

Students’ pragmatic behaviour accompanied with an apparent consumer consciousness and the increasing costs they have to pay for higher education are all arguments used to support the repositioning of students as clients or customers. These are presented as new and dominant traits of today’s generation of university students. However, research on student culture tells us these pragmatic attitudes are not a new phenomenon, and neither are

they straightforward indications of an consumerist attitude to university. Although there are studies that have identified an instrumental conception of higher education in students, and blame it on the market and the prevailing managerialist discourse⁷⁸, most of them have not considered how this discourse interacts with students' shared beliefs and values, or what specific words mean for them.

The role of student culture is not taken into account in the quality assurance policies even though teachers –and students themselves– often identify stereotypical traits and habits students develop from their belonging to a specific group (for example, being hard-working in medicine, gregarious in Business Administration, politically active in Sociology, socially awkward in Mathematics, etc.). Although people will readily recognise these notions as stereotypes, they will also indicate some elements of truth that lie underneath. Some of these elements are what can be considered as student culture, which consists of “a set of perspectives held collectively, perspectives embodying agreements on the level and direction of effort students should put forth in their work as students” (Becker, et al., 1961, p. 217). Notably, in the quality assurance discussion about student needs, retention and satisfaction, there is a lack of attention to the different ways of being a student. Studies on cultural aspects of student life have the potential to reveal how problematic it is to assign a coherent role to the student in the quality assurance regime. This is particularly so because student culture also includes practices identified by Nathan (2005) as “college management” and “professor management”, and contains teacher stereotypes that create reputations through which students will judge faculty members (Becker et al., p. 291). Likewise, students collectively establish ideas regarding how to behave and please particular teachers (Nathan, 2005; Becker et al., 1961), and regarding how negative or capricious certain teachers are (Becker et al., 1961, p. 292). Students can hold negative stereotypes of some teachers even if outside of the classroom context they respect and have high regard for them (p. 293). Furthermore, student culture may vary not only between geographical areas, universities or disciplines, but also between years of study and individual groups, with teachers being able to identify a group's most salient traits (Becker, et al., 1961, P. 130). Student culture may also clash with the teachers' perspectives regarding what is useful or helpful for students (131). Through the filter of student culture – which quality assurance refuses to or cannot acknowledge – students make their individual decisions, interpretations, and expressions about university life and their

⁷⁸ For example, semi-structured interviews with Portuguese students uncovered conception of universities as service deliverers, students as their clients, and quality assessment processes as important for stratification, competition and certification in correspondence to the labour market (Cardoso, Santiago & Sarrico, 2012, p. 292).

teachers. The weight of student culture can be very strong for individuals in a very cohesive group that shares common problems, interacts intensively, and/or shares a common environment (Becker, et al., 1961; Nathan, 2005).

Rebekah Nathan (2005) conducted one of the most in-depth studies of university students that are available. She focused on Freshman year – first year – students in the United States, living in university dormitories. After her year-long experience living with students in the “dorms”, she uncovered ideas and values prominent in student culture that greatly affect the quality of the learning experience but are completely ignored by the management of the university. The ethnography also contains insights on how university policies, administrative and quality assurance measures, interact unpredictably with student culture, producing unforeseen behaviours and unexpected interpretations by the students. Her study uncovers many contradictions between uncontested truths promoted by the audit culture in higher education and student values and behaviours. Above all, Nathan remarks that the role that academics plays in student culture is generally overestimated. As a result, the impact of teachers and classes on student life and decisions is magnified. Perhaps this basic misunderstanding by university administrators about student decision-making strategies, which evidently is not a new occurrence, has never had as strong consequences as in the era of quality assurance, when more and more decisions are being taken based on this limited view.

Another significant study that aimed at revealing aspects of student culture was conducted on American medical students in the 1950s. Based on a mix of the ethnographic method and quantitative data it found several traits that may sound familiar to current higher education students. Much like today’s students, medical students from the 1950’s were faced with decisions about how much and when to study which did not derive from the formal instructions given to them by their teachers or the university. The researchers found that their decisions were influenced above all by a shared student culture that defined the quantity and quality of their efforts (Becker et al., 1961).

Researchers have also examined student culture and its influence on student’s success and their adaptation to the university. Nathan, for example, found that contrary to the assumption that student retention rates are boosted by increasing contact time between professors and students, and by providing faculty counsel and advice for freshmen, it is interaction and support from fellow students that has more importance for students to remain in the university after the first year (2005, p. 140). Other study pointed at the existence and

impact of the “institutional habitus”⁷⁹ over, among other things, the students’ “attitudes towards learning and their degree of confidence and entitlement in relation to academic knowledge” (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, p. 109). This implies that attitudes to learning are not just a result of individual choices but are collectively shaped and unique to each institution. It could be said that institutional habitus can also vary within an institution and be particular to a Faculty or even a programme.

Student culture is also the result of other variables that shape students’ lives, subdividing the student population and impregnating their university experience. In some countries race has a decisive role in the way students will perceive their education and the kinds of obstacles they will face (Nathan, 2005; Garrod, Kilkenny & Gómez, 2014). In other cases a crucial element that shapes student culture and identity is the history of a country and its higher education.⁸⁰ In other contexts, social class constitutes the pivotal variable. A study based on Canadian university students, revealed how social class is an important factor that has an impact on what students expect from a university education (Lehmann, 2009, p.146). The study reveals students’ instrumental attitudes about university. It also shows working-class students “approach university with an ethos of vocational education [...] more likely to insist on learning useful skills, becoming credentialed, gaining an advantage in the labor market, and getting their money’s worth”. In the case of middle and upper-class students, “university is more a rite of passage and a necessity to maintain their class position. Value for money is less important not only because university is a relatively lower financial burden, but also because they come to it from an already advantageous class position” (Lehmann, 2009, p.146). Several studies show how in the United States and the United Kingdom students from a working class background tend to feel less entitled to their university education, have more trouble feeling that they belong or fit in, and tend to “choose” universities where they will find other working class students (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, p. 109). Working class students will not even try to apply to elitist universities. The problem of not “fitting in” could be a very important reason that explains why universities with the highest inclusion rates also have the highest drop-out rates, at least in the United Kingdom (Higher Education Statistics, 2008).

⁷⁹ According to the authors, this “institutional habitus” is constructed from a university’s position in the rankings, its curriculum offer, organisational practices and “expressive characteristics” (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, p. 109).

⁸⁰ This is the case of university reforms in South Africa. When quality assurance and competitiveness discourses were used to implement changes in the higher education system, social and historical issues that defined higher education student identities were overlooked or downplayed. The inadequateness of the term client seemed obvious for the students themselves (Oxlund, 2010).

When solutions to decrease drop-out rates are discussed in the quality assurance framework, student culture – and its interactions with race and class – is not considered. Instead, there is a focus on issues of flexibility in the curriculum, provision of special pedagogies to tackle deficiencies in basic skills, and even creation or improvement of services and amenities. Contrary to these propositions, an empirical study revealed that a reinforcement of the learner identity instead of a flexibilisation of demands and study regimes functions as a better student retention strategy. In universities where working class students are numerous, these tend to display a more strategic attitude. In contrast, universities where the student population was composed mainly of middle class students had a more demanding study regime, and the assumption that students should be studying full-time instead of getting jobs prevailed. This environment tended to diminish the importance of social class, making learner identities become more important than social identities (Reay et al., 2010, p.113), and as a result, working class students developed a greater sense of entitlement to their education⁸¹.

Needless to say, student culture and shared beliefs of what university education should be like also determine greatly students' perceptions of quality in a course. Nathan observed a class that students considered to be the perfect class and discovered it had an "antiestablishment, edgy feel" while pedagogically speaking it was mediocre. The class was in harmony with student culture, containing "the proportion of social versus academic content that [students] believed their learning to comprise [and] a context for learning that was 'fun', irreverent, and separated, both geographically and ideologically, from the formal aspects and authority of campus" (Nathan, 2005, pp. 105-106).

Another important element to consider about student culture is that it does not start and end in the university. Studies have revealed that higher education students, at least in the European case, have important commitments outside of their university responsibilities. The

⁸¹ Other variables that determine how much influence the learner identity will have on students are if they live at home or not, and how involved they are in the labour market. The study also found marked differences in how intellectually challenging the students perceived their courses to be (highest in the most elite universities), how much independent study the students were required to do as a result of a lack of personnel and resources (highest in the most working class universities), how much effort should be put in course work (highest in the elite universities), whether the student identity was their main identity or not (being their main identity in the elite universities), and the reality of working class students needing to work and tend to other responsibilities that take time away from course work in the least privileged universities, while they tend to be more devoted in the elite universities (Reay et al., 2010, pp. 114-118). The authors found there is a tendency that the better resourced universities have the more confident and committed learners (p.119), while the least resourced receive students with a lower academic self-esteem (p. 120). Fitting in becomes problematic because in contexts perceived by the students themselves as being "second class", it encourages "academic complacency and a lack of challenge" (p. 120).

negotiation between these competing demands has an impact on learning, linking it to the life course of the student, and his/her identity and its shifts (Tobbel, O'Donnell & Zammit, 2010, pp. 276-277). This suggests that success in learning also depends on variables that lie outside of the university's scope and the teacher's control.

Placing significant doubts on a quality assurance idealised image of students as choosing and informed clients, which is often used to justify its policies, empirical studies show that students do not always choose their university based on careful "value for money" calculations. It also emerges that elements that fall outside of a university's control, such as race or social class have decisive impacts on student's university experience and on their perceptions, and perhaps a much greater impact than the strategies developed especially for assisting them. They also show how important students' shared beliefs about learning and their teachers are decisive in the way they will evaluate their work.

3.1. Low skills and grade inflation

Again, a point in question in the midst of the massification of higher education is how to retain students that seem to be ill-prepared for university education or face special difficulties as well as a lack of motivation to stay. Empirical studies on student culture do reveal traits and practices that seem to confirm worries expressed by academics, both young and seasoned. For example, an increasing proportion of university students in the United States have inadequate prior knowledge, lack aptitude for studies, and are not really interested in their studies (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Furthermore, the reasons why they claim to be enrolled in a university range from not having a job and seeing higher education as something to occupy their time, doing it because other people are doing it, or doing it because they do not want to be left out of the "knowledge society" for not having enough education, or even because it is a way of securing a job that is 'not too bad'. For others, it is simply a way of securing a job that previously did not require a university degree (Bok, 2006, p. 2). According to Bok, in the United States "since 1970, the percentage of freshmen who rate 'being very well off financially' as an 'essential' or 'very important' goal has risen from 36.2 to 73.6 percent, while the percentage who attach similar importance to 'acquiring a meaningful philosophy of life' has fallen from 79 to 39.6 percent" (2006, p.26). This could be interpreted precisely as a new consumerist attitude, but it could also be interpreted simply as a lack of interest in something young people feel they *have* to do.

This unfortunate reality is sensed by university teachers. According to Arum and Roksa (2011), 40% of college faculty believe that most of their students lack basic skills required for university level work. This variation in student abilities and interests makes it difficult for teachers to provide a satisfactory classroom experience. Furthermore, the drive for internationalisation introduces other significant variations, such as a lack of language proficiency, a significant difference in basic education contents, and marked differences in specific cultural expectations. This situation means that many university students could be expected to fail in their effort of obtaining a higher education degree. However, this is far from true. Students lacking basic skills, and who do not have a clear purpose and motivation to study, are evidently being able to graduate. In fact, in case of failing to do so, the quality assurance regime does not interpret this as necessarily the student's fault but blames it on the university's lack of support or inadequate teaching.

This phenomenon, in which the number of students failing does not reflect the number of students who would be expected to fail, has been identified as grade inflation. The issue has been described not only anecdotally. It is possible to find a variety of empirical studies that have taken a systematic look at the problem. Several have provided good evidence of grade inflation in the United States (see Abbott, 2008; Bar, Kadiyali & Zussman, 2007; Beito & Nuckolls, 2008; and Gose, 1997). These studies consider grade inflation as having occurred when the elevation of grades in a student population coincided with no other indication of any improvement in the students' capabilities. Another study defines grade inflation as "the steadily improving performance of college students as reflected in the grades they receive despite their poorer academic preparation for course work at this level" (O'Halloran & Gordon, 2014, p. 1006), despite evidence of no proportional increases in achievement (for example, in standardized achievement tests), or of no increases in students' academic expectations. For the researchers, whenever an elevation in grade point average can be observed along with evidence of students being increasingly disengaged from educationally purposeful activities (such as time devoted to study), this elevation of grades indicates a lowering of standards (p.1007).

O'Halloran and Gordon (2014) uncovered the following causes for the occurrence of grade inflation:

1. First of all they identify the regulatory environment of increased accountability as an incentive for grade inflation. Its calls for the maintenance of "output goals" such as graduation rates, post-graduation job attainment and graduate school attendance, put

pressure on teachers who conclude that by refraining from giving higher grades to students they may damage the attainment of these goals.

2. Another cause is identified in the competitive environment. Everything is compared in order to encourage improvement in those with the lowest scores in any indicator, including grades. When one institution gives generous grades, the other ones do the same thing.
3. A simple reason lies in policies that allow students to withdraw classes and allow them to do so when they obtain poor grading results.
4. Another cause, which has been analysed in detail, is the practice of teaching evaluation.⁸²
5. There are departmental level factors: “The highest grades typically are awarded in courses in the humanities, business, many social sciences, and education, whereas grades in the hard sciences, economics, and engineering tend to be lower” (p.1011). These could also be seen as cultural factors that respond to stereotypes of difficult or easy topics or disciplines.
6. There are also factors consisting of individual characteristics of teachers and their interpretation of rules. One of them is the instructor’s status: “Among tenure-track professors, those with lower status and with less secure positions are more likely to award higher grades than higher status teachers with tenure” (p. 1012) (a study that shows this is Moor and Trahan, 1998;). From this the authors deduce that “the increasing reliance on non-tenure track faculty who may be terminated easily (e.g., adjuncts, instructors, or part-time lecturers) has fuelled grade inflation” (p. 1012). Another factor has to do with the application of grade distribution rules that promote “particularistic practices” meaning students should be evaluated according to their personal characteristics and circumstances. In practice this results in teachers simply improving the grades of students who did poorly. Conflict avoidance is another factor. When instructors know that a poor grade can initiate a conflict, he or she will tend to avoid it by giving a higher grade than what is deserved by the student. Studies reveal that “students tend to overestimate the grades they will receive” (see Nowell & Alston, 2007), and “believe that their proclaimed level of effort should be given significant weight in determining their course grade” (p. 1013). With these beliefs

⁸² In this matter there are several studies that reveal how the practice of student-teacher evaluation does influence grades. There are cross-sectional studies (see, for example, Eiszler, 2002) as well as longitudinal studies (see, for example, Clayson, Frost & Sheffet, 2006) that show this correlation. Another study found that, although teaching evaluations had an impact in grading, in contrast they had a weak relation to student learning (Johnson, 2003).

being part of the student culture, a low grade has indeed the potential of becoming a source of conflict. Consequently, instructors who give a low grade need to carefully justify it and be prepared to face the student's – and sometimes their parents' – discontent.

7. The lack of attention to cheating is another cause presented by the authors (O'Halloran & Gordon, 2014, pp. 1008-1013).

What is most significant in the above list of causes for grade inflation proposed by O'Halloran and Gordon (2014) is that most of them are a product of, or are reinforced by, quality assurance processes. For Alvesson (2013), grade inflation is a result of the consumer orientation in which satisfied students are a benchmark. He also sees it as a response from universities to students who have become tactical consumers of education, forced to be so by the uncertain value of degrees from non-elite institutions coupled with the competition for attractive jobs. For Alvesson, universities strive to retain these tactical consumers and one way to do so is through grade inflation (p. 93). He sees devastating consequences of this practice that produces "poor and unreliable feedback that reinforces rather than corrects exaggerated self-images in which students regard themselves as clever and destined for high-status jobs" (2013, pp. 87-88). In this view, students are presented as opportunistic and deluded individuals who shop for degrees according to their own convenience and responding to a strategy for job placement. Once again, the university is seen as merely responding to this trend in order to survive in a competitive context. Ritzer coincides with these authors and believes that with the aim of retaining students, universities will deepen the trend of grade inflation and eliminate any possibility of dropping or flunking out in order to allow for the consumption of education. He claims that "the objective will be to eliminate as many barriers as possible to obtaining degrees" (1998, p. 156). Evidently, quality assurance policies do not state that universities should effectively be granting degrees to students who do not deserve them. However they do seem to have this effect by encouraging an intensification of grade inflation.

3.2. Students, “college management” and “professor management”

Closely associated with the problem of low skills and low motivation is students’ tendency to organise academic work in a way that requires the minimum effort needed to obtain the degree. There is a majority of students who have low levels of commitment with their education, choosing not to attend lectures and making a minimum effort (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010, p.112). These students display a strategic attitude to learning (p. 113) based on how to obtain the best results with the least effort. Essentially, studies on student culture from different places – and years – reveal that students have a strategic approach to university demands. Their efforts are seldom the effect of an individual’s own calculations in solitaire, neither are they the result of a teacher’s performance in class or a university’s rules. The way students deal with their day to day tasks and challenges is the result of a mixture of collective beliefs and behaviours, as well as of a group’s accumulated experience.

Here I recall the study on medical students in the United States in 1950s. Extensive participant observation revealed how the students, as a group, go through several stages in their perception of their education. They started with an initial perspective of having to make an effort to “learn it all” in order to be successful in medical school, to a provisional perspective of realising that “you can’t do it all”, then to a perspective based on what consensus the groups create for each occasion, and finally to a perspective based on “what they want us to know” (Becker et al., 1961, pp. 107-157). The results revealed how in a group of students that go through the same experiences together during their Freshman year, there are changes in the way they interpret their education, their obligations, and the level of effort that should be put in and when. Furthermore, these convictions did not stem directly from what the professors told the group to do. They included idealistic perspectives that they had before they started their studies, and collective solutions they arrived to together as they were forced to solve the problem of passing tests and remain at the university. The different perspectives depended on the year they were placed and the major landmark challenges they had to face.

The initial “learn it all” (Becker, 1961, pp. 92-106) phase was based on the beliefs they brought to medical school as individuals. Even though the students found themselves overwhelmed with work and unable to achieve their aim of learning everything, they considered this overload as a normal part of studying medicine, and not as something for which to blame the faculty (p. 102). During this phase they also believed that everything they

were taught was relevant for their future practice (p. 108). The second stage was a collective development. The researchers called it the provisional perspective, which can be described as “you can’t do it all” (pp. 107-134). The acquisition of the new perspective stemmed from the taking of tests, that led them to conclude that the faculty would be “out to get them” (p.109). In this stage they even resorted to studying what they considered was unimportant because they thought it could be included in a test. During this “provisional perspective”, a temporary transitional perspective between the initial one and their final views, students also reflected in a more strategic way on how to focus their efforts. This perspective led students to create their own ‘classification’ of courses depending on the kind of challenge each one presented. They identified two types of courses. One was the “big, tough, important” course, which involved a lot of work and material to learn, and required a lot of independent work for the student. The other type included organised material and manuals. This second type of course was referred to by some students and faculty as “spoon-feeding”, which had both defenders and detractors. “Faculty proponents of spoon-feeding say there is so much for students to learn that this is the only economical way to teach them. Those who favour the detailed style believe that students must be taught to think and that having them organize a mass of material for themselves is the way to do it”. (p.110). Finally, in what the researchers called “interaction and consensus” as final perspective, the students reached a final consensus in which they decide as a group what and how to prioritise in their studies. In brief, the final perspective is described by the researchers as “What they want us to know”. Through their experience, students that belonged to fraternity groups, because of their closeness, reached this conclusion first, while the independents took longer to reach it, resisting for a while and trying to keep learning what they felt was important for their future practice. Once again, this makes clear how group identity, accumulated experience and common beliefs have a decisive role on student behaviour and attitudes towards their academic work.

Both Nathan (2005) and Becker et al. (1961) found that the level of effort and the direction it is given is collectively set by groups. Again, a very important aspect of student behaviour is what Nathan refers to as “college management”. The university dedicated efforts to teach students “time management” skills, with the belief that these could guarantee a better success at combining academic work with social life (2005, pp. 110-111). Time management was introduced as the key to success. Instead, students opted for “controlling college by shaping schedules, taming professors, and limiting workload”; they preferred “college management” over “time management” (p. 113). While the system provided and defined a set of choices with the students’ wellbeing in mind, the students chose according to

their own priorities and created, within the system, a different set of choices. Along with registering classes to fulfil requirements, students sought a delicate balance between easy and demanding courses, a schedule that would fit into certain hours of the day and certain days of the week, and a convenient proximity of the classrooms. On-line courses, originally designed for external students, became a very popular option for those living on campus due to their adaptability to any schedule. Hence, when giving students the opportunity to choose, they do so following their own priorities, which are not necessarily educational. Their tendency to practice “college management” can lead them to strategically choose courses based, for example, on the convenience of its assessment method (see, for example, Harrison & Mears, 2002, p. 105).

This instrumental approach to college can also extend to the relationship of students with teachers. Nathan described “professor management” (2005, p. 116) as a strategy consisting of giving professors what they want in exchange of special treatment. Students expressed that they wanted “career advice, information, recommendations, and As”⁸³ from their professors, while they barely mentioned “learning and discovery” (p. 117). They compared the student-teacher relationship with a “boss-worker relationship” (117) and claimed that getting good results is a question of giving teachers what they want.

Many times the students’ financial situation and the stress brought about by rising tuition costs that result in them being forced to work are mentioned as the root of students’ instrumental attitudes to their university education, and as a reason to dedicating not enough time to their academic work. As Nathan points out, there are in fact political-economic forces that affect the amount of time a student can dedicate to academic work. An increase in tuition fees can indeed increase the amount of hours that a student must work, decreasing in turn the amount of time available for course work. Furthermore, high fees develop into high debt for students who, as a result, make their degree choices preferring those fields that guarantee a well-paid job in the future (Nathan, 2005, p. 151). However, this conclusion can also be misleading and cannot be generalised. First of all, it cannot be assumed that students only work out of necessity, that only those who have financial needs resort to work while they study. Also, the strong focus on tuition costs overlooks other aspects that also reinforce the client or customer identity. The forced conclusion would be that if the student does not need to pay a lot of money, he or she will not feel like a customer or adopt consumerist attitudes to education, and vice versa, when a student has to pay a lot of money this will inevitably generate a consumer attitude and pragmatic approach to higher education. If paying was so

⁸³ An A is the highest grade in the American grading system.

decisive for the development of a pragmatic approach to higher education in students, one would perhaps find a pattern in which students in Sweden and Denmark would have a markedly opposite attitude from American and British students. And there would be very different levels of pragmatism between students in private and public universities in Latin America. An issue that is overlooked in some contexts, for instance, is that the money used to pay university fees does not always come from the student or his/her parents. Many students have scholarships or are financed by a relative who is in a better economic position and will not demand money repayments (in the case of Latin America this is not uncommon). In addition, as seen in the studies discussed above, the same pragmatic attitude that Nathan defined as “college management” and “professor management” was displayed by the medical students from the 1950s, indicating that pragmatic – often identified as consumer – attitudes are not a phenomenon of the current situation.

In sum, student culture is shaped through day-to-day problem solving and long term goals that a collective of students has. It changes through time and varies in strength. Thus, research on student culture casts doubts on ideas about individual teacher performance and individual student motivation and needs as the decisive element that predicts how much effort a student will invest in his or her education, or how successful the learning experience will be. Behaviours and opinions that can be perceived as evidence of a “consumer consciousness”, client-style demands, lack of motivation or an apparent clarity of what students want from their teachers and the university, can in fact belong to a very specific discourse grounded on cultural values shared by a specific groups of students. It is not possible to understand the “truths” students have created about university lives or teachers simply by asking them to fill in a standardised questionnaire. An effort to improve quality focused on individual teacher performance that, in addition, turns its back on understanding student culture and engaging with it, would necessarily conceal instead of reveal important issues on teaching and learning. If this is the case, several other notions from the quality assurance perspective are also erroneous, such as that of pretending to answer individual student needs, as views on quality are collectively generated. Another evident error, especially in internationalised universities, is the effort to standardise teaching practices. Teaching in a group with a very homogenous student culture would necessarily be a very different experience to teaching in a heterogeneous, mixed, or “internationalised” programme, a challenge that university professors increasingly deal with but that quality assurance managers do not acknowledge.

4. *The client student is the invisible student*

“Without beating about the bush, we might say that, in the past, working-class children attended elementary school before proceeding to low-paid, low-status jobs, while today they have higher education (and student loan debts) before they get a similar job. [...] Maybe we can speak of a *higher education proletariat*” (Alvesson, 2013, p. 91).

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that students’ experience of university depends on a common culture they develop through peer interaction, which determines their motivation, sense of entitlement, work ethic and, of course, their perceptions of quality. Quality assurance system’s assumptions that students choose a university based on available quantitative data on the university, cost-benefit calculations in relation to their investment towards the obtainment of a degree and the degree’s future potential in the job market, or on the registered performance of professors, appears evidently flawed. Hence, quality assurance’s view of student satisfaction as an indicator of quality is clearly problematic. In fact, instead of helping teachers and academic authorities to become more familiarised with student’s perceptions of quality – regarding the university as well as their teachers – quality assurance is effectively concealing these perceptions.

An empirical study that focuses on students in the quality assurance regime urges because their supposed beliefs, interests and behaviours have been placed at the heart of the justifications for the application of quality assurance. The problem of claiming to do everything “from the perspective of the clients – the students” (OECD, 1998, p. 13), is that obtaining this perspective through quality assurance mechanisms generates too many assumptions. These assumptions have not been contradicted or questioned even by quality assurance reforms’ main critics. To begin with, it is assumed that students have a “consumer consciousness”; that they know exactly what they want; that they tell university managers what they think through brief interviews and questionnaires; that they are all looking for a risk-free, fast, and direct path towards a precise job; that they perceive their teachers as deliverers of a service; that they have clear opinions about teachers; that they need mediation between them and their teachers; that, as clients, they are always right; and many more assumptions.

Thus, the client/student is treated as a threat or a source of risk to be managed. In doing so, the real student has become invisible. Based on the reviewed literature it is evident that teachers in the quality assurance regime are managed individuals, encouraged to participate in a process of subjectification through audit culture’s “rituals of verification”. I

consider the practice of teacher evaluation as the main ritual to examine because it directly involves the participation of students. This practice is officially presented as a helpful tool for teachers, to assist their improvement, but evidently having students' opinions recorded and 'analysed', as well as seen by others for the purpose of comparison, and compiled as evidence in evaluation and accreditation processes, gives them a whole new level of meaning. For the teacher, these statements become part of a data base, they become evidence that can re-emerge and be examined by someone else in the future and for purposes unbeknown to them. For students, I believe this is also their entrance into the quality management apparatus. Through the questionnaire, their opinions are canalised, possibly given entirely new meanings, moderated, and repositioned, as transparent information, outside of their "social life". The quality audited university is, therefore, one where both teachers and students are being controlled and fabricated, crafted⁸⁴, imagined, and subjectified. In the case of students, it is through these rituals that they are turned into clients.

⁸⁴ Here I draw parallels with Kondo's (1990) ethnography of a Japanese Ethics School, where different rituals were promoted by the institution to produce in workers an identity of surrender to constant improvement and externally-imposed goals, which the ethnographer describes as "crafting selves". The final goal was to produce self-sacrificing and obedient individuals. In the quality assurance regime, a lecturer who is open to "continuous improvement" should be open to continuous testing and direction, and surrender to the challenge of being approved by his or her students in every single course taught. This climate has the potential to produce a "reformulation of the academic habitus" (Garratt & Hammersley-Fletcher, 2009), making it more open to direct control.

V. Research questions: The problem of quality assurance in higher education

Have students developed a client identity? Have they developed a 'consumer consciousness? Educational policy papers that support the latest reforms, such as the Bologna Process, say they have. And many critics of these policies and transformations do not deny it. My empirical analysis is aimed at exploring these questions through two specific cases: Philipps-Universität Marburg, and Universidad Centroamericana in Managua. The exploration is encased on the fact that both universities participate in a global trend in higher education expressed tangibly in processes of evaluation, accreditation, and the closely linked practice of feeding and consulting national, regional and international university rankings. These issues have been critically analysed from different perspectives, each one delineating clear theoretical avenues through which the phenomena can be understood. The following frameworks have been described in the previous chapters: 1. The contributions of Michael Power and Marilyn Strathern, who coined and described the concept of 'audit culture' and the 'tyranny of transparency' it establishes; 2. The studies on governmentality – initiated by Michel Foucault –, which applied to education (by Ball and Popkewitz, among others) have been important among European social science scholars to analyse in particular the trend of 'life-long learning' as a tool of governmentality in European countries; 2. And the detailed descriptions of the corporatisation of universities, being of greatest relevance the analyses contributed by American academics Susan Wright, Chris Shore, Sheila Slaughter, Gary Rhoades, and George Ritzer. All these perspectives have helpfully pinpointed pernicious effects of current managerial trends in higher education, especially on the transformation of the academic's habitus, of the university as a workplace, of the re-shuffling of power relations in universities, issues of trust, and the transformation of the university as an organisation with a greater market orientation, and a greater necessity for legitimation in society – as its reputation of being the provider of a public good is questioned by other social actors.

As described in previous chapters, significant advance has been achieved by different researchers within each of the frameworks cited above. However there is still plenty of room – and need – for the conduction of empirical analyses. It could be argued that given the closeness to the researcher of the organisation under study – and for that matter, of the

subjects coming under scrutiny –, few attempts have been made in bringing these reflections to the field, and putting them to the test by conducting research among colleagues. Furthermore, as surprising as this might seem, a greater gap exists regarding research on students. Apart from Rebekah Nathan's (2005) *My Freshman Year*, and Becker's et al. (1961) *Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School*, both comprising of extensive interviewing and participant observation, and some quantitative surveys with students, explorations of students' perspectives on the audit culture and the corporatisation of higher education, as well as studies that help us understand if there is in fact a transformation in the student population towards a client identity, are virtually inexistent. The need for a contribution that examines the students' perspective becomes apparent when one notices the amount of assumptions being made about what students think and how they navigate the quality audited university, with its multiple rituals, some of which require their active participation. One could conclude that there appears to be a disregard of the students' response to these global trends in universities.

Based on theoretical suggestions about what to observe when trying to understand the managerial "governing by numbers", this empirical investigation aims at exploring undergraduate students' discourses on established 'rituals of verification' of the audit culture in higher education as well as their understandings and use of key words profusely displayed in quality assurance and the "talk of quality" in universities. The way students speak about satisfaction and about their role in processes of evaluation and accreditation will also be analysed in order to explore if they share in any way the client concept used by quality assurance or if any of the concepts used in quality assurance have become hegemonic.

Recalling Wright and Rabo's (2010, p. 5) suggestion that a vital contribution for the study of university reforms would be to track the meanings of words employed in the policies, and how they differ to the meanings that academics give to them, I propose tracking the meanings that common quality assurance concepts are given to by students. Since quality assurance reforms are presented as being designed for the sake of the students, critique has to point at this precise spot. Therefore, instead of focusing on the institutional aspects of quality assurance, on policies, or on the economic side of these processes, which have been studied by the authors presented above, I aim at exploring students' own discourses of quality and quality assurance. As Rhoades and Sporn (2002, p. 384) assert, there is a real need for empirical research on specific quality assurance processes and their implementation "on the ground". This involves looking further than what is stated in policies and regulations, further than what quality assurance officials say about their processes.

A comparative analysis was chosen because of the insights it would provide about one of the audit culture's main characteristics, its capacity to install itself in any context, to have its messages "translated" in specific ways so as to guarantee local acceptance from diverse groups (Dickhaus, 2010). The exploration focused on two cases deemed representative of higher education institutions that have adopted the audit culture (specifically, quality assurance regimes): the private Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) in Managua, Nicaragua, and a public German university, Philipps-Universität, Marburg. In spite of their differences, which will be duly described, both universities initiated evaluation processes more than ten years ago, and both remain committed to these practices.

The study takes into account the organisational context of both universities as well as key input from interviewed teachers and experts, but it is based on students and aimed at revealing dominant elements of their shared student culture, and specifically their shared discourses on quality, quality teachers, teacher evaluation, and students as clients. These four concepts feature prominently in the "talk of quality" used by quality assurance, higher education reform policies, and by university administrators and some teachers as well. I consider the "talk of quality" as a discourse consisting on key words that have acquired very powerful meanings in the quality audited university. They have attained the status of "truths" in a Foucaultian sense, which is not what it is or was, but what has become generally accepted. Words such as teacher – preceded by prefixes such as 'outstanding', 'innovative', 'reflexive', 'inspiring', 'average', 'boring' or 'deficient' – or university – preceded by prefixes such as 'global', 'innovative', 'entrepreneurial', 'top', or 'traditional' – are, taking Foucault's perspective, part of reality as much as what people do. The quality assurance concept of quality reveals itself as a summation. The parts of this summation are constantly being created and go through a continuous variation that allegedly responds to the modern necessity to continuously improve and adapt. In practice, quality is the simple summation of a series of externally defined indicators that a university successfully proves to possess through the compilation and presentation of acceptable evidence.

The "talk of quality" also includes a very precise concept of students. In one word, they are clients (with equally used variations of the term: customer, stakeholder, or consumer). This new 'identity' given to the students has been acknowledged as controversial in several occasions, but it is also presented as inevitable, or as the most up-dated or realistic description of what a university student is today and what he or she wants (see, for example: OECD, 1998; Kaufman, 1995). Certainly this idea of students being and behaving as clients is

continuously reinforced in quality assurance processes. As presented in previous chapters, the label is used in a diversity of documents that support higher education policy and reforms.

In contrast, the definition of quality for teachers and students is –as many other concepts– socially constructed and inserted in shared discourses. It is important to explore the characteristics of this discourse at the student level. For students quality may not be, as audit culture presupposes, something that can be readily defined or described through a summation, easily compared, monitored, and produced through a straightforward plan. When they talk about quality, perhaps they talk about different things even through the same set of terms. However, quality assurance “rituals of verification” (Power, 1997), and specifically the practice of teacher evaluation, disguises this polysemy. The questions included in teacher evaluation questionnaires are perceived as perfectly plausible only because they are part of a system that ‘fetishizes’ the learning experience in the classroom: the measurable aspects of lecturers’ performance acquire the highest relevance, while “satisfaction” is equalised to success and political issues are avoided (see Macdonald, 2002, for a related discussion). For example, these questionnaires do not take into account variables such as age, gender, social class, race or skin colour, which weigh heavily in many societies by shaping social relations and determining expectations and credibility in a person. Since these variables cannot possibly be picked up through the questionnaires, they stay out of view. This is how audit imposes its own concept of quality that is compatible with its ‘rituals of verification’. What is not auditable simply does not count. Therefore, the learning process has to be made auditable, and as a result, becomes over simplified in the managers’ eyes.

This limitation is camouflaged because the evidence-based and summation-based concept of quality relies on the student as a provider of data that automatically becomes evidence. Hence, in appearance teacher evaluation is a democratic practice; students’ opinions are officially – and objectively – collected and taken seriously by the institution. However, in quality assurance students’ perspectives are not obtained with the purpose of being understood or discussed; they are collected as evidence that can be used for the purposes of risk management. Thus, I propose to contribute to the analysis of quality assurance’s effects in higher education by revealing its deep contradictions with student culture, as well as the unforeseeable ways in which its “rituals of verification” can be perceived and used by students. And finally, by revealing in what ways they contribute to invisibilising ‘real’ students, their opinions and interpretations of quality.

1. Research questions

Exploring the ways in which students define quality, good teachers, and teacher evaluation is important because it can reveal in what ways these definitions are similar or differ from those of quality assurance, and whether there are elements that may have become hegemonic in the student populations in questions. The comparison between Marburg and UCA, and the differences between their students' discourses on quality, will help to better illustrate quality assurance's invisibilising mechanisms.

I part from the following assumptions that are grounded in the previous chapter's discussion:

1. Teachers are managed professionals and the practice of teacher evaluation is one of the main instruments that place them in a regime of subjectification which generates "truths" from educational science to promote an idealised image of the good teacher which all teachers should strive to become.
2. Students are also managed individuals in the quality assurance regime, which tries to manage the risk of their negative opinions, perceived as potential threats for the institution's reputation.
3. Through teacher evaluation questionnaires, students' opinions are turned into seemingly voluntary and clear judgements on teachers' performance.
4. The concept of quality used in quality assurance is removed from perceptions and discourses on quality that students share with their particular groups.
5. Quality assurance regimes define students as clients who know what they want, want to demand it, want satisfaction, want to evaluate their teachers, and can evaluate their teachers.

Drawing from the above assumptions, this study aims to explore the contradictions between quality assurance concepts of quality and higher education students' discourses on quality. The questions it seeks to answer are:

1. How do teacher evaluation questionnaires define quality in teaching and teachers at UCA and Marburg?
2. What are the key elements in students' discourses on quality in teaching, quality teachers, and teacher evaluation at both universities?

The final question to answer in the discussion is:

1. By the adoption of the quality assurance regime and its definition of students as clients, what is being invisibilised about students and student culture at both universities? Is the practice of teacher evaluation fostering the client identity in students and/or the client image of students in teachers at both universities?

For the purpose of answering these questions an empirical study was designed focused on gaining access to students' discussions around these topics, widely discussed in the 'talk of quality'.

VI. Research methodology

The main subjects of my study are undergraduate students at both Marburg and UCA, who as part of their regular student experience, encounter practices and concepts pertaining to quality assurance. As stated before, there is a gap in the literature dedicated to the analysis of the impacts of quality assurance on higher education. Empirical studies have been focused on its effects on teachers, producing rich accounts already displayed above. However, most of the critique that points at teachers' rejection of quality assurance practices seems to take for granted students' acceptance of it, or at least, makes no effort to question the assumptions, repeatedly found in policies, about what students want and do. From this point emerges my aim to explore students' collectively held meanings regarding quality, teachers, teacher evaluation, and the notion of students as clients.

Taking a discourse analysis approach I will first describe elements of what I call the 'talk of quality'. As the discourse of quality assurance processes, it represents the particular way of construing quality in higher education from the perspective of quality experts. I take the word "construe" as Fairclough uses it to "emphasize an active and often difficult process of 'grasping' the world from a particular perspective" (2012, p. 11). These difficulties are evident, for example, in quality assurance reforms' constant re-formulation of goals and justifications – as evidenced in the initial chapters– which constitute a way of confronting denunciations that stem from their existence as obvious "recontextualizations" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) of a managerial industrial discourse on quality that is used as a career strategy by university managers (see, for example, Tuchman, 2009). I consider the practice of teacher evaluation as an "enactment" through which the quality assurance discourse is "operationalized". Through this managerial ritual, also loaded with pedagogic meaning, a new way of interaction between teachers and students is put in place. However, I consider that the 'talk of quality' differs from the discourse on quality and teaching used by the students, which, as any discourse, is formed "based on their specific areas of experience and knowledge" (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter, 2000, p. 149). Hence, an exploration of students' discourses on quality will be the entry point to their "collectively held meanings" on quality, teachers and students, and to their "collective practices" surrounding teacher evaluation (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2009, p. 81).

The strategy of comparing the two cases permits a richer opportunity for finding discrepancies between the official "talk of quality" (which shows minor discrepancies between the two universities), and the students' discourses, which will be unique for each case. UCA

and Marburg, therefore, offer the possibility of exploring universities with similar “orders of discourse” (Fairclough, 1992) as quality audited universities, with very different teaching practices and contexts that generate different student cultures. In this sense, they constitute “instrumental case studies”; the cases themselves are of secondary importance to the issue of quality assurance, for which they provide examples and an opportunity of generalisation through theoretical inference (O’Reilly, 2009, pp. 25-26). The analysis will reveal, on the one hand, what are the “truths” for quality assurance regarding teachers, teacher evaluation, and students; and on the other hand, what are the “truths” for students regarding these concepts. A comparison will then reveal which elements are invisibilised through the audit culture’s “rituals of verification”. In order to explore whether variations do exist not only between the universities but also within them, I chose students from two broad groups of disciplines: those open and/or enthusiastic to managerial and market discourses, and those who belong to disciplines with critical perspectives towards these. The implicit assumption was that I would find significant differences in postures towards ideas about the role of teachers, teacher evaluation, and students as clients.

The strategy followed for data collection was a mix of observations (during lectures and seminars at Marburg and during teacher evaluation), individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups with undergraduate students at both universities, and a mix of semi-structured and unstructured interviews with teachers and quality experts at both universities. The interview with students included 25 open-ended questions that prompted them to discuss the following issues: quality in a university; quality in a course; quality teacher; bad teachers and what to do about them; student satisfaction (who or what does it depend on/ is it synonym of quality?); causes of failure (who/what to blame); university rankings and competition between universities; teacher evaluation; are students clients?; evaluation/accreditation; grade inflation and lowering standards.

In order to safeguard the comparability of the data from the two cases, a careful adaptation of the interview and focus group guides was made, which involved the translation from Spanish to English of the questions of the interview, and the translation of the case-vignettes and questions for the focus groups. The adaptation included very important modifications to some of the questions and case-vignettes in order to make them understandable and applicable in both contexts. In addition, documents and official data were also collected and reviewed for both cases in order to aid in the comparison of both contexts.

The fieldwork involved delicate issues of access that have to be discussed. My position as a field researcher was very different in each case, practically opposite, as well as my

previous and background knowledge. This gave me an insider's perspective at UCA, an easier access to students, teachers, authorities and experts, and the possibility of being an "observing participant" (Alvesson, 2009, p. 159) who was "struggling with closeness" and doing fieldwork in a medium in which my identity was well known. This experience, very close to an "at-home ethnography" involved a "struggle to break-out from the taken-for-grantedness of a particular framework that is already quite familiar" (Alvesson, 2009, p. 162), and a special effort to create some distance during the interpretation of the obtained material.

The implications for this were several: on the one hand, interviews with teachers must have been filtered by the interviewee's awareness of my position at the university as Research Director and member of the Academic Vice-Rector's team as her direct subordinate. This gave me unrestricted – and seemingly welcome – access to many people. However, I had to be aware of the ways in which quality assurance and the "talk of quality" encourages a certain "impression management" that is compatible with its logics. This turned the interviews into pieces of performance filtered through the specific "presentation of self" required by the "talk of quality", that nevertheless, several times did cross into the "back stage" (Goffman, 1959), confessing practices that teachers and students do to guarantee that results from "rituals of verification" turn in their favour or confessing feelings of distrust of these practices. It was important for me to detect these changes in the discourse during the data processing because I considered them to have different significance. This applied to students too, since because of the closed campus setting – and the fact that I had been away for a year and a half – several times when I was conducting an interview, colleagues passed by waving good bye or stopping to say hello. This even led some students to comment "you are famous here", "hey, everybody knows you". Therefore, when processing the interviews I had to check how the speakers were positioning themselves in the interviews in terms of who they thought they were speaking to (a Nicaraguan researcher who was doing her PhD in Germany, or a member of staff from the university). Students were sometimes motivated to participate in the interviews out of a spirit of denunciation, which for me implied that they positioned me as a communication channel to university authorities. Finally, another issue I had to be aware of was that I had to repeatedly avoid jumping to conclusions about issues of which I had a direct previous knowledge instead of following the thread of the interviewee's statements.

At Marburg, in contrast, I had an outsider's perspective, a less easier access to the interviewees, as well as a very limited previous and background knowledge accentuated by a language barrier. My position in the field was also of a foreigner from a Third World country doing research among First World "natives", which turned me into something of a rarity. The

ample distance between me and the interviewees generated some difficulties but also advantages. Firstly, I was never considered as a possible member of the university staff – or capable of any influence –, giving perhaps more freedom to the students during the interviews. I also had a fresh – almost completely untainted by pre-conceptions – view of the issues from the interviewees’ perspectives. At Marburg a decisive element for the participation of students as voluntaries was that the interviews were all conducted in English. As a result, students who did not feel comfortable speaking English preferred not to participate.

The sampling strategy was “chain referral sampling” or “snowballing” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). I asked the students to introduce me to their friends and/or classmates who complied with the established criteria of inclusion. However, at UCA I also did some initial contacts from a list of students who had participated in a research contest organized by the Research Directory. In Marburg I contacted most of the students through visits to colleagues’ courses. These visits had two purposes: observing the class dynamics and making a personal invitation to the students to sign up for an interview. Most of the students who signed-up to the interviews, both at UCA and at Marburg, told me how important they thought it was to discuss issues of quality in the university. Some of them said that they do discuss these issues with their friends and classmates from time to time. However, I do not think that a motivation for the topic was the main mobiliser for participation in most cases. At UCA, most of the students agreed to participate because their friend had already participated, felt the experience was harmless, and also felt that they were helping me to complete my project. Several of them said that I could count on them to look for more volunteers (“*usted cuenta conmigo por si necesita más gente*”). And with an impressive promptness they immediately phoned friends who consented to the interview right away, or they gave me their phone numbers. At Marburg, one of the motivations for the students to participate was, according to their own confessions, to practice their English. Most of them had recently been abroad in an English speaking country, or were planning a semester abroad. Some of them also talked about their previous experiences abroad, and I guess the interview was also an opportunity to talk to a foreign person again. Two of the students who signed-up were foreigners, and perhaps did so because they felt some affinity from our shared status. Additionally, several of the interviewees at Marburg told me they had signed up because they thought I had been very proactive and brave in coming to class to make the petition in person. They compared my approach to the common practice of researchers making invitations through collective emails and said I deserved their participation better than the rest. This effect was not planned. Evidently, the snowball sampling method has the disadvantage that it relies on networks and

their selectivity. Even though I did not consider this 'bias' to be a problem for the quality of the data (see, for example: Bernstein, 1983; O'Reilly, 2009), in both places I did prevent an excessively closed scenario by relying on a simultaneous initiation of several and separate "snowballs".

An exact number for the student sample was not established beforehand but rather was defined when the data reached the "saturation" point (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, interviews were conducted until they conveyed no new insights or significant variations in the participants' responses. I tried not to leave a marked imbalance between the number of men and women interviewed but the sample was not artificially designed to be equal. It was not considered that speaking to as many female students as male students would necessarily result in a gender balanced analysis. However, I did try to make sure that one of the samples would not be significantly smaller than the other in order to prevent any evident bias stemming from having one gender with significantly scarcer participation. In this way, the sampling strategy was ongoing, not a one-off event (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 199)

Conversely, selection criteria for the interviewees were carefully established. Firstly, all students had to be at the undergraduate level. The students from UCA had to have been enrolled at the university for at least two quarters to guarantee they had had a direct experience with teacher evaluation, and had grown accustomed to university life. They could also be alumni, but had to have still been at the university in 2008, when the intense evaluation regime was put in place. The sample focused at UCA on students of Business Administration, Tourism Management and Development, Economics, Accounting, Sociology and Psychology; and at Marburg on Business Administration, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology at Marburg. The idea behind the main selection of disciplines was that students of Business Administration and related areas (Tourism Management and Development, Economics, and Accounting) are taught about quality assurance and its tools as ideal strategies for the functioning of organisations; managers constitute the creators and perpetuators of managerial strategies, and are also trained to agree with the neoliberal values of entrepreneurship and continual self-improvement. On the other hand, Psychology students are more likely to work in public service as part of their education, and Sociology and Anthropology students should, by definition, be critical instead. Although I did interview some Sociology students at UCA, they were not especially targeted because they have very different characteristics from the rest of the undergraduate student population at the university (they tend to be older, already professionals, and study only on Saturdays). At Marburg the students had to be enrolled at the Bachelor level and had experience of at least one semester. At both

universities I conducted a few interviews with students from entirely different disciplines as a way of observing if there were significant differences that could confirm or contradict emerging impressions. However, these cases were not included in the most detailed analysis.

Securing the student's informed consent was very important. Before initiating the interview I explained to them the aim of the interview and how the data would be part of a wider reflection on the audit culture in universities. I made clear that I would be strictly keeping their anonymity and invited them to choose a pseudonym. Interestingly, almost all of the students insisted that they did not care if their real name was in the text. All the interviews were recorded after asking for their permission to do so. As a way of not taking the interviewee outside of their comfort zone, I let them choose where they wanted to be interviewed. Most of the interviews at UCA were in the university's green areas and cafeterias. Only one interview was conducted in the interviewee's place of work, and four interviews were conducted in private houses. In the case of Marburg, most of the students were conducted in a coffee house of the student's choice. Only one interview was conducted at an office in the *Institut für Soziologie*, based on the student's preference. As a symbolic expression of gratitude, all of the students were treated to coffee or another beverage.

The focus groups were designed to explore major issues that arose in the interviews to see to what extent they belonged to shared views, or if they represented views that are openly discussed with other students. Observing the interaction between the students when they discussed these key issues was very important to find out if they were controversial issues or not, or to appreciate how significant of meaning they were for the group. This crossing towards a communicative context that involves the group is particularly important in the setting of students since previous research, cited above, has shown that the group context is decisive in the way students define their experiences at university. The data from the two sources was triangulated separately for each case, not combined. While the focus groups at UCA were mixed (meaning that each focus group had the participation of students from different disciplines and years of study), and were contacted through the same snowballing process and included some students who had already been interviewed, in Marburg it was impossible to organise it that way. The focus groups in Marburg were conducted with students from the same discipline who were barely able to set a date and time in which they could all be present. The contacts were done through the student association and in one case through staff in charge of student relations. Several students who had agreed to participate in the focus groups failed to show up, while this was not the case for the interviews.

The focus groups at UCA were conducted in a classroom loaned by the university. This might have caused an impression on the participants because it was one of the classrooms reserved for the exclusive use of graduate courses, not for undergraduate students. These classrooms are nicer than the ones used for the undergraduate courses, quieter and air-conditioned, creating in general a more comfortable atmosphere for the students. As a symbol of gratitude for their participation, the participants received apples, chocolates, cookies, coffee and new pens. At Marburg the students preferred to have the focus group at local restaurants they regularly visit with their friends. As a symbol of gratitude they had coffee or another beverage, and a box of tee to take home.

As stated above, the fieldwork also included interviews with teachers and quality experts. In the case of teachers, the purpose of interviewing them was twofold: 1. Through their interviews I aimed to learn about their experiences with quality assurance, and 2. In Marburg they also were a point of entrance for the observation of their course and to contact their students. In Marburg some of the teachers were colleagues in the *Institut für Soziologie*. Others from different disciplines were contacted through my main supervisor and through a friend in the Anthropology department. At UCA the teachers contacted were among those who had a directed experience with an evaluation and/or accreditation process. I knew all of the interviewed teachers from UCA beforehand. In the case of quality experts, the purpose of the interview was to obtain their views on quality assurance, and also to learn about the procedural aspects of their work. At Marburg they were contacted through my supervisor, while at UCA I already knew the personnel from the office in charge of quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation. All of the interviews with teachers and experts in Marburg were conducted in their office. At UCA most of the interviews were also conducted at the interviewee's office but some were conducted in my office, and one teacher preferred to be interviewed outside of the university to feel more comfortable.

In the case of teachers and managerial staff I was especially careful with keeping their anonymity. Some of them chose pseudonyms, however taking a cue from Tuchman's (2009) strategy in her ethnography at a university, I decided to also change further details about them, such as gender and exact position, so as to minimise the possibility of their identification. These interviewees will only be identified as lecturers, and their position in the universities will be disguised. I will, however, indicate if the person in question has a managerial position, and if it is middle or top, given the significance of managerial work and the managerial perspective in the audit culture. The classification of the interviewees was done as follows: I identify when someone is a professor or a lecturer. If someone is Coordinator of a

Programme or has a job position which starts with the word Director, I classified them as a Middle manager. When someone was Dean or had any higher position, I classified them as top manager. And when I interviewed staff from quality assurance offices, I classified them as expert. After asking for their consent, most of these interviews were recorded, but not all of them, especially in Marburg where most of the time I just took notes and interviews were of a shorter duration. Generally, in Marburg the interviews with teachers and managers were unstructured. Indeed, several of these interviews acquired the form of a conversation.

Data was also collected from teacher evaluation sheets from Nicaragua and Marburg. I was specifically interested in the answers given by students to the open-ended questions. In the case of Nicaragua, I was handed the complete data base of teacher evaluations from three majors in one semester. In the case of Marburg, two professors voluntarily shared with me their evaluation results from courses they had recently taught. Since both sets of data are not fairly comparable, partly because of their significant difference in dimension, they were only used to further illustrate a specific point in the discussion.

1. Fieldwork design

The fieldwork was conducted in three main phases:

1. A first round of participant observation in seminar sessions and interviews with academics and students was conducted at Philipps-Universität, Marburg. It was done in an exploratory fashion at the beginning of 2013. This stood for an initial exploration that served as a starting point for the design of a comparative analysis between the two universities. The purpose of this exploratory phase was to become acquainted with the class styles in Marburg, and the system in general, as well as to observe students' and teachers' behaviour in class. Albeit modest and brief, this initial immersion was necessary to enable the creation of applicable questions to the Marburg context.
2. A second phase consisted of fieldwork at Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) from February 17th to April 23rd, 2014. It included observation during teacher evaluation, interviews and focus groups with students as well as interviews with experts, managers and teachers.

3. A third phase consisted of a second round of observations, interviews and focus groups at Marburg. It was the main fieldwork phase for Marburg and it was developed between May 16th, 2014 and January 15th, 2015. This stage greatly benefited from the accumulated previous experience. It included interviews with professors, lecturers, and administrative staff, as well as observation in seminars and lectures. I also observed a teacher evaluation process. After adapting the data collection tools, the interviewing technique was also adapted to the context in Marburg. Lasting eight months, the German part of the fieldwork was significantly longer than the Nicaraguan phase, which took two months and a half. This was due to several circumstances that made the recruitment of interviewees at Marburg a slower affair: 1. It was easier to contact the students in Nicaragua because of the closed campus design of the university, where they spend many hours within a small gated area. 2. Students in Nicaragua made quicker contacts with other interview candidates, making the snow-balling flow faster. 3. The fact that the interviews in Germany were conducted in English could have been a deterrent for students who did not feel confident in the language and therefore declined to participate.

1.1. Summary of the fieldwork at Marburg

a. Students

A semi-structured interview of 25 open-ended questions was designed for students. Three case-vignettes were written for the purpose of generating questions and discussion in the focus groups with students (see Annex A). A total of 29 students (16 females and 13 males) were interviewed in sessions that lasted between 30 minutes to two hours, most of them lasting one hour. A total of 8 students were interviewed using the focus group method. All of these interviews were recorded, and previously the participants were formally asked for their consent.

Out of the 29 students, 13 were originally from Hessen or living in this state before they started university. This means that 16 students had chosen to come to Marburg for other reasons than for it being nearby. This differentiation was taken into account during the analysis, especially because of its significance regarding university selection criteria.

In the following table I divide the students interviewed into two main groups so as to separate the managerial-related disciplines (Group 1), from the social sciences disciplines and other humanities related areas (Group 2). The other cluster (Group 3) represents students from fields that are in separate Faculties from those of Group 1 and 3 and belong to a minority in the sample. As can be observed, some students have more than one field of study, and hence could belong in more than one group. For those with more than one major I mention first the discipline that they had been studying for a longer time. This group of students who study more than one discipline, together with other students who had been enrolled in a different university or in a different major they had already abandoned (which together amount to 17), had a wider experience in terms of disciplines and universities. Their comparative perspective was taken into consideration during the analysis.

Group 1. Business Administration, Economics: <i>Fachbereich Wirtschaftswissenschaften</i>	
Sex	Major(s)
Male	Business Administration
Male	Economics
Female	Business Administration
Male	Economics / Business Administration
Female	Business Administration / Politics
Male	Economics
Male	Economics
Group 2. Sociology, Anthropology, and other disciplines from <i>Fachbereich Gesellschaftswissenschaften und Philosophie</i> ; and Psychology from <i>Fachbereich Psychologie</i>	
Sex	Major(s)
Female	Sociology
Male	Sociology / Theology
Male	Sociology / Pedagogy
Female	Sociology / Geography
Male	Culture and Social Anthropology
Female	Anthropology / Psychology
Male	Anthropology
Female	Anthropology/ Spanish / minor German
Female	Anthropology
Female	Anthropology
Female	Anthropology

Female	Anthropology
Female	Anthropology / Art
Female	European Ethnology
Female	Psychology
Female	Psychology
Male	Psychology
Group 3. Other disciplines	
Sex	Major(s)
Female	Biology / Philosophy
Male	<i>Orientwissenschaften</i>
Female	<i>Erziehungs und Bildungswissenschaften</i>
Male	Archaeology
Male	Political Science

Regarding the focus groups, one group was conducted with five Business Administration students (three males and two females), and a mini-focus group or ‘Triad’ (Barbour, 2007, p. 60; Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999, p. 8) was conducted with three Sociology students (all males). It was impossible to organise mixed focus groups, as well as a more numerous one. Students at Marburg had busy agendas and could not settle together on one time. Partly this was due to the fact that they do not have a shared class schedule so it was very difficult to make several of them coincide in time and place.

b. Teachers and experts

Unstructured interviews were conducted with four professors, two lecturers, and one *Privatdozent*. Unstructured interviews were conducted with experts: a Master programme Coordinator, a manager in one of the Faculties, and two members of staff at the office in charge of teacher evaluations (see Annex A). Only three of these interviews were recorded.

c. Observations

Five seminars and two lectures were observed from the disciplines of Sociology, Anthropology, Economics and Business Administration. None of these sessions were recorded but a field notebook was kept for taking notes during the observations in class. The aim of the observations was to focus on the interactions in the classroom, the lecturer's performance, and the kinds of response of the students to the activities taking place.

1.2. Summary of the fieldwork at UCA

a. Students

The fieldwork in Nicaragua was based on interviews, focus groups, and observation. A semi-structured interview of 25 open-ended questions was designed for students (see Annex B). Three case-vignettes were written to generate questions and discussion in the focus groups with students. A total of 27 students (11 males and 16 females) were interviewed in sessions that lasted between one and two hours. The following tables provide a summary of the interviewees. For the purpose of the analysis the students were divided into three groups following the same logic as with the Marburg students. Thus, Group 1 includes the managerial related disciplines, Group 2 includes the social sciences disciplines, and Group three includes other unrelated fields.

Group 1. Business Administration, Tourism Management and Development, Economics, and Accounting (Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences)	
Sex	Major
Male	Business Administration
Female	Business Administration
Male	Business Administration
Female	Business Administration
Female	Business Administration
Female	Business Administration
Female	Business Administration
Male	Accounting
Male	Accounting
Female	Tourism Management and Development
Male	Tourism Management and Development
Male	Economics
Group 2. Psychology (Faculty of Humanities and Communication)	
Sex	Major
Female	Psychology
Male	Psychology
Female	Psychology
Female	Psychology
Female	Psychology
Female	Psychology
Female	Psychology
Female	Psychology
Male	Psychology
Male	Psychology / Sociology
Female	Psychology
Female	Psychology
Group 3. Technical disciplines (Computer Engineering, Architecture)	
Sex	Major
Male	Information Technology Engineering with Emphasis on Networks and Telecommunication
Male	Environmental Quality Engineering
Female	Architecture

Unlike Marburg students, it is extremely rare for a student at UCA to pursue more than one major. In the sample of interviewed students there is only one student who was studying a second major. And in the focus groups there were three.

A total of 19 students were interviewed using the focus group method. Two groups were mixed, and one was done with just Psychology students.

Focus groups	
No. 1	
Participants	Major
Male	Psychology
Female	Economics
Male	Psychology / Sociology
Male	Psychology
Male	Economics
Male	Business Administration
No.2	
Female	Psychology
Male	Sociology and Social Work
Female	Sociology
Male	Economics
Male	Accounting
Female	Psychology
Female	Economics
Female	Tourism Management and Development
Male	Sociology and Architecture
No. 3	
Male	Psychology
Female	Psychology
Male	Psychology
Male	Psychology

b. Teachers and experts

A semi-structured interview with 15 open-ended questions was designed for teachers and a total of seven teachers were interviewed (see Annex B). It must be said that all of these teachers also had managerial positions as middle managers and two as top-managers in the university. All of them were experienced teachers, with some having up to 20 years of teaching experience and the one who had the least experience had been a teacher for five years. They had also been working at UCA for many years, one of them had been in the university for 15 years and the one who had joined the university most recently had done so four years ago. All of these teachers had experienced or were experiencing an evaluation and/or accreditation process.

For experts, a semi-structured interview of 21 open-ended questions was applied, as well as another short five question interview and an unstructured interview for three other experts. Informal conversations were also important for the purpose of data gathering. These were carried on with two top-managers and several teachers. A total of six expert interviews were conducted. Three of these quality experts were also teachers at the university, and had many years of teaching experience (between 7 and 28). Regarding quality assurance, most of them had been recently introduced to it. However, one of them had 12 years of experience in that area and another one had 7 years.

c. Observations

At UCA there were no classroom observations, the observation was done at a computer laboratory during a process of teacher evaluation. The observation was brief, only lasting a couple of hours. The purpose of it was to see the organisational aspect of the teacher evaluations and the way students behaved when doing it.

VII. Discussion

The exploration confirmed that both Marburg and UCA have strong characteristics of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012), and at the same time have clearly adopted “rituals of verification” of the audit culture (Power, 1997, 2010; Strathern, 2000a, b, c) stemming from recent reforms that promote processes of quality assurance. Among these we can identify managerial processes and terminology, and a compatible pedagogical approach in teacher training. As a result, at the policy and regulatory level, both universities have acquired very similar structures, processes and discourse. On the other hand, student discourses on quality at both universities differ widely from the official “talk of quality”.

The following discussion will initiate with a general comparison between both cases so as to pinpoint the similarities and differences found and the relation some of these issues have with elements from the quality assurance regime. Here I will present data obtained from documentary sources as well as from teacher and expert interviews, and observations. Afterwards, I will focus on the issue of teacher evaluation as a key script where the ‘talk of quality’ is contained and conveyed to the students. This will constitute the answer to the first question: How do teacher evaluation questionnaires define quality in teaching and teachers at UCA and Marburg? Then I will present the results obtained from the analysis of the student interviews and focus groups. This will provide the answer to the second question: What are the key elements in students’ discourses on quality in teaching and teachers at both universities? Finally, the pivotal part of the analysis will draw from the three previous discussions in order to answer the questions: By the adoption of the quality assurance regime and its definition of students as clients, what is being invisibilised about students and student culture at both universities? Is the practice of teacher evaluation fostering the client identity in students and/or the client image of students in teachers at both universities? Have characteristics of the client identity become hegemonic?

1. A tale of two universities: Philipps-Universität, Marburg in Germany and Universidad Centroamericana in Nicaragua

The opportunity of comparing the Philipps-Universität, Marburg in Germany (hereafter Marburg) and Universidad Centroamericana (hereafter UCA) allows us to see how quality assurance is applied in the same way in two different contexts. What comes to light after a first attentive glance is that not only are these universities located in very different countries – Germany being one of the leading economies in Europe and Nicaragua one of the poorest in Latin America – but also their considerable ‘age difference’: Marburg was established in 1527 and UCA in 1960. Their sizes also differ –with Marburg having almost 35,000 students enrolled in 21 different *Fachbereiche* and UCA having around 9,000 students distributed in four Faculties–, as well as their ‘rhythms’: Marburg’s academic calendar is organised in two semesters, while UCA arranges three quarters in a year. However, in spite of their most noticeable differences, Marburg and UCA have a very important similarity: they have both embarked in the quality assurance regime and, in the process, modified several aspects of their organisation through the creation of new managerial capacity and procedures designed for quality assurance.

For this study, the most important aspects to notice are the very similar managerial strategies that these two universities have put in place following the academic capitalist trends: as detailed in chapter II, both participate in *New circuits of knowledge* that link state agencies, corporations and universities in entrepreneurial research endeavours. They also have access – or at least, are encouraged to seek this access – to *New funding streams* to support these circuits of knowledge. Both universities have created *interstitial organizations* to facilitate the new knowledge circuits (such as *TransMIT Gesellschaft für Technologietransfer mbH* in Marburg, and the *Oficina de Relaciones con el Entorno Socioeconómico* at UCA). Both universities also participate actively in *Intermediating networks* between public, non-profit and private sectors in order to encourage entrepreneurialism in academia.

The development both universities display in terms of their *managerial capacity* to function as economic actors is an element of academic capitalism that comes closer to having a direct impact on students. This managerial capacity, developed as a result of the current trends, goes beyond supporting the commercialisation of research. As part of this trend I include managerial capacity developed to establish client-like relations with students. Concrete

examples of this are: the Career Center, the International Office, and the Welcome Center⁸⁵ in Marburg; and the *Oficina de Ex-alumnos* and *Bolsa de Trabajo* at UCA⁸⁶. Through these offices, the universities also foster their links to the new economy through their alumni. In terms of the *narratives, discourses and social technologies* associated to academic capitalism and the role this regime assigns to teachers and students, both universities show remarkable similarities. They have established processes of evaluation and accreditation – accompanied by the development of managerial capacity for this – that reflect quality assurance’s definition of quality in higher education. Related to these is the development of teacher evaluation and teacher training courses. Between the two cases a slight difference can be observed in terms of the intensity or force with which these changes have been introduced and the capacity of these policies to have an impact on the daily life of teachers and students. Namely, in spite of Marburg’s greater experience in accreditation processes, at UCA quality assurance as a social technology appears to have a tougher grip. To put this issue into perspective, however, it is necessary to describe general aspects of both cases. These will be detailed in the following paragraphs.

Both universities have experienced important transformations in recent years that should be taken into account if one wishes to consider the magnitude of the recent reforms. At UCA, the university faced great transformations during the Sandinista Revolution in the 1980’s. The most considerable change was the separation, by the Sandinista State, of the Engineering faculty from the university for the purpose of creating the National Engineering University. This ‘dismemberment’ of the university by decision of the State, a move which today would be unthinkable, reflects the position of the university as favourable to the revolutionary spirit of the time. Another impact of the decade was that many professors left the university. In some Faculties, as is the case of the Faculty of Economics and Managerial Sciences, almost all of the staff was replaced with new, inexperienced professors. As a result, the 1980’s UCA had a significantly less qualified academic staff than in the 1970’s (Solà Monserrat, 1987, pp. 19-24). On the other hand, the university also started receiving public funds in those years. As a result, UCA is a private university with a mixed funding scheme. Today, around 60% of its budget is covered by public funds.

⁸⁵ All of these office names are originally in English.

⁸⁶ A good indicator of the development of managerial capacity at UCA can be found in data on the evolution of salaries and benefits at the university from 2008 to 2012, which presents the total amount dedicated to covering salaries and benefits in each of those years. While the amount dedicated to cover the salaries of managers and administrative support staff increased from representing 61.43% of the salary budget in 2008 to 64.77% in 2012, the percentage dedicated to cover salaries of teaching staff displays the opposite movement, decreasing from being 38.57% of the total salary budget in 2008 to 35.23% in 2012 (Universidad Centroamericana, 2014b, p. 80).

In the 1990's Nicaragua witnessed a boom in the international cooperation scene (O'Niell, 2004) that involved the creation of numerous private NGOs. While consultancies were highly paid, teacher work had a very low remuneration. Consequently, the university, once again became an unattractive workplace for capable and talented professionals –and during the 90's other teachers left to join the booming cooperation market as consultants. Not only local and international NGOs, but also cooperation agencies from first world countries, United Nations offices and programs, as well as multilaterals, became the most desirable sources of employment for the country's university-educated middle class. As independent consultants, or employees for development projects, many former UCA teachers had access to substantially higher income than what UCA could offer. A further evidence of this is the recent return of some of these professionals to the university following the decrease of cooperation funds to the country. At Marburg, a comparable change – as perceived by some former students and current professors interviewed – is that during the 1980's there used to be several politically active professors with leftist views who are now retired and where not replaced by an equally minded new generation. Active student political movements are still present in the city today.

In terms of prestige, both Marburg and UCA can claim "firsts" in their countries. Marburg was the first Protestant university in the World and UCA was the first private university in Central America. While Marburg was founded with the inspiration of Luther's teachings and the Protestant Reformation, UCA is a Jesuit university and belongs to a network (AUSJAL) of 31 universities in 14 Latin American countries, and others in Europe, Asia and the United States (a positively perceived condition in today's interest on internationalisation). Thus, UCA boasts of its Jesuit inspiration, Ignatian Pedagogy, and international connections. Marburg, in turn, boasts of being a traditional university located in a traditional – and picturesque – university town. In leftist circles it is also highly recognised and valued as a politically active town. Thus, while the almost 500 years old university attracts students from different *Länder* in Germany, as well as a fair share of international students – currently 10% of the student population – the 55 year old university attracts students from different departments in the country. In spite of their special status, neither of these universities caters to the country's elite. Marburg is far from being the costliest place to study in Germany, and neither is UCA the costliest university in the country.

Aside from the image and recognition that stems greatly from their histories, both universities have appeared in rankings. The "Webometrics Ranking of World Universities" an initiative of the Cybermetrics Lab, a research group belonging to the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC)*, the largest public research body in Spain, publishes a World

Ranking of universities based on “their web presence and impact”, with the aim of promoting “academic web presence”. For its 2014 rankings they placed Marburg at number 27 in Germany and 312 in the World; and UCA at number three in Nicaragua⁸⁷. In 2009 they placed UCA at the top spot in the country and included it in a list of the top 10 universities in Central America. Another ranking, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), gives Marburg a 491-500 position in its world university rankings, which includes 1,655 universities. QS also published a list of the top 43 universities in Germany for 2015/2016, and placed Marburg in the 34th position. In turn, UCA obtained a 201-250 position in the Latin American University Rankings by QS. In Germany the CHE (*Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung*) ranking provides more detailed and disaggregated scores, where it is possible for students to observe separate punctuations for various indicators in different disciplines within the different universities in the country. In short, it could be said that neither UCA nor Marburg are great competitors in world rankings, however, they have other prestige sources which they both exploit in their marketing strategies.

On the other hand, a significant element that seems to set these universities apart is the fact that Marburg is a public university and UCA is private. I say that it *seems* to set them apart because in terms of costs it is not so clear if studying at UCA really is more expensive for Nicaraguan students than studying at Marburg is for German students. Being a public university, Marburg receives subsidies from the State towards tuition fees. Students paid 306,34 € for the Winter Semester 2015/2016, an amount that includes unlimited access to public transport (buses, trams and trains) in the city and almost unlimited in all of the state of Hessen and connecting cities with neighbouring *Länder*. However, students who come to Marburg from different *Länder* do have to spend a considerable amount of money in room and board in a city where rental costs amount to 10,50 €/m², placing Marburg as the 18th most expensive student city in the country in which to rent a room⁸⁸. At UCA the fees vary according to the discipline. In the least expensive majors students must pay 60US\$ per registered course per quarter. Other disciplines have the cost of 75US\$ per course per quarter, and the most expensive disciplines cost 100US\$ per course per quarter. The amount a student pays depends on the cost of the courses in his or her discipline and on the amount of courses he registers in a quarter. The total is paid in three instalments programmed in the quarter. In sum, a student who is enrolled in one of the least expensive disciplines and registers five courses – the most common amount – would have to pay 300US\$ in the quarter, while a student taking five

⁸⁷ See the list at: <http://www.webometrics.info/en/world>

⁸⁸ See: immowelt.de

courses in one of the most expensive disciplines would have to pay 500US\$ in the quarter. There is also a pre-matriculation fee of 400 Córdoba, a matriculation fee of 300 Córdoba per quarter, and a fee of 60 Córdoba for the student identification card. Notably, the Nicaraguan university has much higher tuition fees than the German university. While currently a student at Marburg would have to pay around 613€ per year (around 679.5 US\$), a student in one of the least expensive disciplines at UCA would have to pay 900 US\$ in a year plus the matriculation fees. However, UCA is not a university that attracts the elite of the country. Although the cost of studying at UCA is too high for many Nicaraguan families, the student population in the university is quite heterogeneous in terms of social class and origins (urban/rural) due to the fact that the university has an extensive state-funded scholarship programme that covers three of every four students. These scholarships range from 25% to 100% of the cost and can be granted to students from low income families, to students with excellent high school grades, and to students who excel in sports or have special abilities in music, dance, theatre or literature. Therefore, taking all the details into account, it could be concluded that both universities have heterogeneous student populations in terms of economic status. At UCA it can be assumed that students who have scholarships have a considerably different economic situation to those who do not. At Marburg it could be that students who come from different *Länder* might also have a more affluent economic situation, as many have voluntarily increased their expenditure by moving to a new city and covering significant rental costs.

1.1. Teaching/learning: Two worlds, two cultures

While the completion of a degree at UCA takes four years in some disciplines and five in others – a period that includes the dissertation, which is done in the framework of a special final course and with the close guidance of a tutor who has periodical meeting with the student or students – at Marburg, the Bachelor programme has a three year (6 semesters) duration; after this period the student writes the dissertation. This duration was established very recently, with the arrival of the Bologna Process, and is still considered too short by many university teachers and students. As emerged in the interviews, many students still do not finish in this established period and teachers do not necessarily encourage them to do so. At UCA, in contrast, the failure of a student to graduate within the established time-frame is considered a quality failure of the system. This brings down graduation rates, something negatively perceived in quality assurance systems. Inevitably, there is a tension at UCA generated by the conviction that students have to graduate in the stipulated time. Actions are taken for the

early detection of students who might fall behind. This element creates a very different dynamic in the two universities. While in Marburg students usually have to write one exam or final paper to be graded at the end of the course, at UCA, students earn their points through several cumulative assignments. Normally a student already knows if he/she is in danger of failing a course before completing the final assignment.

Another significant difference between the way both universities function is that while at Marburg – as in the rest of German universities – there are two different types of courses: lectures (in which a professor presents a given topic while students mostly listen and take notes) and seminars (in which students participate mainly through presentations and discussions while the teacher guides the process), in Nicaragua there is just one type, which is a mixture of both a lecture and a seminar. There is usually a lecture by the teacher followed by student presentations, group work or discussion. The teacher's task in guiding the process and organising the discussions is very pronounced. Generally, lectures at Marburg do not involve active participation of students. However, I did observe lectures in Economics in which the professor encouraged students' participation through questions and comments, resulting in a very similar dynamic to the typical course at UCA. In addition, at both universities teachers are required to be available for consultation from their students – 'office hours' – at least once a week.

The way courses are created is remarkably different in each university. Teachers at Marburg are encouraged to create courses for their students inspired on their research, design them in the way they consider most adequate, and are also welcome to propose the course schedule they consider most convenient. Hence, a course can be designed based on weekly meetings, a meeting every two weeks, or it can also be designed as a "block seminar" with only two intensive meetings in the semester. On the other hand, teachers at UCA are closely supervised and not free to innovate in this respect. The course schedules are designed by a central office and teachers must accept the timing they are given for their course since the classroom planning is done in a very meticulous way that does not tolerate alterations. In addition, instructors are closely monitored to guarantee their compliance with contractual obligations of teaching hours. Both professors and part-time lecturers must register the moment they enter the classroom and the moment they leave at an electronic 'punch time clock' designed to make sure that teachers do not miss any classroom time. In the case of part-time lecturers, late arrivals and/or early departures from the classroom result in amounts subtracted from their pay checks.

Furthermore, neither full-time professors nor part-time teachers at UCA may design courses according to their particular specialisation or research expertise. All courses are established in the programme's curricula and have an official course plan which is handed to the teacher so the syllabus he or she designs follows its general lines in terms of content and objectives. The syllabus is checked and approved by the Director of Department and Major Coordinator. The evaluation strategy for the course should be made clear in the syllabus as well as the content and teaching strategy for each session. In some Departments teachers also are required to turn in a copy of the reading material they have prepared for the class along with the pedagogic mediation they have designed for each text. This material has to be presented in a formal way, with binding and a list of contents. Lecturers who teach the same course to different groups also have the obligation to attend periodic "course collective" meetings and agree on similar workloads, teaching strategies, and contents. The idea is to guarantee that two groups of students attending the same course with different teachers do not receive different content and workloads. There are also departmental meetings that teachers are required to attend where they are encouraged to talk about special difficulties or successes they have encountered with their students, or discuss difficult cases or situations with particular students. In several Departments instructors that teach different courses but to the same group of students also meet in order to coordinate final papers as a way of integrating the learning process or guaranteeing manageable workloads for the students. In addition, all first time teachers at UCA must attend a week long introductory course on pedagogy and general knowledge about the university's main policies and regulations. This is considered as the first course of the teacher training programme, "Diploma on Teaching Innovation", which all teachers at UCA must complete.

It is important to mention the great amount of part-time lecturers at both universities. In both cases there is a considerable difference between a professor and a part-time lecturer in terms of working conditions, remuneration and stability. Based on my interviews, in both universities students are aware of which of their instructors are professors and which are part-time lecturers. At Marburg because the title usually accompanies the professor's name in course documents, and at UCA because of the professors' possession of a private office, but very few students are aware of other differences. As a result, students tend to speculate a lot about their part time lecturers: for example, a part time lecturer can be perceived by students as a young academic who is beginning his or her career, as an established professional who has a vocation for teaching and does so out of pleasure, or as a failed academic who was unable to secure a professorship or another better job.

To complete the picture on general characteristics of the two universities it is necessary to look at some numbers:

Staff and students in numbers at UCA and Marburg

	Professors* (full-time)	Part-time teaching staff**	Total teaching staff	Managerial staff	Students	Students per teacher (based on total teaching staff)	Students per manager
UCA	123	706	829	540	8,787 undergraduate / 643 graduate Total: 9.430	11,37	17,46
Marburg	358	2.299	2.657	1.794	31,547 nationals / 3,201 foreigners Total: 34.748	13,07	19,36

Sources: Marburg: The quantities correspond to the Wintersemester 2014-2015 (Philipps-Universität Marburg, 2015). UCA: The quantities correspond to the year 2013 (Universidad Centroamericana, 2014a).

Notes: *Professors (full-time): In the case of UCA this means full time teaching staff. In the case of Marburg this includes *Professuren, Juniorprofessuren, Dozenturen, wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter mit Qualifikation und Aufgaben von Professoren*.

**Part-time teaching staff: In the case of UCA these are teachers hired specifically to teach a course (or more); their contracts are based on the amount of hours required in the classroom. In the case Marburg this category includes *Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter mit befristeten bzw. unbefristeten Verträgen, Lehrkräfte für besondere Aufgaben, wissenschaftliche Hilfskräfte*.

When comparing the above numbers it is remarkable to find more similarities than differences between the two universities, in spite of the considerable difference in student population with Marburg having more than three times as many students than UCA. First of all, in both universities there are almost six times as many part-time teachers as full-time professors. The number of students per teacher is a simple calculation obtained by dividing the total number of students by the total number of teachers. Admittedly, this figure does not reveal much about the real amount of students per teacher in the universities because it is not a properly constructed ratio.⁸⁹ However, I also include the same calculation applied to managerial staff, allowing for a simple comparison. This revealed that in both universities the amount of students in relation to each manager is just around six points higher than in relation to teachers.

⁸⁹ Student teacher ratios – even the most sophisticatedly constructed – have been widely criticized for not taking into account numerous conditions that affect and highly determine class size in a university.

The classroom numbers in both universities do vary. While UCA includes no more than 40 students in a classroom, increasing to around 50 students in very rare cases, Marburg has lectures that can sit 300 students or more with seminars that can have around 100 students and as few as 15 or less. Hence, the calculation of the number of students per teacher – which produced very similar numbers – does not give us much information about this reality. Furthermore, the numbers provided fall short of offering an accurate picture because while in Nicaragua undergraduate and graduate students never share courses, this is not the case in Marburg, where some courses can be attended by both undergraduate and graduate students. Hence, unlike UCA, Marburg does not report the number of undergraduate and graduate students in separate figures. They rather separated the number of students between nationals and foreigners, finding this more significant for conveying its degree of internationalisation. The student/teacher ratio also falls short of being a useful indicator in Marburg, where student attendance is not enforced in most Faculties, and the number of students in a classroom fluctuates significantly. For example, a lecture with 300 students officially registered can have a real attendance of 200 or 150. A seminar with 60 registered students could have an actual attendance of 20. This is not the case in UCA, where attendance is a strict matter, and as a result, students very rarely miss a class. In addition, while students at Marburg can choose seminars according to their particular interests, generating a diversity of possible class schedules for students in the same year of a programme, at UCA there are very few optional courses⁹⁰ and students who are in the same year have a mostly identical class schedule.

1.2. Students: From UCA's tight controls and support to Marburg's freedom and independence

Unlike the significant change in lifestyle that becoming a university student represents for a young person in Germany – and therefore in Marburg – which many times involves leaving the parents' house, living alone or with peers, obtaining a part-time job or a personal credit, at UCA there is not much change for the university student. For those who live in Managua, they will keep on living with their parents –which means they are less required to fend for themselves in things like doing the laundry, cleaning, cooking and grocery shopping – especially if they are male students. Extremely few of the students work, either because it is

⁹⁰ For example, in an average programme (Business Administration), out of 61 courses there are five courses classified as electives, which students can choose – from a limited offer of generally two options – according to their preferences.

not expected of them, or because there are very few part-time jobs in Nicaragua that would give them the possibility to combine a work schedule with the extensive class schedule they have, or because – as an omen of things to come – they cannot find a job. They also mention few extracurricular activities and hobbies in comparison with students at Marburg. While for UCA students most of their time away from studying is dedicated to leisure activities with friends, some shared house chores, or personal chores, Marburg students mentioned they dedicated time to working, travelling, student-politics, learning languages, doing internships, charity work, and doing organised sport or artistic endeavours outside the university. For them, all of those activities comprise the “student life” as much as academic activities.

Although my sample does not pretend to be representative, it is possible that students at UCA tend to be younger than students at Marburg at equivalent stages in their academic careers. While the mode of the age of the UCA students interviewed was 19 years, at Marburg it was 23. This age difference of four years – even more significant considering that in Nicaragua I included three alumni – could be partially due to the shorter duration of high school in Nicaragua (one year less) combined with the growing trend among German high-school graduates of taking a gap-year before enrolling in university. Some of them had also completed an *Ausbildung* (apprenticeship) before enrolling in university, or had started in a different discipline they had abandoned. In Nicaragua, students normally do not take time between their high-school graduation and their enrolment in university. And there is no alternative to university for continuing education. In addition, Marburg students perceive a big change regarding teaching dynamics and interactions between high-school education and the university. For UCA students this change is not so pronounced. This perception is coherent with the significantly different levels of control that each system impinges on the student population. Apart from attendance control, which was mentioned before, punctuality and evaluation processes are markedly more controlling at UCA.

Student punctuality in class at both universities basically contradicts general stereotypes on German and Nicaraguan culture. At UCA students are expected to be on time, if they arrive late to class, they risk being marked as absent, something highly penalised and that can lead to failing the course. Therefore, the few times a student is late to class, he or she must apologise to the teacher and present a valid excuse. On the other hand, although students at Marburg are not encouraged to be late, and tardiness is not a problem in seminars with small groups, in big groups students seem free to enter a classroom as late as they need to without being condemned for that. In my observations in class there was not a single case in which all the students were there on time for a big class. In one seminar, for example, 26

students were on time, nine were late, and four were more than 20 minutes late. In another lecture 20 students were on time, ten were around five minutes late, and one was more than 15 minutes late. In a seminar with more than 100 students only 60 were on time and several students left the lecture before it finished; one of them left 15 minutes after it had started, while several left after 45 minutes. Hence, while UCA makes sure students arrive in class on time, students at Marburg are free to be late or leave early if they have to.

Another significant difference that has an impact on UCA's capacity to supervise the students' behaviour and group dynamics is that unlike Marburg, which has premises spread around the city (as is normally the case with European universities), UCA is totally contained within a closed campus (as is the case with most Central American universities). As a result, students at UCA share many areas with their teachers during free time between courses. Moreover, at Marburg each student organises his or her own class schedule according to personal interests. Even students who attend the same course could require very different levels of involvement depending on the amount of credit points he or she wants or needs to obtain. For example, one student might only need to attend a course to get one credit point, another one who needs more points might have to do a presentation, and another might have to do a presentation and write a final essay to obtain the total amount of credit points. At UCA students in a programme are required to take the same courses together as a group, sitting mostly among same major and same year students, having the same teachers, and following a fixed shared schedule which makes them also coincide in their free time. They have to complete the same assignments at the same time, and have exams during the same week for all their courses. This homogeneous dynamic facilitates group participation in special events and tutoring organised by the university, as well as the organisation of meetings for team work for class assignments and student-led study sessions. Constant interaction is also important for students because they need to support each other when they work on class assignments or study for tests, which are constant at UCA due to the cumulative evaluation strategy applied. As a result of this closeness the students generate a strong group identity, solidarity or discord; they face the same conflicts as a group, the same rhythms, share and confront their views and quickly find out what is consensus and what is not. In accordance, they have the opportunity to develop and openly discuss group perceptions about their teachers.

In order to retain a scholarship at UCA a student must pass all classes with a minimum grade point average established by the institution. This generates in many scholarship-holders a strong preoccupation and focus on obtaining the highest possible grades in every course. These students could tell me their grade point average sometimes down to

two decimal points. On the other hand, students who pay would only have pressure to achieve high grades out of personal reasons. At Marburg, pressure to achieve high grades does not depend on financial reasons but on specific dynamics of the discipline combined with the student's personal strategy. For example, first year Anthropology students I interviewed claimed they did not even receive grades. In contrast, a student in Archaeology said they need to have high grades in a course in order for it to be recognised for the Bachelor. In Psychology, students said they felt pressure to achieve high grades in order to guarantee their access into a Master's programme, a necessary step to become a "real psychologist", i.e. authorised to open a practice.

Regarding student politics, these are very active and organised at Marburg. Every discipline has its own *Fachschaft*, or student association, which has its own premises, support and recognition from the university. Some of these associations have a manifest political orientation, such as the leftist *Linke Fachschaft* from the Humanities Faculty (*Gesellschaftswissenschaften und Philosophie*). Representatives from these associations are elected to a general student government or advisory board (*Fachschaftsrat*). The representatives are chosen through a general election in which all students can participate. In contrast, At UCA there is no student association. This disappeared after a conflict that occurred in the late 1990's, in which the students occupied the university in protest for an increase in tuition fees. In terms of student representation, the university authorities recognise a Group Representative (*Representante de grupo*) elected by the students from each year of a discipline. This student has the task of communicating between the group and the programme coordinator in order to establish a direct and efficient link with students to discuss their difficulties or concerns. However, the students interviewed were disdainful of this role, calling group representatives as the official "*sacacopias*" or someone who makes photocopies of the reading material for the group. They also said these students are just the spokespersons "*voceros*" of the university authorities, negating any representative legitimacy to them. Group representatives also discussed the difficulties of their position. They expressed how students many times force them to make complaints about teachers that they do not back-up personally during face-to-face confrontations with the teacher in question and Programme coordinators. This made them feel betrayed and had serious consequences for them because it made it seem as if they were the unsatisfied ones and not the group.

1.3. Quality assurance: A process and a culture

Significantly, both universities have developed very similar quality assurance processes while they have remarkably different teaching/learning practices. At both universities evaluation processes are conducted in connection with accreditation schemes. In both cases the institution has the possibility of choosing an accreditation agency of its preference for the specific accreditation of a programme. Accreditation agencies provide a – usually extensive – list of indicators that a programme should comply with and after a first accreditation the programme must fulfil the implementation of an improvement plan as a condition for re-accreditation⁹¹. Usually agencies present indicators classified into different categories. Some are compulsory, meaning that the programme must comply with them, others are important although not as much as the first group, and others are classified as desirable. These lists of indicators often become guiding principles introduced into the institutions' strategic plans. Professors, lecturers and managers interviewed from both universities worriedly talked to me about precise indicators they knew their programmes needed to fulfil in order to obtain the accreditation or re-accreditation. They stated that special efforts were being conducted in order to be able to comply with them, or instead placed doubts on the possibility of being able to fulfil them because of lack of funds or personnel. They often described how the process made them think about issues they had never thought before and had not occurred to them that had to be done, or had any importance.

At UCA quality is officially discussed only within the framework of evaluation, which is portrayed both as a method and as a way of thinking. Interviewees were quick to state that the university has its own definition of quality which is inspired in its mission and its Christian and Jesuit inspiration. However, when they had to go into detail, they always referred to key elements from the 'talk of quality', such as the fulfilment of standards, the coherence between the mission statement and the actions undertaken by the institution, the continuous change and adaptation, and the flexibility and submissive attitude to evaluation and training that all teachers should have. Marburg has an office dedicated to quality management (*Referats Qualitätsmanagement*), which applies the language of quality assurance to describe how all processes of the university should be guided by its principles.

⁹¹ See CNEA (2011) and ENQA (2009).

At both universities official documents, as well as most of the interviewees, described quality assurance as a methodology or process to which they attribute a capacity to reveal how the university stands in terms of quality. Quality assurance was also given the other definition found in quality assurance literature: it is a culture or frame of mind that individuals who care about quality in education are supposed to embrace unreservedly. An essential concept in this method –and culture– is “continuous improvement”, which has become centrepiece in discussions, and is found profusely in UCA’s official papers. The four “guiding documents”, in which the institution’s commitment to quality is stated, reveal the predominant discourses that surround the issue. The oldest one – the Statutes⁹² – is the only one that talks about quality without mentioning evaluation and/or continuous improvement. It ponders on the university’s Jesuit inspiration, declaring its intention of being a critical institution and helping to transform Nicaraguan society, leading it away from injustice. In the rest of the guiding documents⁹³, as well as in other official documents, such as policies, regulations and strategic plans, quality is deemed to be assured with the guidance of evaluation. The documents repeatedly state that by promoting a “culture of evaluation”, the University guarantees a “continuous improvement” that will help it to be accountable to society. Since 2011, the results of teacher evaluations are part of the incentive system, with teachers having to present evidence of good evaluations in their promotions dossier (Universidad Centroamericana, 2011).

In Marburg the subject of quality is introduced with a veiled recognition of its complexity and of the existence of diverse – and opposed – points of view, as well as the limitations of expressing quality through abstract indicators. However, the *Referats*

⁹² In the document *Estatutos de la Universidad Centroamericana*, written in the 60s and reissued in 2006, we find the following phrase: “Artículo 3: La Universidad Centroamericana tiene como misión colaborar en la transformación de las estructuras de injusticia y enraizar en la cultura los valores de fraternidad anunciados por el Evangelio y la Compañía de Jesús. Pretende la formación de profesionales comprometidos con el desarrollo humano equitativo y sostenible. Profesionales marcados por el deseo de servicio, ‘hombres y mujeres para los demás’ (Universidad Centroamericana, 2006).”

⁹³ The document *Proyecto Curricular y modelo pedagógico*, from 2007, details the principles that guarantee quality in the management of the curriculum. Evaluation and continuous improvement are the basis of five out of six principles: the second principle states that continuous improvement guarantees pertinence in education; the third one says that it guarantees the fulfilment of the students’ needs; the fourth one says that continuous improvement is a participative process; the fifth one says that it depends on creating awareness on everybody; and the sixth principle says that it will help the students’ skills to be in tune with the needs of the job market (Universidad Centroamericana, 2007). Issued in 2008, the document *Modelo de Gestión: Una renovada mirada de país*, states: “La Universidad tiene como reto mejorar constantemente, siempre con el fin de dar a los estudiantes lo que el contexto demanda” (Universidad Centroamericana, 2008a). Also in 2008, the university published its *Proyecto educativo*, which talks about the: “Mejora continua del comportamiento ético y profesional cotidiano en los miembros de la comunidad universitaria...” [and adds its intention to] “Establecer una cultura de planificación y evaluación constante de nuestro quehacer, para lograr las metas establecidas y su mejora continua” (Universidad Centroamericana, 2008b).

Qualitätsmanagement, office in charge of quality management, does insist in the importance of looking at externally defined standards even if they are not the only aspect to consider. And, most importantly, it presents quality as a learning process “*Qualität als Lernprozess*”, and thus introduces the notion that quality is about continuous change and improvement, never-ending, arduous, and self-reflective⁹⁴ (Philipps-Universität Marburg, 2014). Therefore, we can find evident similarities in the way quality is described in both cases as a continuous, never-ending learning process, as the development of a culture that involves a degree of surrender and modification of behaviour from the academics. Above all, quality in both universities is defined in ways that are compatible with the audit culture and its “rituals of verification”.

1.4. Accreditation experience: public vs. private; institutional vs. programme

In Germany an effect of introducing and spreading accreditation processes was to give greater autonomy to higher education institutions by reducing the government’s intervention (Schade, 2007, p. 192). In Nicaragua the opposite happened. With the creation of the CNEA, the National Assembly seized authority over universities which formerly belonged to the CNU (traditionally dominated by academics). In this way, the new institutional accreditation process in Nicaragua is vulnerable to political influence from sectors that have economic ties to certain

⁹⁴ **Qualität** hat zahlreiche Facetten. Je nach Perspektive und Absicht der Urteilenden wird das, was jeweils als „qualitätvoll“ beurteilt wird, verschieden sein. Ohne diese Bedeutungsvielfalt zu ignorieren, wird sich die Philipps-Universität auf bestimmte Dimensionen konzentrieren müssen. Dazu zählen vor allem externe Vorgaben wie die des Hessischen Ministeriums für Wissenschaft und Kunst (HMWK), aber auch etwa die von Drittmittelgebern.

Qualitätsmanagement (QM) sollte sich unserer Auffassung nach aber nicht ausschließlich an externen Vorgaben (wie z.B. Kennzahlen) ausrichten. Diese sind häufig zu abstrakt, um dem Gegenstand angemessen zu sein. Wir verstehen QM daher als einen offenen, dialog-orientierten und durch Neugier motivierten Lernprozess aller Mitglieder.

Qualität als Lernprozess: Da Lernen immer (auch) bedeutet, sich zu verändern, verstehen wir unter Qualitätsmanagement auch, Gewohnheiten zu hinterfragen, offen zu sein für neue Wege und, wo sie sinnvoll sind, Veränderungen anzustoßen und umzusetzen. Dies ist – in allen Bereichen – ein langer und manchmal auch mühseliger Prozess. Er wird aber, davon sind wir überzeugt, für alle Beteiligten zu positiven Ergebnissen führen.

Voraussetzung für erfolgreiches QM:

- klare, realistische, abgestufte und mit den Beteiligten abgestimmte Definition von Zielen
- an diesen Zielen orientiertes, transparentes und sich kontinuierlich selbst reflektierendes Vorgehen
- offene und über alle Ebenen und mit allen Bereichen vernetzte Kommunikation
- Beteiligung und Verantwortungsbewusstsein aller Mitglieder der Universität (Philipps-Universität Marburg, 2014)

private universities. Unlike the German case, in Nicaragua keeping up with standards is perceived as the essence of quality not only for private agencies that offer programme accreditations. The idea of establishing standards for the whole system is at the core of the current institutional accreditation process promoted by CNEA. Guaranteeing minimum standards is considered to be the best safeguard for students in the country. In contrast, for a programme accreditation, ACQUIN in Germany applies criteria that “only partially refer to so-called standards” because even though standards are considered important for transparency, defining intersection points between programmes and determining whether it complies with legal regulations, applying standards for the evaluation of contents of a degree programme is “deliberately avoided” (ACQUIN, 2009).

Admittedly, Marburg has significantly more experience than UCA with programme accreditations; many programmes are in fact already going through a re-accreditation process. These processes tend to be based on paper-work and overseen by a small number of staff. Nevertheless, the participation of students is required at key moments of the process. At both universities the visit from peers involves planned encounters with students. However, while at Marburg these processes are conducted without much announcement to the student population, at UCA the staff makes sure that the students know about the process and its examination-like characteristics, they coach them about its importance and make sure they comprehend the consequences it may have for the programme being examined and the university. An extensive and alluring communication campaign is designed and launched with each evaluation and accreditation process, which includes posters, brochures and official announcements to teachers and students at official gathering.

A total of 29 programmes from Marburg are listed by the *Akkreditierungsrat* as having successfully passed an accreditation process and being authorized to issue an Accreditation Council's Quality Certificate ("*Siegel des Akkreditierungsrates*"). Among them are: the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (*BetriebsWirtschaftswissenschaften*), the Bachelor of Arts in Cultural and Religious Studies (*Vergleichende Kultur- und Religionswissenschaft*), Bachelor of Arts in Education and Training Science/Education Theory (*Erziehungswissenschaften*), Bachelor of Science in Geography (*Geographie*), Bachelor of Arts in Middle Eastern Studies (*Orientwissenschaft*), Bachelor of Arts in National Economics/Economics (*Volkswirtschaftswissenschaften*), Bachelor of Science in Psychology (*Psychologie*), Bachelor of Arts in Political Science (*Politikwissenschaft*), Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (*Sozialwissenschaften*), and the Bachelor of Arts in Archaeology (*Archäologische Wissenschaften*). All of them are accredited by the agency ACQUIN

(Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute). I single these out because they are the disciplines in which my interviewed students were enrolled. Regarding Master degrees, Marburg has 59 accredited programmes. Among them: Business Administration, Cultural and Social Anthropology, Cultural Education in Schools, Economics and Institutions/National Economics, European Ethnology/Cultural Studies, International Development Studies, International Business Management, Peace and Conflict Studies, Sociology and Social Research.

Like the rest of the universities in the country, UCA is currently involved in a process of institutional accreditation required by law and run by the CNEA. The university has successfully passed the first evaluation round, that included the visit of external reviewers, and is applying an improvement plan based on the evaluation results and external reviewers' recommendations. Several individual programmes in the university are preparing for international accreditations, basically by doing an evaluation process that involves checking the list of indicators of the different agencies, compiling data and creating new data that can be presented as evidence, and initiating new processes that are required by the agencies. There was a failed attempt by an undergraduate programme to obtain an accreditation from ACAAI. The university had rushed to the process because it was financed by the Inter-American Development Bank. The verdict was considered unfair by university authorities and unsuccessfully appealed. Other two undergraduate programmes and two Master programmes are conducting evaluation processes as preliminary steps for accreditation attempts with other Central American accreditation agencies, and possibly with a Mexican agency. The choice of agency is made after a detailed revision of the list of indicators used by each agency to see which ones they have the possibility to comply with. This represents a special workload for staff in charge as well as a source of stress for those who see the amount of work that has to be done in order to comply with all the indicators and produce all the necessary evidence. For many teachers this is also a discouraging experience, as they mentioned how several standards are impossible to fulfil for UCA mainly because of economic limitations of the university and the country.

At Marburg too, both accreditation processes and re-accreditation processes represent a considerable workload for those in charge. The processes are also perceived as not so helpful for the aspects they consider most important and decisive for quality, especially in relation to the demands of time and money they represent. Remarkably, teachers had similar opinions in all disciplines:

“I don’t think evaluation and accreditation help quality. They are a total waste of time and resources, and nothing improved. It’s also a waste for the agency. We changed some thing or other, but the curriculum didn’t improve.” (Professor, Marburg)

“Accreditation improves things a little bit, but the price is too high to pay. The workload was so huge that we could not really reflect. We had so much pressure with time. On the other hand, the agency had very fixed criteria, innovative aspects were not valued. We always had to keep in mind the arguments of the agency. Nevertheless, without accreditation we wouldn’t reflect on certain things.” (Lecturer, Marburg)

“There is a pressure to talk to students, and that makes us improve... although the critique from students would eventually come to me without a formal process because this is a small programme. [...] We also make some formal changes, for example with formal regulations of the programme.” (Lecturer and middle manager, Marburg).

“The agencies force you to do an evaluation, and the problem in our programme is that we don’t have enough funds and now part of them will have to be spent on that” (Lecturer, Marburg).

At UCA teachers described evaluation and accreditation processes as useful and generators of “order” and “consciousness” but too draining and stressful. They were also perceived as having a greater impact in the everyday work of teachers. The main issues identified were the workload and speed the processes require, and the unrealistic standards set by the agencies. More than one teacher used the word traumatic to describe them. Here are some examples:

“La evaluación cambia completamente la rutina de lo que venías haciendo antes. Tenés que replanificar todo. Aquí no encaja alguien que diga, ‘yo hago así las cosas y las voy a seguir haciendo así’, caben personas que son flexibles al cambio, porque tenés variables que son tremendas. Para lograr calidad, así como las empresas tienen sistema ISO, sistema Europeo o llámese como se llame, te casas con un sistema que te ayuda a mejorar calidad, pero hay que tener cuidado de querer cumplir indicadores que no te van a ayudar nada en tu contexto. Hay agencias que exigen indicadores que a veces no aterrizan en la realidad nacional y a veces te enfrascás tanto en esos indicadores que descuidás cosas que son más necesarias en el contexto nacional.” (Professor and middle manager, UCA)⁹⁵

“Hablas de acreditación y todo el mundo es como ‘ayayayay’, la gente identifica acreditación con un nivel de estrés, un dolor... y eso debe ser un problema. Yo no sé si las acreditaciones se están cogiendo también por moda, una cultura de carrera, de ir

⁹⁵ Evaluation totally changes the routine of what you had been doing here. You have to plan everything all over again. Someone who says “I do things in this way and I will keep on doing them like this” does not fit here. We need people who are flexible to change because you have variables that are tremendous. To achieve quality, just like corporations have ISO, European system or whatever it is called, you marry a system that helps you to improve quality. But we do have to be careful when wanting to fulfil indicators that are not helpful in your own context. Some agencies ask for indicators that have nothing to do with the national reality and sometimes you get stuck on those indicators and neglect others that are more necessary in the national context.” (Professor and middle manager, UCA)

por la meta, habría que matizar. Es bueno que las instituciones se propongan los más altos estándares, pero hay que ver que esto no se convierta en una carrera de relevo, que ponga a correr a todas las instituciones y explotar a la gente. Aquí tenemos que mantener la ejecución de los programas con calidad, que lleva mucho trabajo, a la par tienes que construir lo que no está construido, y a la par recopilar todas las evidencias y escribir una tesis, porque el informe de evaluación es una tesis doctoral. ¿Cómo vas a narrar 165 indicadores? Solamente decir 165 ya cansa.” (Professor and middle manager, UCA).⁹⁶

“Lo que nos pasó fue terrible, fue traumante, fue desgastante. Nos arrepentimos, nos metimos en ese proceso sin ninguna necesidad, ¿para qué? ¿Para qué nos metimos a andar detrás de una acreditación si estamos bien, estamos haciendo las cosas bien? Yo no digo que la experiencia fue negativa, aprendimos mucho. Fue un boom, todo el mundo hablaba de acreditación, que si una carrera está acreditada la sociedad la reconoce como la mejor, los estudiantes se sienten motivados porque está usted dando una calidad” (Professor and top manager, UCA).⁹⁷

“La autoevaluación aquí cuando se dio le paró los pelos a todo el mundo... Porque son procesos muy intensos y con poco personal. Ahí está el problema. Es una sobrecarga de cosas y no tenemos más gente. Y la vida sigue, porque seguís dando clases, los chavalos siguen teniendo problemas y todo sigue igual, no es que se detiene. El problema es que se suma otro trabajo al que no estás acostumbrado porque no tenés la cultura de guardar, tomar fotos y escribir. Y cuando te dicen, ‘de eso depende la calidad y la acreditación de tu carrera’ te pesa, porque lo sentís como tu responsabilidad” (Professor and middle manager, UCA).⁹⁸

⁹⁶ You talk about accreditation and everyone is like ‘ouch, ouch, ouch, ouch’. People identify accreditation with a level of stress, a pain... and that must be a problem. I don’t know if accreditations are being done out of fashion, a racing culture, to get to the finish line, it’s necessary to sober it down. It’s good that institutions want to achieve the highest standards, but we must guarantee that this does not turn into a relay race, making all institutions run and exploiting people. Here we have to keep the programmes running with quality, which takes a lot of work, simultaneously you have to build what is inexistent, and also you have to compile all the evidence and write a dissertation, because the evaluation report is a doctoral dissertation. How are you going to narrate 165 indicators, just saying 165 leaves you tired (Professor and middle manager, UCA).

⁹⁷ What happened to us was terrible, traumatic, wearing. We regretted having entered the process without needing to. What for? Why did we start chasing an accreditation if we were alright, we were doing things properly? I don’t say the experience was negative, we learned a lot. It was a boom, everybody talked about accreditation, that if a programme was accredited it is better recognised by society and the students feel motivated because you are giving them quality (Professor and top manager, UCA)

⁹⁸ Here, when we conducted the evaluation it was a hair-raising process for everyone. They are very intense processes that have to be developed with not enough personnel. That is the problem. It’s an overload of things and we don’t have more people. And life goes on. You keep teaching, the kids keep having problems, everything remains the same, nothing stops. The problem is that you add a new job you were not used to doing because you don’t have the culture of saving evidence, taking pictures, writing everything. And when they tell you “the quality and accreditation of your programme depends on that” you feel that heavily because you consider it your responsibility (Professor and middle manager, UCA).

Experts and top managers tended more to highlight that evaluation and accreditation are necessary. Even when some of them did criticise some aspects of the processes – particularly its possible incompatibilities with the academic context –, they either mentioned as an unquestionable fact that all universities are conducting these practices nowadays and it is too risky not to follow suit, or that these processes have the following concrete advantageous effects: helping alumni enter the job market, producing a better organisation of the work, or giving prestige to the institution:

“La idea que nos han vendido con las acreditaciones es que cuando estás acreditado, el beneficio es para el estudiante porque la empresa tiende a contratar a aquellos egresados de universidades que están certificadas, que están acreditadas, porque se supone que ya se revisaron sus estándares de calidad. Y lo otro, para la universidad es estar en un nivel de prestigio” (Expert, UCA).⁹⁹

“Aunque el proceso, entendido en función de los intereses del mercado y de posicionarse en los rankings no sea lo mejor, al final es un medio necesario por donde hay que entrar al proceso. La universidad que no se integra corre el riesgo de ser desplazada de una posición de estatus dentro de la academia, dentro del mercado, porque al final está ligada la producción de conocimiento al mercado, a esas posiciones en los rankings” (Expert and lecturer, UCA).¹⁰⁰

“Ayudan a que todos estén más claros de lo que es importante en el proceso educativo, hacia donde apunta la propuesta educativa, cómo debemos hacer para lograr lo que se propone, etc. Por supuesto que estamos hablando de educación y de personas que enseñan y otras que aprenden, y no de la producción de jugos embotellados. Por lo tanto, no hay fórmulas o procesos estandarizados, pero la definición de indicadores de calidad puede contribuir a poner énfasis en los aspectos importantes, a tomar en cuenta algunos aspectos de la gestión educativa, del currículo, o de los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje que tal vez no estaban considerados. Ayuda a dar más coherencia al trabajo, a cuidar la gestión, a definir las prioridades de inversión, etc.” (Top manager and professor, UCA).¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ The idea they have sold us about accreditation is that when you are accredited the benefit is for the student because businesses tend to hire graduates from certified universities who, it is assumed, have checked their quality standards. And other thing, for the university it is about being in a level of prestige (Expert, UCA).

¹⁰⁰ Even though the process, understood as being submitted to the interests of the market and acquiring a position in the rankings is not the best, at the end of the day is a necessary means through we must enter the process. The university that does not join the process runs the risk of being displaced from its status in the academy and the market, because at the end of the day, the production of knowledge is linked to the market and to that position in the rankings (Expert and lecturer, UCA).

¹⁰¹ They help us all to be clearer about what is important in the learning process, to which direction aims our educational proposal, what should we do to achieve its purposes, etc. Of course we are talking about education and about people who teach and others who learn, and not about the production of bottled juice. Therefore, there are no formulas or standardised processes, but the definition of quality indicators can contribute to place emphasis on important aspects, to take into account some aspects of educational management, of curriculum, or about the processes of teaching and learning that were

1.5. Teacher training

The availability of teacher training in a university is considered nowadays as an unquestionable sign of quality assurance. Both UCA and Marburg have teacher training programmes. The following chart presents a brief comparison of their main characteristics.

Teacher training	UCA	Marburg
Office in charge	<p>-The <i>Oficina de Formación Continua</i> is part of the Directory of Graduate Studies. One person, an expert in Education, is in charge and organises the course programme for every quarter. The office grants certificates to those who complete the circuit.</p> <p>-Since most of the participants in the courses are temporary teaching staff who also work in other universities, UCA sees these courses as having an impact on improving higher education in the whole country.</p>	<p>The <i>Stabsstelle Hochschuldidaktik (HD) - Lehrkompetenz- und Lehrpersonalentwicklung</i> has a team of eight members.</p> <p>- The office describes itself as a team of supporters for teachers but also for students. The participation of teachers in the courses is entirely optional.</p>
General characteristics	<p>All teachers, full-time professors and part-time lecturers are required to attend the courses and earn credits toward a Diploma on Teaching Innovation. The course is designed for teachers from all disciplines. The instructors are teachers and staff from the university.</p> <p>- Teachers take part in the courses during the class-free periods between quarters.</p> <p>-The courses are designed to be intensive, requiring teachers to attend for a whole week, enrolling in as many courses as they can.</p>	<p>-The team offers courses as well as personalised support and special seminars with external experts.</p> <p>On the other hand, it also aims to advise the university management in developing teaching-learning quality and the transition to competency-oriented teaching-learning culture at the university.</p> <p>- The office offers discipline-sensitive courses, meaning that they are adapted to the particular characteristics of each discipline.</p>

perhaps not being considered. It helps to give more coherence to work, to take better care of the management, to define investment priorities, etc.”

Experts in teacher training at Marburg do not use a language of imposition; they describe their job as a service for teachers. It is teachers who have to request it and decide how and when to use it. Both evaluation and teacher training are indeed presented as an offer that a teacher takes freely, but are simultaneously embedded in a system of competition and increased insecurity, elements which characterise subjectification (Hamman, 2009, p.51). In both cases the participation in teacher training has been associated to a willingness to become a better teacher.

In spite of the importance of teacher training in both universities, the students interviewed did not know that teacher training existed in the institution. This is especially remarkable at UCA, since the absolute majority of their teachers had to have been engaged in the university's teacher training programme. When discussing problems of quality many students proposed the idea of providing teacher training for the deficient teachers. Since teacher training has been available at UCA since more than ten years ago, and the intensive and compulsory programme has been functioning since at least six years, all of the interviewed students had pedagogically trained teachers but did not know.

The teachers interviewed from both universities who spoke about the new pedagogies tacitly agreed with the paradigms promoted by the latest reforms and quality assurance regimes. The constructivist paradigm and teacher reflectivity notions are very present – particularly at UCA – as well as ideas that are coherent with student-centred learning in both universities. Teachers and experts in pedagogy who described to me the practical implementation of these perspectives on teaching said that it consists mainly in promoting the students' active participation in class and reducing lecturing to its minimal expression or totally eliminating it (in the case of seminars in Marburg). The promotion of student participation was said to guarantee their involvement in the construction of knowledge, and their positioning at the centre of the process. Hence, for the interviewees, constructivism and the student-centred learning depend on the deployment of effective participation strategies in the classroom.

There was, however, a very interesting difference in the way in which these paradigms were understood and applied in both universities. This allows us to see how teaching is a culturally embedded practice in which social expectations about student-teacher interactions and classroom behaviour have more impact than pedagogical concepts put to practice. Both universities have acquired elements of student-centred learning. However, the same discourse used in both universities means opposite things in the practice in terms of the

teacher’s role and the expectations placed on the students. In Marburg, it means fostering an independent student who is pro-active, acts like a responsible grown-up, decides what to read, does not require constant control or coaxing, studies when he/she has to, and shows up to class when is interested. This view demands a minimal intervention of the teacher in a seminar, as one professor said: “As I was told in a pedagogy training course, it’s their class, not mine. I should not interfere!”. In my observations I saw a seminar in which a teacher talked for five minutes in total and apologised for talking too much. Most of the time teachers in seminars introduce the session and wrap up with some important points at the end. At UCA this would be unthinkable. Teachers are encouraged to be student-centred by perceiving their students as vulnerable humans who have needs they should try to fulfil by dedicating time and special or personalised attention when they need it. Students are considered immature, and teachers are expected to control their behaviour, reinforce them, encourage and give them advice. In the words of one professor: “I show them that I care for each one. If a student did not come to class, I ask why did she miss; if someone comes late I ask why were they late, and always make sure I know if someone is going through a difficult situation in their personal life that could require special support”.

1.6. Teacher evaluation

Both universities have established standardised processes for teacher evaluation. These consist of questionnaires with predominantly quantitative questions that are meant to produce comparable statistics. Below I present a brief comparison of the mechanism for teacher evaluation put in place by each university. Both institutions have dedicated an office to be in charge of the process.

Teacher evaluation	UCA	Marburg
Office in charge	-The <i>Oficina de Evaluación docente</i> has one full time employee who is also a teacher in the university. The office, which has more than ten years of existence, is part of the Directory of Undergraduate Studies. During evaluation periods the office hires students as interns to help with the logistics.	-The <i>Lehrevaluation - Studentische Rückmeldungen</i> is part of the <i>Dezernat III. Studium und Lehre</i> and the area <i>Studienangelegenheiten und Qualitätssicherung in der Lehre</i> . The office, which was created in 2007, has a team of two workers and two <i>Studentische hilfskraft</i> who assist with the logistics.

	<p>- The office claims it protects the students and the university's quality by being able to promptly detect unprofessional teachers. However, the personnel are aware of the complexity of interpreting the results and of the extremely small mathematical differences between most of the scores produced.</p>	<p>- The office describes itself as a service for teachers who can use evaluation if they want to, but the personnel are also aware that some teachers need the evaluation to apply for a job post.</p>
<p>Procedure</p>	<p>-All teachers at UCA have to be evaluated by the end of the Quarter. This involves an intricate administrative and logistic operation. A whole week – from Monday to Saturday, from 8:00 to 12:00 and 13:00 to 20:00 – is dedicated to bring approximately 780 groups to the evaluation room, where a new group enters every five minutes. Teachers who teach one or two classes are evaluated in all of them. Teachers who teach three are evaluated in two of them, and teachers who teach four are evaluated in three.</p> <p>-A sample of 20 students is taken from each course. Any student with more than two or three absences is excluded. The interns collect the students from the classroom at a specific time and take them to the computer laboratory where they will fill in the questionnaire. Meanwhile, the teacher also fills in a 'self-evaluation' questionnaire. The students have a small margin of time to complete their evaluation, five minutes, but they often take even less time (around two or three minutes according to my observations).</p> <p>-The results are automatically saved in a system and personnel from the office of Informatics produce individual sheets that contain the average scores given by the students for each course. These results are sent to the <i>Oficina de Evaluación Docente</i>, who then hands them to each Director of Department, who are the teachers' immediate bosses. They, in turn, have to call each teacher for a personal meeting in which</p>	<p>-The interested teacher requests the evaluation sheets and distributes them in the classroom to all the students who want to fill one in. The teacher stays in the classroom while the students fill in the sheet. They take as much time as they need. Then the teacher collects the sheets and hands them back to the evaluation office to digitalise and process the data. The office produces a sheet with the results which consist of average scores in each item based on a Likert scale, and the average score of the rest of the teachers. In this way, the teacher can compare his or her score with the general average and know in which items he/she falls below or above it.</p> <p>-According to the personnel, between 300 and 400 teachers are evaluated each semester. That is, between 11 and 15% of the total teaching staff.</p> <p>-The office claims that the idea of the questionnaire is to provide a feedback for the teacher that should be used to initiate a dialogue about mutual expectations with the students and to identify weaknesses together and try to correct them.</p> <p>-In addition to the personal results of the lecturers, the Office also produces aggregated and anonymous reports both at departmental and university level for purposes of accreditation processes.</p>

	<p>they will discuss the teacher's evaluation results and possible strategies to improve in their weak points. The <i>Oficina de Evaluación Docente</i> also compiles a list of teachers who did not achieve a minimum score of 3 (in a Likert scale from 1 to 5) and passes it to the Director of Undergraduate Studies, who, in turn, enquires about the teacher to the Director of the Department where he or she works.</p>	
Mandatory level	<p>Compulsory for all teachers. Furthermore, teachers who wish to apply for a promotion need to hand in good evaluation results as part of their application.</p>	<p>Officially, it is totally out of free will; the teacher is the one who requests an evaluation. However, evaluation results are increasingly becoming a requisite for the application to a job post.</p>
Who obtains the results	<p>The Director of Graduate Studies, the Deans, the Director of the Department in which the teacher works, and the teacher can see it during a meeting with the Director.</p>	<p>The results are sent directly to the teacher by email, who decides if he or she will show it to the students. They are also sent to the Dean of Students (<i>Studiendekan</i>) in the Faculty and to the Vice-President of Learning and Teaching (<i>Vizepräsident für Studium und Lehre</i>). During accreditation processes they are also requested by programme coordinators to include them as part of the compiled evidence.</p>
What kind of information does the questionnaire produce	<p>Average score for every item and a global aggregated score in a scale from 1 to 5. The scores have been assigned the following meanings:</p> <p>Outstanding 4.75 or more</p> <p>Very good 4.5 – 4.74</p> <p>Good 4.00 – 4.49</p> <p>Must improve 3.99 or less</p> <p>In addition, the teacher's evaluation is also composed of the scores given by the teacher him/herself in a self-evaluation questionnaire, and the scores given by the Programme Coordinator, also based on a standardised evaluation questionnaire. Nevertheless, these two other scores are irrelevant, it is the students' score</p>	<p>Average score and standard deviation for every item, and a graphic that contains the average score of each item in comparison to the global average score of all the evaluated courses of the same type (e.g. lecture or seminar, etc.) in the Department. The results also include the qualitative answers given by the students, as well as the quantitative 'self-evaluation' questions directed at the students.</p>

	<p>which counts. Furthermore, the open-ended qualitative questions have traditionally not been included in these results¹⁰².</p> <p>In practice, some Faculties have officially established that teachers who do not obtain a minimum average score of four points have a problem and should immediately show improvement or risk losing their job. At a central level not obtaining a minimum of three points is considered a “fail”.</p>	
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As seen above, the official discourse contained in the documents and used by the evaluation offices is one of conviction and certainty about the utility and importance of these questionnaires. This is equally so in both universities. On the other hand, according to the interviews, perceptions of teaching evaluation vary considerably within each university. Experts and top managers tend to share the official discourse found in policies. This does not mean that they do not detect flaws in the practice, but their function as instruments capable of obtaining students’ opinions, their utility for teachers, and their importance for the institution are all maintained as truths:

“We only use them as feedback. It doesn’t work to use them to rank teachers because, obviously, if you teach an interesting course you will get good evaluations but if you teach a hard one, like mathematics for example, you will get negative evaluations.” (Professor and Top manager, Marburg)

“Es necesaria porque el proceso educativo debe ser evaluado, pues a través de la evaluación uno puede dar cuenta de lo que está haciendo bien y de lo que puede mejorar. Para el profesor, una seria evaluación ayuda a retroalimentar su trabajo, a dirigir sus esfuerzos en mejorar algunos aspectos, a prepararse más, a capacitarse. La condición para que esto ocurra es aceptar de manera abierta y propositiva que puede mejorar, lo que implica a la vez una dosis de humildad”. (Top manager and professor, UCA)¹⁰³

¹⁰² The students’ answers to the open-ended questions are, in fact, never processed or even recovered from the system. As part of this research I obtained the qualitative answers of teacher evaluations for several majors during one quarter. The information, however, took a special effort to obtain from the system. As the IT technician in charge told me: “This is like having a million dollars inside a cabinet of which you have no keys and no tools to open”.

¹⁰³ It’s necessary because the learning process should be evaluated. Through evaluation you can find out which things you are doing well and which things you can improve. For the teacher a serious evaluation helps to give feedback about their work, to direct his or her efforts to improving certain aspects, to be better prepared, to train more. The condition for this to happen is to accept in an open and proactive way that you can improve, which requires a healthy dose of humility. (Top manager and professor, UCA)

“Para que el docente mejore, si uno no le retroalimenta qué tan bien está haciendo las cosas, cómo van a saber qué tan bien o qué tan mal? El que instala el criterio de calidad de qué tipo de docente sos es el estudiante y la parte administrativa que está viendo tu proceso” (Expert, UCA).¹⁰⁴

“Sobre todo tiene que ayudar para saber lo que están diciendo los estudiantes... Las preguntas están categorizadas. Eso ya es una mejora, porque ya el docente sabe en qué área de su experticia pedagógica debe mejorar” (Expert and lecturer, UCA).¹⁰⁵

All experts and top managers interviewed at UCA consider teacher evaluation as a valid source of feedback, and regard it as a carrier of the students’ opinions and as a clear support for teachers, who otherwise would not know how well or bad they are doing their job. This belief is particularly significant given the fact that most of the managers mentioned how there are just a few examples of bad teaching, and they are often previously known through anecdotal evidence or other sources of observation. This might be another indication of the use of these questionnaires more as messages – in forms of “truths” and classifications – for students and teachers than as sources of student feedback.

The need for continuous feedback is an element of the ‘talk of quality’ that encourages academics to embrace instability in the shape of continuous improvement. This new “proper” mind set, allows the bureaucracy to foster a mentality in which staff should be prepared to put aside their own beliefs, perceptions and experience in order to open up to new, if often ephemeral, goals brought about by the quality assurance process itself. At UCA, the concept of continuous improvement, along with quality assurance, has become common sense among experts and most top managers. The submission to current demands posed by accreditation agencies and other “intermediating organisation” has also allowed the university to direct funds to the opening of new offices and positions of managerial character, and to the creation and support of expensive new “rituals of verification”. As a result, the emphasis on teaching quality found in the prevailing discourse can coexist with institutional decisions that do not favour this element of the university.

Academics in both universities expressed a more ambivalent view of the practice and more varied postures according to their personal experiences. All of the teachers I interviewed

¹⁰⁴ For teachers to improve, if we do not give them feedback about how well they are doing things, how are they going to know how good or bad they are? Who defines the quality criteria about what type of teacher you are is the student, and the management who has been observing your process (Expert, UCA).

¹⁰⁵ Above all, this should help to know what the students are saying... the questions are divided into categories. That is an improvement because the teacher can learn in what aspect of his or her pedagogical expertise he or she should improve (Expert and lecturer, UCA).

had direct and extended experience with teacher evaluation. Its results are interpreted within a very particular context in mind and through their specific personal experience as teachers. In addition, they do not claim to be clueless about the quality of their work without teacher evaluation.

“Evaluation questionnaires don’t reveal how good the teaching was. I teach very technical courses and non-technical courses and students always evaluate more negatively the technical courses”. (Professor, Marburg)

“No se captura todo. El proceso anterior de preparación, nadie se entera, esto está en la nada. Hay trabajo que no se registra.” (Professor, middle manager, UCA)¹⁰⁶

A fundamental element in which the official expert discourse diverges from the teacher’s discourse is in whether students’ feelings of satisfaction can be fair indicators of a proper learning experience. While this seems straightforward for the experts, for the teachers it is not so clear. They consider feelings of frustration and unhappiness as natural components of the learning experience. As such, this ‘invisible’ but inevitable – and not necessarily negative – aspect of teaching/learning is turned into a threat for the teacher when it is captured in the evaluation questionnaire as lack of satisfaction:

“I use evaluation questionnaires a lot but they don’t reveal everything. Sometimes they show something I didn’t know, sometimes they just confirm what I already knew. But anyway, they are just a photograph of one moment in time, the students can be feeling overwhelmed with the content at that moment. But I’m not here to make them feel happy, I’m here to transfer some knowledge. Maybe they spent some time feeling uncomfortable but at the end they learned. It doesn’t matter if our students don’t say they are happy. For me, it’s worst if they say they are happy but then go somewhere else and people see they know nothing and if they say they come from here, it’s embarrassing”. (Professor, Marburg)

The interviews also revealed that teachers are not against evaluation *per se*. In fact, all of them said that in their classes they always include an evaluation based on open questions to obtain feedback from their students when there is still time to improve things before the course concludes. Some did it in writing to keep the students’ anonymity and encouraged all of them to participate:

¹⁰⁶ Not everything is captured. The previous process of preparation, nobody sees it, it is outside of the picture. There is work that is not registered.” (Professor, middle manager, UCA)

“Evaluation questionnaires are a feedback, they give you an idea of how you did. However... this doesn’t tell us if the teaching was good, only whether the students liked it. Open, face-to-face evaluation helps us more to improve the course’s design. I always do that.” (Lecturer, Marburg).

When they are valued, they are done so because they can contain very practical suggestions or because they have a positive impact in making students feel valued, not in relation to fundamental aspects of their course’s contents or their adequateness as teachers:

“For me, student evaluations are really helpful. I obtain feedback from about 30% of the class when they send them by email. They generally say they want me to include more about how they can connect what they learn to their future career. The students also feel empowered because they get the impression that their feedback is taken into account. Although, maybe we do too much evaluation...” (Professor, Marburg)

Still more complex is the view of academic coordinators or middle managers, staff who have the task of intermediating between teachers and students, and therefore have access to two perspectives of the situation. At UCA the interviews revealed the strong tension this process generates for them. Based on the interviews, teacher evaluation processes have become a complicated issue to navigate for course coordinators. Since they are the teachers’ direct supervisors as well as the main interlocutors with students, they find themselves often in the middle of divided opinions. Interviewees at both universities also point out that often their opinions about certain teachers differed from those of students, but that bad evaluations now force them to stop hiring a teacher, as well as the opposite, they said students complain about good teachers who are only being strict or demanding, and that unchallenging teachers are obtaining good evaluations:

“The evaluations contain a big part of what the students think, they don’t take their responses from the air. There are some real administrative problems they point out. However, one has to distinguish between phrases like “I don’t like the professor” and when they don’t want to work so much, from real critique”. (Lecturer, middle manager, Marburg)

“Un profesor bien evaluado siempre no generalmente es bueno. Especialmente por el estudiante. Ellos te lo dicen. Tenés profesores excelentemente evaluados y son de lo más flojos que hay sobre la tierra”. (Professor, middle manager, UCA)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ A teacher who always gets good evaluations is generally not good. Especially by the students. They tell you. So you have teachers with excellent evaluations who are the most lenient in the whole world. (Professor, middle manager, UCA)

For the middle managers, teacher evaluation has effectively usurped part of the decision making responsibilities that come with their position. It is evident that they perceive that the university's management has replaced trust in them for trust in the questionnaire. They consider that the knowledge they have acquired from direct contact with students and teachers becomes invalidated or ignored by the system. This is even more problematic considering that they believe that students sometimes use the instrument in the wrong way:

“Muchas veces los muchachos ocupan la evaluación como desquite, como quien dice ‘aquí a este viejo tal por cual le echamos la vaca’. El problema de la evaluación, en algún momento, es que se valora desde una unidad que está al margen y esa unidad lo que valora son resultados. El que conoce de alguna manera el comportamiento es el coordinador de la carrera, la parte cualitativa la conoce el Coordinador de la carrera, pero hay un nivel realmente de dirección que a lo que se remite es a la parte cuantitativa. Esa parte cuantitativa, muchas veces, muchas veces diría yo, está manipulada por esas cuestiones de los chavalos, el desquite. Los muchachos todavía no conciben el hecho de que el trabajo docente es un trabajo” (Professor, middle manager, UCA).¹⁰⁸

“A veces ese monitoreo reproduce los monitoreos que se realizan a los procesos productivos industriales. Este es un tema más humano. Si una institución está ya colocando a un profesor frente a una clase, tiene que ser responsable de haber analizado a ese profesor y decidido que era la persona adecuada para dar ese curso.” (Professor, middle manager, UCA).¹⁰⁹

“A veces los estudiantes dicen que un profesor llega tarde, yo me voy al sistema a corroborar y resulta que no.” (Professor, middle manager, UCA)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Often the guys use the evaluations to get even. It's like “here we get rid of this old good for nothing...”. The problem with evaluation is that it is examined by an office that is separated from us, and they value the results. Who knows, to a certain point, a teacher's behaviour is the Coordinator of the programme, he knows the qualitative part. But there is a level of direction that only sees the quantitative part. That quantitative part, many times, many times I would say, is manipulated by those attitudes of the kids, the getting even. The guys still do not understand that teaching is a job (Professor, middle manager, UCA).

¹⁰⁹ Sometimes that monitoring reproduces the monitoring that is done in industrial processes. This is a more human issue. If an institution has placed a teacher in front of a class, it must be responsible of having analysed that teacher and decided if it was the adequate person for the course (Professor, middle manager, UCA).

¹¹⁰ Sometimes the students say that a teacher is always late. I go and check the system and find out it is not true. (Professor, middle manager, UCA)

At UCA, teacher evaluation can become an inevitable weigh on teachers' shoulders. It is evidently a real threat on their employment chances, especially for part-time teachers. This is felt strongly by managers who have to stop hiring part-time teachers:

“La evaluación es numérica, numérica, eso es lo más triste. Nosotros somos contrarios como Facultad; los indicadores numéricos, no nos ayudan. Por ejemplo, según la normativa de contratación del docente, si ellos sacan menos que 4, con dos veces consecutivas, algo así, no podemos más contratarlos.” (Professor, top manager, UCA)¹¹¹

“En primer lugar es un cuestionario muy cerrado y en segundo lugar convertís una escala cualitativa a cuantitativa. Según la escala, 3 es bueno, pero si a mí me dan una evaluación con puros 3, si fuese profesor horario estoy casi que despedido, y si soy de planta seguramente tengo una reunión con mi director de departamento, con mi decano y posiblemente hasta con la directora de pregrado.” (Professor, middle manager, UCA)¹¹²

Perhaps because of this situation it is not surprising that teachers have resorted to modify their practices in the classroom based on what will produce positive results in their evaluations.

“Yo le doy seguimiento a las variables de evaluación e intento que ellos estén durante todo el cuatrimestre recordando aquellas cosas que ellos suelen olvidar cuando hacen la evaluación”. (Professor, middle manager)¹¹³

From the above examples we can observe that teachers, and also experts, tend to put into context or tone down the discourse on quality that we find in the documents. Many times this appears as the result of an adaptation they have had to do in order to make quality assurance feasible or bearable. In general, when comparing the responses from both universities, the strongest conflicting reactions are found among UCA middle managers, coinciding with the strong weight in decisions that teacher evaluation has been given in that

¹¹¹ The evaluation is numerical, numerical, that is the saddest part. We as a Faculty are against it; numerical indicators do not help us. For example, according to the regulations for hiring of teachers, if they get less than four points in two consecutive times, something like that, we cannot hire them anymore. (Professor, top manager, UCA)

¹¹² In the first place, the questionnaire is too closed, and in second place you convert a qualitative scale into quantitative. According to the scale three is good, but if I get an evaluation full of threes, if I were a part-time teacher I'm good as fired, and if I'm a professor I surely get a meeting with my Director of Department, with my Dean, and possibly even with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (Professor, middle manager, UCA)

¹¹³ I follow up the variables that are part of the evaluation and try to make them remember them during the whole quarter so that they do not forget those things they use to forget when they do the evaluation. (Professor, middle manager)

institution. At Marburg teachers seem freer to declare its weaknesses, but they are also willing to find advantages to its application. Their view is critical but also pragmatic.

Teachers at both universities do perceive some value in the practice, much in correspondence to the official discourse that promotes it as a very usable tool, they declare that it can help in organising better their work, introducing new elements, or that it improves students' feelings of empowerment in the institution. However, academics find a side to teacher evaluation that is not present in the official 'talk of quality'. In Marburg, teachers perceive a useless element in it, while at UCA teachers perceive a harmful or damaging side to the practice. To a great extent this reflects the differences in intensity with which the practice is applied.

2. First research question: How do teacher evaluation questionnaires define quality in teaching and teachers at UCA and Marburg?

Ambivalence is the word that better captures teachers' responses to the content of teacher evaluation questionnaires. For example, one professor and middle manager at UCA said: "I think the questionnaires have improved a lot, everything the student can say about the class is there." But later she added: "It's not infallible. The student can feel a high level of satisfaction but sometimes does not have an integral or global vision. The fact that a student feels satisfied does not mean *per se*, and by itself, that there is quality". And a lecturer at Marburg said: "Students need support and sometimes it is not sufficiently provided. Evaluation takes some time from class, however it does help to give more importance to teaching. But how do you measure teaching?... It could be that students are happy because they don't have to learn too much. For example, here Statistics courses are always badly evaluated because students don't like them". Therefore, how can evaluation questionnaires both provide the sensation that they contain everything about a class yet at the same time, students' opinions be considered a limited indicator of quality? How can they appear to have the positive effect of increasing the appreciation of teaching and bettering the attention towards students, while also risking to become an encouragement for lowering standards? Firstly, the questionnaires are never short and concise, they always consist of an extensive list of questions, giving therefore the appearance of completeness and thoroughness. On the other hand, teachers know that their work does not start and end in the classroom, and as can be appreciated in the interviews

cited above, their experience has taught them that students’ opinions not necessarily coincide with their criteria of what quality is in the teaching/learning experience.

All of the interviewees made reference to the contradictions inherent to the application of evaluation questionnaires. None of them believed that they actually reflected the quality of their work or of the course they had taught. From the perspective of the quality experts all of these lecturers “lack humility”, or lack the “culture of evaluation” or the “culture of quality and continuous improvement”. There is an obvious gap between the quality expert’s perspective on students’ opinions and the teacher’s perspective. As a professor from Marburg observed: “Just because these politicians and managers say something should be in some way, that is not true, they don’t know what they are talking about, they don’t teach”. In order to understand what is missing or incoherent in the quality assurance perspective, I will dissect the preferred “ritual of verification” of the audit culture in universities, the teacher evaluation questionnaire, to understand how it portrays the teaching/learning experience from the student’s opinions it attempts to collect.

2.1. Teacher evaluation questionnaires

Below I present a general overview of the teacher evaluation questionnaires at UCA and Marburg, their most salient characteristics as well as a classification of the questions based on the type of information that is obtained through them. This will allow us to see the kind of data about the teacher’s performance that is considered important and valid indicators of teaching quality for the university managers. At the same time this is also what the managers want the students to value about their teachers.¹¹⁴

	UCA	Marburg
Number and types of questionnaires	One	Five, each one adjusted to the type of course: lectures, seminars, exercise classes, practicals and language courses. The office also has an English version of each of these.
Structure of the	-The questionnaire has 19	Lectures: 30 closed questions

¹¹⁴ I have translated the questions from UCA’s questionnaire from the Spanish version. The Marburg questionnaires were obtained in English version and so the questions were just transcribed.

<p>questionnaire:</p>	<p>closed questions plus three questions about the student's performance, two questions about the teacher having handed in and followed the syllabus and two open-ended questions about what has helped the student more about the teacher's performance and what aspects should the teacher improve.</p> <p>-The closed questions are divided into four dimensions plus one single final question. The areas are: 1. Teaching competence; 2. Responsibility; 3. Interpersonal relations; 4. Promotion of values; and the last question asks about the student's general satisfaction with the teacher's work and the answer is yes or no.</p>	<p>and an open-ended question about what the student particularly liked or disliked from the course.</p> <p>Seminars: 34 closed questions plus the open-ended question.</p> <p>Exercise classes: 37 closed questions plus the open-ended question.</p> <p>Practicals: 36 closed questions plus the open-ended question.</p> <p>Language course: 35 closed questions plus the open-ended question.</p> <p>-The closed questions are divided into seven sections.</p> <p>-For this exercise I only include the questionnaires for lectures and seminars. In total, 25 of the questions from both questionnaires are identical, as well as the final open-ended question.</p>
<p>Questions</p>		
<p>On clarity:</p> <p>These questions range from the clarity of the contents of the course and the instructions given for assignments, to the clarification of doubts, and the clarity of communication in a teacher.</p>	<p>-Clearly explains the class content.</p> <p>-Clearly explains the tasks, homework and activities you have to do.</p> <p>-Establishes with clarity and anticipation the criteria and forms of evaluation.</p> <p>-Clarifies mistakes and emphasizes correct answers in evaluation activities.</p>	<p>-The seminar/lecture is clearly structured.</p> <p>-The way in which the lecture/seminar is held furthers understanding of the subject.</p> <p>-The lecturer clearly demonstrates how diverse information is interrelated.</p> <p>-The lecturer expresses himself/herself clearly and comprehensibly.</p>
<p>On knowledge:</p> <p>These questions assume that the student has the criteria to know if the teacher has an updated and complete knowledge of a subject the student is starting to learn. They also imply that the</p>	<p>-Demonstrates command of the subject.</p>	<p>-The seminar provides a good overview of the subject area.</p> <p>-The seminar is a good combination of conveyance of knowledge and discussion.</p> <p>-The lecture provides a good overview of the subject area.</p>

<p>student has the sufficient knowledge to distinguish how much content is enough, too little or too much about the subject.</p>		<p>-The scope of the course is... (options are from “much too low” to “much too high” on a Likert scale)</p>
<p>On usefulness or applicability of the knowledge:</p> <p>These questions reinforce the idea that knowledge and the learning experience must be useful in order to be valuable, and it also relies on the assumption that students can detect usefulness and applicability in every occasion.</p>	<p>-Relates the course content with the national and international reality.</p>	<p>-The lecturer clarifies the usability and usefulness of the subject covered.</p> <p>-The lecturer stresses the knowledge gained in the lecture can be applied to other subjects/areas by the students as well.</p>
<p>On the teacher’s manners:</p> <p>These questions are about the teacher’s treatment of the students, his or her politeness or lack of it, they also want to know how the teacher makes the students feel.</p>	<p>-Maintains a cordial and friendly relationship with the students.</p> <p>-Shows a disposition to clarify doubts in the classroom and during office hours.</p>	<p>-The lecturer behaves in a friendly and respectful manner towards the students.</p> <p>-The lecturer seems to care about the students’ learning success.</p>
<p>On class environment:</p> <p>These questions enquire about the general atmosphere of the group as a result of the teacher’s influence. They imply that the teacher has the main responsibility over the group’s behaviour to one another, over ethics and respect. They also aim to find out if, as a result of the teacher’s performance, the student felt comfortable and stimulated in the group.</p>	<p>-Provides an environment of dialogue and participation in class.</p> <p>-Promotes values of solidarity, justice and respect in the classroom.</p> <p>-Promotes responsibility and quality on academic work.</p> <p>-Stimulates an analytical attitude towards course contents.</p>	<p>-There is a good working climate in the seminar.</p>
<p>On motivation:</p> <p>These questions see the student’s motivation and interest as a direct product of the teacher’s performance. They train students to consider lack of motivation in a course as mainly caused by</p>	<p>-Uses teaching strategies that facilitate learning and motivate to study.</p>	<p>-The lecturer makes the lecture/seminar interesting.</p> <p>-The lecturer encourages my interest in the subject area.</p>

the teacher.		
<p>On satisfaction:</p> <p>These questions enquire about feelings of satisfaction regarding the teacher or the course. They are formulated as a general question and placed at the beginning or end of the questionnaire as an encompassing opinion of the teacher and course.</p>	<p>-Generally, are you satisfied with the teacher's work? (options are yes or no)</p>	<p>-Overall, I am very satisfied with the lecturer as the course instructor. (options are "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on a Likert scale)</p> <p>-Overall, I am very satisfied with the course. (options are "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on a Likert scale)</p> <p>-I am very pleased with the advice given to me on my presentation by my seminar instructor (e.g. preliminary discussion, debriefing, feedback).</p>
<p>On workload/difficulty:</p> <p>These questions pretend to reveal if the course was too easy or too difficult, too demanding or too lenient.</p>		<p>-The level of difficulty of the course is... (options are from "much too low" to "much too high" on a Likert scale)</p> <p>- The pace of the course is... (options are from "much too low" to "much too high" on a Likert scale)</p> <p>-How much time do you spend on average per week (outside class) working on the substance matter? (answer is in number of hours)</p>
<p>On student's commitment:</p> <p>Here the questionnaire turns on the student, encouraging a self-confession.</p>	<p>-Have you been constant in your class attendance?</p> <p>-How has your learning in this subject been?</p> <p>-Have you studied and complied with homework in this course?</p>	<p>-The contributors are usually well prepared for questions and discussions.</p> <p>-The really relevant information is usually emphasised in most presentations.</p> <p>-The contributors usually present the information in a comprehensible manner.</p> <p>-Overall, I am very satisfied with my presentation.</p>

		<p>-How much have you learnt in this course? (options are “very little” to “very much” in a Likert scale)</p> <p>-What was your level of interest in the course subject when the course began?</p> <p>-What were your reasons for attending the course?</p> <p>-How many sessions of the course did you miss?</p>
<p>On practical issues:</p> <p>The issues included in these questions do not depend on the teacher.</p>		<p>-The size of the classroom is appropriate.</p> <p>-The equipment of the classroom is appropriate.</p> <p>-The acoustics of the classroom is good.</p>
<p>Questions that require direct supervision of the teacher as a worker or service provider:</p> <p>I set this series of questions aside because: 1. They deal with details that are traditionally overseen by direct supervisors in work environments (e.g. punctuality, which significantly in the case of UCA is already being monitored by the administration) and could be in fact directly supervised by university staff; and 2. They train students to see teaching in a standardised way, focusing on visible and/or computable aspects. 3. Many focus on the teacher’s individual organization and planning, not on the teaching effectiveness itself.</p>	<p>-Comes prepared to class/ or has prepared the class.</p> <p>-Provides study material that is adequate for learning.</p> <p>-Punctually turns in grades and evaluated work.</p> <p>-Is punctual with the established class schedule.</p> <p>-Comes to teach on the assigned days.</p> <p>-Presented the syllabus at the beginning of the quarter, explained general objectives and contents of the course, as well as the evaluation strategies.</p> <p>-The lecturer followed the syllabus during the whole quarter.</p>	<p>-The lecturer makes use of helpful aids (e.g. literature list, script, transparencies) to support the learning process.</p> <p>-The lecturer uses the time available to him/her for the essentials.</p> <p>-The lecturer gives explanatory or secondary information on the subject covered.</p> <p>-The lecturer goes into the students’ questions and suggestions in sufficient detail.</p> <p>-The lecturer’s use of media (e.g. transparencies, presentation, blackboard) is useful.</p> <p>-The schedule of the course (block vs. during the semester, dates, duration) is good.</p>
<p>Several questions in one:</p> <p>These questions have been already classified in the above</p>	<p>-Uses teaching strategies that facilitate learning and motivate to study</p>	

<p>groups. However, I place them here together because they enquire for more than one thing. It is important to point this out because they are evidently flawed questions that force students to answer perfunctorily or confusedly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establishes with clarity and anticipation the criteria and forms of evaluation. -Clarifies mistakes and emphasizes correct answers in evaluation activities. -Shows a disposition to clarify doubts in the classroom and during office hours. -Promotes values of solidarity, justice and respect in the classroom. -Relates the course content with the national and international reality. - Presented the syllabus at the beginning of the quarter, explained general objectives and contents of the course, as well as the evaluation strategies. 	
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The first classification of the questionnaire items produced eleven groups, each containing closely associated or similar questions. I further arranged these eleven groups into seven categories, each reflecting an element of the ‘talk of quality’s’ view of the student’s role in the quality assurance system, of the student’s knowledge, and the kinds of truths it fabricates about the learning experience.

- **The first category is clarity.** These questions derive from the belief that university professors can be very knowledgeable individuals who, nevertheless, are not able to transmit their knowledge clearly. There is an emphasis placed on clarity as having to be immediate, it is inadmissible for clarity to be delayed, dependent on the student’s experiences and actions after the course. Clarity is not only associated to the course’s content, instructions for assignments should also be clear, as well as general rules for the course. Clarity is also about the student leaving with absolutely no doubts about the themes touched on by the course.
- **The second category is knowledge, its usefulness and applicability.** This category includes two groups of questions. The first group reveals that evaluation questionnaires contain the very serious assumption that students can judge whether a

teacher is up-dated, and a course included adequate and complete content, as well as not excessive. The second group of questions reinforces the idea that knowledge is good if it is useful and clearly applicable. It encourages students to judge the value of their education from the perspective of a hypothetical future career. It also forces teachers to make obligatory connection between what they are teaching and reality, or the job market. Allegedly, this would be a very complicated issue to navigate in some disciplines and courses, placing those teachers in a clear disadvantage. It could be argued that these questions also seem to eradicate the traditional hierarchical relationship existing between students and teachers based on the teacher's professional authority.

- **In the third category I include the questions about the teacher's manners and the class environment.** The emphasis here is on students' feelings and on the teacher's impact on them. The questions call on very personal perceptions about the teacher's friendliness and politeness. The second group of questions, which focus on the group, imply that students' dynamics are a direct result of the teacher's influence as a positive role model and impartial leader. A negative environment in a group is the automatic result of bad teaching. These questions do not consider how perceptions on friendliness or manners, as well as values, are filtered through variables of culture, social class, and gender, among others.
- **The fourth category includes the questions on motivation and satisfaction.** Both appeal to emotional aspects of the student's experience. They refer to issues that cannot be guaranteed by a teacher's application of proper pedagogical strategies, as they can be affected by very personal circumstances that a learner might be going through. Most interestingly, these questions convey the message that motivation should be sought in an external source, mainly the teacher, and that the feeling of satisfaction is a necessary element in the learning experience.
- **In the fifth category I bring together the questions on workload and student's responsibility in his/her learning process.** In this issues the questionnaire carries a double message. It promotes the importance of the student's commitment and efforts, but also gives the student the right to say if a teacher has expected too much from them. The control of student workloads is, in fact, a very important element in today's quality assurance systems. In contrast, teachers' workloads do not receive any attention.

- **The sixth category is different to the rest because it enquires about aspects that have no connection to the teacher's performance.** It is hard to tell why they are included in the teacher evaluation sheet. Significantly, these questions are absent from the UCA questionnaire, where undergraduate classrooms tend to be uncomfortably hot, noisy and sometimes too illuminated for a proper display of a power point presentation. On the contrary, they are present in the post-graduate teacher evaluation questionnaire, where classroom conditions and practical support are considerably superior. This could be an element that universities include in tactical ways, evading it when it might produce negative data, and including it when it could produce positive reviews.
- **The seventh category includes questions whose answer entails a direct supervision of the teacher.** They require the student to observe the teacher through a supervisor's lens. To answer these questions properly the student needs to remember a significant amount of detail, some of which might not have been so important for the student during the learning process. These questions are significant because they minutely direct the student's gaze towards specific aspects of the teacher's performance, loading importance onto these specific elements. These questions might be key in reinforcing the image of the teacher as a service provider and the student as a client. However, it is interesting to notice that by answering them, the student becomes a sort of employee for the management, a supervisor expected to report on the performance of the teacher/worker.

These categories of questions do not all have the same weight in the questionnaires, neither are they all present in both universities. Issues of knowledge and the student's commitment are more emphasised in the Marburg questionnaire, while class environment is given more weight in the UCA questionnaire. This detail is coherent with the learning culture at both universities: at Marburg the student is expected to be more proactive and less dependent on the teacher than at UCA, while at UCA group relations are considered extremely important for a positive learning experience, especially given the fact that groups become tightly knit units that go through the same challenges and experiences together. It is interesting to see that while in Marburg the questionnaire includes a clear enquiry line on the sufficiency of the teacher's knowledge (with four questions), at UCA this is replaced by an interest on the teacher as a moral guide, a peacekeeper and promoter of justice and good values in the classroom (with four questions). This relates to cultural expectations deposited on the teacher that are specific of each case, and how they become translated into elements

of teacher quality that are subjected to surveillance and managed through quality assurance mechanisms. It could be concluded that while at UCA an important task placed on the teacher is also about the university's emphasis on the lecturer's responsibility to teach good values to students. Clarity, motivation and the teacher's manners are given the same amount of importance in both questionnaires. The same occurs with the questions that have a supervisory element. But these questions, in addition, have a very significant weight in both universities.

Elements from the 'talk of quality' that are reinforced through these questionnaires load responsibilities on the teacher, ranging from the compliance with minute details of their work as teachers – for which the students' supervision is required – to the impact they cause on students' moods. While the student's responsibility is focused on coming to class and doing the assignments – when they constitute a reasonable load – their motivation is presented as a dependent variable of the teacher's actions. There is also a thick emotional element placed on the questionnaires and the transmission of the idea that learning is possible when the right emotions are present.

The resulting image of the teacher that is promoted through the questionnaires at UCA is that of a polite, friendly and ethic motivator who does not forget to comply with all the standardised elements expected of a class session in the university. At Marburg, the image of the proper teacher is that of a knowledgeable person who inspires commitment, and as in the Nicaraguan case, does not forget to comply with all the standardised elements expected of a class session. Through the evaluation questionnaires, and the results obtained in their application, these definitions of the proper teacher are reified.

In the following section I will present what students say they value about their teachers, how they describe quality – or lack of it – in a teacher, their opinions on teacher evaluation, and their perceptions of quality as well as their opinions on the portrayal of students as clients. Then I will point out coincidences and or contradictions between the "official" discourse on teaching quality – as portrayed in the teacher evaluations– and the students' own. This will show the ways in which the teacher evaluation questionnaire, as a "ritual of verification of the audit culture" invisibilises instead of reveals student's discourses on quality, teaching and being a student.

3. Second research question: What are the key elements in students' discourses on quality in teaching, quality teachers, and teacher evaluations at both universities?

3.1. What students talk about when they talk about teachers

Interviewed students were asked to describe a good teacher. Their answers included descriptions on what the teacher does in the classroom, but in most of the cases the students described the teacher's personality traits. As a result, I created the following typology of quality teachers based on the students' descriptions. To each type I gave a name that suggests the most salient traits. In the table I present a description of the type of teacher giving my own words and I select some excerpts from the interview to give some examples.

The types are not mutually exclusive. While some students did focus their description on one type of teacher, most of the interviewees mentioned a combination of two or more types contained in one person. In the columns to the right I include the total number of times this type of teacher was mentioned by the students from each university. A pattern emerges that reveals similarities and differences between both universities.

Often, the interviewees from both universities also had a particular real person in mind when they made their description. It was complicated for them to produce abstract portrayals of a good teacher. Often, when a teacher has a very positive salient trait, other issues that are not so positive become secondary and unimportant for the student making the description. Sometimes the reasons to like a teacher were very personal. In fact, some students, in both universities, said that their favourite teacher was not liked by many of his or her classmates. In addition, the teacher's area of expertise was often a very integral part of the teacher's description, and many times students said they liked the teacher because they liked the topic he/she teaches even if he/she was not the best teacher. Interestingly, the analysis revealed that some of the types of teachers students describe tend to have a gender, which I have included in my description.

Type of quality teacher	Characteristics	UCA	Marburg
The CEO	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: This teacher is generally male. He is a leader who knows how to use his authority in a positive way.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Discipline is never a problem in his classes. He dominates the class and does not tolerate lazy or stupid students. He expects a lot from the students and does not hesitate in correcting a student who is wrong. However, he knows how to achieve the right balance between being strict and giving liberty. He is very strategic, understands the group and knows what works with it. Not all students appreciate the strictness of this teacher.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Strategic, very specific to each case</p> <p>Knowledge: Is not mentioned.</p> <p><i>“Creo que un profesor que tiene tacto con la gente puede verse como un líder y se le hace más fácil controlar a un grupo de personas”.</i> (Katia, Tourism, UCA) [I think a teacher who has tact with people can be seen as a leader, and he has an easier time controlling a group of people.]</p> <p><i>“To know the right balance between laissez faire and to be too strict. I think that's a good teacher, to make the right balance”.</i>(Nadia, Business Administration and Politics, Marburg)</p>	10	8
The socialite	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: This teacher is cool, extremely confident and charming, an extrovert, different from the rest and unforgettable. Students can't help but like him/her.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Knows how to get the group's respect and collaboration.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Does not have to organise things too much but seems passionate about what he/she does in the classroom.</p> <p>Knowledge: Not mentioned in Marburg, seems irrelevant for UCA students.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p><i>“Tal vez el profesor no tenga los grandes conocimientos pero si es activo, le gusta, se siente cómodo dando la clase y se siente aquella emoción, por muy que los conocimientos sean tal vez muy pobres, uno va a aprender algo.”</i>(Luis, Business Administration, UCA) [Maybe the teacher does not have a big knowledge but if he is active, likes teaching, feels comfortable teaching and you feel that emotion, it doesn't matter how poor his knowledge is, you learn something]</p> <p><i>“Si el profesor es simpático, agradable y bueno, uno disfruta más la práctica de esa clase”</i> (Fabiola, Psychology, UCA) [If the</p>	3	4

	<p>teacher is likeable, nice and good, one enjoys more his class.]</p> <p><i>“She was pretty cool, she was kind of young, She was just so cool, she was so confident in the stuff she was doing, I really liked her and she was so helpful because she was also hanging out at a library in Frankfurt, she was like “if you guys need something there just call me or write me an email I can show you around”, so she was very helpful, very understandful [sic].” (Christy, European Ethnology, Marburg)</i></p> <p><i>“The guys like him because he's funny and stuff, I don't know about the content of his research because we do just a basic introduction. I really liked him, most of the students liked him, but I didn't have the feeling that I was learning a lot, it was just I liked going there because he was funny and maybe he was telling us good things but mostly it was sympathy”.(Romain, Economics, Marburg)</i></p>		
<p>The friend</p>	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: Never intimidating, never pretends to have the last word. He/she is very humble and relaxed.</p> <p>Relationship with students: This teacher really helps the students, is always available and close in a horizontal relationship. This teacher is also very caring and very interested in each student as a person. In fact, he/she interacts with students outside of the classroom and in informal spaces. He/she could remain a friend for life.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Never decides anything on his/her own, always consults the students.</p> <p>Knowledge: Is a very humble teacher that admits students may know some things that he/she doesn't know and can therefore be corrected. He considers everybody's opinions as valid.</p> <p><i>“No tienen que ser tus amigos pero que sintás confianza con ellos, que podás comentarle si tenés algún problema y que por eso no pudiste hacer un trabajo, que no les tengás miedo” (Alfonso, Psychology, UCA). [They don't have to be your friends but you have to be able to feel close to them, that you can tell them if you have a problem and that for that reason you did not do an assignment, a teacher who you are not afraid of.]</i></p> <p><i>“A quality teacher cares for what his student is doing and thinking, and cares for his problems also, not just for what he learns”.(Theresa, Anthropology and Psychology, Marburg)</i></p> <p><i>“Here in our tutorial our tutor was a really sympatik [sic] young guy, you could dudsen, he was not like this formal stuff between you and your teacher, he was like a friend more but he knows a lot and you can ask him everything. The good point was that you didn't have to be shy if your question is really dumb or he answers it three times. He was more like a friend, just not like a professor. But when he thought that you had some nonsense</i></p>	<p>11</p>	<p>12</p>

	<i>shit he was able to tell it in clear words and no one was angry after that because of this kind of connection, ha, ha, ha! (Nina, Anthropology, Marburg)</i>		
The coach	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: This teacher is like a self-help book for UCA students, and a great motivator for Marburg students. He/she knows what is good for them and is a great guide.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Helps to build the students' confidence, making them stronger than their fears, and seems genuinely interested in their learning process as well as their "personal growth".</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Very democratic and inclusive.</p> <p>Knowledge: Not mentioned.</p> <p><i>"Es un profesor que respeta, que motiva a la participación, que te incita a seguir mejorando, te retroalimenta". (William, Business Administration, UCA) [It's a teacher who respects, who motivates you to participate, who incites you to keep improving, who gives you feedback.]</i></p> <p><i>"Tiene que ser un profesor que te genera seguridad y te reconoce y aporta a tu crecimiento personal". (Fabiola, Psychology, UCA) [It should be a teacher who gives you security, really knows you and helps your personal growth.]</i></p> <p><i>"But I think every professor is good in his subject. But it's not enough, especially in the first semester it's important for the professor to motivate the students in the subject" (Heinrich, Economics, Marburg)</i></p> <p><i>"A good teacher, even if I think I don't like the subject is able to get me interested in the subject. Of course it's not his or her job to get me interested but even if I'm not interested they get me to get interested anyway.(Jerome, Sociology, Marburg)</i></p>	9	5
The genius	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: Like the Socialite, this teacher has license to be different.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Always knows more than the students and the students are fascinated to listen. Economics students from Marburg mentioned this type more than the other groups. Is preferred by students who consider themselves more accomplished than their peers.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Not mentioned.</p> <p>Knowledge: His/her strong point. This teacher always knows what he or she is talking. For UCA students he/she seems to know everything by memory.</p>	2	10

	<p><i>“Es el que tiene dominio en la asignatura que él imparte, no hay necesidad de que vea el folleto para estar explicando con sus propias palabras” (Gracia, Business Administration, UCA). [It’s one who has full knowledge of his subject. He has no need to read the text in order to explain with his own words.]</i></p> <p><i>“A really, really good teacher, when they say something, everybody wants to hear” (Karl, Economics, Marburg).</i></p> <p><i>First thing his reputation as a scientist, to be known in the world not only in Germany, or published something which does actually matter for any other science projects” (Romain, Economics, Marburg)</i></p>		
The accomplished professional	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: This teacher has value outside of the university.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Not mentioned. This type was preferred by Psychology, Business Administration and Economics students at UCA, and by Economics students at Marburg.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Provides very concrete examples from his/her own experience.</p> <p>Knowledge: He really knows what he’s talking about because is not only based on the theory. At UCA students consider this teacher as being able to relate the theory to reality as well as to other areas of knowledge, and say things that are not in books, in fact, he/she doesn’t even need the books.</p> <p><i>“Muchas veces me tocaban profesores que se notaba que no tenían experiencia, que eran puro libro y no tenían esa experiencia y nosotros le preguntábamos “qué haría en caso de...?” y no sabían qué contestar. Siento que nos enseñan más los que tienen experiencia”. (Lucía, Business Administration, UCA) [Many times I had teachers that you could tell that they had no experience, that they were all book and had no experience, and we asked them “what would you do in case of...? and they didn’t know what to answer. I feel that they teach us more those who have experience.]</i></p> <p><i>“The teachers here are very good in what they do. I just looked what they did in their past life and it was very cool. One professor worked at the UN, others work apart from the university, what they wrote and what they did is very impressive.(Karl, Economics, Marburg)</i></p>	7	2
The pedagogy expert	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: And in Marburg is generally described as young and female.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Not mentioned.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: This teacher knows how to teach, he/she</p>	2	2

	<p>employs good strategies</p> <p>Knowledge: Is considered an expert in his/her topic but that can be secondary.</p> <p><i>“En primer lugar está la pedagogía y en segundo lugar que sepa de su tema” (Ámbar, Architecture, UCA). [In the first place is the pedagogy and in second place that they know about their topic.]</i></p> <p><i>“Quality in a teacher is that he has at least some kind of skills to teach, not just on the topics, but how to teach. I think that many of the teachers are really big experts on the topics but never learned how to teach. A lot of teachers, in lectures they just stand there and talk, and talk, and talk, and nobody really listens.” (Mario, Psychology, Marburg)</i></p>		
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What becomes evident from the data is that students’ descriptions of good teachers are predominantly loaded with aspects of personal characteristics, personality, and teachers’ relationship to students. On the other hand, both their teaching strategies and their knowledge appear as ancillary characteristics. Many times they were never mentioned, indicating that they fell to a secondary importance in comparison with the elements highlighted. Patterns emerged from the comparison between the number of times each type of teacher was mentioned by the students from each university. Evidently, the friend and the CEO types are very positively perceived at both universities. As can be observed, these two types have very little in common. On the other hand, the Accomplished Professional is one of the favourites at UCA, as well as the Coach, who is also well accepted at Marburg. On the other hand, Marburg students mentioned the Genius in several occasions, while UCA students downplayed more the importance of knowledge. The least mentioned type in both universities were the Pedagogy Expert and the Socialite. Pedagogy seemed to be not such a decisive characteristic for a teacher to be considered good by the students. However, it was suggested that some teachers could benefit from pedagogical training as a strategy to make their classes more attractive. Regarding the Socialite, this kind of teacher is considered unique and therefore not common. Students like the Socialites but they do not expect them to be abundant.

In both cases, students’ discourses describe the teaching profession as a very complex one. In the case of Marburg students, they often said that it was difficult to describe a good teacher, that I was asking them a very difficult question. Furthermore, many of them confessed that they would not be able to be teachers, as it was a very difficult job: “I couldn't

be a teacher, I know that I couldn't. You need to be very calm, have self-control.” (Nadia, business Administration and Politics, Marburg). In the case of UCA, many interviewed students – who spoke from a position of superiority to the rest – considered that good teachers are not appreciated by many of their classmates, who just want to have a good time and get good grades at the end, while the opposite may occur with teachers the students considered not good.

The students interviewed were also asked to describe a bad, or not so good, teacher with their own words. In the same fashion as when they described the good teacher, they talked about what the teachers did in class, but also about their personality traits, and turned to thinking about very particular cases of bad teachers they had had. Some students from Marburg said they did not have any really bad teachers, but they also did not find it as complicated to describe a bad teacher as it was to describe a good one. These types of teachers are presented also through a typology. This time, as a result of the comparison, a significant contrast emerged between the two universities.

Type of bad teacher	Characteristics	UCA	Marburg
The unprepared teacher	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: Can be entertaining or boring.</p> <p>Relationship with students: The class is not necessarily boring, and students say many of their classmates like the teacher because he/she gives high grades and has low expectations placed on them.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: This teacher evidently comes to improvise in the classroom. The class can be an opportunity to relax.</p> <p>Knowledge: Seems to be limited.</p> <p><i>“Que llegan a la clase sin saber qué van a dar. Eso me pasó mucho, que llegaban y se les notaba que hasta ese momento estaban viendo en el libro, lo peor, en el libro chafa de la universidad, viendo a ver qué daban” (Lucía, Business Administration, UCA). [They they come to class without knowing what they will teach. That happened to me a lot; that they arrived and it was obvious that they were looking at the book for the first time. And worse still, in the university’s shabby book, to see what to teach.]</i></p> <p><i>“La clase de un profesor era dar chistes, chistes y</i></p>	10	0

	<i>chistes". (Alberto, Economics, UCA) [One teacher's class was just about jokes, and jokes, and jokes.]</i>		
The ignorant	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: This teacher is evidently outdated and has been caught plagiarizing.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Not mentioned. Psychology and Economics students complained more about this type of bad teacher. But mostly students who considered themselves as more accomplished than their classmates.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Tends to show a lack of preparation, but not always. The class can be very boring but also highly entertaining.</p> <p>Knowledge: Lacking. Students considered this teacher's knowledge to be so poor that they felt they knew more than them. In areas like Psychology and Business Administration these were described as having no experience outside the university and therefore, possessing no useful knowledge.</p> <p><i>"He visto que a los profesores no les gusta ya leer, creen que no es necesario, que ya tienen su opinión y creen que eso es todo. No leen los papers que están saliendo en las revistas. Nadie les exige que se documenten, ni siquiera tienen la presión de tener que dar cátedras cada cierto tiempo y arriesgarse a quedar en ridículo." (Alberto, Economics, UCA) [I've seen that teachers do not like to read. They think it is not necessary, that they already have their opinion and think that is all. They don't read the papers that appear in the journals. Nobody expects them to be documented, they don't even have the pressure to give a lecture every once in a while and risk ridicule.]</i></p> <p><i>"A veces nos daba el material y llegábamos a encontrarnos ese documento en cualquier página como Wikipedia, era muy decepcionante (Fabiola, Psychology, UCA) [Sometimes she gave us reading material and we found the document in any page such as Wikipedia, it was very disappointing.]</i></p> <p><i>"Nos dieron un dossier y yo no lo había comprado todavía y había un tema que me tocaba exponer. Lo busqué en Internet y encontré el mismo folleto que venía dentro del dossier en monografias.com. Han habido muchas ocasiones en que eso pasa." (Adriana, Psychology, UCA) [They gave us a dossier and I hadn't bought it yet and there was a topic I had to present. I looked it up in the internet and found the same document in monografias.com. This has happened</i></p>	11	0

	several times.]		
The despot	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: This teacher does not negotiate, does not answer questions and seems inaccessible.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Makes fun of the students and is likely to give bad grades.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: He has a plan that is non-negotiable, and lectures all the time without promoting student participation.</p> <p>Knowledge: The students consider that this teacher just respects his/her own “opinion”, and does not accept the students’. For these students knowledge is about sharing opinions.</p> <p><i>“Militarizado, muy estricto, sólo llegar “lean esto; aquí hay una prueba”, -“mire, tengo una pregunta”, “¡no, ahorita no!”. (Eddy, Accounting, UCA)</i> [Militarised, very strict, just arrive and say “read this; here is a test”, -“hey, I have a question”, “not now!”]</p> <p><i>Es su clase, pero tampoco tiene que ser el Hitler de la clase. (Alfonso, Psychology, UCA)</i> [It’s his class but he doesn’t have to be the class Hitler.]</p> <p><i>Un profesor esquemático y cerrado tiende mucho a imponer su propia opinión. No es que no escuche a los estudiantes pero de cierta manera regresa al punto de su opinión, que tiene que sobresalir. (Carmela, Psychology, UCA)</i> [A schematic and closed-up teacher has a tendency to impose his opinion. It’s not that he doesn’t listen to the students but in a certain way he returns to his opinion, which has to be more relevant.]</p>	14	0
The couldn’t care less teacher	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: Not mentioned.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Doesn’t care if the students come to class or not, if they learn or not.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Doesn’t care if students are giving very bad presentations, he/she says that all is good.</p> <p>Knowledge: Not mentioned.</p> <p><i>“When the teacher is not too interested in what the students say, he just lets the students present what</i></p>	11	2

	<p>they read and says ‘ah, yeah, very well, very well’ .” (Helene, Anthropology, Marburg).</p> <p>“Unicamente vino, dio su clase, si le entendiste bien y si no también, ‘¡qué voy a hacer, andá leé!’ . Generalmente eso es lo que se da”. (Didier, Business Administration, UCA) [He just came, taught his class. If you understood, good, if not, -“what am I gonna do, go read!”. Generally, that is what happens.]</p>		
The Power Point dependent	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: Not mentioned.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Not mentioned.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: This teacher always uses power point and reads the slides in the class.</p> <p>Knowledge: Not mentioned.</p> <p><i>Un mal profesor es el que presenta un chorro de diapositivas. Un profesor Karaoke. (Elbita, Psychology, UCA) [A bad teacher is one who presents a stream of slides. A Karaoke teacher.]</i></p> <p><i>Llega a leer diapositivas, no investiga bien. (Adriana, Psychology, UCA) [He comes to read slides, doesn’t do his research.]</i></p>	5	2
The pedagogical expert	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: This teacher tends to be female.</p> <p>Relationship with students: She makes the students feel they are back in school or kindergarten.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: She wants to control things too much. The students feel forced to interact in the class in structured ways and to put in more work. As a result, the class doesn’t feel like part of a university experience.</p> <p>Knowledge: Not mentioned.</p> <p><i>“We also have one teacher and she’s like our mother. She uses all of the pedagogic things, it’s just too much. You always have to find the right balance. It’s annoying. For example, she also gives us homework, and we’re like “oh, we don’t wanna do homework”. In university I think it should be voluntary, to get extra points for the exams, it’s a good way to keep the students focused, but we are old enough to find our own way of how to study. No one is doing what she says in the end. (Nadia, Business Administration, Marburg)</i></p>	1	7

	<p><i>I think she actually was a good teacher, but there were some things that scared people out. She did a course and sometimes we felt like in school. She was asking us questions, probably she thinks that this works (Lisa, Business, Marburg)</i></p> <p><i>“She loves her rules, she doesn't get the concept of being a student and having freedom, you can come an hour late to the lecture if you want to, but as a professor you have to accept that, you're not at school. She just has a lot of strange rules, if everybody would stick to them it would be a perfect class, but we're students and she doesn't really get the university student freedom stuff. She wants to make us work like in school (Marian, Economics and Business Administration, Marburg)</i></p>		
The boring topic teacher	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: This teacher is an accomplished scholar, very respected.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Students respect this teacher but they do not want to be in his/her course.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Tends to be a theoretical course with limited or no examples from real life.</p> <p>Knowledge: This person knows a lot, he/she can be a genius, but only he/she is interested in the topic, the students do not care about his/her expert knowledge.</p> <p><i>“Most of the time when it's boring it's when they're area of study, where they do research, is not really interesting. (James, Business Administration, Marburg)</i></p>	0	4
The incomprehensible teacher	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: Tends to not speak clearly or with enough volume.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Not necessarily bad.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: This teacher is either too disorganised and/or cannot explain ideas clearly.</p> <p>Knowledge: Not mentioned.</p> <p><i>I've had a couple of teachers that we just couldn't follow the lectures. We thought "what is this course actually about?". We didn't find out until the end of the semester (Lisa, Business Administration, Marburg).</i></p> <p><i>“No saben explicar o darse a entender pero caen bien y evalúan bien a los estudiantes. (Raúl, Environmental</i></p>	4	4

	<i>Science, UCA</i>) [They don't know how to explain a topic or express themselves but people like them because they give good evaluations.]		
The teacher who just shouldn't be a teacher	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: Students believe that everything wrong with this teacher is about his/her personality. He/she should be doing a different job mainly because he/she is either too shy or cannot deal with people, or is too weird, or even hates teaching. This person also looks ridiculous.</p> <p>Relationship with students: He/she generally lacks the ability to keep attention and respect or group control. Students feel uncomfortable.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Tends to just lecture, and not interact with the students.</p> <p>Knowledge: Knows a lot, can be a great researcher.</p> <p><i>"Not anybody can be a teacher. We had one that was not good. He looked at us and he couldn't really say a word, he didn't know what to say. A little bit about himself, I think for two minutes he talked about that, and then he looked at the wall to make his presentation and never looked back to us. And we said "what is that?" I think he didn't like to talk in front of so many people. (Karl, Economics, Marburg)</i></p> <p><i>Some people are teachers just because they really want to but they shouldn't be. You know that kind of teacher who's there, who's silent, who's always more like not shy but scared, scared in front of other people, you're shaking with them "oh God, is she doing it?" (Nina, Anthropology, Marburg)</i></p> <p><i>No es su vocación y se le nota. (Gracia, Business Administration, UCA) [It's not their vocation and it's obvious.]</i></p> <p><i>I've had teachers who are obviously scared of talking to people, they are too introverted. If you meet with them to talk about something he is very shy, very proper and formal but in a shy way. Those kinds of people are normally not good teachers because they cannot get you interested in the topic. (Amanda, Sociology, Marburg)</i></p>	3	10
The wrong personality teacher	<p>Personal characteristics and personality: It's personal, the student doesn't like this teacher as a person, or doesn't like his/her opinions.</p> <p>Relationship with students: Not mentioned.</p> <p>Teaching strategies: Not mentioned.</p>	2	9

	<p>Knowledge: Not mentioned.</p> <p><i>“It depends on the personality most of the time. It’s something that you feel (Mara, Anthropology, Marburg).</i></p> <p><i>“It has to do as well with the sympathy, your first feeling about a person, of course. (Esther, Anthropology, Marburg)</i></p> <p><i>“Not everybody is going to like somebody, so it’s always that there are some people who don’t like this teacher and some which like this teacher, or like the way he teaches. (Theresa, Anthropology and Psychology, Marburg)</i></p> <p><i>I just don’t like learning under teachers that I don’t like as persons. (Marian, Economics and Business Administration, Marburg)</i></p> <p><i>“Era cuestión de personalidad, era él, su forma de ser, era escandaloso, me caía mal.” (Lucía, Business Administration, Marburg) [It was a personality thing, it was him, the way he was, he was loud, I didn’t like him.]</i></p> <p><i>Ella tiene mucha preparación, pero es la manera de ser de ella. (Leticia, Psychology, UCA) [She is well prepared but it’s the way she is.]</i></p>	
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As evidence in the box above, the bad teacher profiles differ a lot in the two universities. UCA students are more concerned about teachers who are unprepared, ignorant, and despots. On the other hand, Marburg students mentioned the problem of teachers who are simply not suited for the profession because of their incompatible personality. They are also prepared to accept that some teachers are simply personally disliked by them, which for them perhaps does not mean that the teacher is necessarily bad and accept that other students might like them. Remarkably, they also mentioned they do not like teachers who use pedagogical tools profusely, or structure and control the class assignments too much.

The interviews reveal that students focus on one or a few outstanding characteristics in their teachers, positive or negative, which they value above others. In other words, teachers do not need to have a “full package”. For example, it seems to be that knowledge can be secondary when a teacher is motivating and supporting, or that a good teaching strategy is not so important if a teacher has a great personality. In addition, if a student at Marburg is especially interested in a topic, the teacher’s performance can be secondary: *“When I like the content and the topics even if the teacher is not a good speaker I could start to like him”*.

(Romain, Economics, Marburg)". Students clearly convey the notion that many times the image of a teacher depends more on the student's personal views and interests than on the teacher himself and/or his or her performance in the classroom. They often described their admiration for teachers that others do not like. This often made them feel superior or more genuinely interested students. Hence, appreciating knowledgeable and/or tough and demanding teachers can be a symbol of distinction for some students.

Another element that emerged clearly in students' descriptions of good and bad teachers was their understanding of what knowledge is. Their notions about what knowledge is and how it is shared and/or produced are intricately intertwined with their judgements of their teachers and their performance, their constructions and interpretations of their value. For the great majority of UCA students, knowledge in a subject consists of a fixed amount of content, and is shared through opinions that have an equal value regardless of who they come from. This was found in all areas but was especially true in the case of Psychology and Business Administration students perhaps because of their clear professional orientation. As a result of these notions, any teacher whose class covers less amount of content than another teacher's makes the students feel scammed, not having been provided with the amount of information that they should have obtained and would be needing as professional. On the other hand, a teacher who provides additional content in a class – especially if it is useful knowledge – is perceived by some students as providing more value. The following quotes represent these two dominant notions about knowledge:

"Hay clases, como español y matemáticas o derecho, donde son reglas y punto. Pero hay otras clases donde uno podría hacer esa interacción y aunque uno no sepa lo que va a ver, uno está consciente, uno ya está claro o tiene un norte de qué es lo que se va a ver y si uno siente que el profesor va lento en el temario y a la hora de la hora no vimos un tema, esa satisfacción va decayendo" (Luis, Tourism, UCA). [There are courses like Spanish, Mathematics or Law, where its rules and period. But there are courses in which there can be interaction and even if you don't know what you are going to get, you are conscious, you are clear or have a good idea about what you are going to learn. And if you feel that the teacher is going too slowly with the programme and at the end we didn't cover one topic, your satisfaction goes down.]

"Hay una maestra que todo el mundo realmente le tiene miedo, que tiene mala fama pero a mí me encanta porque esa profesora nos da tests o pruebas psicológicas que tal vez en esa clase no las tenemos que ver. Ella dice, 'les voy a enseñar más de lo que tienen que ver', nos enseña cosas de neuropsicología... cosas que nosotros ni pensábamos ver todavía en la carrera (Leticia, Psychology, UCA). [There is a teacher who everybody fears, she has a bad reputation but I love her because she gives us tests or psychological standardised questionnaires that maybe we shouldn't be learning in that class. She says, "I will teach you more than what you have to learn", she teaches us things about neuropsychology, things we were not even thinking about learning at that point of the programme.]

In addition, because of their understanding of knowledge as a set of equally valid opinions, any teacher who does not accept the students' opinions is perceived as stubborn or inadequate:

"Por decir, tenés 40 alumnos en una aula, tenés 40 opiniones distintas y vos como profesor tenés una opinión tuya que posiblemente pueda cambiar a lo largo de que esas 40 personas expresen sus opiniones y de eso un profesor tiene que estar consciente todo el tiempo. (Carmela, Psychology, UCA) [For example, you have 40 students in a classroom, you get 40 different opinions and you as a teacher have an opinion that could possibly change by listening to the 40 people expressing their own opinions. A teacher must be aware of that all the time.]

"Los chavalos no están acostumbrados a sentir ese golpe contra su opinión, nunca en la carrera lo hacen. Un estudiante se enojó y dijo "¡ideay, es mi opinión!" (Alberto, Economics, UCA). [The guys are not used to feeling a blow against their opinion, they never do it in our major. A student got angry and said "Hey, it's my opinion!"]

In sum, UCA students' conceptions of knowledge appear as fundamental in shaping their appreciations of teachers. Hence, when a teacher has professional expertise and very concrete, useful knowledge to transmit, and when he or she does not 'cheat' with the amount of content that a particular course is supposed to contain, the teacher is perceived as good. On the other hand, in Marburg, students do not expect their teachers to provide a fixed amount of content. For them, knowledge is about a liberty to explore. For students in the social sciences a good teacher provides the freedom of choosing what to learn according to very personal interests. A teacher should not use a course to impose a determined content:

As a student I do have in mind what kinds of things I have to do to get my grades, of course, but when I write my essays I like to write about things that I'm interested in. So, if I get an input in the seminar to write about something that I'm not interested in instead of something that is interesting for me, I get bored and I have the feeling that I didn't learn (Esther, Anthropology, Marburg).

In the case of Business Administration and Economics students, knowledge is valued if it can be interesting but also if it can be useful for their personal career plan. Furthermore, the evaluation strategies (exams or essays) in each field – which tend to be defined through institutional decisions – determine highly their perceptions of a teacher's performance. For students who are evaluated through essays, teachers should not fix the essay's topic or what the students should read in preparation, these should be free for the student to decide, whereas for students who are evaluated through exams, a teacher should be clear about the exact content that will be covered in the exam. These students, in addition, distinguished clearly between learning for the exam and really learning. Furthermore, while some courses are perceived as just for passing exams, others are perceived as providing really important knowledge for their future careers. In turn, teachers are expected to be more or less demanding accordingly.

Students in Marburg also said they want their opinions to be taken into account, but they do not expect a course to be based on sharing opinions. In this case, it is the notions of what a university life should be which are very decisively embedded in students' perception of what a good teacher is. When a teacher contradicts this lifestyle's expected freedom and flexibility, or the student's personal life strategy, he or she will be badly perceived.

"I'm working next to the studies and I have times when I work a lot and don't do a lot of studying, but I also have time when I'm studying a lot and don't work. And when you have a lot of exams like in school, homework and stuff, you don't have enough free time where you can do different things. In our studies there's always a period of learning, a period of free time, a period for whatever you wanna do. You have to manage your life." (Nadia, Business Administration, Marburg)

I'm satisfied because I can study here and at the same time have some free time still. I wanted to have spare time to do something next to my studies, not just be a student. (Marian, Economics and Business Administration, Marburg)

The students should think "I can use this in my later life, maybe in a job" or for me the thing I've always been interested in. There are, of course, compulsory lectures but they have to have a choice in where they want to go. If there are things they think "I don't want to do it, I don't need to do it, and it's not very important for my subject, why do I have to do it?" (Heinrich, Economics, Marburg)

Through the focus group discussions I explored how good and bad teachers are discussed collectively. These confirmed that students' judgements of their teachers remain as correlations between type of teacher, type of course (important or irrelevant) and conceptions of knowledge, in the case of UCA; and between type of teacher, type of course (important or irrelevant), and university student lifestyle, in the case of Marburg. It clearly emerged in the focus groups that teachers are good or bad mainly in relation to the value given to the course they teach. Students also confessed to having double standards regarding what they think is good for them and what they will actually demand; or between how they think a good teacher performs in the classroom and how they really want them to perform in each particular case. Grades emerged as a very important issue in the focus groups, and the more nuanced description of teachers provided in the interviews was replaced by a dichotomy between the easy teacher (flexible and high grader), and the difficult teacher (rigid and tough grader).

The following excerpt is from the focus group with Business Administration students from Marburg. It evolved around the importance of pedagogic skills figured in Case-Vignette 1. It shows how the type of course and the university student life-style appear to have more weight in judging the teacher's performance than the performance itself:

Student 1: *The teacher sounds like one that we have here in Marburg. She is very interested in getting the students to participate, but since they are low level courses, the students are fresh and they don't like to participate this much she wants to.*

Student 2: *It depends on if the students have to take part in this course or can choose to take the course, when they can choose they are interested, but when they have to, you just want to pass the exam for this course and won't do anything more.*

Student 3: *Yeah I guess it depends on the feeling of the course, when I like it I will interact with the teacher, but when I think it's a stupid theme and I don't need it any time, I don't want to have some pedagogic teaching skills. I would take the other side in your case study, I don't like to make the university like Kindergarten. I think students must be self-motivating.*

Student 1: *There must be a reason why they are here in university, they are obviously not children anymore.*

Another excerpt from the same focus group gives a glimpse at students' perspectives of teachers as depending on their personal strategy. Upon listening to Case-Vignette 2 about the difference between a demanding and an easy teacher, students debated about which one they would prefer. In this sense, it becomes evident that, for students, learning is not always the priority. A teacher who can make students learn a lot is preferred when students do want to learn. If this is not the case, and there is a possibility of obtaining a better grade in a less demanding course, students would prefer this option:

Student 1: *I guess when I have interest in this subject I would take the first one; if I only want to pass the exam easy, I would take the second one.*

Student 2: *But I think the overall grade of the bachelor is so important, is part of the Bologna process. When we had the diploma, the grades for the diploma were not that important, you just had to pass. In the Bologna, every grade you get will define your future.*

Student 1: *What are the consequences?*

Student 2: *You want to have good grades for your masters.*

Student 3: *Yes, the grade is more important than learning in your subject.*

Student 2: *Yeah, you have to apply for a master as well.*

Student 3: *Or when you need to transfer to another university.*

Student 1: *I think this pressure makes some students make bad decisions. I want to pass, I don't care about anything else.*

Interviewer: *What makes it easier, the subject or the teacher?*

All: *The teacher!*

Student 3: *Maybe also the subject, there's a difference between accounting and finance, and management. You get better grades in management.*

Student 2: *I guess it's because the teachers are more challenging.*

Student 1: *Maybe in accounting and finance they are controlling you. You have one exam after the exercises, and in some subjects you know which exercises are going to be in the exam. In those you don't you can get a good grade but you have to do a little bit more.*

Student 4: *I started to pick the courses strategically like in the third semester. At the beginning I didn't. Especially in the first semesters I looked more on my grades. Then I decided to do my master in Marburg, and for the Marburg students it's easier to get accepted for the Masters, so then I started only taking courses where I was interested in.*

The focus group with Sociology students revealed the same attitudes about students' strategical approach to teachers, but shows slightly differing views about the importance of the teachers' knowledge vs. his/her teaching skills. Furthermore, the impact of the student's intentions and motivations appear decisive in the kind of teacher that will be preferred:

Student 1: *There's a difference between knowing a lot about your science and being a good teacher.*

Student 2: *I think it depends mostly on the expectations of the students. Some expect very practical use of what they learn and I think you have to differentiate between the students, if they want practical uses or if they want more theoretical material.*

Student 3: *I think, ahh... it's a different thing about science for what it is. Is it to know something or is it like every other training? I worked as a mechanic before and that was really, really good to have things you can do after the training. Science work is different. For science is more important to understand things. I would disagree with the difference between knowing things and being a good teacher. I can be a good teacher without having a course in pedagogy. It's a weird thing in a university to go to a teacher and say "you could make this course better, you should have a good teaching" and mostly they just mean certain forms of teaching and I don't know why.*

Student 1: *Do you remember Hans Joas when he was here in Marburg last year? Who wrote that famous Sociology book? I didn't get a word when he was speaking [laughs]! But he wrote one of the best teaching books for Sociology I know. So there's a big gap between knowing and being a good teacher.*

Student 3: *But sometimes I think if they are really passionate with their material, what they are studying. If they are passionate they can motivate also the students to be passionate with it. But it's not everyone, I don't know, it's because of the character.*

Interviewer: *Do you all agree that a passionate character in teachers is very important?*

All: *Yeah!*

Student 3: *Especially about the expectations of the students, of course, if I want to get some wisdom I will join the teacher, if not, if I only want to get my license... [laughs from the group]*

The following excerpt from the second focus group in Nicaragua also reveals contradictions between considering someone to be a good teacher and actually wanting them to be their teacher. It also shows a dichotomy between easy teacher and difficult teacher, and reveals that while students are not happy with either type, they tend to despise easy teachers when they teach important courses. The level of importance of a course also appeared clearly in this discussion:

Student 1: *Tuvimos una profesora que sabía muchísimo, brutal pues, tenía metodología y todo lo que decía lo dejaba muy claro. Pero nadie quiere volver a tener clases con ella. La evaluaban mal. Era dura, era como un guardia. [We had a teacher who knew a lot, amazing, she had methodology too, and everything was very clear. But nobody wants to have a class with her again. She was badly evaluated. She was tough, like a soldier.]*

Student 2: *Nosotros [‘Nosotros’ significa los estudiantes de su Carrera, pues él pertenece a una distinta de la del estudiante que habló antes] tampoco somos objetivos cuando evaluamos. Hay una complicidad entre los profesores malos y los alumnos malos. Hasta hubo un profesor que hizo la broma “ah, salí mal evaluado, significa que le estoy haciendo huevos”. [We [‘We’ means the students from his major; he belongs to a different one than the student who spoke before] are also not objective when we evaluate. There’s complicity between bad teachers and bad students. One teacher made the joke: “hey, I got bad evaluation results, it means that I’m doing a really good job!”]*

Student 3: *Hay un problema enorme con la actitud que mostramos hacia eso. Cuando tenemos un docente que nos exige, en la mayoría de los casos decimos “es que ese viejo es un maldito, no nos ayuda, como nos pone esas clases, ala gran puta, no nos da chance de hacer las babosadas”, cuando lo tenemos todo blandengue y todo pendejo, es como que “ah wow, tranquilo, este maje es relajado, no voy a clases, igual siempre me va a reprogramar los exámenes”. [There’s a huge problem with the attitude we have about that. When we have a demanding teacher most of the time we say “that damn old man doesn’t help us, how tough his class, shit, he doesn’t give us time to do the stuff”. When he’s all softy and dumb we go like “hey, wow, cool, this man is relaxed, I won’t go to class, he’ll just re-programme my exams”.]*

[The group laughs.]

Student 2: *De hecho, los profesores que son realmente buenos son conscientes de su calidad y están saliendo mal evaluados pero no les importa. Parte de la exigencia de ser bueno es exigir a los estudiantes, por muy diaverga que sea el maje, tiene que exigir. Qué pasa, me manda a leer a huevos, aunque no quiera, porque tengo que hacer una exposición. [In fact, really good teachers are aware of their quality and are getting bad evaluations but they don’t care. Part of being a good teacher is challenging the students, as cool as the guy can be, he has to be demanding. He makes me read against my will because I have a presentation to make.]*

Student 4: *Hay un profesor que sabe mucho y nos dice “no me digan profesor, yo soy amigo de todos ustedes”. Te pone al igual, es muy importante. [There’s a teacher who knows a lot and he tells us: “don’t call me teacher, I’m your friend”. He makes you feel you are his equal and that is very important.]*

Student 5: *Algo que afecta mucho cómo sale el docente evaluado cuando es bueno es la flexibilidad que tiene, cómo se relaciona con los estudiantes. [Something that affects how a teacher will be evaluated when he is good is how much flexibility he has and how he gets along with the students.]*

Student 3: *En todas las carreras, hay clases fundamentales, ahí vos como alumno exigís más. Pero hay otras clases que no me interesan mucho por lo que yo sé que no va mucho sobre la línea que estoy estudiando, entonces no me interesa si el maje que la está dando es una fiera o no. Pero en las clases importantes sí quiero que el profesor me exija y aunque nos aplacen. Si me da historia un mal profesor yo no reclamo, pero si es una clase como finanzas públicas, obviamente que sí porque es un tema mucho más complejo. [In all the majors there are essential courses in which you, as a student, demand more. But there are other courses that I don’t care much about because I know they have little relation with what I’m studying so I don’t care if the guy who teaches it is a genius or not. But in the important classes I do want a teacher who demands from me even if he flunks us. If a bad teacher teaches me History I don’t complain, but if it’s a class like Public finance I will obviously complain because it is a much more complex topic.]*

Student 4: *El problema es que muchos profesores se sienten superiores a los estudiantes, y por eso es que no son tan flexibles, sólo eso quería agregar. [The problem is that many teachers feel superior to the students and that’s why they are not so flexible, I only wanted to say that.]*

The focus group discussions from Nicaragua suggest that students share a dichotomous view of their teachers. Teachers are either easy or difficult. An easy teacher is flexible and tends to give good grades. Easy teachers belong in irrelevant courses and their evaluation strategy should be lenient, while the content of the course is not scrutinised by the students. Difficult teachers are rigid and tough in grading, they also guarantee the complete coverage of a course's content. They are respected by students who say they want to learn, but they only belong in courses considered relevant for their future careers. Correspondingly, students shared a dichotomous description of their courses that matches the types of teachers (easy teachers with irrelevant courses; difficult teachers with important courses). A problem arises when a teacher does not match a course or a student's expectations regarding the grades they want to obtain or the level of flexibility they need.

In the focus groups from both universities emerged a clear tendency for students to value their teachers in strategical ways that depend on their notions about knowledge, about the relevance of a course, and about their lifestyle and personal strategies. The discussions were never focused just on a teacher's performance and effectiveness in teaching. Some aspects about a teacher become more relevant than others depending on the students' strategies of "college management" and "professor management". Students were clear in confessing preferences that had nothing to do with their learning process. Seeking teachers who give good grades was very openly discussed by students who say that obtaining good grades is a necessity for their personal plan. Students also discussed openly the practice of avoiding teachers considered to be good but too demanding. In addition, the strategic interactions between teacher and topic were widely discussed, suggesting that teachers are never evaluated in isolation from the particular course they teach, the course's perceived relevance for the students future career, or its attractiveness for the particular student. In short, students will prefer tough teachers in topics they consider important or strategic for their future careers (professional or academic) when they say they are motivated to learn. On the other hand, for disciplines that are considered easy to master, or of secondary importance, they will prefer easy teachers. For example, a teacher who is demanding and tough in grading would not be tolerated in a marketing or sociology, but will be accepted as normal in a mathematics course or a highly professionalising subject.

The student-centred learning paradigm does not take into account the fact that students are not necessarily learning-centred or university-centred. As subjects in the neoliberal governmentality, they are simultaneously improving themselves through other mechanisms aside from higher education. Achieving a healthy lifestyle is one example.

Different technologies of the self compete with each other, and education is not always considered more important than the others. This was observed especially in Marburg. Strategies of “college management” are a way of assuring higher education does not intervene with other sources of self-improvement.

In conclusion, according to the interviews, students’ discourses on teachers reveal perceptions that are tied to teachers’ personal characteristics and personality and their relationship with students as much – or even more so – than to their teaching strategies and knowledge. The emphasis placed on the teacher’s relationships with the students – and the preference for “friend” and “coach” types of teachers – indicates that students’ exchange with their teachers has more aspects in common with a “gift economy” than with a “commodity economy”. Students’ descriptions suggested that they want to be givers and receivers in a cycle of exchange in which both parts, the teacher and the students, have moral obligations to each other. Teacher evaluation could be seen in this case as an element that intrudes at a point in time in which the cycle is still no complete, potentially disturbing the process.

In addition, students’ notions about knowledge, the importance of certain courses, and their notions of university life also become relevant vantage points from which teachers are perceived. The focus groups confirmed this but also further revealed the importance of a teacher’s style being coherent with the course he/she teaches, and with students’ strategies on “college management” and “professor management”, which consist on navigating the university through their personal strategy instead of through the university’s official positions and options to enhance the learning experience.

3.2. Discourses on teacher evaluation: Useless feedback but convenient power tool

Interviewed students were encouraged to discuss teacher evaluation. Because of its widespread application at UCA, students at that university had all experienced directly teacher evaluation and on several occasions. On the other hand, some students from Marburg had not. For this reason, I had copies of the evaluation sheets to show them to students who had very little or no experience evaluating their teachers.

In general, students’ opinions about teacher evaluation were full of contradictions. It emerged that they are not appreciated as a helpful strategy to give proper feedback to

teachers, but they are perceived as a useful tool of power in favour of the students. Many students also considered that the practice of teacher evaluation is a scam created by the university management to make them think that the institution cares for their opinions. In general, at UCA, because students had had so much experience with evaluation they had a tendency to consider it useless, a false promise to guarantee good teaching. At Marburg, students suggested the effects of student evaluations would depend on the type of contract of a teacher, they said professor would be immune to it, while young lecturers could possibly benefit.

In spite of the big differences in frequency of application, UCA students did not appear more familiar with the contents of the evaluation sheet, none of them could remember much about what was asked in the sheets or consider if anything important was missing from them. All students from both universities confessed to sometimes filling them in carelessly, and some students replied that they never filled them in with care. Nevertheless, the great majority of them said that student questionnaires should exist because if they were eliminated teachers would “do what they want”.

Both UCA and Marburg students were generally clueless as to what happened with the results of the evaluation. Only very few of them knew that these questionnaires were processed by the university and the results handed to the teacher and sometimes incorporated into an incentive system. When I described the evaluation mechanism the reactions were of two types:

1. Some students felt the university was not taking their opinions seriously given the fact that some badly evaluated teachers were still being hired.
2. Other students felt it was a very unfair procedure and that they would now be very careful about their opinions so as not to damage any teacher’s career, because “they are human”.

The great majority of students from both universities considered that the practice of teacher evaluation is useless for improving teaching. UCA students said that they preferred the open questions at the end of the questionnaire because there they had a better possibility to say what they really think, while at the same time they confessed to feeling lazy about writing. In Marburg students mainly said the problems their teachers had were difficult to express in a closed question format. Most of the students said they could not feel the possibility of expressing what they thought through the questionnaire. The interviews provided plenty of

examples that could illustrate the cause of this view. They show how a teacher's actions are fixed in a precise communicative context that may be interpreted in different and even opposite ways, portrayed as both appropriate and inappropriate, and necessarily transformed into a different thing – devoid of “social life” – if attempted to capture in a questionnaire:

Student: *I was sitting in a seminar and there were other students giving a presentation over an article we should have read. And I read the article and I heard mistakes in their presentation, they were just telling wrong stuff and I was just, “okay, why isn't the teacher interfering?”. Or at least, okay you can let them talk to an end and then you have to say “okay, that was wrong and that was wrong”. It was not an opinion, it was just wrong. In my opinion a teacher has to step in and say, otherwise the people listening just learn wrong things. Somebody says something wrong, the teacher has to correct it.*

Interviewer: *And why do you think the teacher didn't?*

Student: *I don't know, maybe he didn't want to be rude. I think criticism is like not so easy as it looks to a student. You have to balance it like getting the facts straight but without, like, hurting the students. I just came from a lecture where in the middle of the presentation the teacher stood up and said “Stop it, you're not doing what was planned, you're just doing a wrong topic”, and that I felt pretty rude, I mean they were not saying wrong things, they were just doing a wrong perspective on something. It was about a film, the seminar is about Sinti and Roma representations in movies. And they had a certain movie they should have watched and then say what that movie says about society's perspective on Sinti and Roma. And what they did was they talked ten minutes about the movie and then gave historical facts that had already been given some sessions before. And then the teacher stood up and said, “That was not the topic, you did **that** wrong, you did **that** wrong, you did **that** wrong”. And although it was technically correct and I was thinking that “okay they're giving facts we already heard two times before, why are they doing that?” but I found pretty rude of the teacher to stand up and say “wrong, wrong, wrong”.*

Interviewer: *So how would you handle a situation like that?*

Student: *That's why I don't wanna be a teacher! [laughs] I think it's very difficult on the one hand trying to provide information and preventing the other students to have to hear something twice, and on the other hand not discouraging students doing presentations, I don't know. The students were looking down at the floor...*

Interviewer: *And if you had to evaluate this teacher today?*

Student: *I don't know, I would say maybe the teacher lacked certain social skills I would say, maybe empathy. I would say he should criticize them not in front of the class, just let them finish, tell the points yourself that the group missed, than talk to the group privately. I mean, the teacher had a point because when I was listening I was thinking exactly the same thing. But then when the teacher said exactly what I was thinking I thought “that's pretty rude!” (Joachim, Anthropology, Marburg).*

The above text reveals how a complicated class situation in which a teacher makes a decision to intervene and say something the student basically agreed with, has the potential to generate a poor evaluation for the teacher which, in addition, would not be transformed into usable feedback as it would not transmit a precise idea of what the problem was. This is also the case when the social characteristics of the students who are giving their opinions are also lost in the process:

"But a good question like asking if the teacher behaves respectfully, it's good but it's a very general question. If you have minorities in the class, they are minorities and there won't be many criticism if they complained and statistically you made an average, you would say "oh, it's only like five people, it doesn't matter". Maybe the questions are pretty cool and you get the feeling of getting heard. You're like "okay, maybe I do matter, what I think", but you don't know what happens to this evaluations, you don't know how effectful [sic] they are. Sometimes teachers share the results and so you think, "okay, the teacher cares he didn't just throw it away". In my case, with my background and my political attitudes, etc., you are afraid that if you write something in this field they will know who you are because, as I said, if you are a minority or you have a minority opinion it's easy to track back, or at least make an assumption which can also affect the grade you give explicitly or implicitly, it doesn't have to be conscious. Another point is that I think the university wants to have a certain image, they want to say "we care about our students, we have these evaluation sheets and we do read the reports and evaluate them", I don't know who evaluates them, I suppose the university itself which I suppose it's not methodically correct. So it's like you did something and enough, you took care of a topic. Maybe if there were no sheets, maybe, the movement would come from the students themselves. You try to calm down the big mass, you give them something, and so it appears to be like they care." (Julia, Psychology, Marburg)

Other examples show Marburg students' ambivalence towards the value of teacher evaluations and how serious they should be taken. Here, students confirm the notion that being a good teacher is very dependent on personality issues, and therefore, teacher evaluation turns into an unjust affair.

"I'm not very convinced about those things but I do say that they give a direction. But if I was a teacher I don't really know what I would do if I would get a really bad feedback, how I would be able to change. Because I had this other professor afterwards, as well, and I just felt that he was trying but he continued to fail. And the students were already very narrow minded about how he would present himself and stuff, and they would already judge him beforehand, so it was just kinda like a lost case. It was a small group, just 30 people. And we had him for two years, after the first year it was just "no". So with his personality and his character it was just impossible to change. But this is just reasonable, just because somebody is not fulfilling expectations to make him leave, this is not a nice society" (Gianna, Psychology, Marburg)

"It's not easy because if there is a young one and he's not able... he's not the right type, you know the shy one we were talking about, where do you start? You can't change his personality and he can't change his personality, so we have to live with that problem, that's what I think. You could talk about strategies in schools but not with professors. A good professor know what he has to do". (Nina, Anthropology, Marburg)

Students also suggested that teacher evaluation should not be taken seriously because they are not answered seriously. The sheets can contain useful feedback for the teacher as much they can contain nonsense:

"The teachers should be themselves, just be funny sometimes, don't take too serious everything that students say and don't let it come too close to yourself. Like when someone's saying "hey, I think it's shit what you're doing there", just don't take it serious. (Nadia, business Administration and Politics, Marburg).

"I feel about it, okay I do some crosses and stuff but I'm not so sure whether anyone cares. Sometimes I just read it and do some stupid things like crossing like this and then like that (does some zig zag motions on the paper on the row of boxes). I sometimes did it, to be honest. Which is actually not good when I think about it now because we can't say it doesn't work anyway, or they don't care anyway if we then don't care as well. I never did write anything bad on it, but I sometimes wrote some funny things or whatever." (Romain, Economics, Marburg)

"Most of the time we have free space to write, I write that down: "your topic was good but your lesson was bad" or "your topic is so uninteresting for me but probably it's not your fault", there's nothing the teacher can do for me in that case. The open questions are better because most of the questionnaire, you read it and there are like 25 or 30 questions and you go like "what?!", 10 questions similar and I don't think they really help. Sometimes yes, when there is a course you like and you can just make some marks there. They are a little bit too big. Most of the people are just, tick, tick, tick, tick, they don't really read the questions. Sometimes it would be helpful for the teacher to know who wrote something but with such a big class that is not possible. But sometimes it's helpful for some people to be anonymous because you might have that same teacher in another course in the future. (James, Business, Marburg)

"mmmmh, my interest depends on the mood you have on that day. Sometimes, when I know these thing comes, like, I'm 15 minutes late so I don't have to. Because you have to do it in the beginning of the last lecture of the semester, usually, and if you just come late you don't have to do it. I mean, I want to do it if it's really bad or really good, but maybe I'm not so much interested in it. I don't think they have a big impact, these things. There are so horrible teachers and so good ones, and I don't see them anyhow getting rewarded and I've never seen them getting replaced". (Marian, Business Administration and Economics, Marburg)

"I don't have the feeling that people are taking them really seriously. They are handed out and you have ten minutes to fill them out and then you just write something and if you, like, write anything you just write down what you think the teacher wants to hear". (Anthropology, Joachim, Marburg)

This careless way of filling in the evaluation questionnaires, coupled with their observations about their probable uselessness, or about the management's Machiavellian intentions of making students think they care for their opinions, reveals an edge of resistance towards the practice. In addition, many students stated that there are other, more effective, ways that teachers use to obtain their feedback, which are also now widespread in areas from the social sciences:

In anthropology it's not that multiple choice thing because it's not the way anthropology is working. Doing that kind of survey... when they tell anthropologists, "yeah, we could do a quantitative survey", they go like "no, we're not doing that, that's bullshit!". So they're just

doing a qualitative survey. Nearly in every course I do in anthropology the teachers are interested in what the students are thinking about the way they're teaching. After every course they're giving you a hand sheet with a few questions. What did you like, what you didn't like, if you have some advice for the teacher. It's always anonymous, I really like it because you can write what you're really thinking, it's not that yes, no, yes, no, yes, no, okay, maybe, I don't know, yes, okay. So the teachers are taking the time to read all these hand sheets and to get something from them, for their way of teaching. I think it's very helpful for them. Most of the time students are very honest, they're really writing what they think and taking the time to do this. I do think that this is more useful than the psychology tests, it's standard tests and it just like "yeah, oohhh, I really don't understand this question but okay, maybe yes, okay yes. And this, maybe no, okay no", it's not really what you want to say sometimes, if it was more open and you could write fluently it's very different, maybe you would be writing something very different. But maybe it's also a good way to find out some things, in Psychology the professor was like, "yeah, I recognise, okay I have to speak louder, so now I'll get a microphone", so it helped. (Theresa, Anthropology and Psychology, Marburg).

"If there is a very good or very bad class I do give feedback. And sometimes you have something to say and sometimes you can't come up with anything to say. I would be interested to know what are the teachers doing with the feedback, if they use this thing or not. There are questions that to me seem totally senseless, like how you feel in the class or something like that. Or if the acoustics are good, teachers cannot change those things. Or like how much you learned, that depends entirely on you. If you don't go to class how are you going to learn". (Amanda, Sociology, Marburg)

"First, I was like 'ah, this is something new, let's see, it's also fun to give your teachers grades, change positions, you feel like you're actually in charge of something' but then I stopped filling them up. I didn't know the function of this thing and what happens to it, I'm very critical to the goals of the university because it's connected to economic interests of course, always, so I don't want to blindly support or reinforce something that I don't know. It's also interesting how some teachers explain what it is and some are like "ok, here's an evaluation sheet, please um, fill it out, um...". In the beginning everyone thought they had to fill it out, if you didn't fill it out you were just like this [crosses her arms] and everyone knows you didn't fill it out. Nobody asked what it was for, what happens to it, I didn't ask, but psychology students are always scared, "I have to make a good grade, I have to be polite". Issues of racism, for example, are absent from the sheet. Also for the teachers, what do you do with this kind of information that is so general, you need something you can grasp. For example, with the question "the teacher reinforces my interest on this topic" and students say no, than the teacher says "what did I do, what do I do?". Also, the filling in is always rushed because they need to start the lecture. Sometimes you don't know or you lie, one time I did cross a zero. Since you don't know the importance of the sheet you lie of course. (Julia, Psychology, Marburg)

Students at UCA also had ambivalent views on teacher evaluation. Some mentioned their evident utility, especially for the institution, but also casted doubts about whether they could have a real impact on the teacher:

"A la universidad y al mismo profesor le sirven. A a la universidad para saber con qué tipo de profesor cuenta, qué nivel tiene y qué nivel de satisfacción tienen los alumnos hacia el profesor. Y si el profesor realmente tiene una buena actitud, oídos abiertos para aceptar crítica constructiva, obviamente ese cuestionario sirve para que el profesor siga creciendo y mejorando cada día, y si no lo es, pues al profesor le va a servir para odiar más al alumno". (Luis, Tourism, UCA) [These are helpful for the university and also for the teacher. For the

university because it lets them know the type of teacher they have, what is his level and how satisfied the student are with him. And if the teacher really has a good attitude, open ears to accept constructive criticism, the questionnaire will obviously be useful to help the teacher keep growing and improving day by day. And if the teacher does not have a good attitude, than they will make him hate the student even more.]

Several students seemed to have gone through different phases regarding teacher evaluation. They recalled their enthusiasm about them in their first year of university. But then they commented on its ineffectiveness evidenced by the fact that there are many deficient teachers who are still in the university after several years of bad evaluations.

"Al inicio creía que podía significar algo pero al final "bueno, esto no tiene mucho sentido". Había preguntas repetitivas, cansadas, estándares. No eran preguntas que dijeras, "veamos si este profesor en realidad cumple con esto?". Eran preguntas como "cumple con los valores sociales?" bueno, si cumple con los valores sociales de no matar a una persona, sí. Son cosas a veces demasiado generales. No es narcotraficante, se gana la vida trabajando, el hombre. El cuestionario es tan fugaz cuando lo hacés, evaluar a un docente no es hacerlo con un cuestionario. ¿Queda plasmado en un cuestionario? No, porque son preguntas generales y estándares que encontrás en cualquier cosa de Internet. Pero no hay manera de hacer notar si ese profesor tiene esa calidad. (Alberto, Economics, UCA). [At the beginning I thought they could mean something but at the end "well, this doesn't make much sense". There were repetitive, tired, and standard questions. They were not questions that made you think "let's see if this teacher really does fulfil this. They were questions like "does he fulfil social values?". Well, if it is whether he fulfils social values like not killing someone, yes. Some things are too general. He's not a drug trafficker; he makes a living with honest work. The questionnaire is so fleeting when you do it. We shouldn't evaluate a teacher with a questionnaire. Does this get picked up in a questionnaire? No because they are general and standard questions you find in the internet. There is no way of telling if the teacher in question has quality.]

The following example shows the mixture of critique towards teacher evaluation found in most of the interviews: first of all the student mentions how the questionnaire is used by students as a punishment or reward system for teachers they like or dislike. Then she mentions a disbelief in the questionnaire as an effective instrument for feedback because students are also careless with their responses, which has negative consequences for good teachers because it is used as a tool by the university's management to pretend that they care for quality:

Yo no comparto el sistema evaluativo de la UCA porque es un sistema cerrado. Si el profesor te cayó mal, la evaluación es mala absolutamente, si el profesor te cayó bien porque se rieron y chilearon y es bien en tu onda como estudiante, es una evaluación excelente. El cuatrimestre pasado la profesora que teníamos nos exigía mucho porque ella es bien exigente, tenía sus malos modos a veces, sin embargo ella salió muy mal en su evaluación y eso es lo que cuesta la estadía aquí en la UCA como profesor. Porque un cuestionario lo puede responder cualquier persona y te puede estar hasta mintiendo. Eso no mide calidad, mide la entrada de profesores y la salida de profesores en esta universidad. A veces se pierden buenos profesores. La mayoría de las personas ya ni pensamos porque ni lo cambian el cuestionario, nos lo sabemos, ni cinco minutos nos tardamos, como un niño de primer grado haciendo su caligrafía en chorro, pero si te cayó mal te tomás la molestia de leerlo y hasta de escribir el comentario. Para mí sólo es

algo protocolario, para que la universidad tenga una base de que está cumpliendo con sus estándares en cuanto a los profesores. (Katia, Tourism, UCA) [I don't agree with UCA's evaluation system because it is a closed system. If you didn't like the teacher the evaluation is absolutely negative, if you liked the teacher because you laughed and made jokes and he is cool with the students, the evaluation is excellent. Last quarter we had a teacher that was very demanding, she was a little moody sometimes, but she had a bad evaluation and that is all you need to decide your permanence here in UCA as a teacher. Because anybody can answer a questionnaire and they can be even lying. That does not measure quality; it measures entrance and exit of teachers in this university. Sometimes we lose good teachers. Most of us don't even think because they don't even change that questionnaire, we know it by heart, we don't take five minutes, we do it like a first grade kid practicing calligraphy. But if you didn't like the teacher you take your time of reading it and writing in the comment section. For me it's just protocol, so the university can prove that it is fulfilling standards with its teachers.]

The interviews contained numerous examples about students' lack of credibility on students' responses on teacher evaluation questionnaires. This perspective was generalised:

"He notado que uno va a esas evaluaciones, "pa, pa, pa, pa, pa, pa, pa", si le cayó bien ponía todo excelente, excelente y ya, termina en 30 segundos, le cayó mal, pa, pa, pa, pa, pa, ponía todo regular o mal, mal, le cayó regular entonces le puso intercalado. No siempre se hace a conciencia. A veces se hace sólo por ponerlo o para quemar al profesor.(Alfredo, Business, UCA) [I've noticed that we go to those evaluations, "ta, ta, ta, ta, ta", if you liked him you mark everything excellent, excellent and ready, you finish in 30 seconds. You didn't like him "ta, ta, ta, ta, ta", you mark everything mediocre or bad, you like him more or less, then you mark alternately. You don't always do it honestly. Sometimes you do it with no interest or to get back at the teacher.]

"Como son preguntas cerradas es fácil decir sí, la mayoría apretan el sí, y es que está a la izquierda, entonces uno hace así la mano, diseño gráfico lo tiene todo preparado. Igualmente te digo, esas evaluaciones salen en su mayoría bien porque la gente en sí, las personas, los alumnos, al final no tienen conciencia de lo que se les está impartiendo." (Mythos, Psychology and Sociology, UCA) [Since they are closed questions it's easy to say yes, most people press yes because it's to the left so you do like this with your hand, the people from graphic design have everything ready. In any case, I tell you those evaluations come up good most of the time because the people, the students, at the end of the day have no awareness of what they are being taught.]

"Pero también pueden ser un arma de doble filo estas evaluaciones, porque hay chavalos a los que les cayó mal el profesor porque no los ve bien y los evalúan super mal. Eso se da un montón. Estoy segura de que en algún momento confabulamos contra algún profesor y dijimos "todos lo evaluamos mal". A veces los chavalos podemos ser muy dañinos". (Fabiola, Psychology, UCA) [But those evaluations are also double edge swords because there are guys who evaluate a teacher badly because they didn't like them supposedly because he didn't look at them in the right way. That is very frequent. I'm sure that one day we conspired against a teacher and said "we should all evaluate him badly". Sometimes we can be very nasty.]

Following the tendency – revealed in the focus groups – that students have of placing more importance on some courses than others, and accordingly modifying their expectations of the teacher, the students revealed how this is taken into account when they decide how to

evaluate: *“Responderlos con interés depende de la asignatura. Uno siente que alguna es más llamativa según lo que le atraiga más”. (Sonatina, Business, UCA).* [Answering with interest depends on the course. You feel that some are more important depending on what you are attracted to.]

In addition, at UCA, for many students teacher evaluation questionnaires are not feedback for the teacher. For them, they are clearly for the university authorities. When a student decides to comply or not, or to fill it in seriously or not, they are rebelling or complying with the university management, not with the teacher:

“Es algo que le permite a las autoridades ver si están teniendo los profesores adecuados y competentes o si es necesario hacer un cambio”. (Keyling, Business, UCA) [It’s something that allows the authorities to see if they have adequate and competent teachers, or if it’s necessary to change them.]

“Con las evaluaciones nos tienen como niños. Yo sólo las llenaba cuando sentía que tenía algo que decir. El día de la evaluación los estudiantes lo ven como el día en que vas a salir más temprano” (Ámbar, Architecture, UCA) [With the evaluations they treat us like kids. I only filled them in when I felt I had something to say. The evaluation day is seen by students as they day you will leave early.]

The focus group results confirmed the basic attitudes students expressed about teacher evaluation in the interviews. In general, students tended to be bolder with their opinions when they were speaking in a group. Many of them displayed a shameless attitude, almost cynical, in which opinions and confessions on professor management through evaluations were very evident. Marburg students discussed the ways in which the teacher’s personality is decisive in how students evaluate him/her, as well as the course in question and the course’s final results in terms of grades. In addition, students discussed the importance of perspective. They agreed in the fact that many times when they had evaluated a course they were still not prepared to do so because they did not have the final opinion about the course, which tended to change after the exam of final paper were written. An excerpt from the focus group with Business Administration students shows this:

Interviewer: *Are there good teachers who get bad evaluations and bad teachers who get good evaluations?*

Student 1: *I personally think that the evaluation depends on the personality of the teacher.*

Student 2: *Yes, as an example, a statistics professor. If he is good and challenging the students he will get a bad evaluation from the students because only a few will pass. The majority don’t like statistics, they just do it because they have to.*

Student 3: *Maybe when you don’t like the lecture, and maybe not the professor, but you just don’t have interest in the subject, you are not motivated to do something for it. So it’s not just the professor, it’s the subject.*

Student 2: *As well, with the statistics lecture I would say “oh, it’s bad, I don’t like the lecture, I hate it” [others laugh] and I gave a bad evaluation but afterwards, I wrote the exam and then I had a different look on this and said, oh, he was a good teacher.*

Student 4: *Some teachers here have easy subjects and you hear from former students that the exams won’t be so hard [others: yeah!].*

Student 1: *The [sic] most of the time when you do the evaluations you haven’t even seen the material, you have it at home and can look at them, but some days before the exam you just look at them and know what you’re doing.*

Student 2: *Because we have some lectures we don’t have to go to, and until you see things some days before the exam, then you have an idea. Maybe you also have a different opinion when you are studying and another one after the exam. Maybe it was difficult and then with the exam that was easy then you are happy [others agree].*

The focus groups at UCA revealed contradictory perspectives on the use of teacher evaluation. On the one hand, students spoke of their disappointment for its failure to eliminate bad teachers, and its function only as an instrument used by the university’s management to pretend that it cares for quality. On the other hand, students spoke of selectively using teacher evaluation as an instrument of power in line with their strategies for “college management”, which include how much effort a class deserves or how important it is.

Student 1: *Si se tomara realmente nuestra opinión, muchos de los profesores ya no estuvieran aquí, [everybody laughs] o estuvieran! Sí, o estuvieran [todos ríen]. La mayoría de la gente lo llena porque es obligatorio pero en realidad no se nos toma el cuenta, pues. Pero con estos mecanismos de evaluación estamos queriendo hacer la pantalla de la calidad, tapando las cosas en lugar de construir la calidad. [If they would really take our opinion many of our teachers wouldn’t be here anymore [everybody laughs] or they would be here! Yes, or they would be here [everybody laughs again]. Most people fill them in because it is compulsory but we are not really taken into account. With this evaluation mechanisms we are trying to pretend we have quality, we are concealing things instead of constructing quality.]*

Student 2: *Yo coincido mucho con los muchachos, pero el problema de que si el profesor es bueno o malo tiene que ver con otras cosas, como el aire acondicionado, o que te estén pitando todo el día los buses en las aulas I, cuando se puede hacer algo. Yo no miro a los profesores que si son aburridos o no para decidir si son buenos o malos, lo que a mí siempre me ha interesado es que la clase me sea útil para algo, que yo sienta que esa clase me sirve y es una herramienta para algo, pues. Porque con los profesores que hemos tenido problema en sociología, ese era el problema, que no le hayábamos ningún tipo de sentido de para qué nos podía servir la clase. Tal vez él sabía mucho o habían [sic] otros que metodológicamente eran buenos, pero no veíamos para qué nos podían servir. Por otro lado, a lo de las evaluaciones tampoco les hayo mucho sentido, nosotros a veces decíamos “vamos a evaluarlo mal”, íbamos todos en bloque, como cuando se va a votar en la Asamblea [todos ríen] y es injusto porque ni leíamos la pregunta, sólo íbamos en cascada, malo, malo, malo, la llenábamos en menos de un minuto y el comentario malo. Hasta decíamos que no presentaba el syllabus aunque sí lo presentaba. [I agree with everyone, but the problem of whether the teacher is good or bad has to do with other things, such as the air conditioning, or having to hear honking all day long in the I classrooms, when something could be done to solve the problem. I don’t think about teachers in terms of whether they are boring or not when I tried to decide if they are good or bad. What*

I've always wanted is for the course to be useful for something, that I feel it can help me and be a tool for something. Because with the teachers we've had problems with in Sociology that was the problem, we couldn't find any sense about what the class could be useful for. Maybe he knew a lot, and there were others who were very good methodologically speaking, but we couldn't see the utility of the course. On the other hand, I can't find much sense either on evaluations. We sometimes said "let's all give him a bad evaluation"; we all went in block, like when they vote in the Assembly [everyone laughs] and it was unfair because we didn't even read the questions, we just marked in a line, bad, bad, bad, and filled it in less than a minute, and gave a bad comment. We even said he didn't give us a syllabus although he did.]

Student 3: *En economía las decisiones de la evaluación dependen bastante del nivel de exigencia del docente, por ejemplo, si llega como quien dice arrasando, dejando muchos trabajos, si la clase tiene un ritmo que no todos pueden seguir, ese profesor inmediatamente se va al abismo. Pero aunque lo evalúen mal sigue ahí. Todo esto de las evaluaciones de los profesores es bastante inútil y sesgado. Eso de que te encasillen en decir qué parte del profesor es que vas a evaluar, eso no es real respecto a lo que puede hacer el profesor en un aula de clase. A mí me gusta que el profesor sea exigente pero no a todos.* [In Economics the decisions in evaluation depend a lot on how demanding the teacher is. For example, if he comes, like they say, "destroying" and asking for many assignments, if the class has a rhythm not everyone can follow, that teacher immediately falls in the abyss. But even if he has bad evaluations he stays there. All that about the teacher evaluations is very useless and biased. That practice of constricting you, telling you what part of the teacher you're going to evaluate, that is not real regarding what a teacher can do in a classroom. I like it when a teacher is demanding, but not everyone.]

Interviewer: *So are there good teachers who get bad evaluations and bad teachers who get good evaluations?*

Everybody: ¡Verdadero! [True!]

Student 1: *Por la simpatía, como es malo, es flojo... todos pasan y al grupo le gusta. Significa que para profesores exigentes, esos los van a evaluar mal. Hay una cultura de eso en las aulas de clase. [Todos expresan acuerdo].* [Out of sympathy, since he's bad, he's lousy... everybody passes the course and the group likes him. That means that for demanding teachers, they will have bad evaluations. There's a culture of doing that in the classroom.] [Everybody agrees]

In contrast with the official discourse that portrays teacher evaluations as a proper and much needed feedback for teachers, based on standardised and comparable criteria, students' discourses about teacher evaluation are very different. Some students say that they coincided with this view when they initially encountered teacher evaluation in their first year at university – consequently, filling-in the questionnaires with interest –, but later concluded that it is useless when they saw teachers that had been badly evaluated still being hired (UCA), or when they acquired a more mature perspective of their education (Marburg) that led them to see teachers as professionals with the right to be imperfect. Likewise, students were more likely to conclude that teacher evaluation was conducted first and foremost for the management; they see the management as the main recipient of the content of their evaluation. This was clearly the case at UCA. As a result, students also described the practice as

a hypocritical exercise of the university managers wanting to pretend that they care for quality or for the students' opinions. According to most of the students in both the interviews and the focus group discussions, they often use teacher evaluation in a clear strategical way, or respond in a careless way.

An analysis of the data-base of answers to the open-ended questions written by students at UCA (to which the teachers themselves would not have had access) in the first quarter of 2013, further hints at the ambivalent attitudes these students have to teacher evaluation. After analysing all the answers it emerged that they could be classified into five main types:

- Answers that could be considered 'useful' feedback for teachers because of their specificity, referring to a very precise aspect of the course, or their applicability. For example: "The second assignment was not well explained and we didn't know what to do".
- Answers that were vague, barely producing any meaning. For example: "She has to improve the way she explains".
- Answers that were disrespectful, consisted of insults for the teacher or focused on describing and complaining about the teacher's personality. For example: "He's a pervert bastard" or "She is very moody and bad mannered".
- Answers that focused on asking for a more dynamic or less boring class, or praising the teacher for not being boring. For example: "The class should be more dynamic". Or "The class is too boring".
- Answers in which students had simply written "nothing" or "everything". Here I also included very similar answers, such as "I don't know".

After classifying all the answers I produced a percentage of how many of the total answers could be classified into each type in order to obtain general tendencies. The result can be seen in the following table:

Major	'Useful'	Vague	Insulting	Dynamism/ boredom	"Nothing" or "everything"
Business Administration	13%	44%	13%	9%	21%
Accounting	9%	60%	14%	1%	16%
Economics	16%	49%	20%	5%	10%
Psychology	18%	30%	27%	13%	12%

As observed in the table, a teacher who obtains this feedback is likely to read vague answers that suggest nothing the teacher could 'use', or to read the words "nothing" or "everything" as answers to questions such as: "What should the teacher improve?" or "Of all the teacher's actions, which were the most helpful for you?". In Economics and Psychology, the second most common type of comments are insults. Obtaining information that is specific and could be 'useful' – as teacher evaluation enthusiasts say – is very unlikely in this case, while comments on personality are very present. This brief analysis shows how students' categories for evaluating their teachers do not coincide with the criteria they are supposedly using in the questionnaires. Furthermore, the presence of insults and evidently apathetic or indifferent answers suggest their use of the questionnaires as "vengeance instruments" or as irrelevant processes.

The same exercise was done with a smaller collection of evaluation questionnaires from Marburg. These were from eleven Sociology courses (some seminars and some lectures) by one professor and two seminars by one Psychology professor. The analysis produced a very different categorisation as to the typology of answers:

- 'Useful' answers: they were very precise and detailed, and offered the opportunity to modify a future course. For example: *"Anregung: Vielleicht könnten externe Referenten eingeladen werden, die beruflich in der Entwicklungshilfe tätig sind"*.
- Room/number of students: These answers were about problems with the room or with the amount of students being too big for the available space. For example: *"Ich habe keine Kritik an der Veranstaltung, aber was die Räumlichkeit angeht, war es für mich problematisch, da man akkustisch manchmal nur schwer gehört hat wegen dem Straßenlärm"*.
- Answers about treatment of the students. For example: *"Dozentin beantwortet gern alle Fragen"* or "The lecturer does a good job in dealing with students and has a friendly way of holding the seminar" (originally in English).
- Answers that were focused on the topic or contents of the course. For example: *"Thema grundsätzlich sehr interessant"*.
- Answers that were vague were those that did not say any specific that the teacher could use. For example: *"Kommunikation zw. Studierenden und Dozentin"*.
- Comments requesting more input from teachers were as common as comments requesting less. For example: *"Ich würde mir noch mehr Input durch den Dozenten"*

wünschen“ or “I would like more discussion led by the professor” (originally in English).

The percentage of answers that corresponded to each type can be seen in the following table:

Major	Precise	Room/number of students	Treatment of the students	Topic/content	Vague	Input from teacher: more or less
Sociology	19%	9%	27%	27%	7%	11%
Psychology	39%	0%	29%	7%	11%	14%

In this case, it is evident the emphasis placed by students on referring to how they felt the teacher in question treated them. In Sociology the other issue mostly mentioned was the topic of the course or its content. Students referred specifically to whether they liked the topic or not, or what content had been included, should have or should not have been included. In the Psychology questionnaires it was more common to read very specific comments about things that had happened in the course or that the teacher had done. Although this sample was very small, it does hint at two tendencies revealed in the interviews: the students’ tendency to describe a teacher’s treatment of the students, and the importance they place on the topic of the course as much as on the teacher, when they evaluate their experience. An interesting element revealed in this exercise was the elevated number of times that students, both in Sociology and Psychology, mentioned the teachers’ level of input both to ask for more or for less. An interesting question that arises from this exercise is how a teacher should interpret contradictory feedback such as when some students in a class demand more input from him/her while others want less.

In sum, as revealed in the interviews and focus groups, students from both Marburg and UCA place doubts on the validity of the result of teacher evaluations. Their discourse reveals a very limited knowledge about the mechanism. Most of them say they do not know what happens with teacher evaluations, who sees the answers, who interprets them, and how. Because of them, some of them opt to be cautious with their answers. However, they readily admit their use as a poor tool to “get back” at teachers they did not like, as well as their view of teacher evaluation as being a tool for the university management, instead of a feedback mechanism directed at the teachers. Students also emphasised their deep distrust of the results. The interviews and focus groups revealed an almost homogenous opinion that students are not objective when they evaluate their teachers; this was the case in both universities. It is also clear that when students evaluate their teachers they keep in mind the

value and type of class they taught. They also say they evaluate teachers according to their own interests and stereotypes about a course's supposed level of difficulty and importance. In addition, students from Marburg said they sometimes regretted their answers afterwards when they changed their minds about the teacher or the course's content. This happened because when they did the evaluation they did not have a complete picture of the course as they had not read the material or done the exam.

Overall, students' descriptions of their use of teacher evaluation are evidently different to the way the 'talk of quality' pretends they do. Their use can be described as strategic, and more in line with their efforts in "college management" and "professor management", which consist of adapting the university and the teachers' performance to their own set of choices and criteria.

4. Third research question: By the adoption of the quality assurance regime and its definition of students as clients, what is being invisibilised about students and student culture at both universities? Is the practice of teacher evaluation fostering the client identity in students and/or the client image of students in teachers at both universities?

To introduce this part of the discussion I will recall the interviewee's reactions to the notion of students being the university's clients. With some rare exceptions – concretely, three cases from UCA – this notion was rejected both in the individual interviews as in the focus groups because students felt it turned teaching/learning into an economic transaction. The main reaction was that the idea was misplaced in the university context and did not capture the kind of relationship students want to have with their teachers: *"No me gusta tanto la idea de que el estudiante es el cliente porque no me gusta pensar que soy el empleador del profesor y llegar a tratarlo así (Eddy, Accounting, UCA)."*¹¹⁵ The few students who did agree with the idea went on to explain that although this was an ideal situation, sadly they were not acting as clients because they were not demanding more pressure from their teachers. Interestingly, for them, what a client would do in the university context is reject lenient and flexible teachers: *Yo soy el cliente en la universidad y yo soy quien puedo dejar al profesor que se fresquee porque yo me*

¹¹⁵ I don't like too much the idea that the student is the client because I don't like to think that I am the teacher's employer and come to treat him in that way (Eddy, Accounting, UCA).

quedo con un conocimiento superficial, o hacerlo que él se interiorice en el conocimiento (Sonatina, Business Administration, UCA).¹¹⁶ Hence, when the student as client idea was accepted, it was not interpreted in the same way as in the ‘talk of quality’, which is to give students what they demand to feel satisfied. In the focus groups students discussed this issue in a very heated way. After an interesting and prolonged deliberation, Business Administration students from Marburg considered the term as erroneous, not capable of representing the position of the student in the university. This was the discussion triggered by this idea in the focus group:

Interviewer: *Would you say students are clients?*

Student 1: *I guess this word isn't the right one to call us. In Marburg many demonstrations are against calling the university a factory and we are only clients. And I guess most of us would disagree with these demonstrations because mostly it's stupid argumentation from them. Of course we are saying this university should get more money. But demonstrations are not the right way. Possibly I guess these demonstrators want to have more, more and more and more students at the university, they want everyone, in their opinion everyone should study here. The courses would have too many people, the teaching quality would suffer. So I would take distance from that. In Marburg is very difficult to take this point. [Finding himself coinciding with a focal message of student demonstrations, and probably startled by this coincidence, this student made an effort to distance himself from these events. The reason might be that, typically, these demonstrations are organised and supported by students with leftist views with whom he does not identify.]*

Student 2: *I'm a client if I go to the lawyer, and I am his client. We can say we are kind of clients, but not in the exact meaning. Sometimes, sure we're clients but not in this bad meaning.*

Student 3: *Customer is the proper word.*

Interviewer: *What's the difference between client and customer? [Several talk at the same time...]*

Student 2: *The difference is that I can't become the customer of a lawyer, I'm a customer of a shop but I'm a client of a lawyer. If I pay for an information or a service I'm a client, and if I pay for a thing I'm a customer.*

Student 1: *For information or a service.*

Student 4: *I think also that we don't want to be clients of the university but students say they claim for something. They are saying that we are clients when we want something or want to change something. Only in this case I would use this word client.*

Student 1: *We're not in this customer way clients.*

Student 2: *There's a difference because a client pays all his study fees and can go to the professor and gets served, a customer way would be "I take my purse and take a hundred and get my degree". As a customer I give money and take something, as a client I normally have a personal relationship, a lawyer would be always on my side.*

¹¹⁶ I am the client in the university and I am the one who can let the teacher relax irresponsibly so I end up with a superficial knowledge, or make him delve deeper into his knowledge (Sonatina, Business Administration, UCA).

Student 5: *The relationship between university and student can't be described as client. Client is negative, I don't think.*

Student 3: *But a client is mostly when we are exchanging money for something [several talking]—yes, yes – but we are not paying so much.*

Student 1: *Yes, in the business administration also the agency in the client theory, there, the client is the—interpretation, action-, as client you have less information. The university in this sense has more information about us.*

Student 5: *When we talk about client... it's difficult.*

Student 1: *I guess principal agent theory is perhaps more fitting for the relationship with the university. [Silence for three seconds, they appear to be thinking about it.]*

Student 2: *As a client, I go to my lawyer, pay him, and he should do what I want, but I don't go to my professor to tell him I need a good grade.*

Student 1: *Yeah, you can't go to a professor and say "I need a good grade", and they give it to you [everyone laughs]. Normally I pay a lawyer to do something for me. But I can't go to the professor and pay him and say "take my exam" [everyone laughs].*

Student 2: *I would say I don't think when they wrote the Bologna they thought about all of this, they just needed a word.*

Everyone: *Yeah! [They laugh]*

The focus group discussions about students as clients at UCA were less philosophical about the term but more emotional. Students said they were really offended by the idea and those who were firmly against it took control of the conversation. Two students did not speak, and did not seem so offended, but when coaxed, they said they were also not totally in favour of the idea. The following are excerpts from two focus group discussions:

Excerpt from Focus group 1:

Interviewer: *¿El estudiante, como cliente de los servicios que brinda la universidad, tiene la última palabra sobre si los servicios brindados son de calidad? [Does the student, as a client of the university's services, have the last word about whether the university's services have quality?]*

Student 1: *"A veces los profesores tienen una actitud confrontativa con los estudiantes incluso hasta decir cosas hirientes, decir "ustedes son clientes". [Sometimes teachers have a confrontative attitude and tell us hurtful things like "you are clients".]*

Student 2: *Literalmente! Literalmente, así nos han dicho! [Indicating that I should believe it even if it sounds incredible] [Literally! Literally, they have called us that!]*

Student 3: *"Desde que me dicen cliente, yo me siento ofendido. Una profesora nos dijo "pero si ustedes son los clientes", -"ah, bueno entonces eso somos" y detuvimos la conversación. [From the moment they call me client I feel offended. A teacher said to us, "but you are clients", - "Oh, than, that's what we are", and we stopped the conversation.]*

Excerpt from Focus group 2:

Interviewer: *¿Y cómo les suena la idea de que un estudiante es como un cliente de la universidad?* [And what do you think of the idea that a student is a client of the university?]

Student 1: *Entonces, qué es la UCA, una universidad o una empresa? Porque al decirnos cliente nos están tratando como una empresa. El espíritu y el carácter del estudiante es diferente al de un cliente.* [So, what is UCA? A university or a business? Because when they call us clients they are treating us like a business. The spirit and character of the student is different to that of a client.]

Student 2: *Qué tanto se va a responder a las solicitudes de los estudiantes, qué tanto tiene que ceder el profesor, qué tanto no tiene que ceder para complacer a todo el mundo, en qué medida tienen que influir también las autoridades, no para tomar medidas radicales sino para garantizar un equilibrio entre estos tres poderes que conforman la comunidad universitaria, y no lo que hemos venido oyendo de clientes. Eso es caer en que somos mercancía, somos clientes.* [How much are they going to respond to students' petitions, how much does the teacher have to give in, how much should he not give in to please everyone, up to what point must the authorities influence not to take radical measures but to guarantee an equilibrium between these three powers that make up the university's community, and not what we have been hearing about clients. That's like assuming we are merchandise, we are clients.]

Student 3: *No está bien definida. Primero, la proyección de la universidad, ¿qué es lo que quiere, tratar con un estudiante o con un cliente, en principio?* [It's not well defined, first, the university's image, what does it want, to deal with a student or with a client, in principle?]

Another element I explored in the interviews was the students' views about who has the main responsibility for a course's quality. The majority of UCA students (15) replied that the responsibility was shared between the teacher and the students, four said that it was the teacher's responsibility, three said that it was entirely the students' responsibility, two said that it was shared between the teacher and the university's administrative staff, and three could not answer. In Marburg, as well, the majority of students (12) replied that the responsibility was shared between the teacher and the students, three said that it was the teacher's responsibility, one said that it was entirely the students' responsibility, four said that it was shared between the teacher and the university's administration, and nine did not discuss the issue. What this simple recount reveals is that students' views on who bears the responsibility of the quality in a course differs in a great degree with the 'talk of quality's' tendency to minimise the role of the student in the success of a course, and load it on the teacher. The following examples show students' descriptions of the importance of the students' commitment and behaviour as decisive and also independent of the teacher's performance:

"Hay profesores buenos que no logran desempeñar bien su clase por la culpa de algún payasito, por la culpa de algún alumno que simplemente le da igual la clase y quiere perturbar a los demás. Y le aseguro que son los primeros que dicen 'ese profesor no sabe explicar nada' (Didier, Business Administration, UCA). [There are good teachers that are not able to teach a

good class because of a little clown in the classroom, a student who simply doesn't care about the class and wants to disturb everyone. And I assure you that these students are the first ones who say "that teacher doesn't know how to explain anything".]

"The teacher is responsible, and of course the students too. If the students don't work with you..." (Nadia, Business Administration, Marburg)

"The teacher is responsible to be good informed [sic], to give a course about which he is passionate about [sic], and well informed. But the students too, I think, because if you have 15 students sitting there and all bored and are not interested, you can't give a good course, never mind if you are a good teacher or not" (Theresa, Anthropology, Marburg).

Most students in both universities and from all disciplines also make a sharp distinction between learning and student satisfaction. Most of the time this was in accordance with their views about shared responsibilities in the classroom, but also students who did not see themselves as having a direct responsibility over quality also distinguished between student satisfaction and quality in the learning experience. Student often stated that their satisfaction can easily be obtained but learning is more complicated and depends on the student's level of commitment or interests to a high degree. Several clearly stated that students can feel unsatisfied and have learned, or feel satisfied and have not learned, and that they often conclude this with hindsight:

"La satisfacción no equivale a calidad, eso más que todo es percepción del estudiante. Hubo otro caso en que tuvimos inconformidad pero sentí que ella nos exigió al punto de aprender. Aunque no quedamos conformes con su estrategia de dar la clase, aprendimos" (Sonatina, Business Administration, UCA) [Satisfaction is not equivalent to quality, the former is above all the student's perception. There was another case in which we were not happy but I felt that she pressed us to a point that she made us learn. Even though we were not happy with her strategy in teaching her class, we learned.]

"Yo creo que a veces podemos estar satisfechos por un profesor que te regale la nota, o por un profesor que no de mucho material. Aunque quedemos satisfechos con la calidad del profesor al dar la clase no quedamos satisfechos con la información completa de lo que deberíamos de aprender. (Adriana, Psychology, UCA) [I think that sometimes we can be satisfied with a teacher who gives us the grade for free, or with a teacher who does not give us much material to read. Even though we end up being satisfied with the teacher's quality in the way he taught the class, we are not satisfied with the amount of information we received because it wasn't complete.]

"I'm not sure, to satisfy people is very easy. You can give them, like a free coffee and I'm very satisfied [laughs, he had just received a coffee for the interview]. People who are not interested in what they are studying, having more time to party satisfies them. Less work, satisfied! (Karl, Economics, Marburg)".

What is satisfaction? When you're happy? Maybe it's when they're okay with the stuff they learn, and it's not too tough and not too lazy. Satisfaction does not equal quality. Quality education would be when you are pushed to the maximum, for some persons [sic] that is satisfaction but in general it's not. Many people are happy when they can do their hobbies. (Miriam, Anthropology, Marburg)

In sum, there are noticeable contradictions between the 'talk of quality's' notion that university managers and academics should see their students as clients to guarantee quality in their education, and the students' discourses about the issue. From the students' discussions it was evident that many do not accept the client identity mainly because they do not see their relationship to their teachers as that of a client and service provider. The economic aspect of the term is recalled, but also its incongruence in implying that students should tell their teachers what to do. The 'talk of quality's' insistence on convincing academics of this reality has assumed that students do welcome it as an advantage, improving their position in the university and making the institution and the teachers come closer to the specific and changing needs of the student population. This is especially so when students are perceived as final judges in quality audit processes that include a strong component of risk management of the institution's reputation, and when students' demands are interpreted as sure symptoms of dissatisfaction. However, the client identity does not fit in with the student's pragmatic strategies of "college management" and "professor management". Students' practices of adjusting university time demands to their personal life-strategies, their genuine interests and curiosity, or their conceptions about knowledge, that involve making weak efforts in some courses or with some teachers, and making substantial efforts in other cases, do not necessarily indicate "consumer consciousness" and certainly do not indicate that they know what they want, know what they need, and are demanding it.

In connection with the above I also explored students' opinions on evaluation and accreditation practices, as well as university rankings. The result was unexpected: none of the interviewed students knew what evaluation and accreditation processes are. Regarding the rankings, their reactions varied between disbelief and moderate belief, and confessions about not having ever consulted them, having never seen them, or totally rejecting them, abounded. At UCA, however some students did know about the university having appeared in a ranking, perhaps because it was a highly publicised occurrence. Nevertheless, for UCA students, the clearest indicator of a university's prestige and quality are its registration and tuition fees. Most students concluded that perhaps the best university in the country was one of the two most expensive ones. At Marburg, all of the students knew which university or universities in the country were considered the most prestigious for their discipline, and Psychology students

said their programme at Marburg was the best or second best in the country. For some of them, the prestige of a university is highly connected to the difficulty in being accepted in the programme.

Neither the students from Marburg nor the students from UCA said their decision to study at their university was the result of a consultation of the rankings or accreditation status of a programme. At UCA, students had decided to enrol because it was the most expensive university they could afford (with their family's resources or a scholarship), and said that if they could have afforded the most expensive one they would have enrolled there. However, the Psychology students said they enrolled in UCA because their discipline in that university had the most prestige in the country. At Marburg the reasons cited by the students for choosing the university were diverse: to live in Marburg because it is a nice city, a small city, and/or a "real, classic university town"; in the case of the Sociology students because of the "leftist scene" that still exists in the city; for some Psychology students it was the possibility of doing the *Diplom* instead of the Bachelor, for the Anthropology students it was the programme design "with many options and a unique combination in the country", and for other students, especially those who came from Bavaria, the reasons were that they could be accepted in Marburg with a low *Abitur* grade, or for Business Administration and Economics students who had done a gap year abroad, it was the possibility to start their programme at any of the two semesters.

In sum, prestige appears as an aspect taken into account by some students when they choose a university but it appears to be one criterion among several, especially in Germany. Remarkably, the reasons for choosing a university do not coincide with the 'talk of quality's' assumptions that students demand standardised and abundant information to support their decision process. The data cast doubt on the idea that students' choice of university can be enhanced by providing more information about an institution.

Additionally, in contrast to the 'talk of quality's' emphasis on connecting alumni employability with a university's quality, the interviews revealed that many students do not connect the university's quality with the possibility of obtaining employment in the future. Most of them place almost no responsibility on their particular university for their success in the job market. In Marburg some students revealed that the possibility of obtaining a job depended on crafting a clever strategy for themselves that consisted mainly on doing the right internships. Other revealed their plans of pursuing an *Ausbildung* (apprenticeship) after concluding their Bachelor as a way of accessing the job market. When I asked why they had not gone directly into an *Ausbildung*, they replied they had enrolled in university to experience

the free and social university life. This applied to students from all the disciplines interviewed. At UCA students also replied that it was not the university's 'fault' if they could not get a job after graduation. Their reasoning focused on their responsibility to be entrepreneurial, which they said had been taught to them by the university, and on the reality of the Nicaraguan job market, to which access depends on personal and family connections.

The interviews revealed numerous differences between the 'talk of quality' – its main suppositions and 'truths'– and the students' discourses – with their own suppositions and 'truths'. The following table summarises the most important for this analysis. The data shows that apart from the importance of motivation in learning and useful knowledge (emphasised in bold), there are no more coincidences. Placed side by side, it is evident that quality assurance "rituals of verification" cannot be exercises of transparency.

Concept	Quality assurance's 'Talk of quality' construction/definitions	Students' discourses
Quality in learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Is a summation of indicators -Continuously changes -Depends on teachers' performance -Can be uncovered through students' opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Depends on what a student wants not on what the student receives -Does not depend entirely on the teacher -Students do not necessarily recognise it
A good teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Makes clear the content, course rules and evaluation, assignments and expectations from students -Follows several specific rules set by the university in terms of class presentation and performance -Shows adequate knowledge of the subject, and teaches useful and applicable knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It is difficult to explain -Has the right personality -Has enough knowledge and teaches useful and applicable knowledge -Is a successful professional and, therefore, knows (in some cases) -Fits with our understanding of what knowledge is (a fixed set of content or a wide array from which

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shows good manners with students, and generates a positive class environment -Is motivating -Generates feelings of satisfaction in students -Gives a proper workload to students 	<p>to choose according to personal interests)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Is lenient or strict depending on the importance or type of course -Is very helpful -Is close to the students -Is motivating -Has authority in the classroom -Fits with the student's desired lifestyle (respects their freedom) -Teaches the right course for me (interesting, useful, important)
Teacher evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A helpful feedback tool for teachers -Evidence of quality or lack of quality -Students use it to give their opinions, which should be taken seriously as guides for change -Students want to evaluate their teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Not sure what it is for -Helpful if correctly filled-in by the students and read by the teacher with the right attitude -A strategic tool for the management to supervise and control the teachers who do not behave correctly -A scam from the management to make students believe they care -A useless or stupid practice -Filled in carelessly most of the time -A tool for vengeance or reward -A dangerous tool that can be used against you later
The client student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Is either satisfied or not -Knows what he/she wants -Wants to feel satisfied -Needs protection through managerial mechanisms -Needs to feel important, taken into account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -An inadequate notion -An offence

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Takes informed decisions about his/her education -Knows what quality in an institution and a teacher is 	
Accreditation	-A quality seal that tells students that a university can be trusted and represents value for money, as such, it is a magnet for prospective students, a producer of loyalty among alumni, and a promoter of internationalisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Have no idea what it is -It's about branding and prestige

The audit culture, through the teacher evaluation questionnaire as a “ritual of verification” involving the students’ participation, does not seem to reinforce the client identity in students, but does absorb their responses and convert them into entirely different messages for teachers to interpret. This is done through quality assurance’s capacity to conceal as it tries to reveal. Audit culture frames interactions between teachers and students in a set of standardised elements devoid of “social life” and context. In so doing, it conceals contradictions and important elements of the student culture. Thus, teacher evaluation, as a “ritual of verification”, does not reveal – or to use the preferred word, make transparent – the teaching/learning process that takes place in the classroom.

Recalling the results from the teacher evaluation questionnaires analysed above, the resulting idealized image of the teacher that is promoted through the evaluation questionnaire at UCA is that of a polite, friendly and ethic motivator who does not forget to comply with all the standardised elements expected of a class session. At Marburg, the image of the proper teacher reflected in the questionnaires analysed is that of a knowledgeable person who inspires commitment, and as in the Nicaraguan case, does not forget to comply with all the standardised elements expected of a class session. Both of these images seem to resonate on the students’ opinions shared through the interviews. However, as shown reiteratively above, the students’ criteria for evaluating the experience can be entirely different, volatile, selectively applied, and remain concealed. The social context that gives sense to the teacher’s performance in a specific course, also remains concealed. In addition, the fact that certain elements – e.g. class environment and teacher performance – are intricately linked in the evaluation questionnaire, when in reality this is not always or entirely the case; and vice-versa,

are intricately linked in reality – e.g. type of course and type of teacher – but not in the questionnaire, remains totally concealed.

Concrete examples from the two cases explored reveal that in both universities complaints about the teacher's knowledge might merely suggest that the course's content did not appear as evidently useful or applicable for the student and his/her personal plan. Furthermore, the particular way in which knowledge is conceived (different in each case studied) becomes expressed in the questionnaire as an opinion about sufficient or insufficient knowledge in a teacher. For example, because of their belief in knowledge as a fixed amount of content, when UCA students say that a teacher did not show "command" of a topic, they might mean that he/she did not teach the exact same thing as the teacher in charge of the same lecture in another group. They might also mean that the teacher used power point too much and did not know things by heart, or that the teacher did not give examples from real life. In both cases, opinions about a teacher's performance are embedded on students' considerations about the course in question. For example, complaints about workload in a course might mean that it was excessive *for that specific type* of course, considered unimportant or secondary by the student. Many complaints about a teacher may just mean the teacher's type does not fit the course's type in the student's own classification of courses. Students' appreciations on how demanding a teacher should be depend on whether students believe a class is fundamental for their discipline (UCA case), or fundamental for their interests (Marburg case). Furthermore, inconformity about the teacher's personality is transformed into a set of deficiencies when they are registered in the questionnaire. In addition, a complaint about the teacher's manners might be in connection to a very specific episode that could be interpreted in different ways, and that the questionnaire does not reveal. Additionally, for students, a negative course environment is not necessarily associated to the teacher's performance.

An emotional¹¹⁷ understanding of a teacher's role, which was very prominent in the interviews, although not as much in the focus groups, becomes registered as quality teaching in teacher evaluation questionnaires when it is fulfilled by a particular teacher. This was evident in the predilection of the 'friend' and the 'coach' teacher described by both groups of students. When students expect teachers to have a vertical relationship with them and they find a teacher having a horizontal dynamic, they will find it very positive. On the other hand, when a teacher is perceived as very knowledgeable or successful and as possessing abundant useful knowledge, he or she is allowed to be distant. When a teacher uses pedagogic strategies

¹¹⁷ I mean emotional when students describe a good teacher based on how he/she makes them feel.

that result in a greater demand of time and involvement, students might feel that they are being treated like children and being robbed of their liberty.

The main point here is that quality assurance processes conceal the fact that students have prototypical images of the good or the bad teacher, which sometimes include contradictory characteristics or are focused on how a particular teacher makes them feel, what personality they have, what they do apart from teaching, and on the usefulness of what they know. They also conceal the images of teachers contained in the 'talk of quality', which tends to describe them as lacking pedagogic skills or interest in teaching, especially when they are prestigious researchers.

Students' rejection of the client label, and their discourses about shared responsibilities in the classroom, are also invisibilised in the quality assurance regime. The interviews revealed clear indications that students resist the practice of teacher evaluation. They seldom see the practice as a direct request of feedback from teachers, their resistance is directed at the management. Instead of submissively giving feedback to improve teaching in the university, their main strategies are their self-confessed carelessness in filling them in, their strategical way of filling them in, and their unmasking of the exercise as a management tool for control instead of a feedback tool for teachers.

As clients, students are supposedly 'empowered' with the collection of their opinions through evaluation questionnaires. Paradoxically, most students did not describe the process as empowering, and do not increase their trust in the institution because of the evaluations. In the case of UCA, this even had a negative impact on students' perceptions when they do not see the desired changes. This effect could be the result of a far from empowering process. Through the mechanism of teacher evaluation, students' opinions fall under management control, they are objectified through audit's focus on quantitative measures of performance, with which they are "acted upon, bureaucratically moulded, mass produced" (Collmann, 1981, p. 110). The audit culture defines students as competent clients who are able to make the choices considered appropriate and follow the provided mechanisms to fulfil their needs. Through feedback processes, they are apparently turned into compliant clients who have accepted the official role vested on them.

In that way, teacher evaluation can work in reinforcing the client image in the eyes of the teacher. As a technology that promotes their subjectification, it can be successful in making them willingly transform their performance following the indicators of the evaluation questionnaire. Symptoms of this are the voluntary participation in teacher training courses or

the confession that evaluation “does help to give more importance to teaching”, as a lecturer in Marburg said, or the introduction of ways of performing in the classroom that can prevent negative evaluations due to students’ apparent forgetfulness, as UCA teachers revealed. Nonetheless, as these quotes also indicated, there are elements of resistance also in teachers’ discourses, specifically their refusal to consider these questionnaires as legitimate feedback instruments about their teaching, opting to portray them as just a mechanism to give importance to teaching, a notion with which they agree any way (Marburg) or trying to expressly influence their students’ responses through specific actions in the classroom (UCA).

Bringing the discussed elements together, the most important issue that is concealed by quality assurance is that its discourse based on “student-centred” education, which implies an opposition to an existing but antiquated teacher-centred education, has in fact installed a management-centred education that negates the possibility of rich teacher-student communication, fetishizes the learning experience, governs the teacher through the generation of a “virtual” (Miller, 1998) image of a client student, and disempowers the student.

VIII. Conclusion: Quality assurance and the invisible student

The theory of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) describes how universities develop links to the economy through a series of mechanisms that involve internal as much as external initiative: participating in *new circuits of knowledge*, accessing *new funding streams*, creating *interstitial organizations*, participating in *intermediating networks*, building extended *managerial capacity* and applying associated *narratives, discourses and social technologies*. I was particularly interested in exploring quality assurance practices as an instance of the “audit culture”, which I place as a fundamental element of the *narratives, discourses and social technologies* deployed by academic capitalism. I explored how these transformations in the wider context, with clear impacts on university politics and policies, affect the members of the university – especially students and teachers – and their interactions. As a governing technology, the “audit culture” encourages individuals in the university to self-govern in ways that guarantee the functioning of the regime of academic capitalism. In the case of teachers and students, through audit’s “rituals of verification” it tries to impinge on these actors a server-client relationship that can replace the traditional teacher-student relationship.

The abundance of interesting reflections on academic capitalism and the audit culture, as well as on specific manifestations of these trends, such as the Bologna Process, is coupled with a virtual inexistence of “on the ground” empirical explorations that tackle students in particular. This situation has reinforced assumptions about students that constitute basic supporting arguments of quality assurance. As presented in the theoretical section of the text, quality assurance’s construction of higher education students has indeed permeated critical analyses of higher education, which seem to accept as a truth that students do feel like demanding clients and have an enhanced “consumer consciousness”.

I conducted an empirical study based on two instrumental cases: Universidad Centroamericana in Managua (UCA) and Philipps-Universität Marburg in Germany (Marburg). These provided two examples of very different institutions that, nevertheless, actively participate in the trends of academic capitalism and quality assurance, resulting in their development of very similar structures and an almost identical ‘talk of quality’. The cases

chosen are significant because they do not represent rich, technological, high-ranking, expensive and elitist universities, usually associated with the academic capitalist trend.

The comparison revealed two very different 'student cultures' coexisting with very similar quality assurance strategies. It was evident in both cases that quality assurance processes have arrived together with dynamics of academic capitalism. The analysis also showed the mechanisms through which quality assurance conceals important elements of the classroom interaction and the learning process as it tries to reveal them, providing an example of what Marilyn Strathern refers to as the "tyranny of transparency" (Strathern, 2000c). This is achieved through a key element of quality assurance: its production of 'truths' that appear neutral and scientific (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982) – significantly, presented through indicators and numbers subjected to statistical analysis – are devoid of "social life" and based on common assumptions of the 'talk of quality'. The comparison of Marbug and UCA, two very different universities, also provided the opportunity to see that the concealing effects of quality assurance regarding teaching/learning are not particular to a specific context, showing that its limitations, also pointed out in the quality assurance literature, are not a result of quality assurance being incorrectly administered or applied with insufficient intensity.

A central message in the 'talk of quality' is that students are clients. As such, they have the power to complain, potentially damaging the institution's reputation. The way in which this message is delivered as part of an official incentive system imbricated, in turn, on an examination system – which in both of the cases examined was linked to teachers' employment possibilities – encourages teacher's self-government. The 'talk of quality' provides the ideal image of the teacher to which lecturers should aspire, as well as the mechanisms to become it (teacher training courses).

Both institutions share and reinforce, through different mechanisms, a discourse that I call the 'talk of quality', which is found in the policies, evaluation documents, accreditation agencies, official documents produced by the universities, and is also amply used by quality experts and some university managers. The interviews revealed that teachers in both universities accept some of the notions of the 'talk of quality', especially the necessity of "continuous improvement" and of obtaining feedback from students – in fact, it is now a common practice for them to ask for their students' feedback through their own mechanisms, a practice that is very positively perceived by the students. Nevertheless, teachers filter elements of the 'talk of quality' with a more nuanced perception of their profession based on their own concrete experiences, and also display some elements of resistance to it. Students,

on the other hand, evidenced a markedly different discourse on quality, teachers, teaching and students.

The students' descriptions of quality teachers focused mainly on aspects of the teacher's personality and relationship with the students, and less on teaching techniques, clarity or knowledge. Asked to describe a good teacher, their responses generated a typology of different 'characters', in which elements of personality, relationship, admiration, knowledge and practices were alternately relevant or not, according to each case. Significantly dominant notions about what knowledge is and how it is shared in a classroom appeared as a significant element through which teachers are judged. Hence, at UCA, where knowledge is understood as a fixed corpus, a teacher who does not "cover" all the material in the syllabus, or all the material another teacher did cover, is perceived as very deficient. In addition, knowledge was also described by most of the students as a set of different equally valid opinions, meaning that a teacher who goes back to his/her "opinion" is badly perceived. At Marburg, where knowledge was described by students as a flexible array of possibilities, depending on each person's interests, a teacher who "imposes" an uninteresting topic or does not give flexibility to explore different sources is badly perceived.

On the other hand, most of the elements that appear in evaluation questionnaires to define good teaching – especially rules and procedures defined by the institution about the way a class should be delivered and the material be presented, were barely mentioned by the students, most of the time not at all. Students' descriptions of good teaching were also characterised by placing special attention on 'emotional' aspects of their relationship with their teachers, concretely, on how they made them feel: comfortable, important, motivated, cared for, excited, in awe, entertained, bored, humiliated, unimportant, etc. Their descriptions placed special attention on the teacher's apparent motivation to be in the classroom and regard for the students. It can be concluded that students' descriptions of good teaching were more compatible with gift economy interactions than with commodity economy exchanges (recall the discussion by Cooper, 2004, and references to Mauss, 1990, and others). Students spoke often about their own responsibility in learning, but tended to describe it as something they give in exchange to a teacher who has given them a proper attention.

The empirical analysis also revealed how, in spite of students' rejection of the client identity, quality assurance dedicates much effort to generating and reinforcing the image of the student as a client. This image is poured into processes of evaluation and accreditation, but most importantly into teacher evaluation questionnaires. Empirically, I focused on the practice of teacher evaluation because it is a "ritual of verification" that requires the direct

participation of students. The process' capacity to conceal became evident, as well as its capacity as an instrument to govern the teacher. As a mechanism focused on facilitating the "control of control" and constant recording of improvements (Power, 1997) required by the audit culture, teacher evaluation creates a virtual reality (Miller, 1998) in which the student is portrayed as a demanding and complaining client who knows what he/she needs for a proper education and demands it. In this system the teacher is mainly a performing professional that complies with a set of requirements while he/she is in the classroom, which together as a summation represent quality, and the teaching/learning process is a fully recordable and comparable procedure.

As part of the audit culture, teacher evaluation also keeps the teaching process as unstable, continuously changing, and over-optimized, mirroring today's "liquid society" (Bauman, 2009). The message is clear for students as well who, through the evaluation mechanism, are also told that to be a good worker, their teacher must be flexible, ready to dispose of obsolete knowledge and practices, "lack temporal attachment" and have a "tolerance for fragmentation" (Sennett, 1998, p. 62), behaving in one way as scientists and in a different way as teachers, and in a different way with each group of students, and with each student.

The empirical analysis showed evident contradictions between the 'talk of quality' and students' own discourses on quality, teachers, evaluation, and the idea of them being clients. The interviews showed these contradictions are often obvious for actors in the university. Neither the teachers nor the students interviewed considered the teacher evaluation questionnaire as an undeniably useful tool, and for many of them it was not just a tool but an obvious control mechanism. On the other hand, experts and some managers described it as an irrefutably valid source of feedback. This suggests the issue is a matter of perspective. Observed from the manager's office, quality assurance mechanisms, and specifically teacher evaluation questionnaires, are a practical way of monitoring quality in the classroom, a simplification that allows for quick decision-making, and a way of managing students' opinions about the institution—risk management. Observed from the classroom level, reality overflows the questionnaire. As a tool for governmentality, the teacher evaluation questionnaire promotes an individualised view of the problem of quality in higher education, one that depends on the teacher's compliance with a set of indicators, and that can be reflected in each student's sense of satisfaction. Problems and solutions are thus sought at the individual level. The governance of risk (Power, 2010) is made possible and the students' capacity to hurt the organisation's reputation can be managed and easily re-directed towards the individual

teacher. At the same time, students are encouraged to judge their teachers individually, not to discuss their views openly between them, which could perhaps produced more pondered opinions about teachers. Teacher evaluation questionnaires are presented as opportunities to obtain feedback in anonymous ways so as to guarantee freedom of expression without retaliations. However, this also prevents collective, nuanced, contextualised and debated student feedback.

The interviews and focus groups showed that, in general, teachers are evaluated in a far from 'teacher-centred' way. Students' descriptions about their evaluation practices revealed that answers depend on a student's strategy (regarding future career, current lifestyle, or special interests), on how the course taught is perceived to fit into this strategy or not, on the 'type' of course in question (these types are a result of collective perceptions of importance of course and the effort it deserves), on how the teacher 'fits' the course (demanding teachers with important courses and lenient teachers with irrelevant courses, not the other way around), and on how he/she compares to other teachers. Students also claimed that they decide on how to answer the teacher evaluation questionnaire depending on whether the teacher will be encountered in the future, whether evaluation had a desired effect in a previous occasion, whether he/she likes or dislikes the teacher, or depending on who he/she thinks will read the evaluation and how seriously it will be considered, or on the mood the student is that day. All these considerations are common elements in students' strategies of evaluation.

In contrast to dominant ideas found in today's quality assurance regimes, the students interviewed tended to discredit the notion of student satisfaction, and did not believe that the opinions about teachers and courses of the majority of students is a valid and coherent guide for decision making in universities. Students highlighted their differences, including views about many of them not being genuinely interested in learning. A strongly rejected notion was the thought that students always know what they want and demand it, and that they want to judge their teachers. This shows how, in many ways, students can be the opposite of the idealised client image.

The comparison between UCA and Marburg students revealed that, contrary to standardised notions of good teaching presented in the questionnaire format, students' perceptions are rooted in very specific and local student cultures that include shared notions of what characteristics should a good teacher have, what is evidence of bad teaching, what relationship he/she should have with them, what a good course is, what an important course is, what knowledge is, what the student life consists of, and how they want to 'use' the

university. For example, UCA students are accustomed – and expect – to be forced to do things, to be closely monitored, and constantly evaluated and guided by the teacher. On the other hand, Marburg students also expect closeness from their teachers but without curtailing their freedom. Many of them mentioned how a closer monitoring, or compulsory attendance, would be better for their learning process, but readily mentioned that, nevertheless, they would be totally against it.

The quality assurance perspective filters students' opinions about their teachers and their courses through the evaluation questionnaire. It is a "tyranny of transparency" (Strathern, 2000c) that invisibilises the student and fetishizes the classroom session. As a result, the opinions and demands poured by students on the evaluation questionnaire seem to be those of a client who knows what he wants and wants to say it. This particularly invisibilises students' common practices of "college management" and "professor management" (Nathan, 2005) which, as evidenced in the empirical analysis, are the students' own strategies to adapt the university's choices to their own preferences. These practices go hand in hand with local shared values in the student population and filter their actions in ways that are often interpreted as "consumer consciousness" and a demanding client attitude, or as genuine requests originated in a real concern for their learning process. Thus, students will use the evaluation questionnaire in selective ways as part of their strategy of "college management" and "professor management". For instance, responses in an evaluation questionnaire may be directed at strategically reducing workloads in courses perceived as irrelevant, encouraging a preferred teacher type, leaning programmes towards certain methodologies or evaluation methods, or forcing programmes to focus on evidently useful knowledge or topics they believe are more interesting. Patently, the student-centered learning or student as client notion does not take into account that many times universities are not dealing with learning-centred or university-centred students.

In analysing the practice of teacher evaluation, a mechanism emerges in which teachers are subjectified (Foucault, 1988) in a process organised by managers, encouraged to willingly develop the capacities and style of performance recorded in the evaluation questionnaires. The management, however, needs the collaboration of students, who can only enter the process through a new identity, that of clients. The result is that instead of being empowered, students as clients become, in the practice, supervisors of their teachers, their answers become data, registered evidence required by the quality assurance system. This new role is perceived as totally inadequate by most of the interviewed students, so much so because they reject to define the relationship between teacher and students as analogous to

that of a server who provides what his/her clients demand. They consider quality education as the product of a shared responsibility. This view of shared responsibility of education, however, is further concealed by the “tyranny of transparency”. Quality assurance’s focus on the control of teachers, and *their* performance, based on notions of commodity economies, is blind to the students’ views, which as I mentioned above appear to be more compatible to those of gift economies (Mauss, 1990). It could be argued that with the application of the evaluation questionnaire, the gift exchange between teachers and students is negated, affecting directly this relationship. Perhaps this is why students described the idea of being clients as essentially incoherent (at Marburg) or uncomfortable and insulting (at UCA), and why teacher evaluation is also often used by them as a way of rewarding – giving a gift to – teachers they like. As Cooper (2004) states, the relationship between teacher and student is full of moral obligations from both the teacher and the student. Social interactions are fundamental in this kind of exchange (p.9), while, significantly, the “transparent” information contained in evaluation questionnaires is devoid of all “social life” (Corsín-Jiménez, 2005, p. 74).

Again, students have considerably different perspectives on teacher evaluation questionnaires from those of the ‘talk of quality’. Those interviewed cited several reasons why they distrust the results of teacher evaluations: their self-confessed careless way of filling them in, their use of them for vengeance purposes against teachers they do not like or that have been exceedingly demanding and disrupting of their strategy, or their false responses due to fear of future retaliation. Curiously, however, students do not agree with the idea of eliminating the practice for fear of letting teachers “do what they want”, further indicating that they do perceive the practice as a tool devised by the management to balance power to their advantage, coinciding plainly with the ‘talk of quality’. It could be argued that for students who have had teacher evaluation experience, the purpose of teacher evaluation is far removed from educational purposes. At least, they claim they do not participate thinking it is mainly that. The interviewed students showed some resistance to their role as feedback generators for better teaching practices, mainly by openly declaring themselves too wise to actually believe that. Instead they discussed their use of teacher evaluation as another tool for their practices of “college management” and “professor management”, which, as described above, consist in modifying the university’s available choices in order to generate new ones that are compatible with their own objectives.

The consequences that quality assurance, as a concealment tool disguised in transparency, can have in higher education are several. Important contradictions in the way

quality is defined are concealed. To begin with, the concept of quality is constantly redefined and punctiliously described by each agency, university and program; the idea is that a definition should not be fixed for long as it should be adapted to the changing context and circumstances. Yet, at the same time, the process is based on underlying governing notions of comparability and standards. In practice this is very confusing to follow. Universities are encouraged to define their own concepts of quality, but at the same time they should take into account criteria defined by accreditation agencies as well as externally set standards. The recommendation of following best practices creates an impulse for imitation. Through intermediating organisations tips are passed between institutions and specific strategies are copied from universities that have achieved success in accreditation or a good place in the rankings.

Accreditation processes, through their list of indicators and standardised practices, become a compass for the institution (this was especially evident in the case of UCA). In spite of mentioning that evaluation and accreditation processes are sources of stress and excessive workload, at both universities interviewees mentioned these processes as contributing to create “order” and “conscience”. Staff, especially quality experts and managers, mentioned a sense of orderliness that prevails after an evaluation process, as well as a sense of revelation of hidden facts, a direction for their work, and a sense of connection with a wider academic sphere. Most interviewees did not mention that there are aspects of higher education that accreditation fully ignores or cannot take into account, even if these are among the most pressing problems they identify themselves.

Interviews revealed that while student workload is almost obsessively discussed, in contrast, the reality of teacher exploitation, stress and instability in the academic workplace are blatantly sidestepped in the quality assurance regime. Other issues that were identified in the interviews as very concerning for the teachers are also ignored: for example, students’ lack of preparedness when they enter university is a serious worry for teachers at UCA, and students’ lack of interest was repeatedly mentioned at Marburg. In addition, existing stereotypical conceptions about knowledge are being confirmed or ignored instead of discussed in the quality assurance system. While the ‘talk of quality’ actively reinforces in both cases the notion that knowledge should be useful, in Nicaragua the system reinforces the prevalent idea among students that knowledge consists of a fixed amount of content and on indefinite amounts of equally valid opinions, and in Marburg, that knowledge is anything and only what the student finds interesting.

Many other issues about the teaching/learning experience are invisibilised in both cases. Due to the quality assurance system both universities register continuous improvements through data that is periodically produced and recorded. Both universities could obtain more and 'better' accreditations, as well as advance in the rankings through the application of the correct managerial decisions and strategically placed spending. However, this reputation boosts could be achieved while many serious problems remain. At UCA, for example, the insufficient access to updated bibliography for the great majority of teachers, an insufficient amount of teachers with expert knowledge, issues of classism between teachers and students (appeared in the interviews), gender discrimination (appeared in the interviews), noisy and hot classrooms (observed and mentioned in the interviews), and the chronic financial and political instability reigning in the country, are problems that remain unaddressed by quality assurance. At Marburg, for example, overly crowded seminars, extremely low attendance rates, instances of racial or gender discrimination in classrooms (observed during the fieldwork and commented in some interviews), and insufficient amounts of professors, are problems that fall completely out of the picture of quality assurance.

The real effects of quality assurance – a specific expression of the audit culture – can be observed in the ways in which it reinforces academic capitalism by providing it with the necessary narratives, discourses and social technologies. It reinforces the kinds of relationships and practices that are compatible with the “liquid” but at the same time “grandiose” role given to higher education. Through evaluation, accreditation, and teacher evaluation – all of them “rituals of verification” – it develops ethics and structures that direct the flow of power away from both teachers and students and towards the management, keeping the bureaucracies in place in spite of existing contradictions between the quality assurance regime and the local reality. In sum, while the ‘talk of quality’ redefines the student as a client in an effort to empower him/her, it invisibilises the real student. The specific student cultures and shared strategies to navigate the university are also concealed by teacher evaluation. Furthermore, the empirical data suggested that while the client discourse is not hegemonic in the analysed student populations, this “ritual of verification” does reinforce students’ perceptions of knowledge – however naïve – and a predilection for utility and applicability.

Approaching higher education students’ diverse voices and fostering communication between teachers and students that could become authentic feedback on teaching practices would require debate and negotiations through context specific communication. However, the student-centred, student-as-client discourse only generates a manager-centred practice based on the “control of control” of the audit culture. Posed as a set of practices that provides power

to students, what it actually does is impose a script on their communication. Students are not encouraged to discuss issues directly with their teachers, or to discuss problems as a group to seek negotiations and consensus. The problems are left for managers to resolve who, keeping the client in mind, remain blind to the image of the student.

IX. References

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Annex A. Fieldwork instruments at Marburg: Interview guides, questionnaires, and case-vignettes for focus groups

Student interview

General Information: Pseudonym: _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____ Major: _____
Semesters completed: _____ Originally from Marburg or nearby: _____

1. In your own words, what gives quality to a university?
2. How would you describe a good teacher?
3. What brings quality to a class?
4. Who is responsible for quality in a class session?
5. What is the best way of solving problems that may be presented in a course?
6. When students are unsatisfied with a course, does it mean that they received low quality education?
7. How would you describe a “poor” teacher?
8. Can a “poor” teacher improve? How?
9. Do you think a good teacher should always improve? How?
10. Should universities stop hiring a teacher when students give are not satisfied with his/her work? Why?
11. When a student fails a course, what is generally the cause?

12. What does it mean to be satisfied with a university?
13. Does being satisfied mean that you are receiving high quality education?
14. Is it important that universities guarantee the satisfaction of students? How?
15. Is it important that universities compete between them? Why? Should students chose the one who wins the competition?
16. What does it mean for a university to appear in a ranking?
17. Does a student have the right to expect more from a university when he/she pays more money?

18. What do you think teacher evaluation questionnaires are for?
19. Do you fill them in with interest? Do you understand all of the questions?
20. Is there any issue that is important for teaching but that is absent from the questionnaires?
21. Is it better to evaluate a teacher in an anonymous way or directly?
22. Would anything change if the evaluation questionnaires were eliminated?

23. Do you think evaluation can improve your education?
24. Do you think accreditation can have an impact on your education?
25. Who is responsible for your graduation? And for you getting being a good professional? And who is responsible for you getting a job?

Focus groups: Case-Vignettes and questions

Case 1

The Economics professor has 25 years of teaching experience and has received several prizes for her research. It is very obvious that she is passionate about her research and tries to make the students become interested in the course and read a lot. She gives them lots of information. Nevertheless, the students get bored in the class, it seems to them that there is little that could be useful for their future careers. At the end, in the teacher evaluation questionnaire the students say that the course was not motivating and that they wouldn't like to take another course with this lecturer. The university decides to offer the teacher to take some pedagogy courses to improve her teaching skills.

Since the student, as a client has the last word about the quality of a given course, does this episode show a university's strong commitment to quality?

Are there good teachers who get bad evaluations and bad teachers who get good evaluations?

Case 2

The students are unhappy with a mathematics professor, a recognized researcher. They say that he is not always clear in his explanations, and sometimes is a little boring. He tells the students that they are welcome to stop by his office if they have questions, but that they should spend many hours studying if they want to pass the exam. He claims that his class should be seen as a challenge.

Other students are taking the mathematics course with a doctoral student who is not considered too bright. However, his explanations are always clear and never boring. Furthermore, his exams are very easy to pass.

With which lecturer would you prefer to take the class?

Which lecturer would you give a better evaluation?

Case 3 (two models) (lots of work, feedback, evaluation vs. liberty, self-motivation)

At U1 attendance is mandatory. You are not allowed to miss more than two class sessions. You are required to actively participate in class. You are also required to write three small exams and turn in homework to be evaluated towards the final grade. The teachers give lots of feedback and the students have to keep up with many deadlines and always have to come prepared to class.

At U2 attendance is not mandatory. Students are free to decide when and what to study. There is just a final exam at the end of the semester. Students can organize their time the way they want to. The lecturers are good, and deliver well organized classes. Sometimes students fail the exams because they couldn't prepare themselves adequately.

Which model do you think is better for learning? Why?

Case 4 (rankings, education as investment)

Joachim is 19 years old. He has just enrolled in University A to study Business Administration. After finishing a whole semester he finds out that University B offers the same Bachelor course but that it appears in first place in the rankings. Joachim is happy in University A, but he decides to change to University B as soon as possible and even if it costs him more money. He believes this is the right decision for his career; he sees it as an investment.

Did Joachim make a smart decision?

Teacher interview

General information: Name: _____ Sex _____ Area _____ Years of teaching experience _____
Leader in evaluation process _____

1. When you talk about education quality in Marburg, what are the main issues?
2. When talking about quality assurance, do students have a particular role?
3. Do you think that student satisfaction is an indicator of quality in education?
4. Do you think the work of teachers should be monitored in order to guarantee that they do an adequate job? Continuous improvement?
5. Why should teacher evaluation questionnaires be anonymous? Is it better than direct evaluation?
6. Do evaluation and accreditation processes change the every day work of professors?
7. Do you think evaluation and accreditation processes are currently the best strategy to promote quality in this university? Why?

Annex B. Fieldwork instruments at UCA: Interview guides, questionnaires, and case-vignettes for focus groups

Entrevista a estudiantes

Información general: Seudónimo: _____ Edad: _____ Sexo: _____
Carrera: _____ Cuatrimestres cursados: _____ Becado o no becado: _____
Promedio académico: _____

26. ¿Cómo describirías una universidad de calidad?
27. ¿Cómo describirías un profesor de calidad?
28. ¿Cómo describirías una clase de calidad?
29. ¿Quién es responsable de la calidad de una sesión de clase?
30. ¿Cuál es la mejor manera de resolver algún problema que ocurra en una clase?
31. ¿Si los estudiantes quedan inconformes con el profesor quiere decir que la educación que recibieron fue de mala calidad?
32. ¿Cómo describirías un mal profesor?
33. ¿Consideras que un mal profesor puede mejorar? ¿Cómo?
34. ¿Y un buen profesor **debe** mejorar siempre? ¿De qué manera?
35. ¿Las autoridades de una universidad no deben de volver a contratar a un profesor cuando los estudiantes quedan inconformes? ¿Por qué?
36. ¿Generalmente cuál es la causa de que un estudiante deje una clase?

37. ¿Qué significa estar satisfecho con tu universidad?
38. ¿Si estás satisfecho quiere decir que la educación que recibís es de calidad?
39. ¿Es importante que la universidad garantice la satisfacción de los estudiantes? ¿De qué manera?
40. ¿Es importante que las universidades compitan entre sí? ¿Por qué? ¿Y los estudiantes deben escoger la que se imponga sobre las demás?
41. ¿Qué significa que una universidad aparezca en un ranking?
42. ¿Un estudiante tiene derecho a exigir más a una universidad cuando paga más dinero?

43. ¿A tu juicio para qué sirven los cuestionarios de evaluación docente?
44. ¿Los respondés con interés? ¿Entendés todas las preguntas?
45. ¿Hay algún asunto importante que no se pregunta en los cuestionarios de evaluación?
46. ¿Es mejor evaluar a un profesor de manera anónima o de manera directa?
47. ¿Cambiaría algo si se dejara de evaluar a los docentes?

48. ¿Pensás que la autoevaluación puede mejorar la educación que recibís?
49. ¿Pensás que la acreditación puede tener un impacto en tu educación?
50. ¿De quién depende que te gradués? ¿Y de quién depende que seas un buen profesional? ¿Y de quién depende que en el futuro encuentrés trabajo?

Grupos focales: Viñetas y preguntas

Caso 1

La profesora de español, contratada como 'profesora horario', es muy organizada y responsable. Tiene 25 años de experiencia docente y es miembro de la Academia Nicaragüense de la Lengua. En el aula se nota que su tema le apasiona y trata de que los estudiantes se interesen en la clase y lean mucho. Les brinda abundante información y trata de convencerlos de la importancia de escribir correctamente y apreciar la literatura. Sin embargo, a los estudiantes les aburre muchísimo la clase, les parece poco dinámica, y sienten que no se relaciona con su carrera. Al final, en el cuestionario de evaluación varios estudiantes expresan que la clase no fue motivadora y que no les gustaría volver a tener clase con la profesora. La universidad considera no contratarla de nuevo o exigirle tomar cursos de pedagogía.

¿Este episodio es una muestra de compromiso con la calidad?

¿El estudiante, como cliente o usuario final de los servicios que brinda la universidad, tiene la última palabra sobre si los servicios brindados son de calidad?

¿Cuándo los profesores de una universidad tienen distintos estilos y niveles de exigencia esto afecta la calidad de la enseñanza?

¿Hay profesores buenos que salen mal evaluados y profesores malos que salen bien evaluados?

Caso 2

Los estudiantes están inconformes con el profesor de matemáticas, un reconocido investigador. Dicen que no siempre prepara su clase, no aclara su metodología de evaluación, y no cubre el contenido del programa con fidelidad pues incluye temas muy novedosos que está investigando. No siempre aclara todas las dudas y advierte a los estudiantes que deben pasar muchas horas estudiando para tener éxito.

Otro grupo de estudiantes lleva la clase con un profesor que no domina las matemáticas tan bien como el investigador pero que siempre lleva su clase preparada, explica muy bien su manera de evaluar y sigue el programa del curso al pie de la letra. Siempre está disponible para responder las preguntas de los estudiantes, les deja muchos trabajos en grupo y oportunidades para obtener puntos extra. Los jóvenes están confiados de que pasarán la materia.

¿Con cuál de los profesores preferiría llevar la clase?

¿A cuál de los dos evaluaría mejor?

Caso 3 (dos modelos de universidad)

La U1 es una universidad pública, de tradición y prestigio. Cuando hay problemas, los estudiantes se ponen de acuerdo y durante la sesión de clases piden la palabra y se quejan directamente al profesor. Como resultado, a veces se logran acuerdos entre profesores y estudiantes. Pero cuando un profesor no quiere mejorar no existe posibilidad de eliminarlo de la planta docente. Los estudiantes deben adaptarse a los retos que cada profesor impone y con mucho esfuerzo y autoestudio lograr graduarse.

La U2 es una universidad privada con altos costos de colegiatura, donde se cuida la calidad de la docencia por medio de constantes capacitaciones a los profesores. Se aplica un sistema estricto de evaluación docente basado en cuestionarios. Los estudiantes pueden expresar, por medio de ellos, sus inconformidades. Los profesores están, en su mayoría, contratados de manera horaria y su contrato dura lo que un cuatrimestre. En teoría, si un profesor no es bien evaluado podría dejar de ser contratado. El índice de graduación de los estudiantes en esta universidad es muy alto.

¿Qué modelo les parece mejor para los estudiantes/profesores? ¿Por qué?

Caso 4

Joaquín es un joven de 17 años que acaba de matricularse en la 'Universidad A' en la carrera de economía. Después de cursar un semestre se entera de que en la 'Universidad B' la carrera acaba de obtener una acreditación internacional y que además la Universidad aparece en primer lugar en el ranking de la 'agencia internacional Z' con sede en Madrid. Joaquín está contento con su experiencia en la 'Universidad A' pero decide cambiarse a la 'Universidad B' lo antes posible y aunque la matrícula cueste más, se trata de una inversión para su futuro.

¿Ha tomado Joaquín la decisión correcta?

Entrevista a expertos: Personal de la oficina de evaluación y acreditación; autoridades de la UCA

Seudónimo: _____ Sexo: _____ Años de experiencia docente: _____ Años de trabajar en el campo de aseguramiento de la calidad: _____

1. ¿Qué significa para una universidad estar acreditada?
2. ¿Qué significa para una universidad estar en los rankings?
3. ¿Considera que los estudiantes deben optar por las universidades acreditadas y con mejores posiciones en los rankings?
4. ¿Una universidad que no desarrolla procesos de autoevaluación no está promoviendo la calidad?
5. ¿De quién o de qué depende que haya calidad en la educación que se brinda en una universidad?
6. ¿La calidad en la educación se puede medir?
7. ¿Por qué es importante la opinión de los estudiantes en los procesos de autoevaluación y acreditación?
8. ¿Hay información que sólo los estudiantes pueden brindar; que no se puede obtener preguntando a los profesores?
9. ¿Cuando los estudiantes dicen estar satisfechos, quiere decir que la educación que recibieron fue de calidad?
10. ¿Cuando los estudiantes evalúan mal a algún profesor, qué debe hacer la institución?
11. ¿Qué pasaría en la universidad si se dejara de evaluar a los profesores?
12. ¿Cómo describiría a un buen profesor?
13. ¿Si un profesor no se involucra en procesos de mejora continua está poniendo en peligro la calidad de la institución? ¿Por qué?
14. ¿Piensa que los procesos de autoevaluación son la mejor vía para recolectar las opiniones de los estudiantes?
15. ¿Existen asuntos importantes para la educación que no se captan en un proceso de evaluación?
16. ¿Qué rol tienen los estudiantes en los procesos de control de calidad?
17. ¿Ocurre a veces que los estudiantes hacen demandas que no se pueden atender, o emiten opiniones que no parecen realistas? ¿Cómo se les responde en estos casos?
18. ¿Los procesos de autoevaluación y acreditación se adaptan al concepto de calidad de la propia universidad? ¿Cómo? ¿Y a sus prioridades?
19. ¿Cuál es la principal diferencia entre las universidades de antes, que no implementaban procesos de autoevaluación, y las de ahora?
20. ¿Cuál considera que es la principal fuente de cambio en las universidades: los estudiantes, la ciencia, el mercado laboral, las demás universidades, el gobierno?
21. ¿Por qué se considera que el índice de graduación es indicador de calidad?

Entrevista a profesores:

Profesores que han participado en un proceso de autoevaluación

Datos generales: Seudónimo: _____ Sexo _____ Años de trabajar en la UCA _____

Puesto de trabajo _____ Años de experiencia docente _____

Tuvo rol de liderazgo en proceso de autoevaluación _____ Tipo contratación _____

8. ¿Cómo describiría una universidad de calidad?
9. ¿Cómo describiría a un profesor de calidad?
10. ¿Cómo describiría la relación profesor-estudiante?
11. ¿De quién o de qué depende la calidad de la enseñanza en una universidad?
12. ¿Tienen los estudiantes algún rol en el aseguramiento de la calidad?
13. ¿Cuando los estudiantes dicen estar satisfechos quiere decir que la educación que recibieron fue de calidad?
14. ¿La universidad debe responder siempre a las demandas que hacen los estudiantes dándoles lo que piden?
15. ¿Piensa que una universidad debe monitorear continuamente el trabajo de los profesores para garantizar que lo realicen de forma adecuada?
16. ¿Piensa que los profesores deben mejorar continuamente su práctica docente? ¿De qué manera? ¿Puede dar ejemplos?
17. ¿Cuando un profesor sale mal evaluado, hay que retirarlo de la docencia?
18. ¿En los cuestionarios de evaluación docente se capturan todos los elementos que implican brindar una docencia de calidad?
19. ¿Es mejor que los estudiantes realicen evaluaciones anónimas o directas? ¿Por qué?
20. ¿A su parecer, los estudiantes llenan los cuestionarios de manera cuidadosa y honesta?
21. ¿Ha cambiado de alguna manera su práctica docente o trabajo cotidiano a raíz de la implementación de los procesos de autoevaluación? ¿De qué manera?
22. ¿Considera que los procesos de autoevaluación son actualmente la mejor estrategia para garantizar calidad en la UCA? ¿Por qué?