

DON F. WESTERHEIJDEN

## STATES AND EUROPE AND QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

### 1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE THE QUESTIONS?

This chapter investigates how quality assurance affected the performance of higher education at the macro, meso, and micro levels. The emphasis will be at the macro and to some extent the meso levels of (collections of) countries and higher education institutions. I shall approach my question first with some theoretical considerations, mainly informed by neoclassical economic theory, broadened to a general theory of (political) behaviour (based on De Vree 1982; Lieshout 1984; Westerheijden 1988) and to some extent by neo-institutional economics (as summarised in Eggertsson 1990). Blackmur gave a more extensive economic perspective on the regulation issue in Chapter 2. The theoretical issue in this partial theory of quality in higher education is what are the interests of actors in quality? The neoclassical theory forcefully underpins the proposition that “what gets measured, gets done”, that is, higher education institutions adapt to their steering environment, leading to different emphases in institutions’ performance depending on the conception-in-use of ‘quality’ held by external actors (quality assurance agencies, ministries, supra-national bodies, etc.).

From the higher education institutions’ interest not to lose governmental support, derives my second question. Neo-institutional considerations centring on the agency problem (the difficulty for principals to fully control agents’ behaviour, while agents have different utility functions from principals) will be used to look at the ‘inner life thesis’. This thesis states that there is a disparity between the policy world of ‘(intermediary) agents’ and the ‘chalk face’ world in higher education institutions with a very limited ‘trickle down’ of policy concepts into the still highly autonomous ‘inner life’ of academe with regard to teaching and research. Empirical studies of quality assessment schemes and their impact will be used for informal testing of these two propositions.

A third area, with special relevance at the time, namely the interconnections between countries in what is seen as an increasingly globalising world (almost obligatory quote: Castells 1998), will be looked at in one of the cases of most (and complex) interdependence, namely the European countries, which are involved in the European Union and/or in the Bologna process. Economically oriented behavioural theory will almost completely give way here to institutional considerations; empirical, explanatory research into our interest area of impacts of quality assurance on performance is largely lacking at this level.

With these three interconnected questions in a single chapter, the argumentation may be presented densely in parts, as I aim to keep the chapter within reasonable limits of space. Yet I will try to remain clear. To make a clear start, let me begin by going back to some of the basics of higher education economics.

## 2. BACK TO BASICS: WHY ARE STUDENTS, INSTITUTIONS, AND STATES INTERESTED IN QUALITY ASSURANCE?

In a theory of demand and supply of higher education, two parties play the primary roles: the ‘consumers’, i.e. the students,<sup>1</sup> and the ‘suppliers’, i.e. the higher education institutions. However, higher education is the antithesis of a good traded in the idealised market of textbook classical economics. First, it is far from homogeneous – differences in qualities will be the topic of this chapter. Second, its benefits for the consumers will not appear before buying or even immediately upon ‘consumption’ of the ‘service’, on the contrary they will only appear after many years; education is the *nec plus ultra* of ‘experience goods’, which are defined as those whose quality “can be measured only by using the product” (Eggertsson 1990: 195). Use of education in this context means the ex-student enjoys its benefits in achieving better (paid) jobs, partaking more in society’s culture, and other elements of the ‘common weal’, better health, etc. Third, there are no stable preferences, because the utility function according to which the consumers judge a good’s value is deliberately changed by the ‘consumption’ of higher education itself.<sup>2</sup> This is where a third party enters the theory, namely, the states in their role to create and maintain order in markets among their citizens and, more particularly, to counter-balance market failure.

An axiom of classical economic theory, as well as of an axiomatic theory of individual behaviour (De Vree 1982), is that the subjects themselves best know their utility function, which is a given. All individuals have a right to their own false class consciousness, so to say. The upshot of which is that researchers of higher education, for instance, cannot pose a single utility function for all students, for all higher education institutions,<sup>3</sup> or for all states. It is at the expense of empirical predictive power that such assumptions are made (variety among individual objects in a class of actors is not accommodated). I shall have to find a balance in this trade-off, for without such assumptions, it becomes impossible to make predictions or give explanations about classes of actors.

Besides the micro-economic argument of market failure, states may have macro-economic arguments, such as the desire to stimulate the development of a ‘knowledge economy’ or to obtain a better place in the globalisation process.<sup>4</sup>

How do states take up their role in the higher education system? Here too it is tempting yet dangerous to assume homogeneity: the utility function of states may differ as much as that of individuals – maybe even more so, as the assumption of the state as a single, unitary actor with a single, utility function may already be debatable (Allison and Zelikow 1999). For the moment, I shall assume that states can be unitary actors; internal politics will have to wait till a later occasion. I shall not assume that all states have the same preferences, but will sketch some broad

trends below that do seem to affect many states, at least in the part of the world I happen to know best, that is, Europe.

In recent decades, often connected to the idea of ‘new public management’, the state ideology changed from the welfare state idea, that the state had to intervene whenever it might be beneficial to part of the population, to an ideology influenced by neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism with a much less pronounced role for the state.<sup>5</sup> That discussion affected all areas of state involvement in society, including higher education. The change became visible both in the ‘steering philosophy’ and in the instrumentation of policies. With regard to the steering philosophy, there was a marked difference between the national debates. National political agendas were turned into scientific terms, debates, and ‘truths’, as Enders maintained (2002). Dominating in Europe was perhaps the new public management literature from the United Kingdom, but there – at least in higher education – the situation at the outset differed markedly from the one in continental European countries. In broad brush strokes, in the latter the issue was one of moving from strict, and in the Weberian sense, bureaucratic, control to one of more autonomy in order to become more flexible and in that way responsive to contextual (societal) demands. The British perspective, on the other hand and in equally broad brush strokes, was one of bringing autonomous institutions under sufficient state control to make them more responsive to contextual (state) demands. From both sides of the North Sea, though, higher education was seen more than before in terms of its returns to society – and especially to the economy. For the economic discourse at the same time became dominant, at the expense of other, social and socio-critical discourses that had been prominent since at least the eventful year of 1968.<sup>6</sup>

Traditionally, the instruments of state intervention have been primarily its power or authority (regulation and enforcement) and budget (taxes and grants); later, but already before the rise of new public management, information and communication were added (Jenniskens 1997: 48–56). With new public management the array of instruments was extended further. A conspicuous new instrument was connected with the quality of higher education.

To some extent, the new public management movement was a repackaging of old instruments in new terms:

- Regulation was replaced by deregulation, but the remaining regulation should target critical levers, in cybernetic fashion.
- Accountability post factum about money spent was to replace detailed rules and line-item budget ex ante (but required its own (re-)regulation).
- More autonomy for ‘lower-level’ governmental agencies (among them public higher education institutions) was an instrumentation of deregulation and a condition for those agencies to become innovative (in the sense of trying to find new ways to do their job, which the state intended to be more efficient) that at the same time made accountability more necessary.
- Control over such ‘lower-level’ governmental agencies was often taken to be a non-political task which was therefore not part of the state’s ‘core business’, and outsourced to intermediary bodies (anti-trust and other

market control agencies, in higher education quality assessment or accreditation agencies).<sup>7</sup>

- Funding was more performance-based instead of the traditional input-based formulae or negotiated budgets.

New elements in steering rather than repackaging were associated mostly with privatisation and marketisation. Thus, in higher education, access opportunities increased in many states for private service providers (note here the almost unavoidable ‘service’ and ‘market’ metaphors). And those who directly<sup>8</sup> benefited from higher education, the students themselves, were to engage more in market-like behaviour in that they were to pay higher fees for their tuition. By increasing their financial stakes, more rational choice behaviour was intended by the states as well.

With regard to higher education, the drive for economy (‘value for money’ as a politically dominating view on quality, cf. Harvey and Green 1993), the performance-based funding methods, the deregulation of, for instance, curricula, and the arrival of new non-public providers, in combination undermined old certainties (even if those certainties perhaps were legal fictions) about threshold quality of education being guaranteed by higher education institutions. To counteract these and similar corrupting tendencies, the threshold level of quality of education had to be controlled. Both demands of efficiency and of maintaining a threshold of quality were subsumed under the popular call of quality assurance for *accountability*.

In addition, the rate of change of economies and societies seemed to increase to such a level that the traditional methods of adaptation of higher education institutions to their environments – basically, incremental changes focused on content of teaching and research, instigated by developments in the disciplines<sup>9</sup> (Clark 1983: 234–237) – were no longer trusted to result in curricula that ‘produced’ graduates fit for the labour market. Formalised and continuous quality *improvement* became a new demand.

These two, or in fact three, demands were combined in a single policy instrument, called quality assessment.<sup>10</sup> This instrument was given additional functions when it had to *inform* (prospective) students (and in the case of young students also their parents) in choosing study programmes and locations to apply for (Weusthof and Frederiks 1997).<sup>11</sup>

In terms of information theory the most efficient form of information about quality is given in a single-bit (yes/no) *accreditation* or in a more refined, graded (rated or ranked) list of higher education programmes or institutions. This consequence was drawn by many state governments, especially in the form of accreditation.<sup>12</sup> Some made the next step to *ranking*, for example, the Russian Federation,<sup>13</sup> and more widely magazine publishers did so, as they perceived a commercial market for ranking lists.<sup>14</sup>

Mentioning accreditation and ranking takes me somewhat ahead of where I am in my argument. Let me return to the instrument of quality assessment and its connection to state utility functions. Some years ago, my colleagues and I argued that there was a logical connection between the preferences – or rather, the perceived priorities – of states and the type of quality assessment instrument they

would pursue (Jeliazkova and Westerheijden 2002; see also table 1 below). Moreover, we argued that there was an inherent dynamic, in that (temporarily) bringing a more basic problem to closure would lead to another problem becoming dominant, so that a certain development path presented itself for external quality assessment in any state, with predictable changes in the methodology: from accreditation through different stages of external visits to internally propelled quality management. Even before that scheme was published, events proved it wrong, since with the Bologna Declaration of 1999 a whole new dynamic overtook developments. We added that to our scheme as a trend reversal ('new challenge'), but it showed that the external dynamics dominated inherent developments, and that the utility functions of a large coalition of states could converge in an unpredictable way.

The Bologna Declaration was not, initially, a sign of uniformisation of the states' utility functions, for they had very different reasons, driven by national politics, to join the Bologna process. Some, like Germany or Italy, may have seen in the Bologna Declaration an international lever to enforce national reform (reducing time to degree and drop-out). For others (such as the Netherlands), gaining international recognition for their higher education may have been high on their agenda. A third preference may have been to improve a state's position in the international student competition (also in the Netherlands). Briefly put: there were as many Bologna Declarations as there were countries signing. Afterwards, the process obtained its own dynamic, leading to, perhaps, more convergence of states' priorities and policies for higher education than initially envisaged.

Again I am tempted to run ahead of my line of argument. I shall return to the Bologna process later as the main form of international policy making in higher education in Europe. But before going to the international level, first I need to look at the question of how the introduction of quality assessment instruments affected the performance of higher education systems within the single states.

In economic views on behaviour, it is axiomatic that actors prefer behavioural options more, the higher the net benefits (or the lower the net costs) they expect to be associated with those options. 'Benefits' and 'costs' are taken here in their broadest sense, not necessarily in monetary terms.<sup>15</sup> If a government attaches higher benefits to certain options, these become more attractive to actors; higher costs make them less attractive. Accordingly, if a government puts a premium on graduating as many students as possible, as has happened in some performance-based funding models associated with new public management-like movements, higher education institutions that depend on this premium are (more) tempted to let students graduate, even if that puts quality thresholds in jeopardy. What prevents the system from corrupting, under such circumstances? First, this is not prevented completely, as is shown by the continued existence of 'degree mills'. But that is just a marginal category, showing that, in the majority of cases, *something* prevents total corruption from happening. It must be admitted, though, that no education or bad education is a cheaper option than providing good education, so that corrupting tendencies are rational behaviour for providers of higher education. That it can be rational for 'students' too, may be treated in more detail elsewhere,<sup>16</sup> but is proven empirically again by the continued demand for degree mill services. Gresham's Law of 1558

would apply: bad education drives out the good (more formally, Eggertsson 1990: 196–198).

*Table 1. Phases in quality assurance systems.* (Adapted from Jeliaskova and Westerheijden 2002: 435; with a few corrections added)

<i>1. Problems</i>	<i>2. Role of quality assurance</i>	<i>3. Information base</i>	<i>4. Nature of external review and reporting</i>
<i>Phase 1:</i> Serious doubts about educational standards.	Identifying sub-standard educational programmes.	Descriptive reports. Performance indicators.	Summative; accreditation, checking standards. Report to state.
<i>Phase 2:</i> Doubts about the efficiency of the higher education system and/or institutions.	a) Public accountability. b) Creating quality awareness in institutions.	Descriptive/strategic reports ('self-selling') covering: a) performance; b) procedures.	Ranking of institutions. One report to state and institutions. Identifying good practices.
<i>Phase 3:</i> Doubt about innovation capacity and quality assurance capacity of institutions.	Stimulate self-regulation capacity of institutions.	Public accountability.	Self-evaluation reports about: a) procedures; b) performance. Audit report to: – the institution; – the state.
<i>Phase 4:</i> Need to stimulate sustainable quality culture in institutions.	Split between: – improvement based on self-regulation; – public accountability.	Split between: – self-evaluative reports about processes and strategies based on SWOT, benchmarking; – self-reporting about performance indicators.	Split between: – audit report to the institution; – verifying data to be incorporated in public databases.
<i>New challenge:</i> Decreasing transparency across higher education systems.	Market regulation, i.e. informing clients (students, employers).	Performance indicators about 'products' (knowledge and skills of graduates).	Publication of comparative performance indicators. Standardised testing of graduates?

Beyond Gresham's law, even neo-institutional economic theory still has a hard time coping with the effects of differential quality of a good on a market. Possibilities multiply very fast. To mention but a few options: to what extent can study programmes in different disciplines be seen as substitutes for one another in

the eyes of students considering to enter higher education (to what extent are we talking about a single market for a single good)? To what extent are study programmes in a single discipline only differentiated by their quality (on a one-dimensional scale of utility)?

The counterbalance must come from benefits associated with providing good education, which can be internal or external. *Internal* to the higher education system as a community of scholars (with or without a state) one sees in the first place reputation and esteem in the eyes of peers as the main incentive for behaviour. It is commonly assumed, however, that in the reputation cycles among academic peers (Latour and Woolgar 1979; applied to higher education policy in Vålmaa and Westerheijden 1995) research performance is much more important than education performance (borne out by the different reactions of higher education institutions to rankings of research and of teaching, in Dill and Soo 2005).<sup>17</sup> *Externally*, the institutional elements of the market for higher education *may* act as counterbalancing forces: a higher education institution's reputation, to the extent that it can be damaged by signs of bad education (such as bad employment records, loan payback deficits or students suing their university to refund their fee because of bad teaching), does have some relation to education and may affect its turnover (an indicator of utility). But most of the external motivation is often expected from the monitoring of higher education, especially in the form of quality assessment, accreditation, or ranking. The actors willing to spend the effort for such mechanisms in most cases nowadays are state governments. The free market forces play a role mostly in the (less investment-intensive) ranking business, which in many countries thrives on information elicited in the course of (more investment-intensive) state quality assessment and accreditation schemes.

In the middle ground between market actors in the business of selling information and governments stand the professional organisations that initiated what in the United States is called 'specialised accreditation' (usually at the programme level). In some states, these are self-organising actors, in other cases they are related with the state – in fact, in a number of professions the states themselves are the controllers (e.g. medical doctors in many countries, or lawyers in Germany). The incentives for professions to control quality come from protection of the market of their profession (limiting access to keep suppliers' numbers low, or controlling quality of service provision to maintain the profession's reputation hence each member's capacity to charge higher fees). States have more paternalistic motives: they control certain professions to protect the citizens against malicious provision especially of vital professional services (medicine and engineering are the standard examples).

### 3. ECONOMIC VIEWS ON BEHAVIOUR AND HIGHER EDUCATION PERFORMANCE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

In this section, the focus is on the question of how quality assessment in all its forms has affected the performance of higher education at the macro, meso, and micro levels. First, though, it has to be admitted that the statement "what gets measured, gets done" is almost like a theorem in economic theories of behaviour, hence supposed to be true

theoretically, even before any empirical tests have been taken into consideration. It needs to be specified, however. For the theoretical statement – in fact, a restatement of the basic axiom of expected utility – would be that what gets rewarded gets done. But for behaviour to be rewarded, in an institutional environment of the rule of law, means that it first must be measured. In sum: what gets measured gets rewarded, and what gets rewarded gets done.<sup>18</sup> In the previous section, this statement was the underlying principle in the question: what would have the strongest impact on higher education institutions' behaviour? Would the corrupting tendencies of the performance-based funding (associated with new public management) be more rewarded, or the counterbalancing force of quality assessment?

Now I look at the question in more detail: what does quality assessment measure, what gets rewarded? Basically, there are two way of 'measuring' quality of education: through fixed procedures, often quantitative, associated with performance indicators, or through the intrinsically subjective process of peer review. Of course, things are not as clear-cut as that. On the one hand, some of the most relevant performance indicators are based on subjective (peer) review, for example, feedback from students or fellow-teachers, publication, and citation data (Westerheijden 1991). On the other hand, in current external quality assessment schemes peers are asked to base their judgments on 'objective' data. Still, to the extent that quality assessment schemes are based on performance indicators, they tend to over-emphasise the measurable over the relevant (examples are given in the box below). Many quality assessment schemes use a mixture of input, process, throughput, and output indicators. The choice is based on characteristics of the higher education system (e.g. in some systems, students cannot be selected by the higher education institution so that selectivity data are meaningless), on the quality model popular with the quality assessment agency or ministry, and on the availability of data – which in the end is linked to measurability of information.

#### *Common Performance Indicators*

*Input factors:* staff numbers and their qualifications (available for education), student selectivity, staff-student ratios, funding (per student), facilities (per student), curriculum plans, planned student qualifications (linked with Dublin Descriptors).<sup>19</sup>

*Process factors:* number of hours for different course units/disciplines or for different work forms (lectures, seminars, etc.), ECTS per course unit or for whole degree programme, student feedback on course delivery, alumni feedback on strong and weak points of the study programme from the point of view of their early career.

*Throughput factors (intermediate results):* examination results, resits, progress through different phases of study, grade point averages.

*Output factors (final results):* graduation rates/drop-outs, time to degree, employment rates (in relevant job sectors).



A basic distinction in quality assessment approaches is between mission-based and standards-based evaluation. In mission-based evaluation, which is at the heart of the archetypal US institutional accreditation, the higher education institution's own statement is taken as the standard to be reached: 'fitness for self-defined purpose', so to speak. In standards-based evaluation, external evaluation will first of all establish the 'fitness of purpose' judged against an externally given standard. The most popular example of the latter at the moment in Europe is given by the Dublin Descriptors.

A trend in a number of higher education systems in Europe, associated with the Joint Quality Initiative from which the Dublin Descriptors emerged, is to try to focus on output factors, judged in the light of the Dublin Descriptors. Yet, in the Dutch programme accreditation scheme, much more information is asked than just on the competencies of higher education's output (the examples in the box are to a large extent based on the indicators asked of applicants by one of the agencies active in Dutch accreditation (QANU 2004)).<sup>20</sup>

The litmus test of quality assurance is of course if it contributed to an increase in the quality of higher education. This is certainly not a foregone conclusion, because although in theory there ought not be good quality assurance without good quality of the 'product' – the Demings and Jurans of this world were not interested in quality assurance per se, but in pulling US industry 'out of the crisis' (title of Deming's 1986 book) – practice is more stubborn. Good quality assurance procedures may exist without good feedback of their results into the actual management and 'production' in higher education institutions,<sup>21</sup> and what guarantees that good external quality assessment leads to good internal quality assurance in the first place? Or rather in the second place, because in the first place one might wonder if the external quality assessment, which almost always drives internal quality assurance, is good in itself.

To the extent that external assessment indeed drives internal quality assurance, and to the extent that what gets measured gets done, external assessment determines what type of information is available in the higher education institutions. So, if a government demands information about graduation rates, higher education institutions have an incentive to increase graduation rates, *ceteris paribus*.<sup>22</sup> A perverse effect of this (real, Dutch) example is that quality assessment was introduced in an effort to counterbalance the undesired effects on quality of a funding mechanism that rewarded increasing graduation rates but now is seen to reinforce that corrupting tendency. To make matters even more complicated, increased internal efficiency was a major aim of the government's higher education policy as well – so the perverse effect was a desired effect too.

Quality assessment schemes often targeted publicly debated and easily visible information, to show higher education's responsiveness to society's demands. In that way, the use of manifest information and performance indicators engendered a separation between the public, political process of external quality assurance and the 'inner life' of the higher education institution in its academic sense. The attention for a more holistic, education-oriented view on quality of education was left to the less scrutinisable process of peer review. Designers of quality assessment schemes have, however, always been worried that the discretion inherent in peer review might

degenerate into arbitrariness: either mutual back scratching among close-knit colleagues or wanton exercise of power by academic barons in the disciplines (Westerheijden 1991). The more external quality assessment itself had to operate in a bureaucratic or legal context (the apex of which was accreditation with its fundamental legal consequences of ‘the right to exist’, but which could never be absent in an institutional arrangement based on the rule of law), the more the peers had to base their decisions on indisputable, easily visible information. And the less holistic and education-oriented they could be – as D’Andrea argues in more detail later in this volume. The combination of accountability and quality improvement in a single process, however necessary it may have been for other reasons, could therefore never be easy; it always was a matter of navigating between Scylla and Charybdis (not for nothing was this in the title of Vroeijenstijn 1995).

In our research into the use of quality assessment in the Netherlands, our first, global finding was that no matter how exactly the quality assessment scheme was ‘measuring’ quality, the simple fact that education was targeted already had the effect that this function was given more attention by actors in the higher education institutions than before (Frederiks, Westerheijden, and Weusthof 1994). In many cases, the first self-evaluation process was the first time in many years that teaching staff met to discuss the study programme. Programme coherence and educational innovation increased since then. The government’s focus on programme feasibility (in a Dutch neologism ‘studeerbaarheid’) reinforced these tendencies – another instance of “what gets measured and rewarded, gets done”. At the same time, this shows that the ‘inner life’ thesis was falsified in this case: the primary process of education, which was if not the first then at least the second priority in the minds of academics,<sup>23</sup> was deeply affected by the introduction of quality assessment.

Another effect was the increase in secondary processes around education, such as (computerised) systems to monitor student progress much more closely than before. Until the 1980s, the Dutch tradition regarding students was akin to the German one in which students were expected to find their own way through academia, and they had the right to rot (as one German professor once graphically put it). This changed in the Netherlands after 1988, which in a what-gets-measured-gets-done manner may be linked directly to the fact that from the very beginning of external quality assessment, tables on student progress and drop-out were demanded by the government in each self-evaluation report.<sup>24</sup> Growth in administrative processes might be predicted as a consequence of the rise of quality assurance as a profession, first in the 1970s and 1980s in the business world and since the late 1980s also in higher education, because such ‘bean counting’ is part of what quality officers are expected to do (partly coming out of education science traditions, the discipline from which many quality officers were recruited in higher education institutions), and because it creates budgets, staff, a specialised jargon, and similar ephemera that give them status, hence utility. However, an alternative explanation is the one I gave before, basing the *priorities* in measurement (which are left unexplained by the Niskanian budget-maximising behaviour of actors in a bureaucratic organisation) on external, in this case, governmental demands.<sup>25</sup>

More impacts at the meso and micro levels were noted in, amongst others, McNay (1997, 1999) and Westerheijden (1997). They emphasised for instance the

increased opportunities for higher education institutions' 'managers' (as academic governors increasingly began to call themselves since the new public management revolution) to make differential decisions inside their institutions, using externally proven quality and performance as their main arguments. At the micro level, they noted increased interdependence and cooperation among academics (both in education and in research)<sup>26</sup> as well as increased stress.

#### 4. ADDING THE TRANSNATIONAL LEVEL

Higher education systems function primarily within a country. In mentioning functions of higher education, states tellingly use rhetoric like transmission of the *national* culture to the next generation of *its* population. Or, in macro-economical perspective, states emphasise the need to educate the *country's* workforce. At least until recently, governmental strategic plans for higher education looked at the *nation's* need for higher education institutions, etc.

In colonial states in the first half of the 20th century, the concept of country may have been a bit more ambiguous, and some students in the universities in the 'mother' country came from the colonies, in movements that nowadays would be part of internationalisation – or international trade. Both internationalisation and international trade (for instance, but certainly not only, discussed in relation to GATS) have become important catchwords in higher education since the turn of the century. However, between the decolonisation of Asia and Africa (largely around 1945–1960)<sup>27</sup> and the last decade of the 20th century, the movement of students across continents received little attention from states, perhaps with the exception of the United States, where study abroad and immigration continued to be intertwined.

In international relations, states are sovereign, if not completely autonomous (the difference is explained in e.g. Van Kersbergen, Lieshout, and Verbeek 2000: 37) actors. What, broadly, are states' interests internationally regarding higher education and its quality? International relations, also when it comes to higher education, are simultaneously characterised by interdependence (in partial division of labour, based on comparative advantages) and by competition (among partially similar actors, offering substitutable goods and services to, potentially,<sup>28</sup> a world market).

In classical economic theory, comparative advantages include lower production costs. In all probability, the developed nations had comparative advantages over countries in the third world in producing higher education, perhaps not so much in terms of the monetary running costs (which would be lower in developing countries with their lower salary levels) but in terms of the considerable investments needed to establish higher education systems. Again, the investments must not only be seen in monetary terms but also in terms of cultural and social capital. The monetary advantages for the developed nations were considerable, because they already had large numbers of higher education institutions, so they did not need to invest heavily in setting up higher education systems when globalisation hit higher education. But probably more important was the cultural capital in that the developed nations already had generations of academics ready to engage in teaching, while the numbers of academics in less developed nations were small at best. This advantage

would take at least one, and probably more, generations to overcome given the time needed for academic education (perhaps expressed best as *Bildung*, which is more than ‘academic training’!).<sup>29</sup>

With regard to higher education, neo-institutional economics points to lower transaction costs on the side of students and/or providers in the sense of not having to learn a new language of instruction. The comparative advantage of English-speaking higher education providers has been tremendous on a worldwide scale ever since at least the middle of the 20th century. Moreover, since what is ostensibly traded in higher education are degrees, the advantage of the English language spilled over into an advantage for the names of higher education degrees used in English-speaking countries. As these were the same in the major countries (i.e. the United Kingdom and the United States), the advantages for these English-speaking countries on the world market for higher education were increased.<sup>30</sup>

A factor in international relations and international trade has been the protection of home markets – or protection of the country as such, which is arguably the ‘core business’ of states, as philosophers have emphasised ever since the early days of statehood (see e.g. Nozick 1974; or for the classics, Plato 1974). Higher education often has been given a minor role in this, usually expressed in terms of safeguarding, transmitting, or promoting the national culture.<sup>31</sup> Yet, also, the economic argument of higher education’s role in preparing the country’s workforce may have protectionist connotations.<sup>32</sup>

The attitude in a state towards internationalisation of higher education may probably be explained by these two factors: the comparative advantages or disadvantages it sees for its higher education system on the world market and its tendency for protectionism.<sup>33</sup> The argument in the following will be that both the European Union and the Bologna process have influenced these two factors.

Before I go into that, however, I would like to make two additional remarks. First, I would like to draw attention to the fact that states are not the only actors in international higher education relations. Higher education institutions act as partly autonomous actors on the international student market in their own right. How autonomously they can do so depends on the national institutional framework; public institutions as a rule are at a competitive disadvantage in this respect to private ones.<sup>34</sup> Higher education institutions increasingly are driven to the (world) student market by decreasing state support in many countries; examples are the United Kingdom and Australia, but also the Netherlands. In doing so, they may be supported by their home state (e.g. by support for the ‘national brand’ of higher education, through funding national foundations such as the British Council or the Goethe Institutes, or practically by support for higher education institutions in recruiting foreign students as the Dutch government does by establishing a network of Netherlands Education Support Offices (NESOs)). On the other hand, higher education institutions in their market behaviour may go against governmental policies; elements of that were visible in the Netherlands where institutional funding arguments made public higher education institutions keener on attracting foreign students than the state thought desirable (for reasons of quality or of its funding). Pursuing the Dutch example a little further, the fact that the Dutch government has funding arrangements giving it an interest in limiting the number of foreign students, while it is also government policy to support the higher

education institutions to attract foreign students through NESOs points to the well-known fact that government policies need not be consistent with one another, nor consistent over time. Another inconsistency can be seen in the increased fear of terror since 2001, which made Dutch visa policies much more restrictive, time-consuming, and expensive, while the government also acknowledges that attracting talented people (students and knowledge workers) is essential for the Dutch economy in the long run.<sup>35</sup>

The second remark concerns the fact that internationalisation brought to light a problem that was slowly emerging due to the new public management-related withdrawal of state control from the higher education system. What I mean is that in a market with decreasing homogeneity of the good (which in publicly dominated higher education systems used to be assured through institutional arrangements emphasising homogeneity of higher education institutions (see also Neave 1995) and their funding) the need for information on the side of consumers increases. When internationalisation, both in the form of an ideology forced by the government upon itself (for reasons of EU integration or of international trade – which reason dominated is not the point here) and in the form of actually increasing international mobility of students and higher education institutions, increased the higher education market to cross-border size, the information need became paramount. Even stronger than that, the government's withdrawal from its former type of market control and internationalisation led to such an information lack that the debate turned into terms of 'consumer protection'. Since quality assessment schemes already had an information function, as mentioned above, it was not a surprise that with the changing context the information function of quality assessment schemes was further emphasised – and changed – as well. The rise of accreditation schemes in the Bologna process can be explained in this way.<sup>36</sup>

#### *4.1. The European Union and the Bologna Process*

The European Union and its predecessors, as partly international, partly supranational, and therefore more handily called transnational governmental actors<sup>37</sup> focusing on economic cooperation among European countries, at the outset did not have higher education in their area of competence. In a not uncommon development in the EU, (unexpected) consequences of some of the European Court of Justice's judgments,<sup>38</sup> ditto of general agreements among the member states,<sup>39</sup> and smart manoeuvring of the European Commission in the absence of close governmental supervision,<sup>40</sup> higher education increasingly became an issue on the EU agenda. In the route towards accession for the ten countries that joined the EU in 2004, much higher education regulation was even seen to be part of the *acquis communautaire*.

For a long time, in the European higher education policy arena the leading axiom had been that Europe's richness and strength lay in the very diversity of the higher education systems of the member states (Van Vught, Van der Wende, and Westerheijden 2002: section 2). This argument was part of a complex of arguments, mainly emphasising higher education's cultural role, designed to keep higher education as much as possible out of the European, economic community. With the growing dominance of the economic discourse both in domestic politics and in

international politics ('globalisation!'), the cultural argument lost attractiveness. Moreover, with the growing European integration, disadvantages of higher education's diversity for the smooth operation of the European (labour) market became more apparent. Diversity of degrees and of the underlying competencies of graduates from an increasing number of countries (the EU had grown from 6 to 15 members by that time) led, as stated above, to a significant increase in transaction costs. Intergovernmental cooperation at first took the form of information exchange through the ENIC/NARIC (European Network of Information Centres/National Academic Recognition Information Centres) network. Although the practice of degree recognition had changed from the principle of 'equivalence' to 'recognition' (Van der Wende and Westerheijden 2003), substantial transaction costs remained the rule. The next step was set in the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention of Lisbon (1997), which introduced the principle of 'acceptance' (Van der Wende and Westerheijden 2003).

Apparently and understandably given the international situation (beyond Europe) of increasing competition on the higher education market (Van der Wende and Westerheijden 2003) and the increasing importance of such additional income for the higher education institutions and countries, diminishing transaction costs within the EU was not enough. More harmonisation could aid each of the European countries' higher education institutions in the international competition with, especially, the higher education institutions from Anglo-Saxon countries.<sup>41</sup> In other words, they had a common interest, enough to get together for a temporary coalition. Implicit assumptions are that these countries did see opportunities for making gains on the international higher education market (for the higher education institutions in their country), and that they were not afraid of negative consequences for their economy (no protectionism) and higher education system (no fear of lowering of quality). Although the EU might have been an obvious platform to form such a coalition, this route was not chosen. Instead, ad hoc coalitions first signed the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 (France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom) and then in 1999 the Bologna Declaration.<sup>42</sup>

Why not the EU route? It certainly was not impossible, as shown by the fact that only a year later, the highly ambitious Lisbon Agenda for radical reforms of the national economies, with large financial consequences for especially the research and innovation budgets, was agreed inside the EU framework. From a (neo-institutional) economic-theoretical perspective, the formal reply that in Bologna there were 29 countries – practically double the number of the EU members at the time – is not a sufficient answer. Perhaps the higher education ministers did not want to 'surrender' the culturally sensitive field of higher education to the European actors, the less so as "the Commission has succeeded in weakening the position of the member states in some policy arenas by co-opting previously excluded actors ... into its web of advisory committees" (Van Kersbergen, Lieshout, and Verbeek 2000: 50).<sup>43</sup> And in higher education such actors might be found in the higher education institutions themselves, which were increasingly denationalising, not only because the declining state government funding drove them to the market, but also because the benefits from the EU were increasing (monetary as well as in reputation,

through participation in networks for both education and research; think of Socrates, the Framework Programmes and the European Science Foundation, ESF).

Another reason could be that staying outside of the formalised, judicial institutions of the EU by signing an international 'Declaration' of unspecified nature, may not necessarily have been a binding statement – and it is received knowledge that for politicians it is in general wise to keep options open, not to get bound, until really necessary.<sup>44</sup> Such a declaration could act as an exhortation to other actors in national higher education systems to comply with a minister's preferences, without binding the minister in any definitive way. Which might have been a difficult way to go even had they wished to do it, as higher education reform would require legal reform in many countries, something that ministers could not do on their own but would need to get the agreement of their national parliament for.

If (some) ministers responsible for higher education might have had opportunistic reasons for preferring a declaration, without need for follow-up on the nice words, they would have been disappointed by what happened afterwards. The Bologna Declaration turned into a Bologna process of momentous size, speed and impact. And the EU Commission gained perhaps the most central place in it. Major players in the new policy arena formed by the flying circus of Bologna seminars and conferences are the '4Es': ENQA, EUA, ESIB, and the ENIC/NARIC, that is to say, the platform of (until now)<sup>45</sup> mainly national quality assurance agencies (European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies), the association of universities (European University Association) (and, to some extent, the other higher education institutions), the national student unions (National Unions of Students in Europe), and the national degree recognition agencies. ENQA and ENIC/NARIC can be seen to some extent as government-controlled (although the institutional arrangements are of course different in the countries concerned), the EUA represents semi-autonomous albeit public higher education institutions, and the students are of course unguided missiles from the point of view of governments. But the most powerful actor is the presidency of the BFUG, the Bologna Follow-up Group, made up from the *temporary* representatives of the EU-troika (the past, current and immediate future presidents of the EU Council of Ministers, so membership in this group is limited to 18 months) and the *continuous* representative of the EU Commission.

Again in line with the conclusions of Van Kersbergen, Lieshout, and Verbeek (2000) about EU policies in several fields, the impact of the Bologna process on different countries has been different, partially in relation to their national institutional arrangements (in particular its higher education degree structures), but partially also in what seems to be a random manner: some large countries are reacting vehemently, some small ones too, but also some large ones as well as some small ones do not (Reichert and Tauch 2003, 2005). As mentioned twice already, I venture the proposition that the explanation may be in the national (reform) agenda for higher education: the more reform already on the agenda, the more impact 'Bologna' seems to have had. An additional explanatory factor was also indicated earlier: the expected position of a country in the globalisation game for higher education.<sup>46</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION: CONSEQUENCES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

While it may be early days to make an assessment of the impact of the Bologna process on quality assurance in higher education systems, and especially through that element of the institutional arrangement on the performance of the higher education institutions, let me attempt to indicate some early results.

In parallel to and at least partly influenced by the Bologna process, the number of countries that turned to accreditation as the major quality assurance instrument has increased. The estimate in Schwarz and Westerheijden (2004b) that out of the 20 countries they included in their study, 18 had an accreditation scheme, overstates the issue. Their finding, more exactly, was that in 18 countries there was *at least a minor* accreditation scheme (taken in a theoretical sense, as it might be *called* differently for political or path-dependent reasons) for some *part* of the higher education system. Germany and Flanders/the Netherlands provided clear examples of countries where the impact was to introduce a *major* accreditation scheme – and there are others. In the same countries, major reforms of degree structures took place. In combination, these two reforms may have major impacts on the performance of the higher education systems. In that combination, the impact of the degree structure reform may be recognisable separately. Obviously, programmes according to the new structure were introduced. One of their effects might be to lead to fewer drop-outs as there now is an intermediate ‘honourable’ exit from the higher education system where in many cases that did not exist before.<sup>47</sup>

The mentioning of the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) in the Bologna Declaration led to at least an administrative change of course unit sizes. In many cases further modularisation of study programmes was undertaken than a pure administrative recalculation of workload in ECTS. This may have made study programmes more ‘school-like’, packaging the knowledge in readily consumable packets. On the one hand, this too may show in the quality statistics in higher success rates for students. On the other hand, looking at the content of new modules and especially the higher-order competencies that higher education is expected to transmit, several commentators have voiced the fear that the new bachelor-master structure programmes may be less effective. That would perhaps show in alumni and employer satisfaction results. It is remarkable, however, how fast people adjust their expectation levels to what is on offer in the market of graduates, and relegate their dissatisfaction to coffee-table discussions on how things were better when they were young.<sup>48</sup>

Another consequence of modularisation may have been that students obtained larger autonomy in designing their own learning route, in that way contributing to the ‘deconstruction’ of the study programme as an easily recognisable unit. At the same time, at least some higher education institutions in that process of modularisation have taken further steps towards ‘mass individualisation’ of study programmes by addressing the issue of recognition of students’ previously acquired competencies. Both developments call the current focus on the degree as a meaningful signal for graduates’ knowledge and competencies into question. With it, quality assessment schemes’ focus on degree programmes becomes equally doubtful.<sup>49</sup> Luckily, from that perspective, both in Germany and in Flanders/the



Netherlands it seems doubtful if the current programme accreditation scheme will be continued (after completing the first round). In both countries, with actors mainly arguing from a transaction cost perspective, discussions go in the direction of accrediting larger units, probably higher education institutions or faculties, like the Swiss OAQ (Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities) has done from the beginning.

At the European level, ENQA published its standards and guidelines in the framework of the Bologna process (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005). This document contained “standards for internal and external quality assurance, and for external quality assurance agencies”. Do they provide the powerful harmonising force that would make it possible to predict that the Bologna process eventually will be the ostensibly intended unifying influence for higher education from the European perspective at the national level and below, desired by some, feared by others? No. The ‘standards’ are not at all concerned with the content of education; they are not standards in the sense that the Dublin Descriptors are, or the Tuning outcomes. They do no more than prescribe that all higher education institutions, to be externally evaluated positively, must have a quality assurance system with a policy and instruments, covering (academic) review of programmes and awards, student assessment, staff quality, and adequate learning facilities and resources (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005: 6). That is no more than a minimum definition of areas to be covered by internal quality assurance, and can be fulfilled in many ways, and at many levels (in the sense that ‘level’ is used in quality audits for e.g. the European Foundation for Quality Management model). Finally, the ENQA standards prescribe that public information about institutions’ programmes and awards should be honest. This is a measure of common market regulation – even in commercial marketing outright lying is prohibited.

With regard to standards in external quality assessment, the ENQA standards say only that *formal* decisions (I understand that as accreditation or funding decisions) “should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently” (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005: 7). This does not imply a European level or standard of anything, but the rule of law. The external quality assessment agencies themselves are not subjected to standards regarding academic levels either. Again ENQA states that “processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available”, but as for the process, nothing more is set than an expectation that ‘normally’ the four-step process is followed outlined already over a decade ago (Van Vught and Westerheijden 1993), and which was so general that it hid as much as it revealed about external quality assessment, as Stensaker in Chapter 5 also argues. The most incising requirement on external quality assessment agencies is formal: they “should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis” (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005: 7). Recognition power is in the hands of (public) authorities within the states, leaving the intergovernmental game intact and squarely dominated by the states (each of which may apply different, not

harmonised, criteria), not by a supranational body. The most far-reaching requirement is that external quality assessment agencies “should have in place procedures for their own accountability”, later operationalised as the *expectation* of “[a] mandatory cyclical external review of the agency’s activities at least once every five years” (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005: 26).

Meeting the standards, including the just mentioned one of regular review of the quality assessment agency itself, is a condition for quality assessment agencies being listed in the European “Register of external quality assurance agencies operating in Europe” that is to be established (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005: 30–31). Yet even if these standards were fully implemented as access criteria to the European Register and even if that would lead to blackballing a state-related quality assessment agency (which seems only a theoretical possibility)<sup>50</sup> it still does not constitute a force towards harmonisation of higher education in Europe, as nothing is said about the competencies of higher education graduates.

In conclusion, then, it does not seem likely that current European developments will significantly alter the chances of the Bologna process leading to a very harmonised European Higher Education Area. The shape of the European higher education landscape from the point of view of internationally comparable outcomes of higher education study programmes (i.e. graduates’ competencies) might be more affected by less official forces. For instance, the shared sets of competencies as defined in the Tuning projects might slowly develop to get the status of *de facto* standards. After all, ECTS, which now has the status of the way to calculate ‘worth’ of course units, also began as an ‘innocent’ pilot project. Admittedly, one does not hear the Tuning outcomes mentioned very often anymore – it is therefore also possible that this project has gone the way of many other innovations: interesting but not adopted.

Whatever will happen to the landscape of the European Higher Education Area, it won’t be what we expect now! Prediction of the future will remain difficult – that is the only safe prediction.

## NOTES

- 1 The term ‘student’ is used in a broad sense here, not implying only the full-time, on-campus student directly out of secondary education, but equally the more mature, part-time and/or distance-education learner.
- 2 A consequence of the ‘transformation’ argument put forward in Harvey and Knight (1996).
- 3 *If* the higher education institution is the correct level of posing a unitary actor, that is. Maybe the level better explaining suppliers’ behaviour is the faculty/school within the higher education institution, or even the individual professor – and maybe this level is different in different higher education systems at different points in time. (Think of the different powers of American deans and German professors.)
- 4 Moreover, states may have reasons of social justice to intervene in higher education, for example, if they state that participation in higher education should be open to all without regard to their purchasing power (income). For our purpose of looking at states’ behaviour in relation to quality of higher education in their international environment, these social arguments are irrelevant (i.e. we can take participation as given).

- 5 From a different theoretical perspective, namely a detailed discourse analysis, a similar shift in utility arguments was found in Dutch higher education policy since ca 1960 (Griffioen 2005).
- 6 The growing occupation with economics may be explainable from, for instance, the budget crisis many states faced in the 1970s and 1980s partly as a result of their ever-increasing intervention in all spheres of society since World War II. But the reasons need not detain us here; what counts is the fact that the economic discourse gained the upper hand.
- 7 This control function demanded its own, lower-level regulation, and – especially after some conspicuous failures in, for example, the transport and energy sectors – re-regulation by the state as well.
- 8 The word ‘directly’ often seemed to have been forgotten in the political debate, as if the economy and society as a whole did not benefit indirectly (the externalities of higher education).
- 9 The term ‘discipline’ will be used here in a broad sense, identifying any area of knowledge, whether it is a traditional discipline or an interdisciplinary field.
- 10 The discussion on definitions is in principle tedious since we can define terms as we like, and it reached its apogee in Ball’s question: “What the Hell is Quality?” (1985) and Pirsig’s reply: “It all goes *poof!*” (1984). That discussion need not be repeated here. I simply state that I take ‘assessment’ and ‘control’ to refer mainly to the static measurement of quality; assessment usually denoting the external evaluation, while control often is internal. ‘Assurance’ points to convincing external stakeholders of quality. ‘Quality management’ denotes the activities in higher education institutions to measure, maintain, and improve quality. I use ‘quality audit’ for the external evaluation of quality management or of ‘educational quality work’. ‘Accreditation’ is an external assessment resulting in a summary judgment that a (previously defined) threshold of quality is reached or surpassed.
- 11 Which supposes that students choose studies on the basis of quality of study programmes, rather than, for example, attractiveness of location, social reasons, or the perceived prestige of higher education institutions. This is one example of policy-makers assuming individuals’ utility functions to be uniform and of a certain form, or at least, paternalistically, that they *ought* to be uniform and of a certain form.
- 12 Usually binary, but sometimes graded, as in Hungary (Campbell and Rozsnyai 2002; Schwarz and Westerheijden 2004a).
- 13 But countries in the EU now also take an interest in more refined yet efficient information in the form of rankings, although officially these are left to newspapers and magazine publishers in the free market.
- 14 That (commercial) rankings were often criticised for their shaky methodology is not our point of interest here. A thorough example is provided in Dill and Soo (2005).
- 15 Yet “the scientific relevance of an economic theory of political behaviour is the higher, the more the delimitation of costs and benefits is restricted” (thesis appertaining to Elsinga 1985, my translation – DFW).
- 16 My argument would be based on the chance of not being found out, so that the chances of student degree fraud would seem to be higher in softer disciplines – however, in many cases in those disciplines the potential gains may be less. Taking these lines of argument in combination, the most fraud-prone type of degree might well be the MBA.
- 17 This also may have to do with the long term at which effects of good education become visible, confounded further by the fact that for good education to be successful, good students are also needed, which is a factor beyond the control of the individual academic whose reputation is at stake. See also the Chapter 8 by Rosa and Amaral.
- 18 For that reason, I once stated: “Without the expectation of real consequences, the incentives to organise quality assessment are lacking; with the expectation of real consequences, quality assessment will turn into a power game” (Westerheijden 1990: 206).
- 19 A term I introduced in Westerheijden and Leegwater (2003) and which became a standard name.
- 20 Going deeper, namely to the disciplinary level, the Socrates-funded Tuning projects also aimed to provide (West) Europe-wide agreed competencies for graduates in selected disciplines (González and Wagenaar 2003).
- 21 Of course it could be argued that feedback (in quality jargon: the ‘act’ phase of the Deming cycle) ought to be an integral part of quality assurance. Again, practice does not always conform to (normative) theory.
- 22 The, usually implicit, *ceteris paribus* clause is especially relevant here, as the influence of funding mechanisms is so visible that it will probably override the impact of quality assessment information

- demands. The design of external quality assessment schemes is, therefore, important for the *type* (if not necessarily the *size*) of their impact.
- 23 Literally, academics are members of the Academy. It is used here, as often in higher education studies, to denote all who work in higher education institutions to teach and/or research, in contrast to administrative and support staff.
  - 24 Other quantitative data mostly appeared only later in the checklists for the quality assessment scheme.
  - 25 The same *external dynamics* were explored in connection with function and form of quality assurance schemes in Jeliazkova and Westerheijden (2002).
  - 26 Moed (2005) makes the point that increased (international) cooperation among researchers did *not* lead to increased research output.
  - 27 Latin-America had become independent already in the early 19th century, in days when higher education was still a very elite undertaking (in Trow's quantitative sense as much as in sociological sense). Some colonial powers held out longer, such as Portugal.
  - 28 'Potentially', because costs associated with geographical and social or cultural distance (e.g. language) may make part-world markets more attractive, such as geographical world regions (e.g. Europe) or (former) colonial empires connected through use of the same official language (e.g. the British Commonwealth, the *Francophonie*, or the former Russian sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia).
  - 29 In the formation of cultural capital, the positive externalities of a sizable proportion of a population's academic education need to be taken into account as well – adding to the number of generations needed for a country to acquire it.
  - 30 Which leads to the counter-factual hypothesis that if the United Kingdom and the United States had used different names for their (in fact different) higher education degrees, countries like Germany and the Netherlands would now not have used the names 'bachelor' and 'master'.
  - 31 Obviously, this cultural argument works best in *nation* states.
  - 32 Non-protectionism does not correlate with national institutional structures of a certain type, for example, corporatism (Van Kersbergen, Lieshout, and Verbeek 2000: 52–53). In other words: there is no direct connection with the structure of the country's higher education system either.
  - 33 This is not the place to delve deeper into why countries may be protectionist, but let me state as a proposition that *ceteris paribus* the more a country's economy is dependent on income from abroad, the less it will be protectionist.
  - 34 Public higher education institutions may have other advantages, such as – in a number of cases and in the eyes of certain potential students – high reputation.
  - 35 We touch here on a factor that I will further ignore, namely the demographic context: the Dutch population – like that in most European countries – is 'greying' and 'degreening', meaning that the birth rate is too low to maintain a stable population size in the long run, with all the negative economic effects that will have on the sustainability of the welfare state (or what is left of it).
  - 36 In Jeliazkova and Westerheijden (2002) we had prophesied the rise of other forms of quality assurance after the Bologna 'challenge', but apparently we did not take the information gap into account sufficiently. See also Section 5 of this chapter.
  - 37 "The EU is a supranational organisation. The establishment of its institutions ... nevertheless rests on intergovernmental bargains" (Van Kersbergen, Lieshout, and Verbeek 2000: 38).
  - 38 The main one being the *Gravier* case (Pertek and Soverovski 1992).
  - 39 In this case the principle of mutual recognition underlying the 1985 white chapter "Completing the Internal Market" (Van Kersbergen, Lieshout, and Verbeek 2000: 41–42).
  - 40 In their conclusion about institutional change at the level of EU policy arenas, Van Kersbergen, Lieshout, and Lock (1999: 51) stated regarding these mechanisms: "Member states maintain policy autonomy in the sense that they can change the game, at any time, into an intergovernmentalist game. Nevertheless, policy autonomy is temporarily lost in two ways. First, many *dossiers* are left to the fight between other actors than the member states. Second, 'European' actors, such as the European Commission and the European Court, make use of the freedom given to them by the member states, and sometimes manage to change the day-to-day rules and policies". Higher education was not among their illustrations.
  - 41 As noted before: the United Kingdom takes a hybrid position, as it is an Anglo-Saxon country and the second-largest in the international higher education trade, yet at the same time it signed the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations (Van Vught, Van der Wende, and Westerheijden 2002: note 4).

- 42 Besides, and in line with the finding of international relations studies (Allison and Zelikow 1999; Waltz 1979), there may have been internal political reasons for signing international declarations: I argued above that national reform of higher education was an important driver for the Bologna Declaration (taking my examples from countries involved in the Sorbonne Declaration).
- 43 This should not be taken as a general tendency for the EU to weaken member states' autonomy or steering capacity. Citing nine studies in very different policy arenas, Van Kersbergen, Lieshout, and Verbeek (2000: 56) conclude that "State autonomy has been increased, decreased, and left unaffected. The EU has nullified the effect of other pressures, has reinforced them, or has failed to have any effect on them".
- 44 Jocularly known as Lord Falkland's Rule: When it is not necessary to make a decision, it is necessary not to make a decision (Bloch 1977).
- 45 In 2004, ENQA was transformed into a membership organisation, with a vetting process further detailed in the guidelines for external quality assurance agencies (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005), which are still biased towards (quasi) governmental agencies in the requirement of a legal base. Still, this is not an automatic link with governmental agencies anymore.
- 46 Note that 'the agenda' and 'the game' are not purely controlled by the government, but are also influenced by other actors, the higher education institutions in particular.
- 47 Categorising those who step out in the middle as bachelor degree holders rather than drop-outs certainly impacts the official indicators on the higher education systems involved. But does it also improve the quality of the higher education system? Have bachelors learned more, and will they earn more, than drop-outs after the same number of years of study? Does society benefit more from bachelors than from drop-outs?
- 48 On the other hand, this may be no more than what I call the 'golden age myth' that one can already find in Plato's philosophy, for such stories about ever worse graduates have been around for generation upon generation of academics, so that if there were some truth to it, it would be like the Marxian *Verelendungstheorie* and higher education graduates by now should be completely illiterate (Van het Reve 1978: 57–59) – some elder professors, not necessarily Marxists, might retort that they are, making lecturing "the throwing of false pearls to real swine" (anonymous, cited in Van het Reve 1970: 15).
- 49 This was our reason for emphasising other, more individualised, means of assessing quality than accreditation of degree programmes in table 1 in Jeliaskova and Westerheijden (2002).
- 50 This was one of the main reasons for an expert group of the CRE (Association of European Universities) (now EUA) not to propose developing such a selective register, but to remain on the level of a clearinghouse, only publishing information about external quality assessment agencies (Sursock 2000). Remarkably, the information grid proposed in European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2005) also includes non-complying quality assessment agencies – so that in fact it is the same as the clearinghouse proposed five years before. By the way, the consultative committee on quality in higher education, also proposed in the ENQA document of 2005, was equally proposed by the CRE expert group. Policy development takes time.

## REFERENCES

- Allison, G. and P. Zelikow. *Essence of Decision*. 2nd edn. New York: Longman, 1999.
- Ball, C. *Fitness for Purpose*. Guildford: SRHE and NFER-Nelson, 1985.
- Bloch, A. *Murphy's Law and Other Reasons Why Things go Wrong*. Los Angeles: Price/Stern/Sloan, 1977.
- Campbell, C. and K. Rozsnyai. *Quality Assurance and the Development of Course Programmes*. Bucharest: CEPES-UNESCO, 2002.
- Castells, M. *End of the Millennium, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. III*. Malden/Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.
- Clark, B.R. *The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-national Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- De Vree, J.K. *Foundations of Social and Political Processes: The Dynamics of Human Behaviour, Politics, and Society*. Bilthoven, NL: Prime Press, 1982.

- Deming, W.E. *Out of the Crisis: Quality, Productivity and Competitive Position*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Dill, D.D. and M. Soo. "Academic Quality, League Tables, and Public Policy: A Cross-national Analysis of University Ranking Systems." *Higher Education* 49.4 (2005): 495–533.
- Eggertsson, T. *Economic Behavior and Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Elsinga, E. *Politieke participatie in Nederland*. Amsterdam: CT Press, 1985.
- Enders, J. "Governing the Academic Commons: About Blurring Boundaries, Blistering Organisations, and Growing Demands." Trans. J. File. Enschede: University of Twente, 2002.
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Helsinki: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2005.
- Frederiks, M.M.H., D.F. Westerheijden, and P.J.M. Weusthof. "Effects of Quality Assessment in Dutch Higher Education." *European Journal of Education* 29.2 (1994): 181–199.
- González, J. and R. Wagenaar (eds). *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report Phase One*. Bilbao, Groningen: University of Deusto, University of Groningen, 2003.
- Griffioen, D. *Kwaliteit vormt opleidingen: Een discursieve analyse van vormende normen binnen het Nederlandse universitaire kwaliteitssysteem tussen 1987 en 1999*. Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2005.
- Harvey, L. and D. Green. "Defining Quality." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 18.1 (1993): 9–34.
- Harvey, L. and P.T. Knight. *Transforming Higher Education*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press, 1996.
- Jeliazkova, M. and D.F. Westerheijden. "Systemic Adaptation to a Changing Environment: Towards a Next Generation of Quality Assurance Models." *Higher Education*, 44.3/4 (2002): 433–448.
- Jenniskens, I.G.M. *Governmental Steering and Curriculum Innovation: A Comparative Study of the Relationship Between Governmental Steering Instruments and Innovations in Higher Education Curricula*. Maarssen: Elsevier/De Tijdstroom, 1997.
- Latour, B. and S. Woolgar. *Laboratory Life*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979.
- Lieshout, R.H. "Without Making Elaborate Calculations for the Future." PhD Thesis, Enschede: Technische Hogeschool Twente, 1984.
- McNay, I. "The Impact of the 1992 Research Assessment Exercise in English Universities." *Higher Education Review* 29.2 (1997): 34–43.
- McNay, I. "The Paradoxes of Research Assessment and Funding." In Henkel, M. and B. Little (eds). *Changing Relationships Between Higher Education and the State*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 1999, 191–203.
- Moed, H.F. *Citation Analysis in Research Evaluation*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2005.
- Neave, G. "Homogenization, Integration and Convergence: The Cheshire Cats of Higher Education Analysis." In Meek, V.L., L. Goedegebuure, O. Kivinen, and R. Rinne (eds). *The Mockers and Mocked: Comparative Perspectives on Differentiation, Convergence and Diversity in Higher Education*. Oxford: Pergamon, 1995, 26–41.
- Nozick, R. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1974.
- Pertek, J. and M. Soverovski (eds). *EC Competences and Programmes Within the Field of Education/Compétences et programmes communautaires en matière d'éducation*. Maastricht: European Institute of Public Administration, 1992.
- Pirsig, R.M. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. New York: Bantam Books, 1984.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.
- QANU. *QANU-kader: Gids voor de externe kwaliteitsbeoordeling van wetenschappelijke bachelor – en masteropleidingen ten behoeve van accreditatie, Versie 3.1, Januari 2004 – Augustus 2005*. Utrecht: Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU), 2004.
- Reichert, S. and C. Tauch. "Trends in Learning Structures in European Higher Education III – Bologna Four Years After: Steps Towards Sustainable Reform of Higher Education in Europe." First draft. Graz: European University Association, European Commission, 2003.
- Reichert, S. and C. Tauch. *Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna*. s.l. Brussels: European University Association, 2005.
- Schwarz, S. and D.F. Westerheijden (eds). *Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004a.

- Schwarz, S. and D.F. Westerheijden. "Accreditation in the Framework of Evaluation Activities: A Comparative Study in the European Higher Education Area." In Schwarz, S. and D.F. Westerheijden (eds). *Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004b, 1–41.
- Sursock, A. *Towards Accreditation Schemes for Higher Education in Europe?* London: Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University, 2000.
- Välilmaa, J. and D.F. Westerheijden. "Two Discourses: Researchers and Policy-making in Higher Education." *Higher Education* 29.4 (1995): 385–403.
- Van der Wende, M. and D.F. Westerheijden. "Degrees of Trust or Trust of Degrees? Quality Assurance and Recognition." In File, J. and L.C.J. Goedegebuure (eds). *Real-Time Systems: Reflections on Higher Education in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia*. Enschede, Brno: CHEPS, Brno University of Technology, 2003, 177–206.
- Van het Reve, K. *Marius wil niet in Joegoslavië wonen (Marius Does Not Want To Live in Yugoslavia)*. Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 1970.
- Van het Reve, K. *Uren met Henk Broekhuis (Hours with Henk Broekhuis)*. Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 1978.
- Van Kersbergen, K., R.H. Lieshout, and G. Lock (eds). *Expansion and Fragmentation: Internationalization, Political Change and the Transformation of the Nation State*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999.
- Van Kersbergen, K., R.H. Lieshout, and B. Verbeek. "Institutional Change in the Emerging European Polity." In Van Heffen, O., W.J.M. Kickert, and J.J.A. Thomassen (eds). *Governance in Modern Society: Effects, Change and Formation of Government Institutions*. Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000, 35–60.
- Van Vught, F.A., M.C. van der Wende, and D.F. Westerheijden. "Globalization and Internationalization: Policy Agendas Compared." In Fulton, O. and J. Enders (eds). *Higher Education in a Globalizing World. International Trends and Mutual Observations*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002, 103–120.
- Van Vught, F.A. and D.F. Westerheijden. *Quality Management and Quality Assurance in European Higher Education: Methods and Mechanisms*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the Commission of the European Communities, 1993.
- Vroeijsenstijn, A.I. *Improvement and Accountability: Navigating Between Scylla and Charybdis: Guide for External Quality Assessment in Higher Education*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 1995.
- Waltz, K.N. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979.
- Westerheijden, D.F. *Schuiven in de Oosterschelde: Besluitvorming rond de Oosterschelde 1973–1976*. Enschede: Universiteit Twente, Faculteit Bestuurskunde, 1988.
- Westerheijden, D.F. "Peers, Performance, and Power: Quality Assessment in the Netherlands." In Goedegebuure, L.C.J., P.A.M. Maassen, and D.F. Westerheijden (eds). *Peer Review and Performance Indicators: Quality Assessment in British and Dutch Higher Education*. Utrecht: Lemma, 1990, 183–207.
- Westerheijden, D.F. "Promises, Problems and Pitfalls of Peer Review: The Use of Peer Review in External Quality Assessment in Higher Education." In Banta, T.W. (ed.). *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee, 1991, 130–142.
- Westerheijden, D.F. "A Solid Base for Decisions: Use of the VSNU Research Evaluations in Dutch Universities." *Higher Education* 33.4 (1997): 397–413.
- Westerheijden, D.F. and M. Leegwater (eds). *Working on the European Dimension of Quality: Report of the Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education as Part of the Bologna Process*. Amsterdam, 12–13 March, 2002. Zoetermeer: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen, 2003.
- Weusthof, P.J.M. and M.M.H. Frederiks. "De functies van het stelsel van kwaliteitszorg heroverwogen." *Tijdschrift voor Hoger Onderwijs* 15 (1997): 318–338.