

An Integrative Review on the Experiences of Integration of Quality Assurance Systems in Universities

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Abstract : Concepts of quality assurance and management are now part of the organizational culture of the Universities. Quality Assurance (QA) systems are, in large part, provided for by national regulatory dictates or supranational indications (such as, for example, at European level are, the ESG Guidelines "European Standard Guidelines"), but their specific definition, in terms of guiding principles, requirements and methodologies, are often delegated to the national evaluation agencies or to the autonomy of individual universities. For this reason, the experiences of implementation of QA systems in different countries and in different universities is an interesting source of information to understand how quality in universities is understood, pursued and verified. The literature often deals with the treatment of the experiences of implementation of QA systems in the individual areas in which the University's activity is carried out - teaching, research, third mission - but only rarely considers quality systems with a systemic and integrated approach, which allows to correlate subjects, actions, and performance in a virtuous circuit of continuous improvement. In particular, it is interesting to understand how to relate the results and uses of the QA in the triple distinction of university activities, identifying how one can cause the performance of the other as a function of an integrated whole and not as an exploit of specific activities or processes conceived in an abstractly atomistic way. The aim of the research is, therefore, to investigate which experiences of "integrated" QA systems are present on the international scene: starting from the experience of European countries that have long shared the Bologna Process for the creation of a European space for Higher Education (EHEA), but also considering experiences from emerging countries that use QA processes to develop their higher education systems to keep them up to date with international levels. The concept of "integration", in this research, is understood in a double meaning: i) between the different areas of activity, in particular between the didactic and research areas, and possibly with the so-called "third mission" "ii) the functional integration between those involved in quality assessment and management and the governance of the University. The paper will present the results of a systematic review conducted according with a method of an integrative review aimed at identifying best practices of quality assurance systems, in individual countries or individual universities, with a high level of integration. The analysis of the material thus obtained has made it possible to grasp common and transversal elements of QA system integration practices or particularly interesting elements and strengths of these experiences that can, therefore, be considered as winning aspects in a QA practice. The paper will present the method of analysis carried out, and the characteristics of the experiences identified, of which the structural elements will be highlighted (level of integration, areas considered, organizational levels included, etc.) and the elements for which these experiences can be considered as best practices.

Keywords : quality assurance, university, integration, country

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