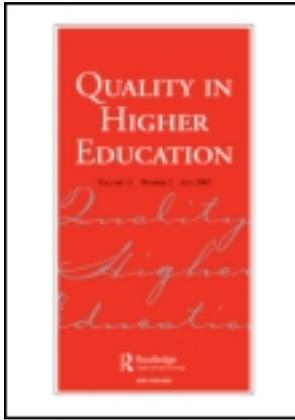


This article was downloaded by: [94.64.159.202]

On: 31 August 2012, At: 07:35

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Quality in Higher Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cqhe20>

The public debate on a quality assurance system for Greek universities

George Stamelos^a & Aggelos Kavasakalis^{a b}

^a University of Patras, Rion Achaïas, Greece

^b Geitonas School, Greece

Version of record first published: 01 Nov 2011

To cite this article: George Stamelos & Aggelos Kavasakalis (2011): The public debate on a quality assurance system for Greek universities, *Quality in Higher Education*, 17:3, 353-368

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2011.628807>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

The public debate on a quality assurance system for Greek universities

GEORGE STAMELOS^{a*} and AGGELOS KAVASAKALIS^{a,b}

^a*University of Patras, Rion Achaïas, Greece;* ^b*Geitonas School, Greece*

Over the last 10 years, the regular functioning of Greek universities has been disrupted several times due to various reforming governmental efforts by major Greek political parties. Actors inside (academics, students) and outside (policy-makers and analysts, experts, journalists) university resist the implementation of certain European education policies, such as the establishment of a quality assurance mechanism, at a national level. In order to analyse this resistance the advocacy coalition theoretical framework, developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, is used. Therefore, Greek universities are considered as a policy subsystem where actors, inside or outside universities, form coalition networks that share policy core beliefs and values, engaging in coordinated action in order to translate these into public policy. The beliefs of the key actors presented here are derived mainly through semi-structured interviews but also through the analysis of the parliamentary proceedings, articles published in scientific magazines and the press and specialised material posted on the internet. This article investigates and analyses the intense process that led to a policy change in the subsystem with the establishment and implementation of an institutionalised quality assurance system.

Keywords: quality assurance; university; advocacy coalition framework; public debate

Evaluation and university: from local reality to the international discourse

The debate about the need for the establishment of an evaluation system on Greek higher education triggered intense conversation and conflict for almost two decades. On the one side, Greek governments tried to promote evaluation policies for universities, shaped along and in coordination with the international and supranational level. On the other side, a considerable part of the university community resisted the establishment and implementation of these policies.

*Corresponding author. Email: gstam@otenet.gr, stamelos@upatras.gr

This discussion was usually not limited to the evaluation process itself but was also extended in a more general discussion about the university and its role in society. This should not be a surprise, as this debate takes place not only in Greece but also at an international level. For example, Zgaga (2007, p. 12) referred to the issue of higher education expansion; the stronger demand for higher education was not only a simple response to the growing employment options but also a result of the population's higher social and cultural expectations. Moreover, higher education is no longer primarily a personal call; it is a social demand because modern societies, in order to function, must increase their numbers of educated and skilled people. The main difficulty in the process of expansion is not the pace but the fact that the university has changed its size but not its philosophy and values. Wagner (1995, p. 15) considered that 'changes concerned mainly university external life, the issues of finance, governance and structure. The internal issues and purpose of what is taught and how it is taught have been subject to far less change. As a result the external and internal worlds are now out of balance'.

Because of these developments, one of the main concepts in the international debate about the modern university is quality and its assurance through formal evaluation. Ellis (1993, p. 3) claimed that it is an ambiguous term as it has connotations of both standards and excellence. Harvey and Green (1993) in their discussion of the relationship between quality and standards in higher education noted that quality is a relative concept and identify different aspects of quality: quality as excellence, as fitness for purpose, as value for money and as transformation. It should be mentioned that Harvey and Green identify a fifth aspect of quality (quality as perfection), which refers to the flawless consistency of a product or service but that is better understood in other settings. However, the definition of quality in higher education is not the only problem. Another difficulty is that quality assurance, at the bottom line, is concerned with power. Administrators try to assume control on the academic process by arrogating the power to require compliance with a system of monitoring, reviewing and accountability, notions that all are important in the quality debate (Vries, 1997, p. 57).

Institutionalising an evaluation system on Greek universities: European influences and local efforts

In Greece, the first law that enacted evaluation processes for every activity of a higher education institution was voted in 1992 by a conservative government (New Democracy administration). More specifically, the government promoted the 24th article of law (2083/1992) entitled: 'Evaluation of activities of Higher Education Institutions' to establish a quality assurance system within the sector.

Greek universities have traditionally been mistrustful of the Ministry of Education (Greek University Reform Forum, 2006). This mistrust was intensified by the general philosophy in the law, according to which the result of the evaluation could have unfavourable repercussions on the evaluated institution, as it could influence a part of the public financing.

Moreover, an analysis of the parliamentary proceedings indicates that only the ruling party was in favour of an evaluation that promoted competition between universities and potentially a system of ranking. The other big Greek political party, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), was opposed to the principle of the particular law. Nevertheless, PASOK was in favour of an institutionalised evaluation system that should respect the autonomy of institutions. The representatives of the left-wing parties, with some variation, were totally opposed both to the new law and, more generally, to the principle of external evaluations of institutions (Parliamentary Proceedings, 1992a,b,c,d,e,f). Despite parliamentary opposition the law and the specific article were passed. However, due to continuing reactions, mainly by the academic community, the provisions of article 24 were not activated and the particular article was never applied.

The year 1998 was a very important year at European level for the policies of quality assurance in higher education for two reasons. First, the initial Recommendation for European cooperation on quality assurance in higher education was published (Official Journal of European Communities, 1998). Second, this year saw the beginning of what would become, a year later, the 'Bologna Process'. These two developments marked the beginning of the formation process of a European Higher Education Area, in which the development of quality assurance policies is a central objective. However, only seven years before, in a memorandum that influenced European education policy, evaluation was not seen as a priority or an objective (Commission of the European Communities, 1991). Nevertheless, quality was horizontally penetrated in all other policy priorities and objectives. At a local level the impact on the Greek higher education system can be distinguished via the intensification of efforts of adoption and implementation of an institutionalised evaluation system for universities, as much from the administrations of PASOK up to 2004 as from those of New Democracy from 2004 to 2009.

During this period the Ministry of Education, realising the difficulties and the intensities that had been caused by previous legislative efforts, mainly from actors inside universities, focused attention on the promotion and strengthening of 'quality culture' in the Greek higher education system. The policy's essential objective was the weakening of the belief among actors that external evaluation is a danger to the university itself. Indeed, the voluntary attendance of Greek universities in national evaluation programmes ('Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training' during 1995–2000) and international programmes ('European Pilot

Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education' by the European Community (EC) during 1994–95, 'Institutional Management in Higher Education – I.M.H.E.' by the OECD during 1994–98, and 'Institutional Evaluation Programme' by the European Universities Association during 1996–2005) was aimed at their familiarisation with evaluation processes.

In these international and national evaluation programmes 75 university departments and 22 higher education institutions were evaluated, usually with positive results. After this initial familiarisation with external evaluation processes the Ministry of Education, in 2003, prepared the publicity for further discussion of a draft law about the formation and implementation of an institutionalised evaluation system for universities (Ministry of Education – Draft Law, 2003). The public presentation of the draft law resulted in intense reactions, as can be seen from articles in scientific journals and the press (Apekis, 2003; Mpliaronikolaki, 2003; Strevina, 2003; Theotokas, 2003). This negative climate in combination with the national election in spring 2004 postponed the passing of the law.

After the change in administration a new cycle of consultations began. It should be mentioned that, as a member of Bologna Process, Greece had already undertaken the engagement to enact, until the Bergen Communiqué in 2005, a national system of quality assurance in higher education. However, the public debate was again very intense and the official dialogue was inevitably contradictory. During the spring when a draft law for a quality assurance system in Greek higher education was published, the intensity of the debate became stronger as evidenced by articles in the media at that period (Koumantos, 2005; Lavdas, 2005; Maistros, 2005; Markatos, 2005; Milionakis, 2005; Theotokas, 2005; Venieris, 2005). The law was finally voted in during the Parliament's summer season, August 2005 (Law 3374/2005).

As a result of the intense debate, different opinions emerged inside the university. The academic staff trade union, the Federation of Greek Universities Teaching and Research Staff Associations (POSDEP), hardened its position and was no longer able to express the wide range of academic perspectives. Thus, a variety of spontaneous and unstable networks inside the university formed and promoted their opinions on the internet and in the mass media. These networks usually expressed views that are either in complete contradiction to the position of POSDEP or at least have major differences.

Theoretical choices

The initial theoretical choice was the search for analytical tools from theories that connect policy formation and implementation with the construction of networks because, in this article, policy-making is conceptualised as a continuous struggle between the actors who develop their strategies. This choice has been reinforced because, in the specific research topic, shifts or

changes in beliefs and policy strategies during the last decade could be observed. Finally, from the field of networks theories, those frameworks that consider interests as a unique criterion to constitute a coalition (interest groups) did not appear applicable to the present issue. The reason is that in the area of higher education and research, apart from the obvious interests of groups of actors, powerful systems of values and beliefs exist that form a distinguishable identity. Consequently, it seems that the theoretical work of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, known as ‘advocacy coalition framework’ (ACF), detailed in the following paragraphs, could cover these conditions.

Long before the establishment of ACF, Heclo (1974) considered policy-making and policy change as a product of both (a) large-scale social, economic and political changes and (b) strategic interaction of people within a policy community involving competition for power and efforts to develop more knowledgeable means of addressing a policy problem. ACF attempts to translate this basic insight into a framework of policy change over time (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1988, p. 130). ACF regards policy-making as a continual process with no strict beginning and end, the content of which is influenced by changing coalition networks representing different policy beliefs (values) and interests. These advocacy coalition networks are formed by actors that might include bureaucrats, politicians, interest-group representatives, researchers, policy analysts and journalists. ACF, like other theories of the policy process, generally assumes that actors are self-interested and instrumentally rational (Ostrom, 1990; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1995). More concretely, the decision that ACF is a suitable theoretical tool to analyse the issue in this article was based on: (a) the existence of formation of two conflicting coalition networks concerning the quality assurance policy programme; (b) the fact that individual networks inside these coalitions have been tried to promote their belief system and interests; and (c) the article’s intention to investigate the process of policy change in the specific policy programme inside intense social conditions.

The ACF has four basic premises: (a) understanding the policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning requires a timeframe of a decade or more; (b) the most useful way to think about policy change is through a focus on ‘policy subsystems’ (it is an area where the actors from various public and private organisations interact; these actors follow and seek to influence governmental decisions in the specific policy area); (c) those subsystems must include an intergovernmental dimension; and (d) public policies can be conceptualised in the same manner as ‘belief systems’ (that is, sets of value, priorities and casual assumptions for the realisation of the policy problem or in general of the public policy) (Sabatier, 1993, p. 16).

Outside the policy subsystem there are two sets of exogenous variables that affect the constraints and opportunities of subsystem actors (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1988, pp. 132–33). The first, rather stable set of variables

includes the basic constitutional structure, socio-cultural values and natural resources of the political system and are seldom the subject of coalition strategies because they change very slowly and with difficulty. The second, more dynamic set of variables includes major socio-economic changes, changes in the systemic governing coalition and changes in policy decisions. These variables are elements that may result in policy change because they could cause changes in networks' belief systems or in the power and resources of networks and network coalitions.

ACF assumes that actors within the subsystem form advocacy coalitions having common belief systems. Therefore, within these coalitions they share a set of normative and casual beliefs and possibly engage in coordinated action to translate those beliefs into public policy (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1988, 1999). The belief systems in each coalition are organised into a hierarchical structure. At the top is the deep core shared belief system, which includes basic ontological and normative beliefs that are very difficult to change; on the medium level are the policy core beliefs, which represent coalitions' basic normative commitments and perceptions across the policy subsystem; at the bottom are the secondary aspects of a coalition's beliefs, which are instrumental decision and information searches necessary for the implementation of policy core beliefs. ACF assumes that the policy core beliefs are the fundamental glue of coalitions because they are normative values and problem perceptions that focus on an entire policy subsystem and serve as the primary perceptual filter for actors in a policy subsystem in order to determine their perceived allies and opponents, potential sources of coordination and potential sources of advice or information (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999, pp. 120–22).

On the general process of policy change the ACF has a particular interest for the understanding of policy-oriented learning. Hecló (1974, p. 306) claimed that this notion refers to alterations of thoughts or behavioural intentions that result from experience or new information.

The theoretical framework forecasts concrete assumptions with regard to the creation and stability of advocacy coalitions, the process of policy change due to actions of networks during at least a decade and the process of policy learning, which is very important to this theoretical model (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1988, 1999; Sabatier, 1993; Leach *et al.*, 2005).

ACF and the policy subsystem of the Greek university

In the policy subsystem of the Greek university there are networks formed both inside and outside universities. They all try to shape not only public opinion for topics related to universities but also the related educational policies. For example, the PASOK, a political party outside the university network, is in favour of an institutionalised quality assurance system although

it criticises certain articles of the law (Parliamentary Proceedings, 2005a,b,c) and POSDEP, inside the university network, is totally against an institutionalised quality assurance system (POSDEP, 2006a, 2006b).

Inside the university system, the informal but prestigious network of the Rectors' Conference is always active. The university traditionally and officially has been represented by the Rectors' Conference and Greek government in official public debates with them.

During the last seven years the voting of laws concerning universities, the continuation of intense public debate, along with the weakness of POSDEP and the Rectors' Conference to express the views of many academics, has led to the formation of new (but unstable) networks inside the university; more specifically, (a) the 'Declaration of Academics' is a declaration of a new network (Initiative for the Reform of Greek University, 2006), (b) the coalition AR.SI. (Left Today) with an initial extensive policy proposal for the reform of higher education (AR.SI., 2006), (c) a network with an initial policy paper entitled 'Reform on the basis of common sense' (Initiative of Academics for the Reform and the Upgrade of Public University, 2006) and (d) the 'Greek University Reform Forum' network, which presented on its blog-site the paper 'A few thoughts on Universities' (Greek University Reform Forum, 2005). This rise of various bottom-up movements of academics attracted the attention of the press and in the beginning of 2007, the press, simplifying the various networks, named them: 'the movement of 1000' (Stamelos *et al.*, 2007).

Although this name was initially given by the press, it was used purposefully by many actors for various reasons afterwards. It was used by the leadership of the Ministry of Education, as well as by members of other networks. For some actors, this use constituted a unique and independent movement and for others a proof of submission and identification with the official policies.

Finally, inside the university, there are also active actors who do not belong to a specific network but their beliefs and opinions are very important as they are individual personalities of high social repute and, therefore, could be considered key actors.

Parallel to these networks inside the university, there are actors who represent networks from outside universities. They are also trying to shape public opinion and convert their own interest to public policy concerning universities. These are various stakeholders representing networks of employees and employers and political parties.

The two main networks representing employees in Greece are the General Confederation of Workers of Greece (GSEE) and the 'Higher Administration of Unions of Public Employees' (ADEDY) and these networks officially express their views about universities, mainly through their specialised institutes: Institute of Work of GSEE/ADEDY and the Centre of Growth of Educational Policy of GSEE. A network representing employers

that always states its proposals for educational policies concerning universities is the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises and especially its institute of research named the Foundation for Economic and Industrial Research.

Finally the networks of political parties in Greece also try to influence public opinion on issues concerning the Greek university through educational policy texts, articles in think-tank foundations usually formed by them, articles posted on internet pages and in the daily press. It is obvious that the role of the two major political parties is significant, because when they are in power, they can pass laws and therefore shape and influence the conditions in the particular area of educational policy.

All these networks during the period of the last decade formed coalitions either promoting evaluation policies in the universities or encouraging resistance and the final inversion of these policies. Thus, during the last decade there has been an advocacy coalition of networks that tries to promote formal quality assurance policies (advocacy network 'in favour'). In this coalition there are the networks of the two major political parties (PASOK and New Democracy) and the networks of employers. Simultaneously, active networks usually constructed inside universities form an opposite advocacy coalition as they perceive an institutionalised external evaluation system as a threat (advocacy network 'against'). In the later advocacy coalition of networks it seems, from the present research findings, that important changes have recently taken place. Actors (collective or individual) with powerful or weak connections to this advocacy coalition begin to formulate beliefs and values that bring them into an area between the two opposite advocacy coalitions. These players may have the role of a 'policy broker'. The role of a policy broker is important for the implementation of a policy programme or for a policy change to take place because as Sabatier says '[policy brokers]' dominant concern is with keeping the level of political conflict within acceptable limits and with reaching some "reasonable" solution to the problem... The distinction between "advocate" and "broker" is, however, a continuum. Many brokers will have some policy bent, while advocates may show some serious concern with system maintenance' (Sabatier, 1988, p. 141).

Methodology

This study is based on two sources. First, official policy documents and other published material, designed to influence public opinion, were analysed. These included Parliamentary Proceedings, articles in scientific magazines, texts in newspapers and internet web pages. Second, semi-structured interviews were carried out with representatives of networks and key actors in the policy subsystem of the Greek university. Fifteen interviews have been used for this article and whenever an interlocutor's opinion is quoted they are identified by a code, S1–S15.

The findings of the survey

Beliefs related to the policy issue of networks outside the university

The networks of the two major Greek political parties, with some differentiations on the implementation, accept that a type of institutionalised quality assurance system should be implemented in universities; the two left-wing political parties, with different arguments between themselves, are opposed to the law. Through the analysis of the parliamentary discussions it could be concluded that the representatives expressed their beliefs about the notion of quality in higher education but not always very clearly. The rationales presented by the government and the majority opposition party put forth the notion of quality as ‘value for money’, while some of the majority opposition speakers appeared to be in favour of a quality assurance system that would guarantee ‘fitness for purpose’. The representative of the communist party seemed to espouse the view that any form of quality assurance would connect universities with economic interests and finally lead to their degradation. In addition, the representatives of the minority (left-wing) opposition party supported notions of quality that adhered more to a concept of a ‘transformative’ approach to quality and, therefore, see quality as not measurable (Parliamentary Proceedings, 2005a,b,c).

Various stakeholders representing networks formed outside the university express their views about the role that the university should play in society and, in general, they believe that there should be an institutionalised evaluation of the university. They also believe that such a system is necessary for the universities’ social accountability and for the production of a well-trained manpower (interlocutors S11 and S12, members of network GSEE/ADEDY). Interlocutor S11 also claims that university should be connected with the market because there is a need for graduates to be employed in positions relevant to their studies, in order to have reciprocity and maximum profit for the entire society.

It could generally be concluded that the networks outside university have a positive attitude for an institutionalised evaluation system in universities, despite individual differences. Exceptions to this rule are the left-wing parties (particularly the Communist Party of Greece).

Beliefs related to the policy issue of networks inside the university

The network based on the Rectors’ Conference accepts, as intrinsic to the university, the notion of evaluation and this network also believes that there is a need to implement some form of institutionalised evaluation in combination with other necessary steps in order to improve and ensure the quality in universities. The announcement of the 49th Rectors’ Conference states that universities should be evaluated with reliable procedures. However, there are some necessary prerequisites: the state should ensure the minimal conditions for proper function of universities; and the

government should be committed clearly in the law about the way that the results of the evaluation are going to be used (Rectors' Conference Announcement, 2005).

POSDEP constituted a network totally opposed to the quality assurance law and the proposed institutionalised evaluation system. Characteristically, the view of the leadership of POSDEP was that the quality assurance law has nothing to do with the assurance of quality in education but it only manages to establish an 'institutionalised framework and procedures for the commercialisation of education and of scientific research' (POSDEP, 2006b, p. 11). It was also claimed that the law not only cancels the independence of the university but it constitutes cession of our country's right to practice a national education policy (POSDEP, 2006b, p. 12). Another example of this network's beliefs can be seen in the arguments of the General Secretary of POSDEP, in his article in *Kyriakatiki Eleftherotypia* entitled 'Higher Education Selling out' (Maistros, 2005), where he argued that implementation in Greece of Europeanisation and Bologna policies would lead to the 'commercialisation' of higher education, students would become 'customers' and universities 'knowledge supermarkets'. Theotokas (2005), an active member of the POSDEP network and a critic of the philosophy of the law in respect to the notion of quality, claims that an evaluation system, instead of promoting employability skills and learning outcomes, should rather promote reflection and critical thinking, which is a transformative view of quality.

Two observations are necessary for the analysis and understanding of the interaction between networks concerning the specific policy issue. First, the public debate was not restricted to the analysis of the quality assurance law and often contained discussions with regard to wider notions as autonomy or university philosophy.

The second POSDEP became increasingly inflexible and given the continuing intense policy, social and educational conflict, many academics felt that the network no longer represented their beliefs. As a result, several new networks of academics, mentioned above, emerged with different perceptions about institutionalised evaluation.

Many interlocutors believe that the specific law, although regulative, notwithstanding problems, does create an adequate structure. However, at the level of implementation it is too bureaucratic, vague in respect to the criteria of the evaluation and creates difficulty in respect to university autonomy. For example, a supportive interviewee, who is a vice-rector, notes: 'it creates a structure but not the conditions for its implementation' (S7). The interviewee S1 (a full-professor with a special weight in the university, a key actor) holds a similar opinion but he also adds that with the particular law there is also a problem of autonomy of universities, which becomes stronger if the mechanism of quality assurance is connected to the resources that the evaluated university is going to receive from the state.

A totally different opinion about the quality assurance law is expressed by S2 and S9. S2 (a member of the Greek University Reform Forum network) considers that bigger steps should be taken and the evaluation procedure should have already been connected with the financing of universities. S9 (a member of the network 'Initiative for the Reform for the Upgrade of University') argues that the quality assurance law leaves adequate freedom to the institution and simply establishes certain procedures that each institution will use in order to understand, according to its own objectives, whether or not it does well and where it can do better.

In the public debate, certain scepticism has been expressed about the notion of quality and the difficulty in conceptualising this notion. As Markatos (2005), a former rector, stated, 'the notion of quality is elusive...it has the very important disadvantage that quality means different things to different people, and this discussion becomes more difficult whenever it is combined with inadequate resources and mediocre infrastructures'.

About the different theoretical aspects of quality, interviewee S6 (a respondent who belongs to the Initiative for the Reform for the Upgrade of University and has also signed the 'movement of 1000') claims that 'the structure and the total function of the Greek university do not give the opportunity for excellence...a quality assurance mechanism is something that helps to identify and promote best practices'. With this view he seems to agree with 'Greek University Reform Forum' network as it understands quality as 'excellence'. This network does not support directly in its official documents the notion of 'quality as excellence'. However, by analysing its policy papers it could be seen that it tends to this version of the notion of quality.

On the other hand, many academics, members of the so-called 'movement of 1000' understand the notion of quality as 'fitness for purpose'. As can be seen in the document produced in a conference they organised in 2007, they accept that a quality assurance mechanism could be beneficial for the function, standing and competitiveness of Greek universities in general, so long as measures are taken to avoid (a) the excessive bureaucratisation of the quality assurance procedures, (b) the emphasis on quantitative performance indicators over a more substantial and qualitative assessment of teaching and research in universities and (c) an emphasis on standardisation procedures that may contradict the notion of university as a locus of creativity in teaching and research (Initiative of Academics for the Reform and the Upgrade of Public University, 2007).

The notion of quality as 'value for money' also has its supporters. For example, S4 (a member of the network 'Initiative for the Reform for the Upgrade of University') states that after the big expansion of universities (increasing access) the question of value for money is introduced automatically, as the resources are more-or-less fixed but the university has to

educate more and more people. Therefore, he believes that an evaluation system in the universities becomes essential.

About the notion of university autonomy, interlocutor S1 says that even if the question of evaluation is very important, the independence and autonomy of the university is, in his opinion, a central value that should inspire all the activities of the university. S7 states that the increase of financing of universities should go together with efforts towards improving the quality of universities but at the same time he considers that it is important that a climate of confidence be cultivated between university and state.

Conclusions

According to the ACF, policy change could take place either by the existence of significant perturbation external to the subsystem, or by long-lasting procedures inside the policy subsystem. The development of quality assurance policies and institutionalised evaluation in higher education is a change that is external to the Greek university subsystem. Indeed, they are policies that have been formed at a European Union level and their implementation in Greece has caused serious reactions. After the initial period of conflict an agreement of Greek public policy about quality assurance system with the European policies seems to have become a reality.

However, there is a considerable distance between the policy core beliefs that have been promoted by European education policies for universities and those of some networks inside the university. Therefore, the tension in the policy subsystem of Greek university is expected and the line-up of allies and opponents is and should be rather stable since many common policy core beliefs of the networks during the last years are in dispute.

On the other hand, there is an exceptional interest in the analysis of the processes that took place inside university as a process of internal change. These activities led to the inversion of forces that reacted to the implementation of the specific policies and resulted in the appointment of a more consensus leadership in the representation of academics. The required time for this vital change was considerable but in the limits that ACF predicts. This change can be considered to be a result of policy learning so much from the attendance of universities in international evaluation programmes as much as from the intense public dialogue that took place, particularly during and after the major crisis of 2003. Attention should also be given to the parallel emergence of new networks during the process of public dialogue. These networks might have played the role of a policy broker. Therefore, they could promote the development on specific policies in the subsystem, because the actions of a qualified policy broker (or mediator) during a

conflict may result in a policy change. This requires further research and analysis.

At this point three observations can be made. First, although the education system in Greece is considered particularly centralised, for the last decade, the Greek governments have faced difficulties in implementing their decisions. This occurs because of the way that the notions of 'power' and 'control' are conceptualised in Greek society, which is different in comparison to some other societies. Consequently, as ACF was not developed mainly for the Greek context, this point should attract more attention and further research on the way the policies are developed and implemented in different social frameworks should be carried out.

Second, ACF also predicts that it is difficult for policy learning to take place when it is not possible for quantitative data to exist on the central topics of the public debate concerning the policies under implementation, or when these notions are too abstract and qualitative and are not connected with theories that can provide experimental data or concrete measurable results simultaneously. As has been shown, the central notions during the public debate were those of quality, autonomy, methods and use of state funding and finally the role that the university should have in a modern society. These central notions, and also the public debate in general, were too abstract and qualitative. Nevertheless, an important change was achieved inside universities. Consequently, in the future, a modification or at least more specialised research concerning the policy change might be needed, not essentially due to the accumulation of quantified elements but due to the actors' subsystem qualitative comprehension on a specific subject. If this is an interesting area for further research, then it might also need to forecast an additional differentiation between the needs of official power and actors in the subsystem. The official power would mainly need the accumulation of quantified elements but the actors would need more qualitative elements in order to analyse and comprehend the characteristics and the particularities of a policy issue.

Finally, future research might address the role of EC financing via European (educational) programmes. Indeed, it appears that the belief system of networks inside universities are influenced by the European Framework Programmes, since the considerable financing through these programmes plays the role of *deus ex machina* or a Trojan horse (depending on the political view).

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the suggestions of the anonymous reviewers.

References

- Apekis, L., 2003, 'The Draft-Law for the "Evaluation" of universities: new attack of neo-liberalism in the university', *Antitetradi tis Ekpaideusis*, 67, pp. 18–21 [in Greek].
- AR.SI. [Left Today], 2006, *Proposals for the new law-framework for universities*. Available online at: <http://www.arsh.gr/el/readText.asp?textID=3> (accessed 20 October 2008).
- Baumgartner, F.R. & Jones, B.D., 1993, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press).
- Commission of the European Communities, 1991, *Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community*, COM(91) 349 final (Brussels, Commission of the European Communities).
- Ellis, R., 1993, *Quality Assurance for University Teaching* (Buckingham, Open University Press).
- Greek University Reform Forum, 2005, *A Few Thoughts on Universities*. Available online at: <http://www.sci.cny.cuny.edu/~themis/greekuniversityreform/> (accessed 20 October 2008).
- Greek University Reform Forum, 2006, 'For a radical reform in Greek universities', *Kerdos*, 21 July [in Greek].
- Harvey, L. & Green, D., 1993, 'Defining quality', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18(1), pp. 9–34.
- Hecló, H., 1974, *Social Policy in Britain and Sweden* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press).
- Initiative for the Reform of Greek University, 2006, *Declaration of Academics*. Available online at: <http://www.phl.uoc.gr/dialogue/A15.pdf> (accessed 20 October 2008).
- Initiative of Academics for the Reform and the Upgrade of Public University, 2006, *Reform on the Basis of Common Sense*. Available online at: <http://www.host-edcm.gr/gai/initiative/documents/index.php?language=el> (accessed 20 October 2008).
- Initiative of Academics for the Reform and the Upgrade of Public University, 2007, *Conference for the Upgrading of Public Universities: Targets and prerequisites* (Athens, March 2007).
- Kingdon, J.W., 1995, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (2nd edn.) (New York, NY, Harper Collins).
- Koumantos, G., 2005, 'Behold the evaluation', *Kathimerini*, 29 May [in Greek].
- Lavdas, K., 2005, 'Evaluation and independence-autonomy in the Greek universities', *Eleftherotypia*, 17 March [in Greek].
- Leach, W.D., Lubell, M., Pelkey, N.W. & Sabatier, P.A., 2005, 'Theoretical frameworks explaining partnerships success', in Sabatier, P.A., Focht, W., Lubell, M., Trachtenberg, Z., Vedlitz, A. & Matlock, M. (Eds.), *Swimming Upstream: Collaborative approaches to watershed management* (Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press).
- Maistros, G., 2005, 'Higher education selling out', *Kyriakatiki Eleftherotypia*, 12 June [in Greek].
- Markatos, N., 2005, '(About) quality and evaluation of universities: measuring excellence or irrationality?', *Eleftherotypia*, 11 April [in Greek].
- Milonakis, D., 2005, 'University: quality evaluation and independence', *Eleftherotypia*, 6 May [in Greek].

- Ministry of Education, Draft Law, 2003, 'National system of quality assurance and evaluation of higher education, institutes of life-long learning, International Greek University and other provisions', Athens, September 2003 [in Greek].
- Mplironikolaki, E., 2003, 'Berlin Communiqué: towards the market university', *Themata Pedeias*, 14, pp. 72–6 [in Greek].
- Official Journal of European Communities, 1998, *Recommendation of Council of 24th September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education* (98/561/EC), L 270/56 (Brussels, 07.10.1998, OJEC).
- Ostrom, E., 1990, *Governing the Commons* (New York, NY, Cambridge University Press).
- Parliament Proceedings, 2005a,b,c, *IA Period of Chaired Parliamentary Democracy, Conference A, Meeting E–Z, Tuesday 12 July–Thursday 14 July 2005*, Athens [in Greek].
- Parliamentary Proceedings, 1992a,b,c,d,e,f, *Z Period of Chaired Parliamentary Democracy, Conference B, Meeting IG–IH, Friday 28 August–Tuesday 8 September 1992*, Athens [in Greek].
- POSDEP [Federation of Greek Universities Teaching and Research Staff Associations], 2006a, 'The university that we defend', *Conference proceedings*, Athens, Greece, 15 February [in Greek] (Athens, POSDEP).
- POSDEP [Federation of Greek Universities Teaching and Research Staff Associations], 2006b, *The Proposals of POSDEP for the Upgrade of Public University* (Athens, POSDEP).
- Rectors' Conference Announcement, 2005, '49th Rectors' conference final announcement', Vouliagmeni, Greece, 27–28 May.
- Sabatier, P., 1993, 'Policy change over a decade or more', in Sabatier, P. & Jenkins-Smith, H. (Eds.), *Policy Change and Learning: An advocacy coalition approach* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press).
- Sabatier, P., 1988, 'An advocacy coalition framework of policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning therein', *Policy Sciences*, 21, pp. 129–68.
- Sabatier, P. & Jenkins-Smith, H., 1988, 'Symposium editors' introduction', *Policy Sciences*, 21, pp. 123–7.
- Sabatier, P. & Jenkins-Smith, H., 1999, 'The advocacy coalition framework: an assessment', in Sabatier, P. (Ed.), *Theories of the Policy Process* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press).
- Stamelos, G., Papadiamantaki, Y. & Kavasakalis, A., 2007, 'Negotiating quality: the crisis of the Greek public university', paper presented at the *WIII World Congress of Comparative Education Societies: 'Living Together: Education and Intercultural Dialogue'*, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 3–7 September.
- Strevina, G., 2003, 'Critiques on the draft-law for the evaluation of universities, the institutes of life-long learning and the International University', *Themata Pedeias*, 14, pp. 77–8 [in Greek].
- Theotokas, N., 2003, 'Evaluation and quality assurance: from the academic university to the production of education services', *O Politis*, 116, pp. 19–32 [in Greek].
- Theotokas, N., 2005, 'Accreditation and quality assurance of education services', *Avgi*, 29 May [in Greek].
- Venieris, G.I., 2005, 'All the problems should be recorded', *Eleftherotypia*, 7 February [in Greek].
- Vries, P., 1997, 'Academic standards and the quality management debate in British higher education', in Radford, J., Raaheim, K., Vries, P. & Williams, R. (Eds.), *Quantity and Quality in Higher Education* (London, Jessica Kingsley).

- Wagner, L., 1995, 'A thirty-year perspective: from the sixties to the nineties', in Schuller, T. (Ed.), *The Changing University?* (Buckingham, Open University Press).
- Zgaga, P., 2007, *Higher Education in Transition: Reconsiderations on higher education in Europe at the turn of the millennium*, Franberg, G.M. (Series Ed.), Monographs on *Journal of Research in Teacher Education* (Umea, Sweden, Umea University).