Higher Education Quality and University Evaluation: European Political Discourse and Localized Practice- The Case of Greece

The issue of higher education quality is given great attention in the European Union and, consequently, in national educational policies. Quality is related to the concept of evaluation and to the need for effectiveness and accountability in all stages of higher education policy making: policy production, implementation and strategy. The political discourse at the European level focuses on the 'tuning' towards the fulfillment of the goals of the 'Bologna process', which faces the difficulties based on the historical, political and socio economical differences of the member states. It is, therefore, of great research interest to investigate the way that this specific European policy framework is being localized.

This paper aims at investigating the recent policy initiatives in Greek higher education with the major focus being university evaluation. Using the methodology of text analysis, informed by critical political discourse techniques and other ways of policy analysis, the relevant documents that have been produced within the last decade are analyzed. On the basis of the text analysis we set the major axons of our investigation of the current policy practice. We proceed to the study of the so called 'experimental university evaluation' that was applied to a number of Greek universities. Lastly, the findings from the various investigations are brought together in an effort to draw some conclusions in the field of university valuation in Greece, which can be considered as a 'localized European policy' in the state of implementation.

1. Introduction – The purpose of the paper

In the recent educational and political debate, at both the European and the national levels, great attention is being given to the need for the effectiveness and the quality of the education, including that of higher education and mainly university education (Cowen,2002;Dale,2000; Jallade,2003). The arguments that are used usually refer to the recent radical changes in the environment of work and production, as well as to the high speed of the technological and scientific progress. In Europe and mostly within the European Union the efforts focused on the creation of a unified common space in the European higher education through the 'Bologna process'. Between 1975 and 1985 seven European Community (EC) Directives were adopted concerning the "mutual recognition of diplomas and certificates, including measures to facilitate the exercise of the right establishment and freedom to provide services" (EC,2003). It is of relevance to mention that in 1994 the report on "Recognition of diplomas on academic and professional purposes: Interaction for a single European area for education, training and professions" (Jallade,2003:230-231) listed a number of proposals under the headings:
1) Information, 2) Mobility, 3) International Convergence, 4) Quality Assessment and 5) Academic Professional Forum.

Within this framework, the issue of Higher Education (HE) quality assessment becomes dominant and is used as a prerequisite for the promotion of a single European education space through the comparability of the degrees and, consequently, the enhancement of the mobility of the labour force and its professional development.

All European states that participate in the "Bologna process" have experienced the difficulties that this procedure may involve. This was identified within the EU, even after the

application of the 'open coordination policy method' (Papadiamandaki,Stamelos,Bartskli,2006). This method helps states to progressively develop their own policies towards commonly agreed objectives by providing a co-operation framework for the states with a view to convergence of national policies. The major 'obstacles' that the efforts towards any kind of political convergence may involve, are based on the various historical, political and socio economic differences that appear in the context of educational systems in Europe and the promoted competition among the EU nation states.

This paper aims at analyzing the theme of university evaluation in Greece with special reference to the recent "trends" in the relevant field of research. References are also to be made to the framework of "political – public debate" around this issue at the various levels of decision making. Using the methodology of text analysis (Kazamias,Zambeta,Karatzia,2001) informed by techniques of policy analysis together wit the neo-institutional theory (Ball,1994;Gale,2001;Scott,2001), the documents that have been produced in Greece within the last decades and are of great relevance to university evaluation are analyzed. An effort is made to isolate the factors that influenced their production and their implementation as a national policy. Wherever applicable the contexts of implementation and practice are investigated and the findings are put in a contrastive framework with the findings of the review of the relevant field of research.

2. Some methodological issues

For the needs of this analysis, the public policy debate is assumed to be created by a number of discourses that can be considered as ways "of talking about and conceptualising policy" (Ball,1994,p.109; Karadjia-Stavlioti,1997). In this sense it could be argued that in the case of text analysis of documents that refer to educational evaluation the discourses in dominance might be influenced by the main ideas and concepts in the field of educational effectiveness, education quality and effective educational evaluation design (Alahiotis&Karatzia-Stavlioti, 2006). Additionally, they might be influenced by the ideas in the relevant policy documents either local or European. Consequently, an investigation has to be undertaken in the field of the existent university evaluation theoretical arguments and policy practices (The Council of Europe,2003).

The documents analysed concern the white papers and ministerial circulars since 1990 and mainly the texts produced after the Bologna process. The analytical tools used are formed particularly for this analysis and are based on the theoretical and methodological considerations that form the HE quality evaluation "debate" as presented below. In this framework, the texts analysed are treated as policy documents on the basis that policy can be treated as *text* as well as *discourse* and *ideology* (Ball,1994;Gale,1999;2000).

More specifically, the major principles and axons that are found in the field of university evaluation "debate" are presented and used as "organizing issues". In doing this, any «new» elements, concepts, organizing principles and ideas that appear in the recent "university evaluation towards university quality culture" are isolated and commented upon. Thus, our major research interest is to:

- investigate the ways that the issues in the field of HE evaluation are formed, how they are given a meaning and how they are interrelated and structured in order to form the local policy on Greek HE evaluation,

- study whether we can draw any conclusions on the ways that travelling" policies are mediated by the "embedded" practices and cultures of different systems to produce particular local versions of policy (Ozga,2005).

3. The development of systems of University quality evaluation-A comparative approach

The European "debate" on HE evaluation

In this section we review the major historical "events" in the field of University evaluation and present them in a comparative framework in an effort to isolate the major parameters that would form the axons of our analysis. As we go through this review the "uneasy coexistence" of universities[1] with industry (market) is appearing, even if it is found in different settings.

It was after the Second World War that the United States (US) industry (Rassis,2004) realized the important role that the university could play towards social and economic development and improvement and demanded to have proofs for its effectiveness (Cook,1989:34). In this context words like *responsibility* and *accountability* are transformed and related to *evaluation*, *effectiveness* and *productivity related funding*. The evaluation of Universities began then through the assessing of the amount of research and teaching they provided. Meanwhile, various types and techniques of university evaluation were developed.

In Europe, university evaluation was firstly applied in the end 1980's in France, Great Britain, Holland, and Denmark with the development of four clearly distinguished types of University evaluation (Rassis,2004;Mattheou,2001). In all cases University evaluation was attacked and doubted by the University teaching personnel mainly on the grounds of the difficulties that arise in any effort to define the quality of University education and, even more, to quantify it using objective measures and indicators. Some researchers believe that the reactions against the introduction of university evaluation were lessened not because the university teaching staff was persuaded for its usefulness and/or objectivity, but because it was strongly enforced by the central governmental power.

University evaluation was gradually adopted by most of the European countries through the establishment of the legal national procedures of university evaluation related to quality assurance. In this "evolution procedure" one may identify the contribution of the radical development of Information Technology systems and the European policy developments since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Most European policies since then led towards the internationalization of European university education as well as to its connection to the labor market demands (Jallade,2003). In this "debate" a lot is said on the globalization of the economy and economic competitiveness.

In the Lisbon meeting (2000) the strategic target of EU to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth and greater social cohesion" (EC,2002) was set. This radical transformation of the European economy should be based on the modernization of the social welfare and educational systems. It should be mentioned that national governments have always been reluctant to transfer powers relating to higher education to the EU level (Papadiamantaki *etal.*,2006). Despite this, the European Commission worked on the development of the future objectives of education systems in an effort to bring some kind of "convergence" in the national policy initiatives. The following key objectives set by EU could be identified in many national

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[1] For the needs of this paper, the term "university" may be used alternatively to that of HE institutions.

educational policies around Europe (i.e.The Greek Ministry of Education Strategic Planning for the 3rd European Community Support Framework –EPEAEK):

- Improving the quality and effectiveness of education/training systems.
- Facilitating the access of all to education/training programmes.
- Opening up education/training systems to the world.

We may identify that since 2000 there is a shift in the EU discourse towards the *improvement* of the *quality and effectiveness* of HE since the past discourse focused almost exclusively on quality *assurance* as a means for enhancing cooperation among higher education institutions and promoting degree comparability and recognition (Papadiamantaki *etal.*,2006). However, the scope of the policy was European and the rationale was mainly economic. In the documents produced it is clear that the major focus of the quality assurance discourse was on the promotion of the mobility of the European labour force. Within the Lisbon agenda there are multiple references to the need for "coping" with the globalization pressures, as well as a widespread concern towards the enhancement of the standing and the attractiveness of the EU institutions. The rational is identified to be both *economic* and *political* and it forms the basis for the introduction of an "explicit element of competition" in the European discourse of higher education (Mattheou,2001). This element initiated a discourse such as the one in the report for "Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in the EHEA[2]", where it is stated that European higher education will need to demonstrate that it takes the quality of its programmes and awards seriously and is willing to put into place the means for assuring and demonstrating that quality.

It might be stated that the Bologna process is a "bottom up" policy, while the Lisbon process is led directly by the Commission, a fact which has implications in terms of perceived ownership (Papadiamantaki *etal.,*2006). Consequently, there are differences in terms of the mode of multi-level governance these processes represent. The Bologna process can be seen as characterized by "mutual adjustment", whereas in the case of the Lisbon process one could speak of "intergovernmental negotiation" (Scharpf,2001).

During the Bologna process, certain initiatives have been undertaken at the level of the European Union that are closely related to the issue of University quality and evaluation. The outcomes of these initiatives were:

- The establishment of the European Forum of Quality Management (EFQM, 1995).
- The construction of a proposal for the European cooperation in the field of the evaluation of the quality of higher education.
- The creation of the European Network of Quality Assurance (ENQA).

At the same time the European University Association (EUA) claimed that quality assurance is one of the major responsibilities of Universities and that evaluation is a way that might contribute towards the quality assurance of research and teaching. It also set the goal to assess and gradually remedy three matters of major importance to Universities, the: a) *identity gap*, b) *responsibility gap* to the society, and c) *reliability gap* in terms of their offer to students, science and societies. These characteristics may be used to comprehend the normative pillar that universities as institutions use to embed their cultural identity.

The case of Greece

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[2]   European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

The developments in the European space and, mainly after 1992 influenced the "debate" for the establishment of a system of HE evaluation in Greece. It should be noted that the HE system in Greece consists of two differentiated sectors (university and technological) and three cycles of study according to the requirements of the Bologna process as refined in Prague. By constitution, universities are public institutions. The establishment of private HE institutions is not allowed. Universities are fully self-governed legal entities of public law, under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (MoE). The Technological Education Institutions (TEI) function by their own status which is similar but not the same with that of universities. As a result of the Bologna and through the Directive 89/48 TEI were granted university status (HETEI). A transitional period (until 2008) is set to allow TEI to reorganize and submit new status. The binary system still stands as TEI hold their technological character. They are, currently, granted the right to conduct research, establish joint master's programmes in cooperation with universities and confer the corresponding degrees. They do not offer third cycle degrees (Papadiamantaki *et al.,*2006).

The first effort towards HE evaluation was not of long duration, and was undertaken with the legalization of the procedure of the assessment of higher education institutions by the National Council of Quality (NCQ). The law provided for the NCQ, the members of which would be appointed from a catalogue of candidates prepared by the Rectors Conference, to implement the assessment and evaluation processes. The opposition of academics was intense and this law was never implemented.

The second effort was the participation of Greek Universities (on a voluntary basis) in the European Pilot project in 1995-96. The major goal of this project was to find a way for the synthesis and convergence of the French, British, Holland and Danish systems in an effort towards the formation of a unified system of University evaluation (Pashardis&Kriemadis,1999). Seventeen countries participated in the project, of which fifteen were member- states. The issues investigated in this project might be of interest to our investigation, firstly because Greece was one of the countries that participated in the project, this fact being a factor that initiated and influenced the debate on university evaluation in Greece. Secondly, the comparative work undertaken in the aforementioned study could inform our analysis mainly when formatting the categories and axons of our analysis. The then Minister of Education (MoE) stated that he would use the experience of these two Universities participation in the generally accepted model of university evaluation in order to expand its application to other Greek Universities on a voluntary basis. This political action may be as an effort of the MoE to reverse the negative climate through the development of a bottom-up policy aiming to encourage and facilitate the development of a quality assurance culture in higher education institutions.

The next political step of the MoE was the establishment of the National Council of Education, which included a Unit of Quality assurance. In 2001 the Ministry of Education continued the effort with the proposal for a social dialogue on "the institutionalization of a National System of the Evaluation of the Quality of Higher Education", a proposal, which was not been put into practice.

Supplementary to the above it is worth mentioning that Greece participated to the Bologna and Prague meetings, where the new framework of the concrete goals of the European educational systems until 2010 were set, focusing on a common framework of university education. The Ministry of Education Strategic Planning for the 3rd European Community Support Framework (EPEAEK II) funded an Action on "The Evaluation of Higher Education", undertaken by the Center of Educational Research. Within this Action the Ministry of Education organized in March 2002 the first seminar on "Quality assurance and university evaluation in Greece" in order to bring together the various higher education institutions and develop a "dialogue culture" on the evaluation of the universities.

More specifically in the frame of EPEAEK II, 9 Universities and 7 HETEI out of the 32 institutions in the country proceeded to the evaluation of their research and teaching work and educational services. In addition, six Greek universities were evaluated by the EUA (exGRE). Although these evaluations do not provide us with a variety of comparative approaches and results, as they lack of the development of a reference framework with indicators and benchmarks (Psacharopoulos,1988,Kladis,2003), it is considered that they were successful on the basis of the following:
- for the first time there was an opportunity to list and certify the needs and necessary macro-interventions;
- necessary information for the objective description of problems was gathered;
- through the collected information and data there is an opportunity to evaluate and prioritize the indicated changes, to set the goals and adjust the actions and the micro-level;
- there is a possibility for a more effective use of the resources and the energizing of the human power, and
- experience was gained regarding the way to quantitatively and qualitatively choose and analyze data for future evaluations, and, generally the strengths and weaknesses of the University departments became known.

In the public debate that has been initiated in 2001, the academic's professional association –POSDEP- opposed the implementation of a quality assurance system. It adopted a militant stance against the proposed reforms and declared that it refused to accept *the neo-liberal orientation of University sector and commercialized knowledge*; this development is seen as a result of GATS agreements (Papadiamantaki *etal.,*2006), World Trade Organization policies and the Bologna process, which would eventually lead to the degradation of the public University. Not all academics opposed to the implementation of policies proposed by the Bologna process as this may be seen in the memos of the Rectors Conference. However, those who oppose to Bologna are expressing their views openly in public (Yetimis&Zontiros,2000).

The professional association of HETEI scientific teaching personnel (OSEP-TEI) also opposed institutionalized evaluation. However, this association was mostly interested in the controversial issue of the Directive concerning the repositioning of TEI in HE and mostly with reference to the two main points related to evaluation and quality assurance: a)the request for evaluation of the programmes of studies offered and b)the demand for the upgrading of the

qualifications of the scientific teaching personnel, few of which have completed doctoral studies.

The student body had a weak reaction towards these developments. Firstly, it is a fact that, recently, the student movement had not been strong, in comparison to the militant movement that actively participated in educational reforms in the past. Secondly, Greek student unions do not participate in the activities undertaken by European and other international student unions concerning Bologna. It is true, however, that there were numbers of students who rallied in protest against Bologna.

In March 2003 the MoE submitted to the Rectors' Conference a draft law for the establishment of the "National Council for Quality Assurance and Assessment of Higher Education" (NCQAA). The MoE emphasized the relation of NCQAA to the European policy on quality assurance and stressed that the law was an outcome of an analysis of European quality assurance systems, supplemented by opinions of international experts that are adjusted to the specificities of the Greek education. The MoE expected to pass the law by the end of 2003, but national elections and a change of administration form the socialist party of PASOK to the conservative, neo-liberal party of New Democracy (ND), stalled the process.

The efforts of the new administration concentrated on the passing of the law for Lifelong Learning Institutions (3374/2005) and the law for Quality Assurance (3374/2005). The new law 3374/2005, which is analyzed in the next section, was presented in the Ministerial meeting on education in Bergen and it is planed to be implemented in September 2006. In a summative form, this Law provides for the implementation of evaluation procedures, internal and external, to Greek HE institutions every four years. Internal evaluation is supposed to be carried out by the members of the Academic Unit, while external will be organized by an independent Authority and carried out by experts of academic authority. This same Law establishes the system of European credits, which is considered to serve the mobility of the students as well as the acquisition of the "diploma supplement" that will "accompany" the degree.

4. Text analysis of the Law 3374/2005 for HE Quality Assurance

Considering discourse as *text* as well as *ideology* and *practice* (Ball,1994;Gale,2001) we proceeded to the analysis of the text of the aforementioned Law. We present the results of our analysis organized under the headings of the contexts under which critical political discourse analysis considers that policy is produced. More specifically the *contexts* used are those of *influence*, *production*, *practice*, *outcomes* and *strategy*. It must be always noted that the contexts are loosely coupled and there is no one simple direction of flow of information between them (Ball,1994).

a) *Context of influence*

The investigation undertaken under this heading refers to the identification of the *"timing"* and *"the actors"* of the production of the law on Quality Assurance. These are used to isolate the parameters that might have influenced the construction of the text of the law. As it was described in the previous section, although the PASOK administration prepared a draft for the law, its final version passed through parliament under the ND administration. The efforts of the still present MoE focused in passing the laws on Lifelong Learning and Quality Assurance, while at the same time she established a Committee on the "Promotion of the

Quality in HE" in which the members were mostly academics appointed by the MoE. The representatives of the Unions chose not to participate accusing the Government for a top-down process used to legitimize decisions already made. The specific Committee was supposed to make recommendations mainly on administrative maters that could be "remedied" through legislative actions and support the Universities and HETEI in their effort to upgrade the quality of their institutions. At the same time, the ND government is planning to a Constitutional revision in order to allow for the establishment of private non-profit making Universities- an issue that is very controversial in Greece.

In applying the analysis of the context of influence, the issues that relate to the existing situation in the Greek University sector were taken into consideration. We found that the *quality assurance discourse* was chosen to substantiate the policy initiatives of the Greek Government towards the Bologna process and the Lisbon strategy. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Law 3374/2005 passes under the heading "Quality assurance in HE System - Acquiring and Transferring Academic Credits- Diploma Supplement". The issues found that are of interest to our research question could be described as follows:

- the discourse used to support the specific policy is connected to the local legal or institutional situation in Greece and projected to the European Union discourse;
- the literature that relates to educational evaluation and the promotion of quality is used to favor the introduction of a system of evaluation;
- the European initiatives on HE quality are discursively found in the text, as is elaborated upon in the next section on the context of production;
- the Greek academic community, although, in terms of "oral discourse" accepts the need for the improvement in the quality of HE, it still does not have a "unified position" towards the introduction of any official type of evaluation. This issue could be related to the fact that the "reasoning" towards this policy, as it is given in the first paragraph of the Law (and not only) is written in a rather "simplistically rational way". Consequently, the academics would find it not easy to document their positions against the Law using references to the text (see Site of POSDEP:http://www.ntua.gr/posdep)

The study of the Law text led us to identify the Greek Government's main strategy as being one to *support the implementation of Bologna and Lisbon and relate the policies undertaken to the Greek steering model of HE*. In this sense it is obvious that the issues of attractiveness and competitiveness of HE (Lisbon strategy) and of evaluation and comparability of European HE systems (Bologna process) have to be addressed at state level.

b) *The context of text production*

The analysis concerning the step of the Law text production uses specific organizing principles that relate to the issues found to be "common and familiar" in the systems of University evaluation in Europe. These findings were the outcome of the European project in 1995-96 and were somehow welcome by the politicians at the various levels of EU. Since Greece was one of the 17 countries that participated in that project, we consider that its outcome influenced the formation of the University evaluation discourse in Greece in the more specific way of the relevant Law text production. These organizing principles are:
- Autonomy and independence in the procedures and methods that refer to the evaluation by the government or by the higher education institutions.

- The application of self-evaluation procedures.
- External assessment by a group of specialists.
- Publicize the assessment report.

The text of the Law has got the format of a legal text. However, it is organized in a way that includes ideas, concepts and principles that allow us to assume the following:

- There are two types of evaluation as far as the type of evaluator is concerned: *internal* (where self-evaluation procedures are applied) and *external* (where a group of external experts participates):

  · Internal evaluation of Departments and Faculties (and through them of the institutions) will be repeated regularly, the latest every 4 years. Each higher education institution should form a "Unit for Quality Assurance", headed by the Rector or the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs to coordinate and support the evaluation processes in each institution. In each Department a Quality Assurance Team is formed by members of the teaching and research staff and students of the department. The outcome of this process is an internal evaluation report.

  · External evaluation is effected by a 5-member Committee of independent experts who study and critically evaluate the results of the internal evaluation report. They also visit the institution that is being evaluated in order to view things and discuss on matters that the internal evaluation report brings to their attention. The Committee writes a report which is given to the established by this Law "Council for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (CQAHE).

- Evaluation is *related to quality assurance and quality improvement* of the HE institutions.
- It is considered to be a continues, systematic, documented and detailed measurement, identification and documentation of the work that HE institutions do. This work should be related to the *aims of their "mission"* and more specifically to the quality of the following HE institution outcomes: *teaching, research, programmes of study, services, administration, infrastructure, use of new technologies, transparency and effectiveness in the use of economic ant other resources.*
- The report of the external evaluators is *publicized* by the CQAHE, which is an independent administration supervised by the MoE. This Unit is responsible for all the administrative issues that are related to HE evaluation, it holds an electronic information data base, makes proposals towards the promotion of HE quality and produces studies using the data provided by the evaluations. Most importantly, the UQAHE informs both the institutions and the government of the results of the evaluation. It also follows up the quality assurance plan that the institutions produce and apply.

It is not easy to identify the degree of *autonomy* and *independence* in the procedures and methods that refer to the evaluation by the government or by the higher education institutions. On the contrary, the Law provides for the official use and critical evaluation of the internal evaluation report during the process of external evaluation. This issue could be related to the method of steering of HE by the MoE in Greece on the one hand and the "academic independence" culture that is identified" in the Greek HE institutions (Mattheou,2003).

c) *The context of practice*

In analyzing the context of practice we studied the way that the text is supposed to be implemented and, in doing so, use ideas and concepts derived from the neo-institutional theory as expressed by Scott (2001). According to this theory the HE institutions are influenced by three "institutional pillars", which exert pressure and relate to changes in social structure and the goals and mode of organization and are identified as: (a) the "regulative pillar", comprising the legislative framework and/or national regulations, the "normative pillar" comprising the norms and values and (c) the "cultural-cognitive" pillar.

Having pointed out in the previous sections the way that the Law text was produced and having studied its content, we may claim that we presented the "regulative pillar". While studying the context of influence we made some statements regarding the views of the various "stakeholders or social actors", these being, apart from the HE institutions and the MoE, the academics and the students. Researchers (Stamelos *etal.,*2005,Mattheou,2001 point out that the Greek HE institutions are under a normative pressure, emanating from both the national (i.e. the MoE) and the European level conducting to structural changes. The regulative pressures were put forward by through:

- The passing of the Laws on HE Quality Assurance and Lifelong Learning Institutes.
- The adoption of EU policies concerning ECTS/Diploma Supplement.

One could argue that there is a reform under way in Greece towards the Bologna objectives and within the Lisbon strategy. However, as regards to the "cultural-cognitive" pillar, there is a point that requires some explanation. It is the objection of academics to an institutionalized evaluation process. The collective action of POSDEP led to the delay of the passing of the law on Quality Assurance, as described before. It is clear that the institutions' immediate interests and the values and attitudes of the academics diverge substantially form those of the MoE. In this case the interests and the intentions of the MoE, in alignment with the EU were to promote the harmonization of the European HE, whereas the allegiance of the academics can be seen as lying with their institutions. Academics appear to oppose to any kind of evaluation that would diverge from the traditionally and widely accepted values of *academic freedom* and *institutional autonomy*, and, consequently limiting their power to control what constitutes an academic programme of studies and who is qualified as an academic (Stamelos&Papadiamantaki,2003).

What is of great interest to our analysis is the fact that currently there is a great opposition to the state HE policies and mostly to the reform of the constitution for the allowance of "private non-profit-making HE institutions". All opposition actions relate the latter to all measures that have been undertaken within the "Bologna process". They are discursively interrelated and treated as a "bunch of neo-liberal" practices that would use quality assurance arguments to lead the public HE section to under funding and inefficiencies and, finally deprive it.

d) *The context of strategy*

Within this section we investigate the connections among the diverse contexts at both the level of practice and that of ideology. It seems that the *discourse of HE Quality* is related to most undertaken educational policies and it is the one that dominates the current debate in a discursive way. It is also given a "varied" meaning be the different "system actors". The MoE

relates quality to *evaluation* and *productivity oriented competition*. On the other hand, POSDEP relates its opposing to the reforms stance to its will to "defend the quality of public university". Although some (previously silent) academics in favour of the new policies have now made public their opposition to POSDEP, the reactions against the measures are peaking with growing numbers of students joining in. HE institutions seem to use the *strategy of defiance* by resisting institutional measures to conform to an evaluation process in a highly public manner. It is clear that the structural reforms in line with Bologna and Lisbon were and still are resisted by a good part of the academic community i.e. faculty members, professional associations, and students. This response can be explained by the enhanced *legitimacy* enjoyed by the universities and their academics.

It seems that one can not understand the deadlock to which the efforts to implement the policies have arrived unless this is examined from a social policy perspective. More specifically we additionally make use of the ideas expressed in the "Policy Advocacy Coalition Framework" (Sabatier,1991) to investigate the context of strategy as it seems to develop currently in the Greek HE policy arena. In this sense, one may consider policy making as a continuous process, with no strict beginning and end, the content of which is influenced by the changing coalitions of ideas and interests.

Nowadays, the discourse concerning the betterment and competitiveness of universities focuses on the necessity to establish a quality assurance system that would facilitate the participation of Greek institutions in European and international research and educational networks. It seems that international relations form a basis for the development of a new inter-university hierarchy (Mattheou,2001).Such a hierarchy would influence the criteria of acceptance and promotion of academics through the ranks. The research activities of institutions and/or departments in Greece have recently fostered and supported their European and international profile and collaborations. However, institutions that have less developed infrastructure seem less able to take advantage of the opportunities offered and, therefore, their internationalization activities depend a lot on the initiatives of interested academics. It could be that academics that favour traditional-existing hierarchy based on ranks are worried and motivated by the belief that institutionalized evaluation will lead to a new stratification of departments, institutions, fields of study and education systems together with the transformation of education from a public to a private good. Additionally, the evaluation of HE systems across Europe and the formal stratification of institutions may compromise with the particular departments/academics that were in the past able to participate in international research networks.

Concentrating our study to the case of Greece we isolate issues of inequality within the HE system some of which could be related to the globalization forces most of which re internalized through EU. In some ways, globalization opens access (i.e.via the internet) and makes it easier for students and scholars to study and work anywhere. However, existing inequalities may be reinforced and new barriers may be formed. It has always been supported that powerful universities have dominated the production and distribution of knowledge, forming centers of academic leadership that tended to be located in larger and wealthier countries (Rassis,2004). This world of centers and peripheries (Altbach,1998) grows more complex nowadays. The dominance of the major (mainly English) languages and the growing rise of the cost to achieve a "center" status makes it difficult for universities in countries without deep financial resources like Greece to join the ranks of the top academic institutions, unless this is done through EU funding-an issue that is worth further investigation. It could be that there is a deep "resistance" of the Greek HE institutions and academics towards this type

of inequity that by both the HETEI and the universities, though through a different perspective. They all fear, that inequity through funding would be enhanced by the specific HE quality assurance and evaluation framework.

5. HE quality assurance and political discourse in Greece- Concluding comments

It seems that the central steering model of HE in Greece has influenced all steps of this policy text on quality assurance production and implementation. The EU Bologna and Lisbon initiatives had to "pass" through the Greek centralized, but not always strong at the level of practice governance and "adjusted" to the local context. It definitely had to "allow" for issues related to the "legitimized academic freedom". It is true that there is still an enhanced *legitimacy* enjoyed by the Greek universities and their academics, which allows them to act as "professionals, exercising their control over the state via cultural-cognitive and normative processes, constructing cognitive frameworks that define arenas within which they claim jurisdiction and seek to exercise control" (Scott,2001:129). The Greek academic community tends to value the intellectual and cultural autonomy that they, more or less, have acquired through the cultural and social identity of their institutions -universities or HETEI-. The somehow conformity stance of the HETEI sector might be due to the wish to have "structural isomorphism" with universities and be at the center and not the periphery.

It seems that the EU discourse, which is influenced by the globalization forces, has brought a new era of *power* and *influence* in the HE area. Politics and ideology have taken a subordinate role to profits and market-driven policies. It could be that multinational corporations that are influencing universities and research institutes may lead to monopolies and dependencies in the area of research through the control of funds channeled to research. The *quality assurance* discourse is considered to substantiate these initiatives.

It is not, therefore, surprising that HE evaluation in Greece seems to be at a regulative level yet, since the culture of the major actors is differentiated and the value placed on it is not at the same level and/or priority. The dominant state driven policy discourse *on quality assurance in a public manner in order to enhance productivity* is thought to be "market oriented" by the, still, legitimized, academics in Greece. Students connect all policy measures undertaken after the Bologna to the *depreciation of the public sector of HE and to the devalue of their degrees*. They feel not empowered, not in control of their studies or their future professional lives. It is more likely that a longer negotiation process with a more envisioning positioning by all interested groups is needed to achieve any convergence in the "cultural pillar" and have any kind of "localized policy practice on HE quality assurance". In such a case it is more likely to have any national policy initiatives effectively implemented.

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