

Emerging Trends in the Quality Assessment of Romanian Higher Education

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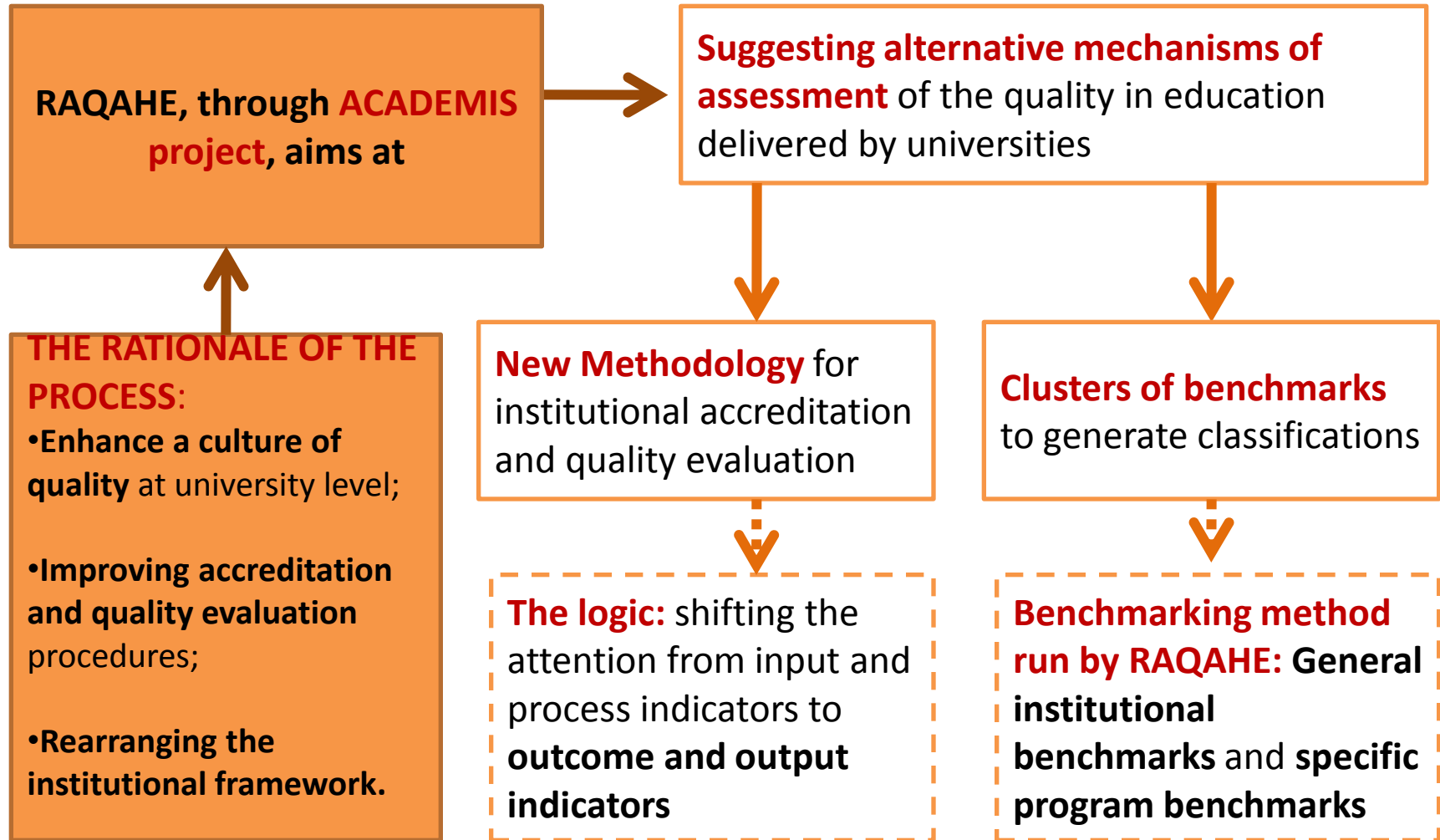
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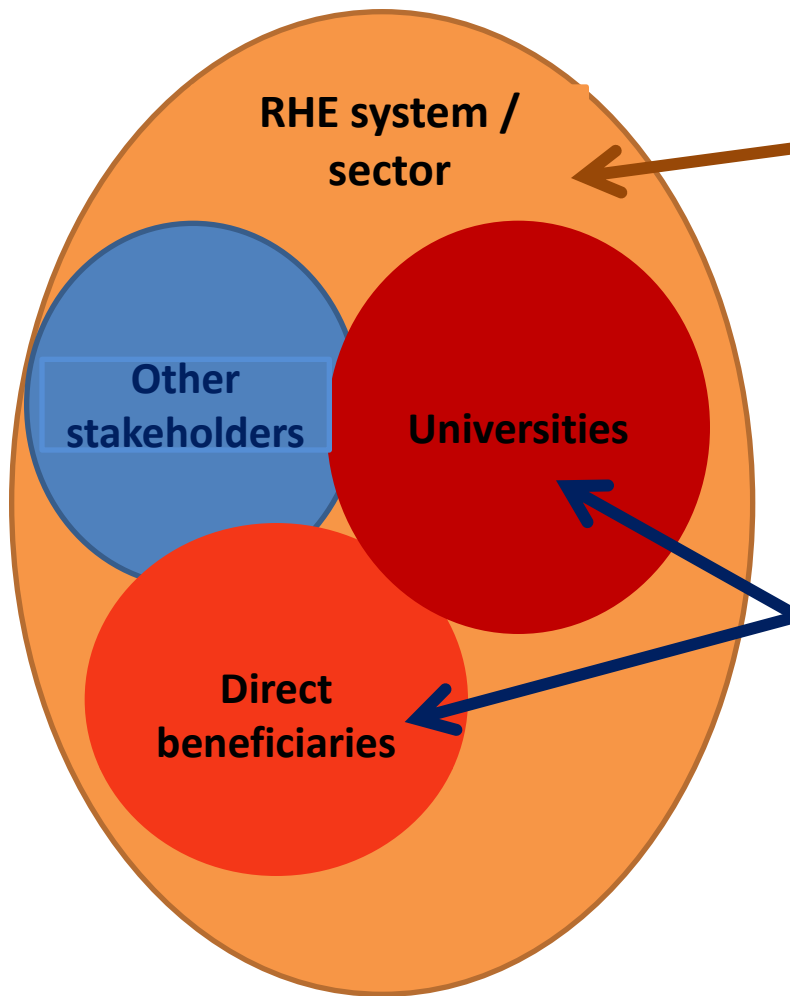
-- Overview

- Drawing the context
- Scanning the RHE landscape
- The 1st Quality Barometer
- Reporting results of the 1st Quality Barometer
- The 2nd Quality Barometer
- Key findings of the 2nd Quality Barometer
- Some issues to reflect on

--Drawing the context



-- Scanning the RHE landscape



The 1st Quality Barometer (reported earlier this year)
Perception analysis approach

KEY ISSUES

- Academic staff and direct beneficiaries perceptions over HE quality;
- European institutional actors' perceptions over RHE progress in the quality area (i.e. ENQA, EUA)

The 2nd Quality Barometer (forthcoming)
Institutional analysis approach

KEY ISSUES

- universities' quality assurance institutions and practices;
- students' lifestyles and perceptions of learning;
- Academic staff, students and employers opinions over HE quality

--The 1st Quality Barometer

THE PERCEPTION BASED-CONTEXT ANALYSIS APPROACH

The empirical findings
were delivered through
quantitative methods

Surveys run on academic staff,
students and employers

Secondary data analysis run
on prior national and European
strategic documents and
reports referring to RHE quality
assurance

The **GENERAL PICTURE OF THE RHE system**,
stressing the **national quality assurance institutional
framework (RQAIF)**

Contradictory multi-faceted picture

**A positive external
image of the RQAIF**

In the context of Bologna
Process and of RAQAHE
external evaluation by ENQA

**A dichotomised internal
image of RQAIF**

**A rather pessimistic picture of the HE
system** on the basis of employers'
opinions as well as objective data
(statistics) from the university level

A rather optimistic image built on
subjective data - academic staff and
most students' opinions

*The 1st Quality Barometer was meant to shed light on **the key trends of
higher education quality, from a systemic, general, perspective.***

-- Reporting some results of the 1st Quality Barometer

The **positive external image** of RQAIF

- ✓ Romania received positive feedback for its efforts towards the **implementation of Bologna Process** (i.e. Bologna Stocktaking Report, Leuven, 2009) ;
- ✓ RAQAHE obtained **full membership in ENQA** (2008) and was listed in EQAR.

The **dichotomised image** of RQAIF

The **optimistic image** built on academic staff and students' **perceptions**

- ✓ Students and academic staffs' perceptions concerning **the quality of their faculty and of the educational process** are generally positive;
- ✓ Students' optimism of **finding a job** after completing the studies;
- ✓ The great majority of students and of academic staffs considers the **RHEI at least as good as the Western Europe HEI**;
- ✓ 8 students out of 10 prefer to have their **master degree in Romania**;
- ✓ Academic staff reports designing their courses based also on **students' feedback and labour market requirements**.

The **pessimistic image** build on HE statistics and employers' **perceptions**

- ✓ The graduates are **have better theoretical background** and less **practical competences**;
- ✓ The universities are **not providing for for the labour market**;
- ✓ Employers largely prefer graduates that also **work part time during their studies** over those that concentrate only on their academic duties.
- ✓ The RHEI are **not listed among the best universities** in any global ranking;
- ✓ RHE system still has **low rates of foreign students**;
- ✓ **The guidance systems for career and employment are still very poorly developed** within universities;
- ✓ RHE is defined by **under-funding problems**.

--The 2nd Quality Barometer

THE INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS APPROACH

The empirical findings
were delivered through
**qualitative and
quantitative methods**

In-depth interviews with
RAQAHE experts

**Experimental benchmarking
exercise** on a statistically
representative sample

Secondary data analysis run
on both universities' strategic
and operational plans, and
legislative institutions for
quality assurance

Surveys run on academic staff
and direct beneficiaries (i.e.
employers and students) and
in-depth interviews with
students and teachers

- ✓ How are the university **institutions and practices for quality assurance performing?**
- ✓ How **diverse is the institutional framework** for quality assurance within universities?
- ✓ Are the universities **providing the necessary resources** for their internal quality assurance institutional framework?
- ✓ How **does the incentive matrix**, that pushes the universities' towards quality assurance, **look like?**

- ✓ What are the **universities' major directions of institutional development** in the near future?
- ✓ What **level of institutional diversity** can be attached to Romanian universities?

- ✓ What are the **perceptions and opinions** of the academic staff, employers and students **over the quality of the RO universities?**
- ✓ What are the current students learning habits as well as their general lifestyles and how can these be related to quality assurance?

-- Main focus of the 2nd Quality Barometer

- Institutional autonomy of HEIs.
- Quality assurance mechanisms and procedures.
- Current teaching/learning practices and students lifestyles.
- Diversity or homogeneity?



Technical core



Quality assurance practices

-- Key findings of the 2nd Quality Barometer

What should be the decision-making level for the financing of the HEI?

	Ministry	Central agencies	University level	Faculty/department level
HEI type				
State-owned	46%	5%	40%	8%
Private-owned	18%	3%	72%	6%

What should be the decision-making level for higher education quality assurance?

	Ministry	Central agencies	University level	Faculty/department level
HEI type				
State-owned	12%	38%	31%	19%
Private-owned	9%	30%	50%	11%

-- Key findings of the 2nd Quality Barometer

What should be the decision-making level for institutional accreditation?

	Ministry	Central agencies	University level	Faculty/department level
HEI type				
State-owned	34%	57%	6%	3%
Private-owned	46%	46%	7%	1%

What should be the decision-making level for study programmes' accreditation?

	Ministry	Central agencies	University level	Faculty/department level
HEI type				
State-owned	25%	48%	18%	9%
Private-owned	31%	42%	22%	6%

-- Key findings of the 2nd Quality Barometer

- Public universities still have better reputation (critical symbolic resource)

Evaluations of the overall quality of public and, respectively, private HEIs

		teachers	employers	students
Average		scale from 1 to 10		
	Private-owned	5,3	5,8	5,8
	State-owned	8,0	7,4	7,8

- Private universities have more access to financial capital and financial autonomy (public universities are more constrained by the legal framework)

-- Key findings of the 2nd Quality Barometer

University quality assurance procedures are

- mainly formal and *ritualistic*
- mainly directed towards complying with the formal criteria legally required
- not functional, do not lead to internal decision-making, but are only ceremonially presented to external actors (RAQAHE)




The university quality assurance institutional arrangements are triggered by two major drivers:

- **Legal framework** (i.e. Quality assurance legislation specifications)
- **The need for certain quality certifications awarded by RAQAHE**



High level of homogeneity among universities' quality assurance institutional arrangements

-- Key findings of the 2nd Quality Barometer – general trends

- HEIs act on (educational) markets that are incomplete because of information asymmetries  there is a high dependency on symbolic resources such as accreditation and certification that tend to be highly valorized.
- Therefore, in competing for capital (students) and legitimacy (accreditation), the universities strive to reduce uncertainty and are guided by common models – this leads to **high levels of homogeneity** not only in the quality assurance procedures, but in the technical core as well (teaching/research practice and objectives).
- Universities increasingly strive towards financial stability through increasing the range of academic degrees offered (Bachelor, MA, PhD in various domains) and thus they become more similar between them instead of differentiating and focusing on specific market niche.
- They tend to be mainly concerned with their logistic and material capability building as well as on symbolic goods (achieving accreditation) instead of focusing on the internal quality of study programs.

-- Some policy implications

The two Quality Barometers depict a rather **centralized, paternalistic** and **formalised** image of the RHE landscape.



One option is to move towards a more decentralised quality assurance system, encouraging universities to develop and sustain truly functioning internal quality enhancement mechanisms. The **focus** of the central agency could alternatively be on **auditing the internal HEI's systems** as well as the on the **outputs and outcomes** of HEIs study programs.

There need to be better incentives to lead universities into assuming responsibility and **embedding a quality culture within their technical core (teaching, research etc.)**



There is a high need for **less central regulation** and abandoning of the current paternalist stance thus encouraging universities to become more responsible and to act really autonomously.

-- Some policy implications (2)

- The current legal framework leads to **homogenization** of HEI's and **structural isomorphism**
 - The current legal framework has reached a phase where it tends to stimulate **formal**, mainly **ceremonial** and **non-substantial** results of the internal quality system.
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- **Building benchmark-based classifications** can sustain a process of differentiation of HEIs providing for various needs of the society and competing on specific market niches.
 - Also **benchmark-based classifications** can stimulate universities to pay more attention to their own quality assurance procedures and mechanisms.
 - Romanian Education Ministry, RAQAHE, CNFIS and other institutional actors should **tie more consistently the financing to quality in order to offer universities better incentives for quality.**
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