

FONDUL SOCIAL EUROPEAN

Investește în
OAMENI



Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education

Jan Kohoutek (ed.) “Implementation of the Standards and Guidelines
for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Central
and East-European Countries – Agenda Ahead”

Ioan Horga

Quality Assurance Review, Vol. 1, Nr. 2, Decembrie 2009, p 180 – 188.

Publicat de: Consiliul Agenției Române de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior -
ARACIS

Locul publicării: București, România

Tipul publicației: tipărit, online

Quality Assurance Review este editată în cadrul proiectului „Asigurarea calității în învățământul superior din România în context european. Dezvoltarea managementului calității academice la nivel de sistem și instituțional“, Contract POSDRU/2/1.2/S/1, cod proiect 3933.

Pentru a reproduce un text din revistă este necesar acordul scris al colegiului de redacție al revistei Quality Assurance Review.

Răspunderea pentru textele scrise aparține autorilor.

Conținutul acestui material nu reprezintă în mod obligatoriu poziția oficială a Uniunii Europene sau a Guvernului României.



UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ



MINISTERUL MUNCII,
FAMILIEI ȘI PROTECȚIEI SOCIALE
AMPOSURU



FONDUL SOCIAL EUROPEAN
POS DRU
2007-2013



INSTRUMENTE STRUCTURALE
2007-2013



MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI, CERCETĂRII,
TINERETULUI ȘI SPORTULUI
OPSDRU



Jan Kohoutek (ed.) “Implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Central and East-European Countries – Agenda Ahead”

UNESCO-CEPES, Studies on Higher Education, Bucharest, 2009, 328 pp

Ioan Horga Prof., University of Oradea
ihorga@uoradea.ro

The publication is the outcome of the Research Plan *Tertiary Education in the Knowledge Society* (identification code MSM0023775201) of the Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague, Czech Republic, and it attempts at showing the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) at the level of the quality assurance agencies in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. After the volume *Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area* edited by Stephanie Schwarz and Don F. Westerheijden, published in 2004, Jan Kohoutek pursues the way in which the Bologna signatories have been faced with implementing the ESG since 2005 and the most significant outcomes of implementing the EGS (covering a span of four years) in Central and Eastern European countries.

The analysis of precedents of the process to assure a *Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* in Central and Eastern Europe as moulded by the post-communist experience of higher education quality mainly influenced by the American model of assessment and accreditation particularly in Hungary and Romania and also by the British model in the Baltic countries allows Jan Kohoutek to see the quality of the answers provided by the ESG implementation process within a natural axis. It is interesting and firm the statement according to which Central and Eastern Europe has had since the previous pre-Bologna experience to assure quality considered as a first generation experience, certain advantages in practising ESG implementation based on a certain regional interoperability provided by the *Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education* (CEEN), established in 2002, as well as due to practice diversity belonging to the dynamics of the process of quality assurance in higher education.

Moreover, through systematic assessment of the importance of certain factors in both the emergence of quality assurance as a political issue and the expression of special policy in the field, the conceptual framework may provide fruitful perspectives through transnational differences and resemblances. In the conclusions of the chapter entitled *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A contentious yet intriguing policy issue*, Kohoutek says that “whether CEE accreditation schemes will remain ‘first generation’, or if (and when) they will evolve towards a second-generation approach with mutual recognition of agencies’ practices that are up and running is hard to predict, given the absence of a generally valid pattern” (p. 48)

Transposing the ESG implementation analysis in the ensemble of knowledge and research referring to implementation ontology and processing that Kohoutek makes in the third chapter of the paper provides on the one hand the observance of deep belongings of ESG implementation to the dynamics of implementation as a phenomenon and the literature in the field (Pressman, Wildavsky, O’Toole, DeLeon, Hill, Hupe, etc) and on the other hand, he stresses the particularity note of the European model to implement standards of quality assurance in higher education.

Developing the idea of ESG implementation belonging to the general phenomenon of implementation, Kohoutek underlines that implementation supposes two distinct notions:

implementation as a process (execution policy) and implementation as a result. Besides, the two distinct notions lead to different qualities: **responsibility** at the core of the relation between objectives and results and **confidence** which is the feature of carrying out a policy (implementation process).

The syntheses carried out so far show that the ESG implementation process on the agenda of the Bologna Process quality assurance mainly suggests the fact that it is an open method of coordination and a means of persuasion on ESG implementation governance except for cases when there are better alternatives. At the same time, knowledge on ESG implementation process is generic with a low level of prescription. Therefore, ESG implementation process is open to local interpretation; it can be altered too by using the lower level of stakeholders, which is essential for the success of ESG implementation. Last but not least, considering the indivisibility, responsibility and confidence in the implementation process, in ESG implementation just like any policy implementation, it has to determine a demonstration of responsibility procedures of any agency assuming the enforcement of implementation programme. Unfortunately, syntheses referring to the study of implementation suggest little on the success and difficulty individual agencies face when enforcing ESG. For this reason, Jan Kohoutek, the editor of the book, appeals in the second part of the book to comparative analysis of national agencies' expertise in some CEE countries (Latvia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia), while in the third part of the book he analyses the impact on the level of a selected academic entity.

Latvia's expertise in ESG implementation process is the object of Agnese Rusakova and Andrejs Rauhvargers' survey. In 2005, Latvia adopted the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area* (ESG), elaborated by ENQA and its partners. The Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (HEQEC), that became a foundation in 2004, was the institution that was concerned with strategies to assure quality in Latvia. This institution sought not only to assure active involvement of the country to establish a *European Higher Education Area*. It also stressed the particularity of this involvement. This was shown by the three objectives pursued in the ESG implementation process: assessing Latvian and institutional programmes with the support of mixed experts teams (Western, Baltic and Latvian) in a wider European context (due to Western experts); assessing Latvian and institutional programmes in accordance with similar regional experiences (due to Baltic experts); making sure that assessment was carried out according to Latvian standards and regulations (due to native experts).

At the same time, the benefits of using international experts are obvious for the particularity of the Latvian system of quality assurance and consist of transparency, international credibility and "European dimension". They are strong arguments to debate on a national level with employers, parents, other interested individuals as well as the society in general. This model has also reduced the involvement of the state in a higher education system having strong personal connections when finding an independent expert free for each field of study was pretty complicated. From this point of view, the positive experience in Latvia could be interesting for other countries aiming at introducing periodical assessments with the involvement of foreign experts.

In the current quality assurance system in Latvia, external quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes is carried out in a cyclic form according to the ESG 2.7 Standard. After the first round of accreditation ended in 2002, each programme and institution has to be accredited every six years. The year 2007 was the end of the of the second accreditation cycle for programmes and higher education institutions. At the same time, this country implemented ESG almost to the full with few exceptions referring to the following: *ESG 3.5 Standard*, yet the HEQEC website provides detailed information concerning the HEQEC focus framework and a detailed description of the methodology applied; *ESG 3.8 Standard*, currently HEQEC does not subcontract or externalise the assessment process organisation for the activities stipulated in the statutes.

The authors of the survey show in the closing section that the Latvian ESG implementation model is currently facing important challenges for the future. Certain formal requirements of the existing accreditation framework need to be reconsidered; for instance, "the academic community is considering the idea to introduce the accreditation of a department, rather than of personalities" (p. 110). The good collaboration with stakeholders provides many opportunities to develop the

activities of quality assurance provided by HEQEC. An example of such a challenge refers to different assessments, less traditional types of surveys, such as part time distance learning, part time and intensive partial studies. An important issue is the acknowledgement of Lifelong Learning and its corresponding insertion in the existing study system. It is also necessary to substantially improve the assessment of the results obtained after studying the requirements of the labour market within a professional programme.

In the chapter entitled *The European Standards and Guidelines in Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Hungary*, Christina Rosznyai considers that ESG implementation has to take into account historical and cultural differences between countries. Her demonstration is based on Hungary's different experience in the field of Quality Assurance (QA) starting from the institutional framework, implementation process and results of the process.

From the point of view of the institutional framework in the QA field in Hungary, together with the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) established in 1992 and reformed in 2005 as an independent national body of experts assessing quality in education, research and artistic activities in higher education, the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture and the Higher Education Institutions (the Higher Education and Scientific Council and the Hungarian Rectors' Conference) also have determined responsibilities.

From the point of view of the ESG implementation process, the HAC responsibility is not to assess the validity of QA assessment models; it has to check if the QA system of an institution leads to a higher quality of education, research activities and services. The assessment of an institution by HAC is organised on three levels. In the first place, HAC Accreditation Guidelines for institutional accreditation comprises indexes for an internal quality assurance system that should be covered irrespective of the type of institution. Secondly, each external assessment team includes a QA expert delegated by the HAC Quality Development Subcommittee, a body required by law. Last, a member of this subcommittee controls the report of the external team by confronting it with the institution chart and can alter the report before the final approval and accreditation during the HAC plenary session.

Within the eight-year assessment cycle, HAC provides QA assessment from the institutional, study programme and other educational forms points of view in a system *ex-ante* – institutional (new institutions and new faculties), programme (bachelor and masters) and other educational forms (doctoral schools at universities, professorial positions) and in a system *ex-post* 8 years – institutional (institutions and their faculties), programme (degree programme) and other educational forms (doctoral schools).

From the point of view of the ESG implementation process results, we have to say that HAC was among the first European QA agencies to undergo an external evaluation by an international panel. In spring 2008, a second review was conducted to only with ESG and for continued ENQA membership. External experts considered HAC as fully conforming to five out of the eight second level ESG standards and six out of the eight third level ESG standards. Their proposal was to focus more on the ESG 2.3, 2.4, 2.8, 3.4 and 3.6.

Meeting these standards has to be connected with HAC opportunities and challenges. They are expressed around three main aspects: an over-regulation of higher education and HAC; a legally unstable environment; HAC resources. Many of these challenges and many aspects relating to them are common to many countries at this stage of implementing the Bologna Process. Some of them, such as excessive regulations, can be a problem persisting mainly in Central and Eastern European educational systems.

Nevertheless, the commitment of all parties interested in higher education to implement the ESG is expressed, as the gradual adoption of the ESG by all higher education institutions has proved. The HAC external assessment report tests the way this organisation works according to European standards out of which the majority were HAC leading principles for most of its history. The main opportunity for Hungary's higher education and particularly the HAC at the time is the fact that the

alterations needed to keep up with the changes in the European Higher Education Area and the Bologna Process that started a long time ago while the actions employed to implement the ESG are neither numerous nor difficult.

Poland's experience in ESG implementation is shown by *Ewa Chmielecka* in the survey entitled *National External Quality Assurance system in Poland an implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines*.

In Poland, there are two main accreditation systems: the state system represented by the *State Accreditation Committee (PKA)* that started the activity in January 2002 and the "academic" system represented by the academic accreditation committees for different study programme groups, generally of a certain type, provided by higher education institutions. Academic committees accrediting the universities represented in Poland Academic Schools Rectors Conference (PASRC) cooperate with the *State Accreditation Committee*. Many of these committees were established before the *State Accreditation Committee*.

Thus, the ESG implementation process in Poland has to be conceived from a double perspective: state – PKA is a state institution and its office forms a part of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education –, and academic represented by the ten academic accreditation committees.

The Ministry established the PKA and is the main recipient of its findings. PKA reports to the minister its opinions and conclusions on: establishing universities, granting the universities the right to provide higher education in specific study structures on different levels of education, establishing faculties for higher education institutions located in other towns, assessing programmes quality provided by certain study structures, assessing training system quality, conformity of higher education.

The ten academic accreditation committees that legally are non-governmental bodies offer national-level accreditation for bachelor programmes (*licencjat/inżynier*) and master degrees (*magister*). Their evaluation standards are generally more demanding than the ones of the *State Accreditation Committee*. Academic accreditation is voluntary and is organised every five years. The accreditation procedures adopted by all the committees are very similar, although they can differ in some details, and involve certain steps: appointment of expert groups to develop specific standards and criteria for assessing the quality of education for specific fields of studies; application of a HEI unit offering course in a given field of studies for accreditation of this field; establishment of an evaluation panel to conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of a field of studies offered at a specific institution of higher education; a review of the report at a plenary session of the Committee and the taking of the accreditation decision.

Concerning the ESG implementation stage, even though Poland works on the two accreditation systems mentioned above, there have been substantial evolutions on all levels. By analysing the elements of each ESG standard level, one can see that although both accreditation systems respond to these standards, they do it differently, while sometimes there are even contradictory situations that have not yet been solved. For example, at Point 2.7 Periodic Reviews, in the case of PKA assessments, the cycle lasts six years, while within the *Foundation for the Promotion and Accreditation of Economic Studies (FPAKE)*, one of the ten accreditation committees, the first accreditation is granted for three years and the subsequent accreditations take place after five years.

There are still major challenges that the Polish stakeholders in implementing ESG have to face.

In the near future, all higher education institutions in Poland will have PKA accreditation and it is very likely that the number of institutions attempting to have a special distinction will have a hard time to access FPAKE accreditation through an attractive method. However, the FPAKE authorities are aware of the fact that limiting their operations in Poland will finally lead to losing its current position as compared to the agencies enrolled in the European Records that can enter the accreditation market in the country. Yet the greatest and most important challenge in the years to come is adjusting accreditation to the National Qualification Framework standards developed in Poland considering that study programmes designed with instruments based on the results of learning – knowledge, skills and attitudes are still new.

The evolution of ESG implementation in Slovakia is shown by Jozef Jurkovic. Accreditation of the degree programme is defined by the Higher Education Act as a process in the context of which the Accreditation Commission (AC), at the request of a higher education institution, assesses its capacity to implement a degree programme (Act of 2002). Based on the standpoint of the AC, the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic makes a decision granting the right of higher education institutions to confer the academic degree appropriate to the accredited study programme. The objects of accreditation are: degree programmes and award scientific-teaching degrees of docents and professors. The Minister of Education may ask for complex accreditation to be performed even prior to expiry of the six-year period.

In 2006 – 2008, all public higher education institutions, all state higher education institutions and one of the private higher education institutions were assessed by the European University Association. The higher education institutions prepared self-evaluation reports according to the same standards, and subsequently underwent a peer review by the EUA working group. The final reports by the individual higher education institutions identified strengths and weaknesses of the institutions and recommended actions to be taken. The project was initiated by the higher education institutions and financed by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, under the condition that the higher education institutions should publicise their final reports. At the same time, a Sectoral Report was developed, which gives an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the higher education system in the Slovak Republic as a whole (p. 175).

As far as ESG implementation is concerned, at present time, it is not the primary aim of the AC's work to improve or assess the internal system of quality assurance of higher education institutions, but AC is strongly involved in external assessment of higher education institutions. Thus, there is no interconnection between the internal quality assurance instruments of the institution and the external assessment of quality by the AC (p. 193). There is an interconnection of public structures represented by the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions and AC as an independent QA assessment structure as far as assessment criteria (of public competence) and assessment procedures (of private competence) are concerned. Implementation of the recommendations is rather an internal affair of the higher education institution, and the purpose of the recommendations is to sustain the results achieved in research and educational activities until the next complex accreditation. Generally speaking, the present setting of the rules on external quality assurance is compatible with ESG Standards 2.1-2.8. However, some of the arrangements, including those pertaining to the work of the AC, have a special setting for historical reasons and are not fully compatible with the ESG. Currently, there is a joint project with the AC of the Czech Republic, which includes cooperation in preparing for an external review against ESG standards.

When analysing the Slovak expertise in ESG implementation from the point of view of the relationship between opportunities and challenges, it will be necessary to mention certain aspects that have to be envisaged in the future: the question of developing internal quality assurance mechanisms for higher education institutions; introducing a system for monitoring and improving them in the context of the external system for quality assurance. There is a need for a reassessment of the present conditions in order to respond better to the missions and tasks of institutions, especially in the case of professionally-oriented higher education institutions; there is also a need for refocusing the assessment criteria, which currently aim at fulfilment of minimum standards, to account for continual improvement of institutional quality processes, monitoring student progress, and harmony between the aims of degree programmes and student achievements; the status of the AC and its financing should be given further consideration, as should be the relation between the AC and the higher education institutions, and between the AC and the Ministry, especially concerning potential conflicts of interest of the Commission's members impacting on the independence of the Commission procedures.

Helena ebkova, in the chapter entitled *The European Standards and Guidelines in Quality Assurance Mechanisms in the Czech Republic*, locates the expertise of this country in the QA European culture. Evaluation of the quality of higher education institutions in line with international developments is part of the *Long-Term Plan for Educational, Scientific, Research, Development*,

Artistic and Other Creative Activities of Higher Education Institutions for 2006-2010 (Long-Term Plan). The Accreditation Commission is in charge with the accreditation process as the agency legally responsible for external quality assurance whose responsibilities are clearly defined in its founding acts in 1998. With the expenses covered from the budget of the Ministry, the AC is composed of twenty-one members appointed by the Czech government on the basis of a proposal by the Minister. To prevent conflicts of interests, the Act requires that the members of the AC should not be academic officials (p. 210).

The AC working programme includes the evaluation of private higher education institutions, faculties of public higher education institutions (the first evaluation of a whole public higher education institution was planned for the latter half of 2008) and of accredited activities provided by both public and private higher education institutions with the aim to provide recommendations for improvement (pp 207-208). The activities developed by AC can be as follows: evaluation of higher education institutions; elaboration of standpoints on applications for accreditation; elaboration of standpoints on applications for granting state permission; elaboration of standpoints on the establishment/division of faculties for setting the type of higher education institutions; preparation of documents and conceptual materials; collaboration with external partners at both national and international level; implementation of the Bologna Process principles, namely ENQA standards (p. 212).

As far as the ESG implementation is concerned, the AC's 2007 annual report states that the AC is committed to the ESG principles with a view to gaining full ENQA membership, contingent on successfully undergoing the ESG review, the granting of which entitles the AC to be included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The way in which its members are selected, and also its composition, are considered an adequate guarantee of the AC's independence from any "third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders" (ENQA, 2005) that might influence the outcomes of quality assurance processes (expert panel's conclusions and recommendations).

From the point of view of meeting the *ESG standards for quality assurance agencies*, considering that the AC is funded by the ministry from public money, not all functional needs of this institution are covered, which makes it vulnerable to meet the ESG 3.4 Standard claiming financial autonomy of assessment agencies. As far as the *Implementation of ESG Regarding External Quality Assurance* is concerned, the AC has fulfilled most standards with certain taints. Even though the elements of the external review processes correspond to the ESG 2.4. Standard, the relevant ESG principles have been implemented only partly (p. 223). Also, if the AC's regulations on publishing reports on external quality evaluation and the easy accessibility of the reports are fully in harmony with the ESG 2.5 Standard, the structure and content of the reports sometimes differ significantly, as well as their style and tone (p. 224). Although the ESG 2.7 Standard is fulfilled, however it is not possible to argue that the evaluation of accredited activities and the evaluation of institutions are dynamic and continuing processes with the cycle of the review defined in advance.

Speaking about the constraints and weaknesses of the QA system in the Czech Republic, external evaluators of the system consider that the strength of the Czech higher education quality assurance is that "it is a mature system with widespread participation among Czech academics"¹ and make a positive assessment of the AC activity "for a regular and recurring review of programmes"² To be more specific, there are two strong points of the Czech QA system: the high level transparency of the AC's procedural criteria that are publicly available on the AC's website and the international cooperation of the AC.

Out of the Czech QA system weaknesses mentioned in the OECD 2006 assessment report, we mention the following: the composition of the AC's work groups in terms of the representation of employers, students and other stakeholders is not optimal; it is criticised that the AC's judgements

¹ File, J., Weko, T., Hauptman, A., Kristensen, B. and Herlitschka, S. (2006). "Country Note: Czech Republic. OECD-Directorate for Education, Education and Training Policy Division, Thematic Review of Tertiary Education". Paris: OECD.

² Ibidem, p. 226.

are made on the basis of inputs rather than outputs, and that the accreditation process focuses mostly on personnel and material resources (i.e. input-oriented indicators such as numbers of professors, available facilities etc.), not taking into consideration “the wider scope of institutional performance such as institutional management and governance and student support services; low diversification of the Czech tertiary education system, to which the accreditation procedures currently in operation contribute (p. 227-228).

The challenges and the agenda that the AC faces can be derived from the recommendations of the OECD experts and from the AC’s self-evaluation: the activities must be more effective and create space for discussion of conceptual issues; the need for diversification of tertiary education; the consultation of the stakeholders outside of higher education in the selection of Commission members ; opportunity to facilitate the development of internal quality assurance processes; shift between accreditation of degree programmes and the accreditation of institutions; the variety of institutional approaches to internal evaluation should be considered an opportunity for the future; putting greater focus on conceptual work and policy objectives for quality assurance development along with wider consideration and/or the dissemination of examples of good practice.

Following John Brennan’s³ argument on the lack of attention paid to the institutional dimension in the body of literature on quality, and, more important, the lack of empirical evidence on implementation of the ESG at institutional level, thus pointing to a “black box” in the sense of factual knowledge of the corresponding policy processes, the last part of the book comprises two case studies from the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Czech Republic. Chapter 9 provides details on the implementation of the ESG by UWB, while Chapter 10 sets the case of UWB implementation of the ESG in the context of the university’s policy, learning from participation in three projects oriented at quality improvement.

The last chapter of the work entitled *Developing Higher Education Quality Assurance in Central and Eastern Europe: practicing the science of muddling through* written by Jan Kohuteck, Eva Pasackova, and Hana Rendlova, seeks to sum up the content of a book that sheds light on the one hand on commonalities of QA systems in Central and Eastern Europe and on the other hand on national particularities as a result of the cultural matrix differing from one country to another.

The authors also underline the evolution of the QA assessment process in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of the transition from one quality control system using instruments belonging to the centralised state to a quality assurance assessment based on democratic principles. At the beginning of the 1990s, the reform propositions offered by foreign experts were based on implicit assumptions that they had sufficient knowledge of the country’s transformation specifics, on the possibility of attaining consensus on “the quality issue”, on how it should be solved, and by what methodology. The foreign experts may have been proposing solutions of the theoretical and rational planning type: implement a system-wide regulatory measure in line with the national specifics (i.e. from the US accreditation concept, the CEE countries, as a rule, adopted only assessment against threshold standards, leading to approval/ accreditation; the misunderstandings and confusion stemming from the foreign expert’s language of theory may have made the task no easier for those muddling through the quality assurance issues in implementing newly devised quality assurance schemes in the CEE countries. This stage balances between national needs for quality assurance and misunderstandings and confusion stemming from the foreign expert that the authors of the abovementioned chapter consider *symbolic* (p. 279).

In the mid-1990s, implementation of quality assurance policy in the CEE countries changed *from symbolic to political and administrative* step: the quality assurance agencies that had been created. Minimal quality standards were settled. According to F.A. Van Vught, the implementation of these measures resulted in establishing an institutional quality compliance culture⁴. The initiation

³ Brennan, J. (1999). “Evaluation of Higher Education in Europe”. In: Henkel, M., and Little, B. (Eds.). *Changing Relationships between Higher Education and the State*. London: Jessica Kingsley

⁴ Van Vught, F. A. (Ed.). (1989). “Governmental Strategies and Innovation in Higher Education”. London: Jessica Kingsley.

of the Bologna Process agendas such as structured study has made an impact on the implementation of CEE quality assurance practices, making them increasingly time-consuming and labour intensive, due to the necessity to accredit every new degree program. It is evident that the preference in all Central and Eastern European countries for accreditation rather than quality assessment alone occurred because, at the time of transition, a priority was to establish some sort of quality control for the higher education sector (p 280).

The adoption of the ESG guidelines for quality assurance agencies, which, if fully implemented, will put the agencies under the obligation to undergo periodic external reviews and keep to accountability standards factor into the quality assurance policies of the CEE agencies, making them more “*experimental*” than ever before. The hypothesis of the authors is checked by comparing the activity of quality assurance agencies from five countries: Latvia, Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and the Czech Republic by using five variables (objectives, control, areas, procedures, uses) brought to the foreground by Perellon⁵. As a consequence of this comparison, the authors of the chapter see the primacy of the application of accountability-oriented evaluation for the accreditation/approval concept, as suggested by the agencies’ scope of activities (areas) and procedures applied (based on the general quality assurance model), and publication of results (uses) (p. 282), with slight taints referring to models in Latvia and Poland.

At the end of the article, the authors consider that “the adoption of ESG in 2005, making full ENQA membership conditional on agencies successfully undergoing the ESG review, can hardly be regarded as a supranational policy initiative of the type that blows away without making any impact at all. Followed by the elaboration of rules qualifying agencies to be listed in the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education*, based again on a review against ESG, ESG implementation is likely to have achieved a reasonably high position on the agendas of agencies whose activities centre on assuring higher education quality primarily within state or federal border” (p. 283). The same authors further state that the quality assurance agencies in Latvia, Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and the Czech Republic are generally compatible with ESG, with contextual variations reflecting the degree of embeddedness of national quality assurance practices. Although the ESG experimental implementation pattern makes room for contextual interpretations by implementing actors, it is not unreasonable to expect certain adjustments to agencies’ quality assurance practices, an opinion shared by the author of the present book review.

⁵ Perellon, J. F. 2005). “*Path Dependency and the Politics of Quality Assurance in Higher Education*”, in *Tertiary Education and Management*, 11, pp. 279–298;

References

1. Brennan, J. (1999). "Evaluation of Higher Education in Europe". In: Henkel, M., and Little, B. (Eds.). "Changing Relationships between Higher Education and the State." London: Jessica Kingsley;
2. ENQA. (2005). "The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area". Helsinki;
3. File, J., Weko, T., Hauptman, A., Kristensen, B. and Herlitschka, S. (2006). "Country Note: Czech Republic. OECD – Directorate for Education, Education and Training Policy Division, Thematic Review of Tertiary Education". Paris: OECD;
4. Kohoutek J. (2009), "Implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Central and East-European Countries, – Agenda Ahead", UNESCO-CEPES, Studies on Higher Education, Bucharest;
5. Perellon, J. F. (2005). "Path Dependency and the Politics of Quality Assurance in Higher Education", in *Tertiary Education and Management*, 11, pp. 279-298;
6. Schwarz, S. and Westerheijden, D.F. (Eds.). (2004b). "Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area". Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
7. Vlăsceanu, L., Grünberg, L. and Pârlea, D. (2007). "Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions". Retrieved on 5 July 2008, from: <<http://www.cepes.ro/publications/pdf/QA&A%20Glossary.pdf>>;
8. Van Vught, F.A. (Ed.). (1989). "Governmental Strategies and Innovation in Higher Education". London: Jessica Kingsley.