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Entre la utopía tecnocrática y la colegialidad académica: aseguramiento interno de la calidad en universidades chilenas
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Summary

The massification of higher education, combined with globalisation and changes in the organisations of contemporary society, has altered the relationship between states and universities. The desire to achieve the benefits provided by university education has grown, and therefore higher education institutions are required to be more transparent, accountable, and socially responsible. Along with these phenomena, there are discussions about the technological irruption, financing, and sustainability of the higher education system, as well as the opportunities for student access, progress, and graduation. There is also an increase in private higher education institutions, which are more susceptible to market fluctuations, and the student population is becoming progressively more diverse.

The impact of these changes tends to reformulate the governance of universities, creating a new, more technocratic social order, which distances them from the traditional academic organisation. From this emerges a rationalised university that has changed the role of academics, ousting them from the main position they occupied in the formulation and evaluation of higher education policies. Universities become decisive entities for the state, civil society, and markets. Consequent phenomena are the loss of academic collegiality within universities, the accelerated fragmentation of knowledge, and the deprofessionalization of teaching. Therefore, the quality of universities and their programmes became a central, public, and socially shared concern.

Until the 1980s, higher education institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom were the only ones in the world with an established tradition in the development of quality assurance systems. In contrast, most higher education systems elsewhere evolved without formal external quality assurance mechanisms until the 1990s. Since then, following the Anglo-Saxon example and its good performance indicators, quality assurance systems have been established in almost all countries, acquiring different approaches, purposes, degrees of formality, procedures, and instruments. In the specialised literature, there is a variety and growing complexity of definitions of quality, which, without theoretical consensus, gives rise to different approaches to quality assurance.

There are two types of quality assurance systems in higher education, closely related, that seek to respond to the demands of the global and changing agenda. External Quality Assurance Systems (EQAS), which are those established at the national or supranational level to safeguard the suitability of the certificates conferred by universities. In general, they make use of accreditation processes to carry out their mission. Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS) refer to the second type and are those designed by the universities themselves. They correspond to internal review processes, carried out within the institutions for their own purposes.

For approximately two decades, the forms of the EQASs have been questioned, although paradoxically, public policy has given them a predominant place so that institutions can demonstrate responsibility and accountability to society. They are criticised from different perspectives: for encouraging rankings and the standardisation of universities that are diverse; for generating ceremonial behaviour to show that external regulations are complied with; for

producing academic resistance and fatigue due to the bureaucratic work they demand, among others. Invariably, when governments regulate any aspect of higher education (frequently in a changing environment), this leads to some modification that forces universities to generate responses. These new demands put the institution under stress, especially when they involve routines that take professors away from actual academic work.

To advance in quality and undo or attenuate the difficulties mentioned above, national, and supranational quality agencies have indicated to universities that they should not be passive recipients of the controls and demands of the EQASs. Therefore, they are encouraged to assume their own responsibility for quality as active contributors to a task that is their own. Thus, the IQASs originate with different degrees of formality. Currently, in several countries, the development of IQASs is required by their respective EQASs. In Europe, this trend began in 2005 as part of the Bologna process. In Chile, this requirement is recent and was enforced by the last higher education reform of 2018. Despite the increase in IQASs, it is debatable whether they can per se contribute to institutional improvement without being perceived as a new bureaucratic device. Similarly, whether they contribute to improving student training and to developing an internal culture of quality, as is often proclaimed by national or supranational agencies. It is also noted that both EQASs and IQASs affect academic cultures by introducing behaviours and values that are alien to the commitment and academic mission of universities. The variety and dissonance of expectations with respect to these systems generate questions for which there are no single answers. It is necessary to dive into specific cases and university contexts where the configuration of IQASs occurs.

The Chilean higher education system has particularities that affect the adoption and deployment of IQAS. It is made up of 147 tertiary institutions, most of which were created since the 1980s. Of these, 55 are universities, of which 18 are state-owned and the rest are private. Most of university enrolment is concentrated in private institutions that participate in a broad and segmented higher education market of great dynamism and until recently insufficiently regulated. The reform, currently under implementation, seeks to channelise this institutional diversity and protect its development according to quality standards and the public interest.

This study explores the impact of EQASs on the configuration of IQASs according to the international literature. It analyses and compares the dynamics and relationship between EQA and IQA models, specifically those from Europe and the Asia Pacific, where more research is being done is being done on this subject. Then, it delves into the IQASs that are beginning to occupy a relevant place in the Chilean university scenario. The study of internal quality assurance models and of the academic quality cultures in which they operate allows us to address the central question of this thesis: how a university's academic quality culture is affected when its IQAS is configured and institutionalised. In relation to this, how universities themselves can critically analyse their IQASs and guide their potential for better teaching and training.

Most studies on quality assurance policies and systems approach the phenomenon from the perspective of EQAS and their quality management procedures. This paper, on the other hand, analyses and discusses IQASs from the perspective of a cultural approach. The conceptual framework adopts a perspective of analysis based on the practical and symbolic aspects of

quality. On the one hand, it includes the quality approach documented in the literature of higher education studies, whose findings are characteristic of academic microcultures of universities. On the other hand, it also includes an approach to a culture of quality that has been integrated as part of the university itself, positioned and subjectively compatible with the academic profession. Conceptually, a culture of quality has transformational characteristics and is related to student education, thus clearly different from a focus on quality as accountability, which requires bureaucratic processes normally encouraged by EQASs.

The fieldwork for this qualitative study is based on three Chilean universities: a state university, a dependent private university, and an independent private university. The three are in different parts of the national territory but are similar in size in terms of enrolment and academic body, as well as being accredited at similar advanced levels according to the national accrediting agency. All of them have a trajectory of approximately 40 years. During 2021, a total of 40 semi-structured interviews, each lasting about one hour, were conducted with authorities and professors from different disciplines. They enquired about the reception and adaptation to the reform, the new EQAS, and its requirement to configure an IQAS in each university. Four vice-rectors were interviewed (two academic vice-rectors from the two private universities; one academic vice-rector for undergraduate and one for graduate studies from the state university); six deans from different disciplines (two from each university); three directors of quality assurance (pertaining to each university); three teaching directors (one from each university); 12 directors of undergraduate and graduate programmes (4 from each university) and 12 full-time professors with no other positions (4 from each university).

Chapter 1 studies the quality assurance models in the field of higher education and their changing aspects. There is abundant literature on EQASs and less on IQASs, although they are closely interrelated. For them to stimulate the development of a quality culture, they need to align their demands with institutional beliefs and values. Many studies draw attention to the symbolic perspective of organisations, which is systematically underestimated in the case of higher education institutions. In general, it is not considered a determining factor for self-identification, social cohesion, and commitment, all decisive variables of an authentic quality culture.

An in-depth comparative review makes it possible to identify three types of IQAS configurations, depending on the impact of external policy on these systems. First, the United Kingdom is a case where there is a strong external influence, guided by New Public Management (NPM), in organisational remodelling. On the other hand, there are dissimilar cases of internal alignment. Taiwan is one of them, with the implementation of self-accreditation processes driving the creation of IQA and the adoption of a managerial perspective to achieve EQA standards. Another example is that of academic groups or microcultures that stand out for their quality work and whose IQASs respond to the intrinsic motivations of each institution. The European League of Research Universities (LERU) agrees with this vision and is, therefore, critical of instrumentalist public quality assurance policies. The third dynamic attempts to balance the above external and internal perspectives. Such is the case of the European Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), which encourages the design of IQASs that meet the required standards, while at the same time being coherent with the institutional culture in which they are developed.

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), agreed upon by the Association of European Universities (EUA), reflect the dual purpose of this "soft law".

The conceptual framework that concludes the first chapter identifies external and internal factors that help characterise the context of the university organisation, its academic culture, and the configuration of its IQASs. External factors refer to the regime of regulations to which institutions must subject themselves. External regulations are necessary to communicate trust to society and build institutional legitimacy. The risk is that universities will develop a culture of mere compliance, rather than a greater capacity for self-regulation and improvement, as theoretically expected of a transformative IQAS.

Internal factors are addressed from an integrated cultural perspective that identifies the character of the university from its genesis, actors, and crucial moments. Institutional and academic autonomy; the organisational structure of the contemporary university; academic leadership are some of these internal factors that contribute to, or inhibit, the configuration of IQASs coherent with the institutional academic culture. Complementarily, a typology is used to illustrate in a simplified way the cultural construction of quality in universities. It combines degrees of group control with the intensity of external rules, resulting in types of institutional responses to investigate how organisational structure and academic culture combine in different IQASs. Finally, the conceptual framework proposes three variables of academic quality culture as an analytical lens to argue about the distance between this culture and the configuration of IQASs: social integration, academic collegiality, and meaning construction.

Chapter 2 reviews the slow and progressive changes of the IQAS in the history of Chilean higher education. In Chile, towards the end of the nineteenth century, and then during most of the twentieth century, what we now call "quality assurance" resided mainly within the institutions. Professors were their main guardians and enjoyed autonomy in their work. They joined a faculty early on, making a kind of collegial control possible and lowering the risk of becoming a deregulated monopoly.

The first state university, the Universidad de Chile (1843), was endowed with a relevant mission, and serious efforts were made to adapt it to the Chilean reality: far from the world and without academic tradition, but with leaders who had high expectations about its mission. Although the initial idea was to achieve a university model that was more Napoleonic in nature, the reality was that distancing teaching from academia deserved criticism in a small country with few resources. As new institutions were created, there was an incipient kind of EQA, since the exams to graduate from those universities were held by the University of Chile, which acted as a supervising body. Like what happened in other countries, these exams were the focus of dogmatic disputes, which led to new legislation in 1879 creating the Council of Public Instruction as an external quality control body for exams. State protection did not contravene academic freedom, but demanded exams to prove that sufficient learning had been carried out.

The secularisation of society, since the beginning of the 20th century, brought with it political and ideological conflicts that resulted in modifications to the original form of safeguarding quality and in new demands towards universities. However, the 1973 coup d'état abruptly

interrupted democracy and the attempt at renewal that universities had been intensely debating since 1968 and 1969. Professorship lost its autonomy and university authorities, faculty, and students were expelled in a process of ideological cleansing. The rectors were replaced by rector-delegates designated by the military regime. The "supervised university" was understood, under the military dictatorship, mainly as a matter of public order that ignored internal cohesion and replaced it with external coercive discipline.

In 1981 a new Universities Law was introduced which encouraged the entry of private providers to higher education. This resulted in a large and competitive market. Along with moderate and inorganic growth and increasing social segmentation of students according to family income, concern for quality gradually took hold, although without being translated into legal measures.

Since the 1990s, with the return to democracy, quality in education became a public policy priority. At the same time, the massification of enrolment required the addition of components of social protection and inequality correction to mitigate the effects generated by competition. A dynamic scenario emerged, with multiple opportunities to help strengthen the sector, and there was an unprecedented boom in the higher education market. However, the number of programmes increased significantly without any kind of quality assurance, enrolment growth was not planned, and the state was devoid of tools to deal with these phenomena.

Accreditation emerged as the modern solution to the problem of quality. It was understood that quality assurance was primarily dependent on the institutions themselves. To promote this, accreditation processes were piloted, leading to the legal consecration of EQAS in 2006, with the creation of the National Accreditation Commission (CNA in Spanish). It was determined that the quality of an institution or degree course should be evaluated by evaluating its level of internal and external consistency, that is, 'fitness for purpose' based on its own objectives and responsiveness to public interest and social demands. This dual perspective assumed the existence of IQA, although it was not explicitly named. The influence of EQA spread quickly and led to organisational and cultural modifications within universities. It is worth mentioning that, in both 2006 and 2011, students took to the streets demanding quality, public, and free education. Several reports drew attention to the fact that radical changes to an EQA were needed that did not meet its goals. Against this backdrop, a long and intense ideological debate on a new reform for higher education began in 2015, culminating in 2018 with a new law that updated the EQA and included IQA as an additional dimension to be accredited, all this under the premise that quality that was internally and externally consistent had been lacking.

Chapter 3 delves into the reception by universities of the higher education reform. To place the case of each university in context, an integrated cultural perspective is adopted. Then, to analyse each institutional case, a typology of quality culture is used, based on the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1.

In the case of the state university, a notion of quality that implies greater control and evaluation by authorities and administrators predominates. It visualises an integrated quality assurance system with a bureaucratic support structure, consistent with its institutional culture. There is a receptive cultural approach in the sense of seeking to comply with the state imperative and

identifying opportunities for improvement based on new external requirements. Therefore, the responses of this university involve understanding quality according to an external framework to which it is necessary to adhere, be accountable, and demonstrate compliance. This requires a properly designed organisational structure, norms, instruments, and procedures within the institution. Indeed, most of the literature on quality assurance adopts this administrative perspective: management and institutional structure must be coupled with an EQAS.

The private university with partial state funding approaches the need to adapt in a different way. Aware of external requirements, it seems to prioritise and focus its attention on its own development plan, with a centralised quality assurance unit that embraces what, in practise, they are used to doing. Its environment and leaders are, to a large extent, the driving forces behind this institutional context. Its integrated culture means that uncertainty can be dealt with in the best possible way. The cultural response of this university is more regenerative, but not exclusively. As regenerative and receptive opportunities arise, there is time for development, but the internal plan inspired by the institutional mission always takes precedence. Its cultural perspective of quality goes above and beyond management. University work seems to be impregnated with meaning, which helps nourish the institutional culture. Social integration and the interdependence of its members form a cultural framework within which changes occur.

Finally, the private independent university adopts a regenerative perspective in its approach to changes in standards, although with several reactive aspects. The context of institutional re-accreditation in which this university was involved at the time of this study has a bearing on this. As a result of external demands, it fits into an ideal type that finds new opportunities for learning and self-analysis. At the same time, it criticises new demands that are sometimes perceived as excessive or unnecessary. In general, it adopts a practical and functional approach to what is expected of it to avoid generating more bureaucracy. Adaptation is, above all, functional and depends on the agency of those who hold positions of responsibility.

In general, Chapter 3 shows that the work of institutional adjustment to the new regulatory framework has been a matter of dispute at the managerial and administrative level. Teachers, on the other hand, do not report any significant impact. Although all the universities that were examined wish to consolidate a quality culture, they proceed in different ways. The state university modifies its organisation and management; the dependent private university strives for changes that attract support; the independent private university approaches it in a more functional way.

Chapter 4 investigates the adaptation to the new regulatory environment and the configuration of IQASs. Similarities and divergences are identified between the cases of Chilean universities and with the international comparative experience. The increase in formalised IQASs, encouraged by EQASs, devised at the central national level and with some impact on university culture, seems to be a global trend. Similarly, the research confirms that the actions carried out by the authorities of the three universities are mainly aimed at responding to the EQAS. IQA configuration is dealt with in the same way but differs according to the emphasis placed either on monitoring or on the flexibility required to achieve it, its scope, and degree of faculty

participation. Likewise, leadership that alternates between transactional and transformational, which affects the design and implementation of the respective IQA.

Under the premise that an effective SIAC that promotes academic quality requires to be exercised by cohesive and collegial academic bodies, the chapter also explores the perspective of deans and professors. Having a specific type of university does not appear to influence the opinion of the respondents. The dissonance between legal compliance and academic perspective affects academic culture and risks undermining efforts to improve the quality of teaching and research. There are still collegial traditions and collective patterns of deontological norms that act as a frame of reference, even though universities have become more complex. In addition, most professors refer to committees or councils as instances of cooperation, deliberation, and decision making that have an impact on student training. Likewise, they value instances of participation and agree that to ensure quality, it is necessary to actively involve the collegiate leadership of academics. All of which presupposes a certain level of social cohesion, based on academic commitment and leadership that encourages it.

Chapter 4 ends with some dilemmas between organisational structures and academic cultures. The authorities tend to design a quality system that is visibly inserted into the organisational structure. However, most professors identify that quality assurance occurs on a day-to-day basis. They visualise the risks and advantages of SIACs according to their configuration, whether it is more bureaucratised or integrated into the collegial practises of the academic culture. In the case of the deans, they adopt a position of cooperation and harmonisation of perspectives, as they try to balance the tension produced between administrative fragmentation and academic culture.

Chapter 5 discusses and integrates the fieldwork findings considering the conceptual framework. Where possible, it contrasts them with some recent research on quality culture and IQASs. It also explores the relationship between quality culture context variables and their relationship with IQASs.

Regarding social integration as a quality variable, the level of intensity of quality culture would be determined, in large part, by the links between members of the organisation. It is not possible to monitor and evaluate this variable using the procedures used by the EQASs. This variable is continuous, requires mutually respectful peers, is not vertical or prescriptive, and is verbal and in person. Public regulations and market forces prove to be ineffective in managing complex public goods such as higher education. Therefore, to increase a culture of quality, it is necessary to collectively solve the dilemmas faced by the academy, and this presupposes commitment and social integration.

Collegiality as a second variable of quality culture correlates with social cohesion in the organisational and cultural context of universities. The Humboldtians' conditions of academic work continue to be desired by the academic tradition. Likewise, what characterises the social context that makes cohesion and collegiality possible is not the absence of conflicts, but the type of relationships that individuals establish to work together. It is reasonable to propose the adoption of a renewed collegial format for Chilean universities with self-governing capacity that

brings back responsibility to academic communities. Exercise of collegiality guarantees quality through respect for the criteria and values agreed upon and assumed by those engaged in teaching and research. According to the findings of this study, collegiality continues to be present, but within increasingly bureaucratised university environments. This study proposes assuming a change of context, giving a new meaning to the collegiality that survives within the academic body. The combined co-existence of these two approaches (collegiality and bureaucracy) - and the dynamic that exists between them - means that a new social order can be discerned. This is progressively more complex, managerial, and technocratic but, at the same time, is collegiality-based among expert peers at different levels of organisation.

Closely related to social cohesion and collegiality, the construction of meanings as a third variable of quality improves the significance of academic work. If the aim is to institutionalise a transformative IQAS, it must necessarily be discussed and agreed upon with the academic body, so that it adheres and gives it backing. If the aim is only to comply with the new EQAS criteria and standards, then a ceremonial IQAS could be sufficient, under the wing of an ad hoc administrative unit. In practise, universities pursue both objectives with respect to IQASs. Thus, internal arrangements move on a continuum between a transformational and an administrative compliance pole.

In conclusion, from a public policy perspective, the challenge in terms of quality assurance is to balance the regulatory function of the State with processes that are adjusted and relevant to the university institution. Certainly, market instruments are insufficient, while self-regulation can generate a lenient application of quality standards. It is not easy to adequately balance these dynamics, but it is it feasible to eliminate them.

The strengthening of a culture of academic quality and the configuration of IQA correspond to different processes, and neither is a consequence of the other. The first is related to accountability and responsibility procedures; the second is related to the critical commitment of academics to continuously improve their work. Therefore, the quality culture is not achieved through the design of a formalised IQAS. However, the similarity between the two is that there is no ideal model for either and neither does it develop in a linear, uniform, and irreversible manner. Both have acquired global relevance. Quality culture, as an aspiration; IQAS, as a new dimension of evaluation whose fulfilment may (or may not) correspond to quality culture.

The Chilean experience, although distinctive, resembles other European cases in that the enforcement of an IQAS does not seem to have introduced (yet) any essential cultural or cognitive change in the institutions. Rather, it has led to a situation where regulation needed to be formally renewed or appear to be. This indicates that the IQA institutionalisation process is in its infancy in Chile and that practises, including academic traditions, were already present. In all, if renewing quality assurance - by demanding IQA - is confined to introducing formally approved standards, manuals, or policies that do not contradict academic practises and culture, then this reinforces the findings that the backbone of an internal guarantee of quality continues to be the academic body.

Delving into the contemporary scope of the Humboldtian collegial tradition allows us to understand and appreciate the transformative power of academic work. Discussions about quality assurance in Chilean universities are fed by this sort of historical sounding board. However, this possibility of resignifying collegiality can be diminished or strengthened according to the political arrangements and organisational structure of the universities. Institutions are at precisely this crossroad. Techno-bureaucratic models are limited in their capacity to preserve or deepen social cohesion, collegiality, and the construction of meanings. It is necessary to assume that both models of coordination, collegial and bureaucratic, must be regulated together.

The results of this study provide an analytical focus that helps to better understand academic organisation, as well as investigate the proximity or distance of (developing) IQA to institutional quality cultures at Chilean universities. Likewise, it considers to what extent evolving IQASs are based on compliance or transformation. Possibly, neither the State nor the market takes into account these dimensions of quality culture, although they are a necessary component for the renewal of universities.