



2011 INQAAHE CONFERENCE

INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT AND EDUCATIONAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN UNIVERSITIES

A case study of Argentine private universities

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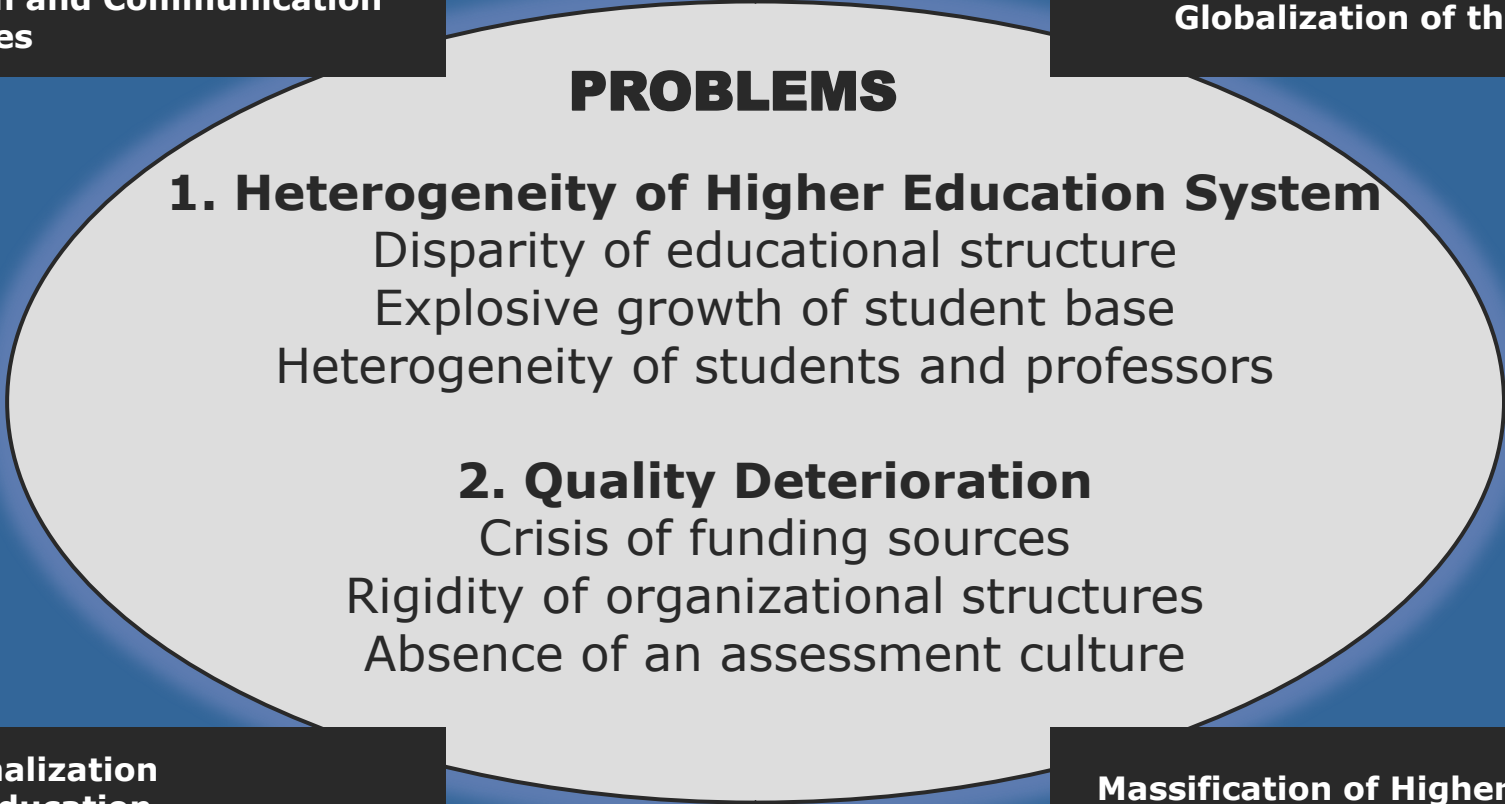
PURPOSE OF STUDY

Study the changes introduced in the educational quality of privately-managed Argentine universities as a result of the institutional assessment process.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Information and Communication Technologies

Globalization of the Economy



Internationalization of Higher Education

Massification of Higher Education

**THEORETICAL
FRAMEWORK**

Socio-historical and contextual approach

Internalist approach

Cultural-institutional approach

FIRST NOTION

Socio-Historical and Contextual Approach

The challenges of the national and international context have raised the need for Argentine universities to address a functional and organizational transformation, in terms of both competitiveness and quality.

SECOND NOTION

Internalist Approach

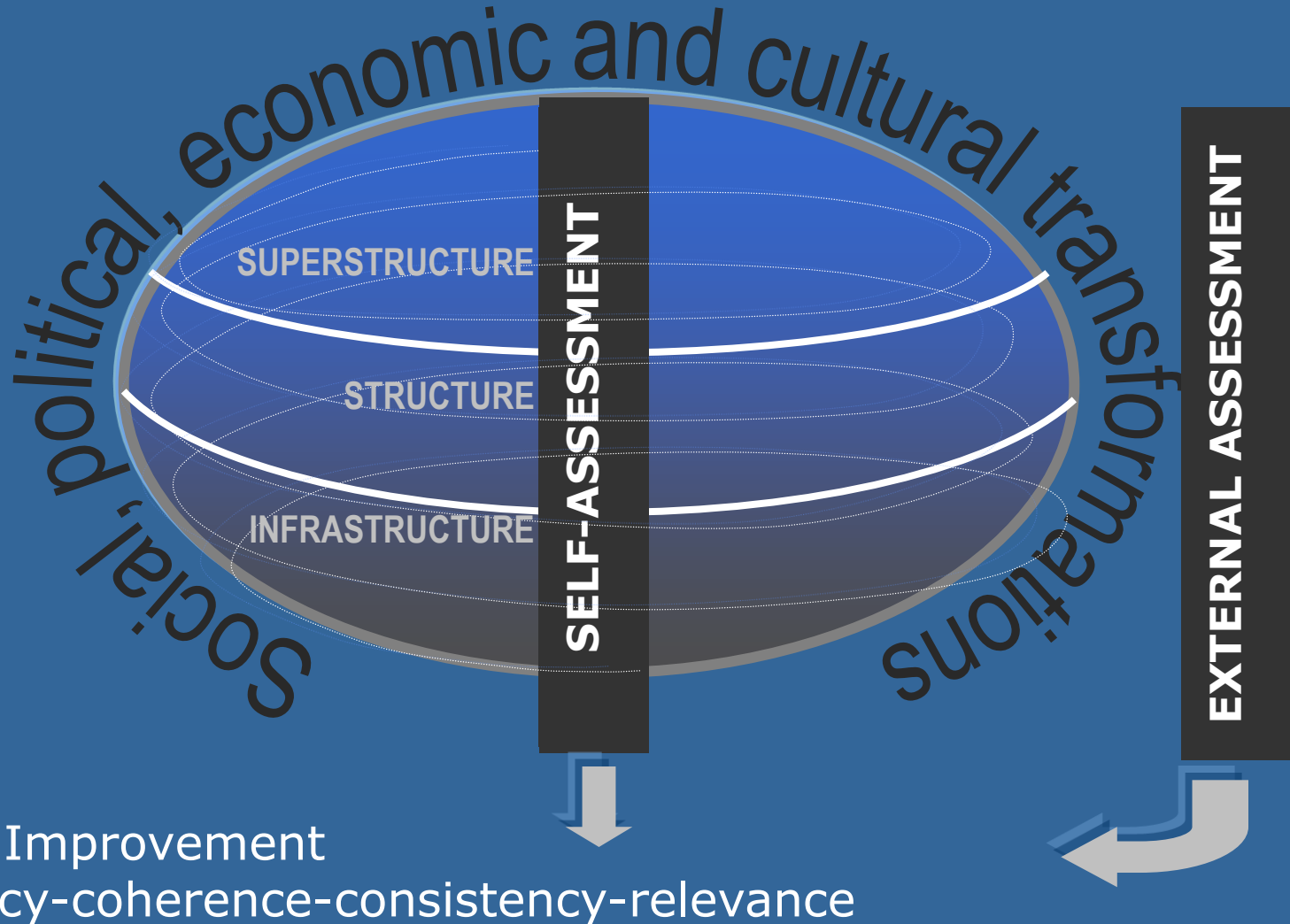
Change in educational quality results from a trade-off between external changes and requirements, and the institutional values, standards and practices rooted in institutional interactions.

THIRD NOTION

Cultural-Institutional Approach

Universities uphold ritualized practices that can be modified upon the realization of the changing circumstances of the environment that distress “the logic of appropriateness” or affect the fulfillment of the goals set.

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT



METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

TYPE OF APPROACH

- Qualitative
- Comparative case study
- **Data gathering techniques**
 - Document analysis
 - In-depth interviews

CASE STUDY SELECTION CRITERIA

- Privately-managed institution
- Established since the 90's
- At least one institutional assessment process completed
- Located in the metropolitan region
- Diversified academic offer
- Size: large (more than 10,000 students); midsize (9,999 to 3,000); small (fewer than 2,999)
- University model (Levy, 1986): demand-absorbing/elite/confessional

CASE STUDIES SELECTED

UNIVERSITY	DATE ESTABLISHED	EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT	LOCATION	SIZE	UNIVERSITY MODEL	ACADEMIC STRUCTURE
1	1991	2006	Buenos Aires City	Small	Elite	4 departments and 3 schools
2	1991	2003	Buenos Aires City	Large	Demand-absorbing	6 faculties
3	1991	2000	Buenos Aires City	Midsize	Elite. Confessional	5 faculties, 2 institutes and 1 school

**INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
STRUCTURES**

1 – Building qualitative matrices for structural dimensions of the university:

- Weaknesses and / or areas for improvement (documentary analysis of self-assessment and external assessment reports and interviews with university presidents).
- Organizational changes implemented, analyzed based on adequacy, coherence, consistency and relevance criteria (documentary analysis comparisons and interviews).

**2 – Comparative Summary
Comparative summary and unified diagnosis.**

FINDINGS

Institutional weaknesses at the superstructure, structure and infrastructure of universities

DIMENSION: SUPERSTRUCTURE

The rigid academic org chart of universities affects professors' engagement in the academic life of the institution.

	LARGE AND MIDSIZE UNIVERSITY	SMALL UNIVERSITY
Problems identified:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional structure with faculties: affects integrated work - Discipline territoriality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being a research-led (<i>bottom heavy</i>) university, 80% of professors are visiting professors and do not stand chances to participate in management spheres, which conditions their feeling of belonging and engagement.
Change Statement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Horizontal departmentalization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the percentage of regular professors and researchers.
New Improvement Strategies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unifying teaching criteria and managing the articulation among subjects common to all degree programs. - Horizontal committees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of institutional standards.

FINDINGS

Institutional weaknesses at the superstructure, structure and infrastructure of universities

DIMENSION: STRUCTURE

Absence of a policy to encourage institutional engagement in social development through social responsibility and university outreach programs.

	LARGE AND MIDSIZE UNIVERSITY	SMALL UNIVERSITY
Institutional Project:	<i>"Promote equity and social inclusion through community actions."</i>	<i>"Favor equal opportunities among students of different social strata."</i>
Results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community-oriented activities led by market demand: training and education courses, graduate degrees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social selection of students from socially privileged sectors. - Scarce financing support given to students from low-income sectors.

FINDINGS

Institutional weaknesses at the superstructure, structure and infrastructure of universities

DIMENSION: INFRASTRUCTURE

Scarce research funding, mainly coming from tuition fees paid by students.

	LARGE AND MIDSIZE UNIVERSITY	SMALL UNIVERSITY
Change stated:	Hiring new researchers.	
Findings	<p>Significant increase in the number of research projects.</p> <p>20% of academic staff is categorized as researcher.</p>	<p>“Research-led” (bottom-heavy) university.</p> <p>5% of academic staff is categorized as researcher.</p>

FINDINGS

Types of organizational changes introduced in the Universities analyzed based on the criteria of adequacy, coherence, consistency and relevance

TABLE 1: Types of organizational changes associated with the adequacy criterion (development trends and ability for change the institution has had over its academic history to adjust to its historical and present context).

Type of Organizational Change, based on Brunner & Nogueira's classification (1999)	Findings	Comments
<i>Changes driven by modifications in context and by university management.</i>	Growth in the student base to meet higher market demand. Diversification of the undergraduate academic offer. Increase in the graduate offer. Offer of education and training programs and courses for third-parties from government and industry. Pragmatic adjustment to government-required assessment and accreditation processes.	In the three cases, these findings are explained in the interviews as a response to demand from the local and national environment.

FINDINGS

Types of organizational changes introduced in the Universities analyzed based on the criteria of adequacy, coherence, consistency and relevance

TABLE 2: Types of organizational changes associated with the criterion of coherence (the relationship existing among the elements that make up each institutional dimension and across dimensions).

Type of Organizational Change, based on Brunner & Nogueira's classification (1999)	Findings	Comments
<i>Changes driven by University management and governmental structures</i>	<p>Implementation of horizontal articulation mechanisms across the various academic units.</p> <p>Establishment of committees made up by professors and experts for the review and update of syllabuses in line with social demands.</p> <p>Increase in the dedication of professors to carry out community outreach and research activities.</p> <p>Increase in research production.</p>	<p>These findings occur mostly due to acceptance / adoption by the institution of the suggestions proposed in external assessment reports and compliance with the standards required for the accreditation of degree programs, as can be inferred from the results of university president interviews.</p>

FINDINGS

Types of organizational changes introduced in the Universities analyzed based on the criteria of adequacy, coherence, consistency and relevance

TABLE 3: Types of organizational changes relating to the criterion of consistency (stability, process duration and soundness, and institutional actions).

Type of Organizational Change, based on Brunner & Nogueira's classification (1999)	Findings	Comments
<i>Changes driven by University management</i>	<p>Objectives or actions oriented to promote institutional engagement of the academic body:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Humanistic training program for professors (midsize university) - Full-time dedication for researchers (small university) - Discussion and reflection workshops and institutional values (large university) 	<p>These findings reflect the passion and identity with which Presidents have sustained and defended the institution's core set of beliefs.</p>

FINDINGS

Types of organizational changes introduced in the Universities analyzed based on the criteria of adequacy, coherence, consistency and relevance

TABLE 4: Types of organizational changes relating to the criterion of relevance (the relationship between institutional findings and the institutional project).

Type of Organizational Change, based on Brunner & Nogueira's classification (1999)	Findings	Comments
<i>Changes driven by University management and government structures</i>	At this point, no effective changes are observed, but rather, "expository changes towards improvement," (Corengia, 2010) associated with reducing the rigidity of the academic organization and to raise participation of professors in the academic life of the University	

DISCUSSION

- 1 From the perspective of university presidents, the validity of institutional assessment is recognized, though they admit that assessment is performed only when it is a government requirement:** position of *pragmatic adoption* based on the need to meet legal requirements (Camou; 2007).
- 2 An analysis of the organizational changes identified leads to the conclusion that they cannot be considered in a linear fashion as a one-to-one or cause-and-effect correlation of institutional assessment processes.** The study has found organizational changes resulting from modifications in the context; changes driven by the authorities to strengthen university values and beliefs, or triggered by "*the logic of appropriateness*," following the principle of normative neo institutionalism (March & Olsen, 1984), and changes arising from the institutional assessment process and associated with institutional development (improving graduate training of professors and increasing teaching hours, developing academic training programs, updating syllabuses, increasing research).
- 3 Accreditation processes for undergraduate and graduate degrees required by the Government have had a relevant impact, leading universities to accelerate quality improvement processes,** resulting in the hiring of professors and researchers, infrastructure improvements, curriculum redesign and other aspects, with the aim to ensure the survival of the program or at least its qualification under established assessment standards. The importance of these processes overshadows the possibility to establish a more linear or straightforward relationship between institutional assessment processes and the quality improvements implemented.