Governing by Evaluation: Setting the Scene

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Abstract   This introductory chapter starts by outlining the aim of the book: to analyse and discuss the interplay between governing, evaluation and knowledge with an empirical focus on Swedish higher education. It then goes on to locate this aim and the intended contribution within the wider research context and in previous studies. The chapter also highlights some important national traits of the Swedish case and Swedish higher education policy development, before presenting the overall conceptual frame employed in the book and the project it builds on. Finally, an outline of the forthcoming chapters is provided.

Introduction

In this book, we address and problematise issues of how, where and why evaluation and quality assurance reforms are shaped, legitimised and enacted in the context of higher education. More specifically, the aim is to analyse and discuss the interplay between governing, evaluation and knowledge, with an empirical focus on Swedish higher education. We are interested in the pivotal role of knowledge as a governing resource, and we seek to highlight the particular features of evaluation as a practice that makes knowledge work for governing.

We draw on extensive empirical studies and findings from the project *Governing by evaluation in Swedish higher education* 2013–2018, in which we sought to understand the governing-evaluation-knowledge problem, by focusing on international and national contextual and political frames underlying recent evaluation and quality assurance reforms in higher education. We also sought to understand the

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enactments of these reforms in Swedish higher education institutions and in the responsible national evaluation agencies. While working with our project, we found that the term *nexus* captured much of our research ambition and understandings of these relationships. Hence, the use of *nexus* in the title of the book refers to both the meaning "connection, link" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary n.d.), and to the older, Latin meaning "the act of binding together" (Wiktionary n.d.), or "a binding together" (Oxford Dictionaries n.d.). Throughout this book, we use the development of evaluation and quality assurance (EQA) systems in Swedish higher education to explore and analyse how governing, evaluation and knowledge are connected and bound together, in the activities of policy travel and brokering, decision-making, media coverage, design, enactment, translation and by assumptions and conceptions of quality.

We recognise the intimate connection between geographical space and time and the need to acknowledge how the patchwork of higher education governance varies across (and within) nations. Paraphrasing Massey (2013), we could imagine ourselves taking a train across the international higher education landscape. Despite transnational influences and modes of governing, we would be "cutting across a myriad of stories going on". Massey's allegory identifies the higher education landscape as "a pincushion of a million stories", and Sweden offers a particular national framework for particular stories. Sweden was the first European country to create a unified mass higher education system in the 1960s and 1970s (Neave 1998). Based on modernist ideas of reform through social engineering (Larsson et al. 2012a), forms of evaluation that aimed at improving the system were developed and set up as a direct response to this development. From the outset, governing work depended on knowledge and expertise and used evaluation as a specific kind of knowledge-based form of enactment of governing. We might even say that epistemic governance and Sweden is an old affaire de Coeur. So, whereas the general utopian ideas of using evaluation for purposes of improvement have remained intact, the welfare state in Sweden has undergone dramatic changes, as has the higher education system and the modes of governing the system by evaluation. Such forms of historical continuities have inspired Swedish scholars to challenge the orthodoxies of the governance narrative and develop more context-sensitive descriptions in terms of, for example, a shift from social engineering to "advanced liberal engineering" with emphasis on the important role of regulatory apparatuses involving "standardisation, monitoring, auditing and evaluation" (Thörn and Larsson 2012, p. 263). At the same time, Sweden shares a dominant rationale for contemporary governing based on modernity with most countries in Europe and beyond. That is, the rationale governing by objectives/goals and results/outcomes, which in turn requires feedback mechanisms like evaluation (Therborn 1995).

The particular contemporary Swedish history, the specific continuities, displacements and breaks, makes it highly informative to zoom in on the Swedish case in order to explore the role of evaluation in governing higher education. As such, the book is a contribution to understanding governing that actively works with transnational developments and interrogates them through detailed and specific national, local and institutional exploration. Illustrations from a specific national case may

also help other researchers to identify specificities and thus to contribute to scholarship that acknowledges globalising and transnational developments but pays attention to translation in a particular context.

Research Context and Project Contributions

In Europe and beyond, higher education has increasingly been targeted by political initiatives aimed at intensifying the societal and economic benefit from this sector (Shattock 2014), and researchers have been attracted to studying these developments more closely. Common observations from a vast number of studies point to the expansion or massification in terms of the number of students; the changed relations between the State and higher education; the importance of internationalisation/globalisation; transnational governance; mergers of higher education institutions; a move towards market-oriented policies – including commodification and increased media relations; the adoption of new public management in higher education institutions' (HEIs') internal governance structures; the relation between academic freedom and institutional autonomy; and the shift to performance-based funding (e.g. Olssen and Peters 2005; Gornitzka et al. 2007a; Herbst 2009; Schuetze et al. 2012; Sultana 2012; Rider et al. 2013; Goodman et al. 2013; Shattock 2014; Cai et al. 2016; Fumasoli et al. 2017). In the European context, the significance of a common degree structure and of outcome-based learning objectives and standards (e.g. Brøgger 2018; Normand 2016) are also recurrently observed. There is indeed a rich literature covering different aspects of EQA in higher education in the wake of the developments described above. Such studies include, for instance, systemic and structural aspects of these relationships, issues pertaining to design selection and implementation of quality assurance activities and tools, as well as critical analysis of quality assurance as regulation and occupation (c.f. Travers 2007; Westerheijden et al. 2007; Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker 2010; Paradeise and Thoenig 2013; Rosa and Amaral 2014; Enders and Westerheijden 2014; Jarvis 2014; Leiber et al. 2015; Beerkens 2015; Brady and Bates 2016; Toots and Kalev 2016, to give a few examples from the last decade). However, such studies have rarely dealt with the Swedish case. In fact, with a few exceptions, research in Swedish higher education (c.f Geshwind and Forsberg 2015; Wedlin 2011; Wedlin et al. 2017) have seldom explicitly targeted EQA practices (c.f. Gröjer 2004; Karlsson et al. 2014; Lindgren 2012; Kettis and Lindberg-Sand 2013). By this book, we seek to add to this literature, by focussing on different facets and the interplay of and between knowledge, evaluation and governing in higher education.

As a point of departure, we suggest that contemporary transformations in higher education governance reflect moves of simultaneous deregulation, decentralisation and self-governing on the one hand *and* reregulation and centralisation on the other. Inherent in these activities is the dilemma of balancing (external) control/accountability and support (House 1993; Karlsson Vestman 2011) in education governance and evaluation, as also noted in research on global and European education policy

(Ozga and Lingard 2006). In the words of Campano, "These complex, often contradictory governance shifts in higher education represent a process that could be of considerable interest, were it included in the broader debate on 'governance' that has emerged over the last 15 years in the social sciences" (2011, p. 1622). Not only do these transformations of higher education concern governance shifts and tensions, but they also incorporate different actors and work processes as well as the emergence of the so-called intermediary bodies (Neave 1998). Furthermore, the transformations encompass ideas of what higher education (or a university) is and should be (Karlsohn 2016). Here one of the key ideas in the book emerges, namely, that governance may transform social realities in profound ways.

Different means are used in these political endeavours and balancing acts, and in this volume, we have deliberately concentrated on exploring EQA systems as part of these governing efforts. We find that much of the transformations noted in contemporary research on higher education are in fact visible in (national/state/regional) EQA systems. Such systems are themselves subjects for reforms, policies and political decision-making, in how they best are designed, implemented and practised (e.g. Salter and Tapper 2000; Danø and Stensaker 2007). They may therefore capture governing ambitions, moves and tensions, as well as the extensive policy work and enactments by different actors involved in these processes in diverse institutional settings.

Governing by evaluation in higher education always presupposes and involves different forms of knowledge. Firstly, evaluations themselves are based on particular epistemologies and choices regarding methodological designs, and their concrete enactment involves practical forms of know-how. Moreover, such evaluations also necessitate some knowledge about the real world of higher education systems, including the formal laws and soft rules that HEIs – and evaluations for that matter – must adhere to.

Fuelled by efforts manifested in the Bologna Process and the formation of the European Higher Education Area, organisations such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and their *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)* (2015) are increasingly influential in governing higher education across nations and systems (Enders and Westerheijden 2014). These policy developments also carry potential (re)locations of power and relationships, in which national systems and higher education institutions are navigating their roles and functions (Lingard and Rawolle 2011).

We argue that Sweden is a particularly productive site for examining the complexities of governing higher education in the context of EQA. Several national reforms have been implemented over the last three decades (see the section on the Swedish case), producing certain governing tensions, reflecting moves of the simultaneous deregulation and decentralisation of self-governing on the one hand and reregulation on the other, manifested in:

(i) Problems of balancing control/accountability and development/enhancement (learning).

(ii) Challenging international-national-local institutional relationships, for instance, in the exclusion of the Swedish national agency as a member of the strong policy organisation the ENQA.

(iii) An almost 2-year-long period in which no reform decision of a new national EQA system was taken, but tensions were intended to be restrained.

These particular circumstances formed a unique opportunity to study the contemporary relations between governing, evaluation and knowledge in higher education and its local institutional, national and international (European) policies and practices. In taking this approach, our research reported in this book:

(a) Provides insights into the power of European policy flows and activities concerning EQA in higher education and their national and institutional enactments. We see that the interrelatedness of European and national policy activities, paired with a specific national reform situation produced a powerful governing context, in which higher education institutions have to act on and reconcile various internal and external demands and conceptions of quality in higher education.

(b) Contributes understandings of governing by evaluation at a point in time when one national EQA system was terminated, but the content and design of the new system that was to replace it was pending for almost 2 years. Previously, the systems followed one another without interludes, and this temporary halt was a new situation for the higher education sector. By studying national politics and policy processes in this "interval" between two major quality assurance reforms and by analysing how higher education institutions responded to and handled national and international policy signals, we show how governing is "done" when a national reform is expected but not yet decided.

(c) Generates findings from a particular research design (see the Appendix) in which the evaluators and the evaluated were studied in parallel, facilitating a holistic view of external evaluation processes. This design gave us knowledge of how certain governing signals in the evaluation processes are enacted in the work of higher education institutions. As will be shown, this enactment varies and is infused by local institutional contexts, knowledges and experiences.

(d) Provides knowledge from the rare opportunity to study national EQA reform "in the making" and its short-term influence on education policy and practice in real time. The design allowed us to study how the policy for a new national EQA system is made and put into practice in the Swedish higher education system as the events unfolded. This gave us knowledge of, for instance, the stress put on European policy, the importance of actors' conceptions of quality in higher education, of what types of knowledge are required to translate policy into practice, to examine, measure and assess quality, and hence make knowledge work for governing in evaluation processes.

Furthermore, the book offers opportunities for comparisons to Sweden for nations that may share some of the particular characteristics of the Swedish case, in order to gain collective insights, understandings and knowledge about the

contemporary governing of higher education and how evaluation, quality assurance and knowledge are inextricable parts of this. The book contributes to descriptions and analysis of how evaluation expands over time and reaches out and involves an increasing number of actors and activities at different levels, nationally and internationally, in the governing of higher education. Therefore, the book also responds to the ambition expressed by Furubo and Stame (2019): to provide "a critical view" of evaluation, scrutinising it within a wider societal context, something not done that often. As called for by scholars from different research perspectives, the book offers an illumination of the relationship between the construction of policy and practice in higher education (Wedlin 2011, pp. 46–47) or what Gornitzka et al. (2007b, p. 13) identified as "[a] need to find ways of looking at the relationship between policies and practices in higher education". From our rich empirical material, we also describe in some detail "the missing link", that is, what happens with political signals and decisions in the everyday practice of higher education. We draw on our empirical work to illustrate and problematise different aspects and facets of the relations between governing, evaluation and knowledge in the context of Swedish higher education.

In the remainder of this chapter, we describe the case of Sweden and some general features of higher education governance. We also note the significance of the Bologna Process and the subsequent policy and governing work in the reshaping of the higher education system during the last decades. We then discuss the conceptual triad that is located at the core of our research interest, namely, governing, knowledge and evaluation. The chapter ends by introducing the forthcoming chapters.

The Swedish Case

Although rather large in geographical terms, Sweden, with its approximately 10.2 million inhabitants, is not a big country in population. During a major part of the 1900s, it was a rather homogenous country in that it had a protestant state church, Swedish as administrative and major language, and was ruled for more than four decades by the Social Democratic party (1932–1976). Politically, Sweden is known for the Social Democratic party's control of the economy by central planning, along with corporatist arrangements (c.f. Rothstein 1992). The famous so-called *Saltsjöbaden* spirit (Larsson et al. 2012b, p. 16–17) came out of an agreement in 1938 between the workers' union and the employers' organisation. The agreement stipulated that the labour market should not be subject to regulations by the government. Instead, labour market issues should be handled by the different labour market actors in consensus-seeking processes without interference of the government. Another signifying trait of the Swedish post-war state was of course its social welfare expansion and growth. Swedish welfare came to be characterised by general distribution of social welfare and high public spending in areas such as social services and insurance, health care and education. This resulted in a particular form of social democratic welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990) in which comprehensive

and publicly financed welfare were conceived as the norm. Taken together, institutional arrangements like these are argued to have built trust in the state and also gave some stability for the welfare society project, aided by a culture of consensus-seeking procedures and extensive consultations prior to reforms (Larsson et al. 2012b, p. 16–17).

From the 1930s and onwards, the development of the welfare state through centrally planned piecemeal social engineering took off (Larsson et al. 2012b, p. 16–17). Trust and social engineering are important characteristics for Sweden, and political decision-making and extensive reforms were to be based on expert knowledge (Larsson et al. 2012b, p. 12–14). Such expert knowledge was achieved through the recruitment of experts to national committees representing different interests in society. Reports from the committees were sent out to various stakeholders for consultation before political decisions were taken. This government rationale was in place more or less up until the 1980s, when the economic crisis of the 1970s put an end to the expanding welfare state with its social and educational reforms.

In general, Swedish politics, with its proportional electoral system and multi-party system, has often been seen as a culture of relative political consensus, along with willingness to cooperate and negotiate. A history of minority governments and the need for bargaining and coalitions have counteracted more confrontational "the winner takes it all" political approaches, as promoted, for instance, by the English political system (c.f. Lewin 2002). However, the last decades witnessed an increasing political polarisation in the form of two dominant blocs (a predominantly social democratic and centre-right, respectively). The most recent elections have complicated this picture, as a growing populist right-wing and anti-immigrant party is holding the balance of power between the blocs (Aylott and Bolin 2015). The 2019 minority government coalition (Social Democratic and Green Party) came into office after seeking support from some of the parties in the former centre-right bloc.

Looking closer at education policy, a signifying trait of the post-war era has been the political advocacy of equivalence (sometimes translated to equity) as a means to promote equality, increasing social justice and mobility and to counteract the effects of an uneven distribution of resources. However, economic and societal transformations of the Swedish welfare state have contributed to gradually transform education to be conceived as a "private good" rather than a "public good" (Englund 1993). A focus on individual freedom of choice, individualised responsibility, competition and individual capacity building now serve as general guiding principles for education policy (Englund 1993; Dahlstedt and Fejes 2019). The social justice dimension once incorporated in the notion of equivalence has been challenged and arguably infused with new meanings. It should however be noted that higher education in Sweden is free of charge to Swedish and European students, and there is still a strong policy emphasis on widening access and participation in higher education, along with strivings to actively recruit underrepresented student groups (c.f. Government Offices of Sweden 2017).

To sum up, the strong social democratic heritage and power as a form of "hegemonic force" (Agius 2007, p. 585) has framed the history of the Swedish welfare state. Although influenced by several characteristics of New Public Management

(Pollitt 1995), neoliberalism has not become what Braithwaite (2005, p. 3) calls "an institutional reality" in Sweden, as neoliberalism has not been institutionally effectuated in terms of "a diminished public sphere". The influx of market ideas has increased the role of regulation in shaping policy and politics, which is highly evident within the education area. Market ideas and consumerism have increased the need for bureaucratic regulation, audit, inspection and other forms of control. We find it therefore apt to lean to ideas of "regulatory capitalism" as a broad description of the contemporary regulatory design and institution – "one that is being constituted, shaped, constrained and expanded as a historically woven patchwork of regulatory institutions, strategies and functions" (Levi-Faur 2017, p. 289; see also Braithwaite 2005). In the next section, we move from general historical and social depictions to the particular characteristics of Swedish higher education.

Swedish Higher Education and Its Policy Context

The majority of the 48 Swedish HEIs are public. There are also a small number of independent higher education providers that predominantly give courses within a specific and more limited subject area. Today, about 350,000 students attend these HEIs. The number of students enrolled in Swedish higher education has increased considerably over time. Going back to the 1977 higher education reform, when most postsecondary education was organisationally relocated to higher education, the number of students increased to reach about 160,000 in the early 1980s. An even more intensified student expansion was evident in the 1990s and the 2000s, to reach a high point with 365,000 students in 2010 (the Swedish Higher Education Authority, SHEA 2018). Higher education staff are employed by the state, making higher education the largest public sector in terms of the number of persons employed. In 2017 there were more than 75,000 HEI employees (the corresponding figure for full-time equivalents is about 60,000). Research and teaching staff make up about 60 per cent of all employed in Swedish higher education. The expansion of higher education is discernible in the number of research and teaching staff as well, which has increased over time. This also goes for the number of hired administrative personnel in HEIs. This category of employees has increased by almost one third in the last decade (SHEA 2018).

Within a government context, it is important to recognise that Sweden has a political system in which the ministries within the government are small compared to many other countries. The national agencies are part of the state in that they (ideally) implement and administrate parliamentary and government decisions, and they are separated from the government office and the ministry offices. Swedish agencies are often portrayed as largely autonomous compared to many other countries. The autonomy, independence and accountability of agencies are regulated by laws adopted by the parliament and by ordinances and provisions issued by the government. Each agency is also governed by annual appropriation directions, which regulate the activities, objectives and economical resources for the agency.

This arrangement means that a ministry and its political ministers are not allowed to intervene in individual matters handled by the agency (known as ministerial rule). Administrative discretion, coupled with extensive informal contacts with the ministry, along with agency employees' expertise, place the agencies in an influential position (Rothstein 2005; Pierre 2004).

In the case of higher education, there are two major national agencies: the Swedish Higher Education Authority (SHEA, *Universitetskanslersämbetet*, *UKÄ*) and the Swedish Council for Higher Education (*Universitets- och högskolerådet, UHR*). The former is responsible for national supervision, EQA and some other government assignments, and in this book this intermediary body will play a central role. The latter agency works with admissions to higher education, evaluates foreign students' qualifications and brokers international exchange, and thus its scope is not within the primary interest of this book.

The Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434 n.d.) and the Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100 n.d.) apply for all public HEIs, with some special regulations for the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the Swedish Defence University. They also receive annual appropriation directions from the government concerning the use of the annual budget and how to report back to the government. For some HEIs, this means that they are commissioned to undertake special assignments, for example, decentralised medical education or education in minority languages.

The Swedish higher education system mainly consists of two kinds of HEIs: universities and university colleges. Universities have a more far-reaching right to award degrees compared to university colleges. University colleges have to apply to the national agency for the right to award degrees and certificates for degrees in art, professional degrees, and master's and doctorate degrees, while universities have to apply for the first two types of degrees and are free to award master's and PhD degrees. Independent providers receive degree-awarding powers from the government. However, as we show in the chapter "National Evaluation Systems", these are conditional rights that may be revoked, should the HEIs not live up to the requirements set in national EQA exercises. Universities are often larger than university colleges, meaning that they comprise of several faculties and scientific areas. Some HEIs are specialised in, for instance, technology, medicine or art.

Higher education is free of charge for citizens within the European Union, the European Economic Area and Switzerland. Before 2011, higher education was free of charge for all. Higher education in Sweden is funded by tax revenues. Some other arrangements also exist but are scarce. From the 1993 reform (Government Bill 1992/93:1), performance funding was introduced, meaning that a per capita revenue is allocated for each student registered on a course, and a per capita revenue is allocated for each student who fulfils the course requirements. This reform also introduced mandatory internal quality assurance at the HEIs and could probably be described as the first move after the Second World War towards market orientation, since it introduced incentives for the HEIs to compete in order to attract students. This reform was also a move towards increased institutional autonomy, in that the HEIs could now decide on curricula (with the exception of professional programmes)

that earlier were centrally decided. In the comprehensive study by Bauer et al., they summarised the shifts as follows:

> The shift in authority was primarily characterized by the move away from centrally regulated and steered institutions to more autonomous institutions, led by more powerful institutional leaders who were now to compete in an education marketplace. Such a shift in the distribution of authority between the state and the institutions naturally brought about a change in the authority in the central bureaucracy, with a new emphasis on accountability rather than on planning and managing the system. (Bauer et al. 1999, p. 101)

The entire degree structure of the Swedish system changed in 2007, when the "three-cycle" system (degrees at three levels) from the Bologna agreement was decided and Sweden abandoned the previous structure with two levels (Government Bill 2004/05:162; Parliament Standing Committee on Education 2005/06:UbU3). The influence of European policy became apparent with this reform and clearly spelled out in the government's motivation of the proposed change:

> In order to contribute to Swedish higher education's international comparability, attraction and currency, the Government proposes and make assessments concerning changes in the educational and degree structure in Swedish higher education. This is done particularly on the basis of Sweden's participation in the so-called Bologna process, which today includes over 40 European countries. This process aims to promote mobility, employability and the competitive power of Europe as a continent of education. (Parliament Standing Committee on Education 2005/06:UbU3 n.d., p. 1)

This parliamentary decision led to a revision of all national requirements for degrees at all three levels. It also led to a major revision of local plans for different education programmes and subject courses at the HEIs. Programmes and courses should, from then on, be based on the rationale of the relation between expected learning outcomes (learning objectives) and acquired learning outcomes and whether or not the latter was in line with the requirements for a specific degree.

These developments have continued with a reform to further strengthen HEI autonomy (Government Bill 2009/10:149), leaving the HEIs to decide on internal organisational structure, on types of positions and requirements for employment, and to allocate resources internally at their own discretion. From the 1993 reform onwards, a number of national EQA systems have been decided, implemented and operated, which we will analyse in more detail in the chapter "National Evaluation Systems". Next, we will elaborate on our general understanding of the three concepts that we see as central to explore the *nexus*.

Understanding Governing, Knowledge and Evaluation

As an overall point of departure, we have used governing, knowledge and evaluation as a conceptual frame. The different chapters also draw on additional theoretical resources, some more and others less, in order to bring out relevant perspectives from the presented data. We have adopted an eclectic approach to further our understanding of these processes, and recognising this deliberate theoretical plurality has been an important basis for our joint work in the research project.

Governing

Our interest in researching governing goes back to our previous projects on quality assurance, school inspection and education governing in compulsory education (c.f. Ozga et al. 2011; Grek and Lindgren 2015; Carlbaum et al. 2014). Here, governing is conceptualised as a verb, as a way to emphasise the actual work and doings of, and in the policies that governing entails. This formed our overall conceptual approach to governing, and we draw on this to research governing of higher education and the work that are done in these processes. Our approach to governing draws attention to the work of actors and their mediation. They engage in activities that build on and foster certain knowledge that move across nations and contexts in particular ways, which relies on data and comparison as sources of legitimacy.

We understand governing as the activities composed of assemblages of places, people, policies, practices and power (Clarke 2015, p. 21). This notion of governing was put forward as a way of trying to "focus on the complexity, contestation and translation of governing practices that avoided the system-theory references of governance and the totalising tendencies of governmentality" (Clarke 2015, p. 12–13). This conceptualisation, however, does not entail a view of the complete hollowing out of the state (c.f. Rhodes 2007) but rather points to the practices and doings in diverse, complex and multilevel arrangements and acknowledges that (state) governing in itself is a way to make this diversity of arrangements governable (c.f. Pierre and Peters 2000). However, the state is not a monolithic entity but encompasses a multitude of actors, opinions and actions, as well as the tensions within and between them. In this context, neo-institutional approaches and insights from organisational studies are useful in order to further analyse such governing complexities (c.f. Jacobsson et al. 2015).

Furthermore, ideas on decentred governance draw attention to the importance of actors' contingent desires, beliefs, preferences and intentions as part of meaningful actions and activities of governing, that is, that governing works through processes where actors "create and act on meanings" (Bevir 2011, 2013, p. 56). This means that we pay careful attention to individuals by examining "the ways in which patterns of rule, including institutions and policies, are created, sustained, and modified by individuals whose actions (…) arise from the beliefs individuals adopt against the background of traditions and in response to dilemmas" (Bevir, 2013 p. 65).

We see the acts of governing as a set of multiple processes, involving different forms of work, for instance, through mobilisation of agents and agencies in order to realise certain aims. National EQA systems may be used and adapted to suit very different circumstances and expectations. EQA systems respond to and are affected by changing political demands and display both gradual and more drastic processes of change. The stress on governing as work and doings has led us to recognise the importance of policy enactment (rather than implementation) (Ball et al. 2012). Enactment is used to draw attention to that policy, as encoded text must be decoded in concrete environments, often in messy and non-linear processes of interpretation and translation. As Ball and his colleagues argue: "Enactments are always more

than just implementation, they bring together contextual, historic and psychosocial dynamics into a relation with texts and imperatives to produce action and activities that are policy" (Ball et al. 2012, p. 71). With our approach, we want to highlight that the work of "doing EQA" entails enactments that are embedded in different institutional and organisational contexts and that local contexts matter. We are also interested in the political work that is being done, the speed and pace at which these governing activities are designed and enacted (c.f. Jessop 2015), as well as in the actors that broker and/or carry knowledge and "do" policy. In this book, we will introduce the reader to a particular group of people we have named "qualocrats" who carry and embody such important knowledge and expertise in the field of EQA in higher education.

We claim that "doing" governing is dependent on sharing and negotiating knowledge, to produce (certain) knowledge and to define what counts as valid knowledge, as well as creating solid bases for decisions in the evaluation of central issues. Of particular interest to us is "meditative" governing (Jacobsson 2010), which points to the importance of compared experiences and shared ideas in doing governing. The concept is related to the idea of policy learning and teaching, translation, brokering and networking, as in the "actual work" (Sassen 2007, p. 37) of governing. As Ozga (2016, p. 71) states, we can also discern the emergence of

> new kinds of governing work from particular groups of actors who are positioned at key points of intersection of knowledge production and practical problem-solving. This work demands skills in translating information into 'practical knowledge', mediating conflict and brokering interests. (Ozga 2016, p. 71).

In our project and in the forthcoming chapters, the EQA governing work of such actors and the knowledge brokered in these translations and interactions are explored further.

Knowledge

As a knowledge problematic, governing by evaluation in higher education can essentially be understood as a state practice involving two steps. First of all, the state needs knowledge about the higher education sector. Borrowing an analogy from Scott (1998, p. 2), we might say that the Swedish state, as it struggled to get a handle on the expanding higher education system in the 1960s, was "partially blind; it knew precious little" about the inner workings of higher education institutions, whose creation and transmission of knowledge were underpinned by a principle of university autonomy, which allowed them to organise their work without being particularly restricted by, or accountable to, outside bodies. Back then, programmes were designed, delivered and assessed, and standards were defined and set, within small, local, homogeneous and well-socialised academic communities. These appeared, in the eyes of the state, as obscure as a wild forest with its rich flora of

minerals, insects, animals, grasses, flowers, mosses, shrubs and trees, with their mycelial networks, mycorrhizal fungi and pheromones.

In the next step, as carefully documented by Scott (1998), the state's solution to the problems of representing complex and illegible local practices is often to remake them. The Swedish state used rationalist and centralist measures like central planning, resource allocation and detailed national regulations concerning study plans (Gröjer 2004; Askling 2012). As noted earlier in this introduction, new modes of governance have replaced these efforts. We might think of the contemporary remodelled higher education landscape, based on the credit-based modular formats, as an equivalent to the mono-cropped scientific forest that appears easy to survey, measure and evaluate.

Regardless of the forms of state governing, evaluation has been a prime tool used in order to retrieve knowledge. But evaluation not only has transformative effects on social realities. Social realities can also be transformed in order to be legible to evaluation – in order to be seen by the state (Scott 1998). Once again, we touch on the important issue of transformation and, more specifically, on questions about forms of practices, values, knowledge and potential that might be lost in such transformations.

As noted above, governing by evaluation – the work of formulating and enacting – also involves different forms or phases of knowledge. In order to explore the role of knowledge, we draw on the work of Freeman and Sturdy (2015), who conceptualise knowledge as *embodied*, for example, through tactic and verbal experience, *inscribed*, in different forms of texts and artefacts, and *enacted*, via what is actually done or carried out. Using this three-phase conceptualisation, we identify and describe forms and movements of knowledge that are manifested, incorporated and transformed in governing by evaluation as a social practice encompassing several arenas and groups of actors.

Starting with embodied knowledge, it refers to "the knowledge held by human actors and employed and expressed by them as they go about their activities in the world" (Freeman and Sturdy 2015, p. 8). In this book, we will show that the expertise of key actors, such as the above-mentioned qualocrats, is absolutely vital. Such knowledge includes specific knowledge of higher education governance, institutional and organisational design and experiences from EQA. In times characterised by rapid change and speed, the plasticity and flexibility of such knowledge become particularly important.

The upcoming chapters will also show how documents in the form of policies, guidelines, reports, self-evaluations and so on are equally imperative to evaluative activities. Such inscribed knowledge serves to model, inform, standardise and coordinate actors' work and entail "particular ways of seeing, thinking and knowing; such artefacts can consequently serve to constrain and discipline our interactions with the world and with one another" (Freeman and Sturdy 2015, p. 11). Inscribed knowledge can be stored and travels in time and space. Importantly, inscription is often, at least temporarily, an end product that obfuscates the material process that gave rise to inscription (Latour and Woolgar 1979). We have sought to acknowledge,

or "unbox", these material processes and the work of interpretation and translation that are ineluctable aspects of working with inscribed knowledge. One example is the production of text for different audiences. As we will show, writing and editing text in the context of national EQA often require collective efforts. This leads us to the third phase of knowledge, enacted knowledge, which is the form embodied and inscribed knowledge takes when expressed in doings and actions, for instance, the ways in which new knowledge is generated as people meet, use and share embodied and inscribed knowledge. Although embodied and inscribed knowledge inform and frame actions, enacted knowledge is never totally determined. Thus, we find that this concept is particularly productive when studying the concrete knowledge use and production of policy actors in evaluative and governing activities that cherish certain bureaucratic ideals, for instance, in terms of formal justice and comparative consistency (Molander 2016). As noted by Freeman and Sturdy (2015, p. 15), enacted knowledge is "characterized by a high level of interpretative flexibility which means that one instance of enactment may differ very significantly from another, even when both instances draw on the same embodied and inscribed knowledge". In this book, we use this conceptual scheme as a way to explore what forms of knowledge are in operation in the work of governing by evaluation. In our research project, we have focussed on how different forms of knowledge move, take shape and are reshaped in the course of evaluation reform and activity, as actors go about in their work to make things happen (or not) in the context of these processes.

In order to "make things happen", evaluation reform has also drawn on knowledge of human conduct developed in the social sciences during the twentieth century. Contemporary ideas of total quality management, which are permeating mandatory internal quality assurance systems in higher education, were developed from scientific management via the human relations movement, with increasing emphasis on humanisation through self-government, empowerment, involvement and consensus (Boje and Winsor 1993; Barrow 1999; Behrent 2013). In this book, we notice how knowledge that reformed modern industrial organisations in the 1940s is embraced by contemporary higher education reform. Such parallels open up a range of critical questions, in terms of the effects of particular forms of governing through evaluation, on actors' subjectivities and their work and knowledge.

Evaluation

We see evaluation and quality assurance as closely related social processes. In our case, both involve making judgements and producing descriptions about higher education, and we therefore do not separate the two in a conceptual sense. It is also important to underline that these processes are, by definition, about assessment and judgement, and therefore heavily laden with values (House and Howe 1999).

As noted above, our theoretical approach to governing acknowledges the work and "doings" of policy actors, as well as the importance of aims and directions for future achievements and/or projected future states. The basic rationale of evaluation encompasses assessments about the condition or worth of something (such as higher education), in order to provide an outline of how to move forward, hence the link to governing. Or as Mark and Henry put it: "the link between evaluation and the betterment of social conditions is absolutely crucial as a collective *raison d'être* of evaluation" (2004, p. 36, italics in original). This ambition can be organised and performed in several different ways, for example, by different types of evaluations and/or quality assurance activities/systems.

In this book, we will show that different EQA policies and practices rest on various epistemologies (Dahler-Larsen 2012a), meaning that they are designed and carried out in different ways and build on already existing knowledge. However, EQA also generates knowledge for formative purposes, be it development, improvement, control or accountability – all of them oriented to the future in a "rational" way. Furthermore, EQA entails actors, agencies, policies, places and work, in order to carry out the processes necessary, something we portray throughout the book. In these processes and activities, diverse forms of knowledge are in use, and produced, as already pointed out. In the processes of governing through knowledge, evaluation has also come to be understood as enclosing technologies such as visibility, comparability, sanctions and rewards, which have a productive capacity to shape behaviour, elicit action and even create new ways of being a HEI actor. Thus, through the work, and the knowledge that is activated, EQA also does something to what is evaluated, reviewed or assessed, and that can be understood as part of the governing. Dahler-Larsen (2012a, b) perceives this influence as "constitutive effects" and discusses how indicators are central to such influence (Dahler-Larsen 2012b, p. 173).

In EQA, indicators and/or standards play a significant role in directing attention, raising expectations and pointing out what is considered valuable, important and desirable and what quality (in higher education) consists of. Through indicators and standards, standardisation takes place and makes comparisons possible, something that is central for competition and choice in a market-oriented higher education system. At the same time, other issues become ignored. Dahler-Larsen (2014) claims that indicators/standards therefore represent and enhance particular views of education quality, defining interpretative frames and world views, content, time frames, social relations and identities, and change their meanings as a result of their use (Dahler-Larsen 2014). We will point to some of these potential constitutive effects that the Swedish EQA systems activate.

Over time, evaluation has evolved as a societal phenomenon and practice. From being a one-at-a-time rather delineated process, like programme evaluation, it has successively expanded in scope and comprehensiveness, over capacity building in organisations (e.g. Hueftle Stockhill et al. 2002; Preskill and Boyle 2008) to permanent systems with several interlinked evaluative activities (e.g. Segerholm 2006; Leeuw and Furubo 2008). Dahler-Larsen (2012a) likens this expansion to evaluation machines, claiming, among other things, that evaluation machines "embody a

set of cultural values emphasising risk management, quantification, standards, and a pre-emptive or prospective approach to quality control" (2012a, p. 182). He continues to say that they "are comprehensive and general in coverage" and that "Reality must now become generally evaluable and thereby fit the demands of the evaluation machine" (ibid.). Finally, he argues that evaluation machines "seek to substitute subjective judgement for some objective evaluation based on standards, manuals, handbooks, procedures, or indicators" (ibid.). We will make use of this evaluation machine analogy in our explorations of evaluation as a practice of governing the Swedish higher education case and use the notion "evaluation machinery" to denote the assemblage of elements that these explorations identify.

Outline of the Book

In the forthcoming nine chapters, the reader will discern a movement from the more general to the rather detailed, as we shift our attention from broader historical and international developments to more thorough empirical accounts of contemporary affairs. The later chapters deliberately provide rather comprehensive accounts of evaluative systems and activities from our empirical data. We have intentionally strived to provide cautious and extensive empirical documentation, arguing that this holds an empirical value, in times of rapid restructuring and change. This book therefore moves from the general to the more detailed and attempts to cover different actors, organisations, analytical approaches and levels that, taken together and combined, provide a holistic account of EQA in Swedish higher education.

In the chapter "National Evaluation Systems" we set the national scene for our account about the recent policy and governing processes related to EQA in Swedish higher education. This is done through a historical perspective, in which we describe and analyse national EQA systems, their overall designs and some of their consequences from the 1990s to the 2011–2014 system. In the 1960s, national evaluations of higher education began to be conducted, and successively, national systems were developed. Through the different EQA systems, certain governing signals have been conveyed, making the HEIs used to external evaluation and to expect constant changes as new systems have been implemented. Systems changed, but with some variation over the period, and incorporated an increasing number of activities, people and higher education institutions, academic subjects and programmes. We discuss this in terms of an emerging and expanding "evaluation machinery" in Swedish higher education.

However, the EQA processes we are interested in are not merely restricted to the national but have extended to an international and European domain. In the third chapter "Europe in Sweden", our account of EQA in Swedish higher education therefore continues by extending the exploration to include the influx of European education and quality assurance policy to national policy in Sweden. Here, the ENQA's membership requirements played a significant role in the Swedish policy

debate, which also illustrates Sweden's embeddedness in a wider policy context. In this chapter, we also describe and analyse the channels by which European policies are disseminated to and within Sweden, pointing to the different types of activities such dissemination processes involve. We discuss the role of the state in this EQA policy transfer and conclude that the number of different types of actors, both individuals and organisations, indicate that authority concerning higher education is, at the same time, dispersed and concentrated.

Chapter four "Navigating Higher Education Institutions in Times of Quality Assurance: The Assumptive Worlds of Vice Chancellors" moves from the international and European scene to the Swedish HEIs and the mindsets of an influential group of actors, the vice chancellors. As responsible for the quality assurance work of their HEIs, our interest was directed at their ideas of quality in higher education and of the idea of a university, as well as of the national EQA. Their ideas are described and analysed as parts of their "assumptive worlds" (Marshall, Mitchell and Wirt 1985), understood as a common ground constituting them as a potentially strong influencing force in these matters. The assumptive worlds of the vice chancellors included conflicting ideals, where old traditional ideas coexisted with newer ones adapted to meet global economic demands. In spite of this, they were able to join forces and act on their critique of the 2011–2014 national EQA system.

In the next chapter "Hayek and the Red Tape: The Politics of Evaluation and Quality Assurance Reform: From Shortcut Governing to Policy Rerouting", we draw attention to the important political dimension of the governing-evaluation-knowledge nexus. We analyse the two most recent national EQA systems and show that the (re)construction of an evaluation machinery is far from neutral and uncontested process. We discuss how EQA systems are framed by certain ideological beliefs, manifested in their design as well as in the processes leading up to their design. We also highlight the style and speed of quality assurance policy development and point to the ways in which dialogue and consensus building in the 2016 EQA reform is positioned as countering the "shortcut" policy style characterising the development of the contested 2011–2014 EQA system.

The highly debated 2011–2014 national EQA system is further analysed in the chapter "Quality Evaluations and the Media" but approached from a different angle: the chapter analyses the intersection of high-stakes national higher education evaluations, media communication and PR strategies from the responsible agencies and HEIs. The study shows that the intense debate on the legitimacy of the 2011–2014 EQA system, during its implementation, was largely absent in the analysed media display of individual HEI evaluation results, as well as in the attempted framings and bureaucratic branding activities undertaken by the responsible agencies and the HEIs themselves. These results suggest that once the evaluation machinery is in operation, it becomes hard to criticise, and the formats of media communication, paired with logics of comparability and competition, may hamper critical debate.

In chapter seven "Enacting a National Reform Interval in Times of Uncertainty: Evaluation Gluttony Among the Willing", we turn to an exploration of reform activ-

ities within four HEIs. This chapter offers an empirical illustration of the governing-evaluation-knowledge nexus by pinpointing a particular situation: the time period between two national EQA reforms, when a new national EQA system was being planned and prepared, but its final design was not yet decided. We show how uncertainty during this "reform interval" opens up a potential space for policy-makers and HEIs to navigate. The results demonstrate that tendencies of homogenisation and isomorphism are strong among the four HEIs. Apparent is also the ongoing trend in terms of expansion, as the HEIs willingly dedicate resources to develop and engineer their internal quality assurance systems.

In the following two chapters, we scrutinise the relaunching and preparation of a national EQA system after the reform interval and the enactment of this 2016 system in the form of a pilot prior to its full-scale implementation at two HEIs. In the chapter "Re-launching National Evaluation and Quality Assurance: Expectations and Preparations", we describe and analyse the design work of this system as processes of governing. This work resulted in a very comprehensive system, with several different types of evaluations directed at most parts of the HEIs. Through the reintroduction of institutional reviews of the HEIs' own internal quality assurance systems, the new design was in itself an expansion compared to the previous system. Furthermore, the European EQA policy became firmly integrated in the design work. We discuss how this design emphasises the governing by objectives and outcomes logic, promote a certain notion of quality in higher education and suggest that this design opens up for potential constitutive effects.

Chapter nine "Re-launching National Evaluation and Quality Assurance: Governing by Piloting" explores and discusses enactments in the process of piloting institutional reviews. This chapter draws attention to two empirical cases and particularly the work and experiences of different actors within the SHEA, assessment panels and the HEIs under review. We demonstrate, in some detail, the amount and forms of work done in these processes, and the important role of what we have termed "qualocrats" in operating the evaluation machinery. Their embodied form of expertise is mobilised as they move between and across different domains, to enact and promote certain knowledge in and of EQA. The chapter goes on to suggest that the pilot opened up for mutual adjustments, learning and dialogue that worked in order to smoothen the subsequent broader implementation of the institutional reviews. At the same time, it also gave rise to uncertainty and contradictory anticipating governing signals.

In the final chapter "Evaluation Machinery, Qualocrats, and the Seemingly Inevitable Problem of Expansion", we highlight some of our observations on EQA policy and practice in Swedish higher education. We revisit the notion of an increasingly institutionalised evaluation machinery and discuss the role of qualocrats and judgements along with the expansion and increasing complexity of EQA work in higher education.

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