Hayek and the Red Tape: The Politics of Evaluation and Quality Assurance Reform – From Shortcut Governing to Policy Rerouting

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Abstract In this chapter, we draw attention to the important political dimension of the governing-evaluation-knowledge nexus. The aim is to describe and analyse the processes leading up to the two most recent national evaluation and quality assurance (EQA) systems in operation from 2011 to 2014 and from 2016 onwards by analysing the formation of the respective EQA systems and the actors involved in these processes. The chapter outlines political justifications and ideological beliefs and highlights central shifts and continuities in these processes. We explore how formation of EQA systems can be understood within a wider context of the work of governing by contrasting the fast, competitive "shortcut governing" from the 2011–2014 EQA system with the more dialogue- and consensus-oriented process implying a "policy rerouting" later, as manifested in the process leading up to the 2016 EQA system. We also discuss quality assurance expansion in the context of higher education policymaking.

Introduction

The chapter "National Evaluation Systems" concluded that Swedish national evaluation and quality assurance (EQA) systems have varied over time. In the following, we take a closer look at the political processes preceding the highly debated EQA system in operation from 2011 to 2014 and the most recent system implemented in 2016.[1] The 2011–2014 national EQA system was highly debated and made its mark on both the 2016 EQA system and on the processes leading up to the decision to

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[1] This chapter is partially based on previous conference presentations and papers that have been revised and updated (Lindgren and Rönnberg 2015; Rönnberg and Lindgren 2015). Some of the empirical data reported in this chapter have also been published in Lindgren and Rönnberg (2018).

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introduce this new system. As we zoom in on processes of policy formation, it will become clear that EQA systems do not just replace one another like the seasons of the year – shifts may involve deep and heated political conflicts. This chapter will draw attention to how EQA systems are framed by different ideological beliefs that are manifested in designs in terms of whether such systems ought to, for instance, focus on conditions, processes, and/or results. We thus want to highlight the important political dimension of the governing-evaluation-knowledge nexus. As Jarvis has observed, "Far from simply a managerial tool, the history of quality assurance has been inextricably political; used as much to engineer sector and organizational change associated with specific political agendas as it has the pursuit of excellence" (Jarvis 2014, p. 158).

We ask the following questions:

- What political justifications and framings characterise the reform processes leading up to the respective EQA systems, and what actors were involved?
- What continuities and/or shifts can be discerned in the respective debates?
- How can these political debates be related to governing by evaluation?

The rest of this chapter has the following structure: We begin by discussing our approach and present the data analysed in the chapter as a way to set the scene. The policy story we intend to tell begins with an analysis of the process leading up to the 2011–2014 EQA system and the actors involved in this highly debated process. We then briefly move on to the system that was put into effect as a result of the reform and point to the incremental readjustments that were implemented. We go on to discuss the process leading up to the 2016 EQA system and highlight the overall bottom-up and consensus-oriented model of policymaking characterising this policy process. The concluding discussion points to the ideological framing of quality assurance, issues of policy speed, and how national EQA seems to expand over time.

Approaching the Politics of Evaluation in Higher Education

The starting point for this book is the inherent political-ideological character of the governing-evaluation-knowledge nexus. Evaluation is an increasingly important activity in society as a whole, and as such, it is also embedded within a political frame and governing rationale (Dahler-Larsen 2011). As we noted in earlier chapters, a dimension often referred to in governance concerns centralism and decentralism. This dimension is, of course, also related to and embedded in particular national political histories and debates. The Swedish Social Democratic Party has made a distinctive mark on Swedish education policy. In the post-war era, this party has rarely been out of office. Parties located to the centre-right formed coalition governments in the mid-1970s, in the early 1990s (1991–1994), and for two consecutive terms in the 2000s (2006–2014) (Jarl and Rönnberg 2019). The processes we analyse in this chapter thus began during the non-socialist government's first term in

office in 2006 and spanned the post-2014 national election developments, when the social democrats formed a minority government with the Green Party (Aylott and Bolin 2015).

Going back to the centralisation-decentralisation divide, social democracy has historically turned to centralism, the "strong state" (Lindvall and Rothstein 2006), and regulation as means to realise political goals, while the political right has emphasised decentralism and deregulation (Bennich-Björkman 2002). During the last decades, however, this polarisation has largely been dissolved as ideas on decentralisation, deregulation, and marketization have been embraced across the political spectrum from left to right, contributing to political-ideological convergence.

Swedish higher education policy may not be the most politicised policy area within the Swedish welfare state, compared to, for instance, compulsory education or employment. Even so, there are important ideological lines of conflict within political debates concerning higher education governance and evaluation. Tangent to the more general political debate, there are converging ideological and party-political unifying standpoints in terms of common overall goals regarding, for instance, academic freedom, collegiality, and autonomy. However, when looking more closely at the political rationale on how these common and cherished values are to be promoted and defended, certain political and ideological differences are brought forward. We argue that one way to unveil and explore such lines of potential conflict is to analyse political debates of external evaluation systems and their designs.

To explore matters of evaluation design, a general definition is a good starting point. Notably, conceptualisations of and in social science are seldom straightforward, and in our case, there exist numerous definitions of evaluation. We will not enter that discussion here, but instead turn to Vedung, who has provided a general definition on this flexible concept, namely that:

> Evaluation is a careful retrospective assessment of the merit, worth and value of administration, output and outcome of government intervention, which is intended to play a role in future practical situations. (Vedung 2000, p. 3)

Evaluation may focus on different aspects of an intervention, such as a higher education programme or institution, for instance:

- (Pre)-conditions/input (e.g. funds, people, instructions)
- Processes (e.g. teaching, supervision)
- Outcomes/results (e.g. what the students have learned; goal attainment, examination results, assessments of student final degree projects, etc.)

If the overall purpose is to use the evaluation for further and future improvement of the intervention, a holistic approach to evaluation intuitively appears valid. In order to understand how a certain result has come about, one must examine the conditions and process. It is not sufficient to only to look at the results and/or outcomes of the intervention; one must establish how these results came about (Weiss 1998; Franke-Wikberg 1992). Where to put the emphasis and what approach to

employ in the assessment of (certain aspects of) interventions have differed. Different actors located in different parts and functions of the state, such as political parties, national agencies, HEI chancellors, researchers, etc., have displayed different opinions and preferences in this regard. Additionally, as the organisation and design of national EQA systems are ultimately and intrinsically related to state governance, they have been the objects of debate emanating from certain political-historical developments.

Governing Evaluation: Governing Knowledge in Swedish Higher Education

Early forms of evaluation were introduced as a part of the Swedish "rational social engineering" welfare state project originating in the 1940s (Vedung 1998; Gröjer 2004). At that time, the expansion of the HE sector served political goals pursued by the Social Democratic Party in terms of social and regional justice and equality. During the 1950s, however, problems of low examination frequencies in higher education were identified, and these problems did not go away despite an increase in input by way of raising the number of lecturers and lecturing hours (Abdallah 2002). In the 1960s, more elaborate pedagogical theories (e.g. frame factor theory; Dahllöf 1999) attempted to "open the black box" of the education process and explain the relative failures of the expansion of the education system in overcoming problems of social inequality (Abdallah 2002). These ideas were later fused into an evaluation model that included conditions, processes, and results (Franke-Wikberg 1992). As we showed in the chapter "National Evaluation Systems", national EQA systems in Sweden have evolved since the 1990s, and these ideas have continued to circulate and been put to use (albeit with a somewhat different emphasis) in components of different EQA systems. In this chapter, we will show that the 2011–2014 EQA and 2016 EQA systems are no exceptions.

While such comprehensive systems that seek to asses conditions, processes, and results are perceived as scientifically valid, they are also costly and have often been criticised for being too bureaucratic and inefficient (Gröjer 2004). As we will see in the following, proponents of the political right have tended to argue that thorough assessments of conditions and processes run the risk of interfering with the *autonomy* and inner workings of HEIs (cf. Government Bill 2009/2010:139). Inherent in this criticism is a rather overlooked aspect of problems with governing by evaluation. We express this as the problem of *governing situated knowledge*. The basic idea is that attempts to assess processes of knowledge production or teaching with the overall purpose of improvement and/or control in fact run the risk of eroding important aspects of such practices.

This critique of technological rationalism and defence of situated knowledge can be discussed in line with arguments from Hayek on "the role of knowledge in society" (Hayek 1945). Hayek argued that top-down planning runs up against a

"knowledge problem" that makes comprehensive, overall management of complex, dynamic systems inherently infeasible. According to Hayek:

> [T]hose who clamour for 'conscious direction' – and who cannot believe that anything which has evolved without design (and even without our understanding it) should remember this: The problem is precisely how to extend the span of our utilization of resources beyond the span of control of any one mind; and, therefore, how to dispense with the need of conscious control and how to provide inducements which will make the individuals do the desirable things without anyone having to tell them what to do. (Hayek 1945, p. 527)

Hayek's argument holds implications for any attempt to govern human practices since the knowledge necessary for efficient resource allocation is "dispersed, subjectively held, fleeting, and largely tacit" (Foss and Klein 2013, p. 2). In this way, questions of governing by evaluation are not just a matter of the cost of:

> searching for, identifying, transmitting, etc. such knowledge and/or setting up complex mechanisms for its revelation; like Polanyi (1959), Hayek seems to have held the view that there is knowledge that is inherently personal and cannot be communicated at any cost. (Foss and Klein 2013, p. 13)

Therefore, while knowledge ultimately resides in the heads of individuals, Hayek (1945) claimed that when such knowledge is somehow combined and allowed to evolve over time as dynamic and spontaneous systems, humans will possess knowledge that they do not develop if separated. Nevertheless – and this is important in relation to systems of EQA – nobody possesses all this knowledge in its totality; hence it cannot be codified and then collected and held by any central planner. Thus, it is argued, evaluation ought not focus on or interfere with the process (i.e. the actual work within HEIs) – this must be left to "the man on the spot" (Hayek 1945, p. 524), and evaluation ought only to assess the outcome of the process.

In this chapter, we highlight how these ideas on governing evaluation are played out in Swedish higher education policymaking; we explore the role of knowledge in political justifications and framings as well as continuities and/or shifts in the contemporary debates on EQA systems. We also link our exploration to issues of deliberation and speed in the processes of political policymaking.

Modes of Policymaking: Issues of Deliberation and Speed

Evaluation systems may be organised as a top-down or bottom-up activity or try to combine these approaches in different ways (Franke-Wikberg 1992). The EQA systems, the processes of designing them, and the policymaking leading up to their instigation can be conducted in several ways. In this context, we want to draw attention to processes of policymaking in terms of deliberation and speed. Lewin (2002) argues that political decision-making can be conceived in the following two simplified and ideal typical ways: firstly, in the form of a consensus-oriented policymaking approach, in which parties, decision makers, and other stakeholders try to agree as much as possible. Secondly, and in contrast, policymaking can also be

characterised by a competitive approach. In this mode of policymaking, the winning political party or parties show its/their ability to take action and not let policies be watered down to reach a broad consensus. The focus is rather on prioritising the task of getting reforms and new regulation in operation.

On one hand, decisions made according to the cooperative model are more likely to be long-lasting and not to be withdrawn if a new government comes into office. On the other hand, cooperation and seeking consensus also entails some difficulties when it comes to (certain perceptions of) political accountability. Arguments have been raised that the competitive model can indeed be seen as more efficient and can result in more innovative policy solutions (Lewin 2002). Far-reaching cooperation and consensus-seeking across the political spectrum and among stakeholders run the potential risk of producing "more of the same" instead of something "new" due to the nature of reaching agreement and bargaining, often resulting in small, incremental adjustments (Lewin 2002).

More recent discussions on modes of policymaking and their speed have drawn attention to the increasingly trans- and international character of such developments. This is highly relevant for higher education, as Europeanisation and influences of international organisations, such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), are prominent in this particular policy field. Peck and Theodore (2015) argue that:

> The modern policymaking process may still be focused on centers of political authority, but networks of policy advocacy and activism now exhibit a precociously transnational reach; policy decisions made in one jurisdiction increasingly echo and influence those made elsewhere; and global policy "models" often exert normative power across significant distances. (Peck and Theodore 2015, p. 3)

This work is informed by Jessop's ideas on fast policy, i.e. a form of policymaking "reflected in the shortening of policy-development cycles, fast-tracking decision-making, rapid programme rollout (…) and relentless revision of guidelines and benchmarks" (Jessop 2015, p. 208). An overall starting point is that policymakers increasingly face temporal pressures to design and implement policy due to general acceleration of time and shortenings of time horizons in other social spheres of society (Rosa 2013). Policymaking, it is argued, thus becomes increasingly "based on unreliable information, insufficient consultation, [and] lack of participation", often framed by "the rhetoric of crisis" or "a climate for emergency measures or exceptional rule" (Jessop 2015: 208). According to Jessop (2015), these conditions tend to privilege policy actors who are able to "operate within compressed time scales, narrows the range of participants in the policy process, and limits the scope for deliberation, consultation, and negotiation" (p. 208; cf. Takayama et al. 2017).

We use these ideas on modes and speed in policymaking as an overall analytical framework to discern the policymaking styles and rationales that our analysis of the two national EQA policy processes brings to the foreground, bearing in mind the identified governing evaluation – governing knowledge issues raised in the above discussion.

Data and Sources

In this chapter, we primarily draw on official and political documents, including government bills, reports, and parliamentary debates but also on different documents produced by various stakeholders and actors in these processes. We see these documents as embodying "the political processes by which they are produced" (Freeman and Maybin 2011, pp. 164–165). Following this, we have analysed and collected materials produced at different stages in these political processes leading up to the two most recent EQA systems. This material also includes reports from the Swedish National Agency of Higher Education (SNAHE, in Swedish *Högskoleverket*) and from 2013, the Swedish Higher Education Authority (SHEA, in Swedish *Universitetskanslersämbetet*). Reports from other stakeholder associations, for instance, the vice chancellors' organisation, the Association of Swedish Higher Education (ASHEI, in Swedish SUHF), the university teacher union SULF, and the student association SFS, are included. The process and the resulting national EQA system have been exposed in several media outlets and form a background for our understanding of the debates. We also draw on data from interviews with a number of actors involved in these processes. In particular, we turn to the project's interviews with policy brokers (PB), including individuals who were actively involved in these processes.

We did a qualitative-directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) of the text and transcripts in which we initially identified relevant passages of text and then examined these passages in more detail by paying special attention to the arguments, justifications, and attempts of legitimation embedded in the processes leading up to the respective EQA systems. We finally add that we do not intend to elaborate on all details in these processes but rather to highlight some important and signifying traits and moments.

The Process Leading up to the 2011–2014 EQA System: Shortcut Governing

Through a government decision in 2008, the evaluation system for 2007–2012 was cancelled due to heavy criticism from the higher education sector. The argument was, briefly put, that there was too much focus on conditions and too little on processes and outcomes. One of our informants, a key actor involved in the design of the system that was supposed to replace the revoked system, recalls the overall critique and debate and that the Director General at the SNAHE used to banter about the bureaucratic meticulousness of the 2007–2012 system: "It was all about counting the number of senior lecturers", but "what these lecturers were actually doing – if they were teaching at all – was not checked" (PB 7). Critics argued that the system was not transparent and thus became out of touch with reality, and it demanded that HEIs fill in "tidy Excel sheets that required information 'not of this world'" (PB 7).

Preparing a New EQA System

In 2009, the Ministry of Education formed a group led by a university vice chancellor that included representatives from the SNAHE, ASHEI, and the main student union. This group delivered a report with suggestions on how to design a new national EQA system. According to another of our informants, who had been working within the SNAHE as an architect of the 2007–2012 system, the ASHEI slowly became a "power broker" within the HEI sector during this time:

> Initially, [ASHEI] was an interest group without any formal status. It was a small club for the vice chancellors where they met and discussed common affairs and where they exchanged experiences, but during this time ASHEI developed into a very potent power-broker. There were many reasons for this (…) The new [SNAHE] Director General, for example, did not understand that he did no longer belong to the circuit around ASHEI, where he had been an influential person. (PB 2)

This informant described a cultural shift in which boundaries between the jurisdictions and functions of assessors and those assessed were blurred:

> You cannot let those who are to be assessed set the conditions for the assessment, but of course, there must be dialogue and mutual understanding. There must be mutual respect among the parties and for the different functions of those parties. (PB 2)

At this point, new forms of interchange between actors within the agency and HEIs were initiated. According to Policy broker 7, this was a strategically important transformation:

> It was a cultural clash, because N.N. and N.N. [authors' remark: names omitted] and many of their disciples shared the conviction that the agency must not involve the sector too much when designing a system. (…) We had the idea that when you design a new system, you darn [well] must involve the sector a lot, you must build it with the sector (…) [and for] these systems to work, you must work together with the sector and design the systems so that the people within academia find them relevant. It was a pity that, in a sense, we did not get the chance to develop our system further, because it was [an open] window that I think will never be open again. (PB 7)

As we will see later in this chapter, this window of dialogue was soon slammed, but eventually it was opened again as ideas on trust, cooperation, and engagement were reintroduced.

A Rejected Agency Proposal Caused a Stir

As mentioned, the Ministry of Education gave an assignment to the SNAHE in 2009. The agency was to develop a design for a new EQA system to include so-called quality evaluations that would highlight and measure results. Weekly meetings were held with the ministry and agency, and the SUHF and SFS were also partners in the discussions. About 6 months later, the work resulted in a report to the ministry emphasising three aspects in particular: expected learning outcomes and

examination, achieved learning outcomes, and students' experiences and influence (SNAHE 2009). According to Policy broker 7, it was a pared-down system that deliberately broke with the previous system. It was deliberately "very, very slimmed". According to this informant, there is a risk for evaluative systems to expand if experts are allowed to design them. We can see that discussions on evaluation design are not only about the individual parts of systems but about the size and scope of systems:

> You cannot let those "quality people" draw up [these systems], because it's like in every other area of expertise: They want to do everything. The previous system was enormous. I think that it included five components; it was way too bulky. (PB 7)

The ministry then worked on a government bill (2009/2010:139) that was to be presented to parliament. As this work progressed, it became clear that the Ministry was not completely satisfied with the SNAHE report and wanted to make further elaborations and amendments. The Ministry, however, did not involve the SNAHE in these further discussions, and the SNAHE report was turned down. It was accused of not focusing enough on outcomes and thus did not respond to the terms of reference the working group had received.

According to Policy broker 3, who at the time was a key political actor within the centre-right government, the argument for turning down the report was based on a basic "ideological view" of autonomy that was congruent with a particular evaluation design. In the words of Policy broker 3:

> It [the Ministry's argument, authors' remark] was based on an insight that HEIs have been micromanaged in many ways. (…) So, the idea was to decrease micromanagement based on the insight that it is not efficient. It is not efficient to seek to govern complicated activities like higher education and research through micromanaged organisations (…) The debate was greatly about [whether] "it [is] right to have a system that concentrates on the results of activities" or a system where evaluation is about [determining whether] "the processes [are] found to be good". I think the latter option is wrong since you end up inside the activities fiddling around with how things are done instead of looking at the results. (PB 3)

One expression of this ideological conviction was the attitude towards the planned use of "learning outcomes" within the evaluation design in the rejected SNAHE report. Policy broker 7 asserted that these "learning outcomes and the assessment of whether these outcomes were attained became the 'hate object' [authors' remark: a strong Swedish word to indicate what attracts discontent] of the ministry and a reason for why the report was turned down" (PB 7).

Eventually, the Ministry of Education presented their version of a new EQA system. This was done with the bill "Focus on knowledge – quality in higher education" (Government Bill 2009/2010:139). Before this bill was submitted to the parliament, actors such as the ASHEI and the SNAHE had tried to argue in favour of the old rejected report, which was claimed to have been largely endorsed and approved by the HEI sector, in contrast to the hastily prepared bill (cf. Kaliber 2013). In the bill, the government stated that the system delivered in the SNAHE report was not in line with the government's ideas on autonomy, as it focused too much on expected learning outcomes in curricula and forms of examinations, i.e.

issues related to planning and realisation of teaching and learning activities. It was concluded that:

> Experiences from previous evaluation systems show that evaluations are powerful instruments of governance. Grounds of judgement that target how the internal processes are designed in order to reach the goals risk producing unintended steering effects, hence such grounds of judgement ought not to be part of the national evaluation system (…) The assessment ought to primarily concern actual education results and not be based on documents that merely display the intentions of a HEI when it comes to carrying out education with good results. (Government Bill 2009/2010:139, p. 13)

A Heated Political Debate

In June 2010, a parliamentary debate was held (Parliament Minutes 2010). The political opposition argued against both the design of the system and the "shortcut" policy process behind it. The new proposed national EQA system was criticised for its narrow focus on results and for being micromanaged by the political (Government Ministry) level and thereby not allowing HEIs sufficient autonomy. In the debate, the social democrat Mikael Damberg, who represented the political opposition, summarised the critique. He said:

> The government has – on its own and totally unprovoked – bulldozed over the entire higher education sector and in addition, on its own – as it has been said – "played around as if they were a national agency for higher education" by knocking together a homemade micromanaged quality evaluation system. This is unbelievable. Because the preconditions have never been better than they are today: There is a deafening unity in the Swedish Parliament [concerning a need for a new system]. (…) This should have been done in close cooperation with the HEIs, ASHEI, and the students. But when the work was done and anchored, the government jumped in like an elephant in a glass shop and messed around. They came up with a new system that was presented through a couple of slides in an oral presentation at a meeting with the HE sector just 20 days before the bill was sent to the parliament. (Parliament Minutes 2010, Mikael Damberg, Social Democratic Party)

The quotation points to a critique aimed at the democratic process itself. Thus, accusations of *micromanagement* that the centre-right wing directed to system designs under social democratic rule (including input, process, and results) are now directed at how such systems are politically processed and decided (top-down without deliberation). Minister for Higher Education and Research Tobias Krantz replied in the debate and underscored that the nature of the political process and policymaking is in fact about conflicting perspectives and eventually also about determination and the ability to act in times of urgency:

> The government bill has caused debate. This is excellent. It is good that important bills are debated and that they excite people. If the Swedish higher education sector was quiet we would have a reason to be worried. There are voices in favour of the bill, and there are others against it. The best way to avoid criticism is to do nothing. However, Sweden is facing a very important and big challenge. This is not the time to sit with our arms crossed. Sweden shall have a world-class higher education. (Parliament Minutes 2010, Tobias Krantz, Liberal Party)

Policy broker 7 also underlined the virtues of a decisive and efficient mode of policymaking in that even though deliberation is crucial, fast policy is needed to produce change. This informant argued in favour of line management and against traditional collegiality as a solution to this problem:

> If the ambition is to be at the front of the development in an international perspective, then HEIs cannot only be managed collegially, because not much change will come about. (…) We were convinced that we [actually] needed something [other] than what we had. (PB 7)

The discussions above about the political process leading up to the 2011–2014 EQA system reveal different ideological approaches to HE governance and evaluation of HEIs. These ideas are closely related to essential overall goals of and in higher education, such as academic freedom and social and economic development. These ideas were fused into and manifested in concepts such as autonomy and collegiality and also, as we have seen, different designs of EQA systems. At the end of the day, however, actors across the political spectrum appeared to be willing to govern HEIs through evaluation with somewhat different technologies.

Implementing the Debated EAQ System

Somewhat paradoxically, and in contrast to the government rhetoric, a parliament-appointed evaluation carried out by a group of Danish evaluators showed that the results of the 2011–2014 EQA system did seem to govern internal processes within HEIs in profound ways (Sørensen et al. 2015). The increasing orientation of actors within HEIs towards expected learning outcomes implied a thorough implementation of the Bologna reform. This was manifested through careful planning, assessment, and documentation, which was put forward as one of the most important success factors in this EQA system (Sørensen et al. 2015, cf. SHEA 2015, 2017). In a likewise paradoxical manner, the 2011–2014 system had a centralising effect and produced a continuous expansion of quality assurance work. One vice chancellor who was interviewed in the evaluation described the changes imposed by the EQA system in the following way:

> Previously, we were incredibly decentralised, and in principle, all quality work was managed locally in the organisation. But we have centralised it, because it was needed (…) This evaluation model was very non-transparent to many actors within the organisation (…) After the first round [of evaluations] we could see that this was not going to work, so what we did was to set up a central… firstly, a central support function, but also, really, an organisation where the areas, that is our faculties, have their organisational representatives involved who can support and assist. (vice chancellor in Sørensen and Mejlgaard 2014, p. 22)

This tendency towards expansion and centralisation will be further elaborated in this chapter and later in this volume. Now we turn to the process initiated during the implementation of the 2011–2014 system that resulted in the 2016 EQA system.

The Process Leading up to 2016 EQA System: Policy Rerouting

In the following, we will show that how EQA systems were politically "done" changed as ideas on dialogue and mutuality gained ground as a response to the previous perceived shortcut process. This dialogue was embedded within a discursive frame that, at least on the surface, appeared to slow down the speed of policy. As we shall see, deliberation and dialogue involve time-consuming work by actors. In addition, ambitious evaluation designs that result from the cooperation and consensus-seeking process may in turn produce new undertakings within organisations as national EQA expand. Slow policy may thus become a functional condition for social acceleration (Rosa 2013).

In April 2014, just a few months after the Swedish agency lost its membership in the ENQA, SHEA University Chancellor Harriet Wallberg was commissioned to propose a new quality assurance system for the higher education sector by the same Government that did the shortcut and introduced the 2011–2014 EQA system. This meant rerouting the process and the EQA system. Looking at the process, concepts like mutual trust, collaboration, and dialogue were emphasised, and the work was done in collaboration with different reference groups, including HEI, student, agency, and working-life (including unions) representatives. This involved efforts and work from several actors. There were meetings with HEI representatives; minutes were written and stored at the ministry (Ministry of Education 2015), and a consensus-oriented approach was stressed (cf. SHEA 2014a). Of course, such meetings and procedures had been taking place in the previous process leading up to the 2011–2014 EQA system as well, but as we will exemplify, the narrative to be conveyed in the new process was to explicitly declare the importance of coordination, cooperation, and seeking dialogue. In this context, trust comes across as a central notion in this discursive construction of values and meanings.

Trust of and in Swedish Higher Education and Beyond

In our interviews, many key policy brokers expressed hopes for the future and that such deliberations would result in a system based on trust:

> The big differences between EQA systems are between systems that trust HEIs and systems that do not trust HEIs. Sweden has had a system that did not have any trust in the HEIs. We have had that for many, many years in different forms. I hope that we are moving onto a system that puts trust in the HEIs. (…) Ultimately, the political level must decide if it can put trust in the hands of the higher education sector. (PB 4)

As demonstrated in the chapter "Europe in Sweden", policy brokers also adopt and circulate ideas on national and international arenas, carrying knowledge from international to national discussions. One of our informants who was involved in such international collaborations and exchanges compared the European

development with the situation in Sweden. This policy broker highlighted an encounter with EQA systems within a wider European meeting and setting also relating to the issue of trust:

> You could feel, not just the systems on paper, but people of flesh and blood, talk about their experiences. One important conclusion that we brought [home] with us was that the Swedish culture on [the] evaluation of higher education specifically, and perhaps more generally, is characterised by far less trust than what we could see in these countries (…) the autonomy of HEIs had a completely different and profound meaning abroad. People within the HEIs took on the responsibility, and within the equivalent to SHEA and the Ministry of Education, there was respect and trust in that HEIs actually took on this responsibility. So right now, we are hoping that all the work with the proposal [the forthcoming 2016 EQA system, authors' remark] (…) will lead not only to a new improved EQA system but [will] promote a certain an academic culture in Sweden. (PB 1)

This quotation is also significant in that it highlights that Europe (and the ENQA) became a more dominant point of reference in the preparatory work in this policy process compared to the 2011–2014 process. Importantly enough, the SHEA Director General was quoted on the SHEA English website: "When implementing the new system for quality assurance for Swedish Higher Education, the European Standards and Guidelines must be taken into account" (SHEA 2014b) – thereby strongly conveying the message to the English-speaking SHEA website readers that Sweden and the agency are committed to ensuring that the new EQA system will meet international and European standards. It can be noted that the same text was also published on the ENQA website under the "News" section (ENQA 2014).

Later, on the Swedish SHEA website, the Head of the Department of Quality Assurance at SHEA described the process:

> It was important for us to invite a dialogue before we have a complete decision basis. Also [the HEIs, authors' remark] will be using the new system, since it is important they are involved (…) After having discussed the proposal for a new national quality system with over 400 people, we are bound to say that the response has been largely positive (…) We have received important input (…) both before we took the final decision and before the pilots that are starting this autumn (…) Most important is perhaps that we felt that there was trust [authors' remark: among people in the higher education-sector] in the new quality assurance system. (SHEA 2016)

Shifts and Continuities in Governing (by) Evaluation?

In contrast to the former process, the 2016 EQA system proposal was not only deliberated as it was developed and designed; it was also formally sent to stakeholders for referral. In the 2016 EQA process, the SHEA was assigned responsibility for further elaborating on how to design the 2016 EQA system (Ministry of Education 2015). In contrast to the previous process, the SHEA was thereby granted an important role as an expert agency in the process of designing and implementing the 2016 EQA system. The rerouting thus not only targeted the process but also the content and activities in the EQA system. This rerouting may result in a different mode of

governing by evaluation, and in the forthcoming chapters in this volume, we will address this potential shift in more empirical detail. In certain ways, and on the basis of the data presented in this chapter, it is possible to conclude that the new EQA system implied a form of shift even before its implementation. This shift refers to the values used to frame the processes leading up to the respective EQA systems as "shortcut governing" to be "rerouted". In addition, the 2016 EQA system implied some partial continuities as well as changes – both of which were embedded within the common discursive framework of trust and mutuality. The 2016 EQA system would not primarily be an assessment of students' independent projects (final degree projects), indicating a break with the former 2011–2014 EQA system. A much highlighted "new" (but essentially recycled; see chapter "National Evaluation Systems") dimension of the 2016 EQA system was the SHEA assessment of HEIs' internal quality assurance work. But some activities from the former EQA systems remained, even if reformed – for instance, thematic evaluations and evaluations of education courses and programmes (SHEA 2014a). Such shifts and continuities in processes and EQA systems also inform our concluding discussion.

The Politics of Evaluation and Quality Assurance Reform

In this chapter, we have described and analysed the processes leading up to the two most recent national EQA systems in operation from 2010 to 2014 and from 2016 and onwards. There have been heated political and ideological debates at times, particularly during the first period, inflicted by personal interests and conflicts, involving both high-level official resignations and public disputes (cf. Kaliber 2013).

It Is Natural to Measure and Assure Quality in Higher Education

Despite turbulence and change, a fundamental and important continuity characterises both periods and systems. For example, no substantial public objection or struggle existed about the actual need for the state, via its agencies, to (continue to) evaluate, assure, measure, and steer HEIs. Hence, there is a strong cross-party consensus about the need for such policies and activities in both processes. A Social Democratic MP summarised the common and widespread political assumption about the need for external evaluation in the following statement from the 2010 parliamentary debate:

> It is natural to measure and assure quality in higher education. The state finances higher education and needs to know if tax money is used the best way possible (…) Students have a right to know the quality of the education they are attending (…) [and] they also have the right to know how useful their education is on the labour market. (Parliament Minutes 2010)

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the ideological framing of autonomy and/or trust, academic freedom, etc. has been quite different within the two modes of policymaking in the analysed processes. In this way, the chapter has shown that stakeholders represent issues related to the politics of evaluation and quality assurance reform in partly different and conflicting ways within and across the two decision-making processes. As was also made evident, these problematisations are all directed towards justifying how to design the (perceived best) external national evaluation system. In this way, the inherent taken-for-grantedness that a desire indeed exists for such a system to be implemented in the first place goes largely unaddressed.

The act of extensive national external assessment of and in HEIs is not only taken for granted but also naturalised as a taken-for-granted part of the mindset of each actor and stakeholder in the sector. To illustrate this far-reaching striving for enhancement (cf. Saunders 2014; Stensaker 2007), a Social Democratic MP made a public and almost religious pledge to all higher education stakeholders, arguing that quality development is an approach to life: "Every morning when you wake up, you shall repeat a mantra about how you can work with continuous quality improvement" (Parliament Minutes 2016).

Yet, even if all political actors subscribe to traditional academic values, they also – albeit with different ideological underpinnings – to some extent show conflicting ideas on evaluation designs. Still, they unanimously push for quality assurance reform as well as to the need to measure. These simultaneous and somewhat contradictory stances are not easily aligned. As noted by Jarvis (2014), HEIs are caught between two "narratives" that appear to be difficult to interweave:

> The university sits oddly amid two narratives; one that prizes academic freedom, independence of thought and expression, heterodoxy and exploration to create new knowledge frontiers, on the other hand, an increasingly intrusive series of regulatory regimes that seek to manage, steer and control the sector in ways that serve the interests of the state and the economy by applying specific ideational motifs about efficiency, value, performance, and thus the economic worth of the university to the economy. (Jarvis 2014, p. 156)

A more easily managed interlinkage is that the new government used the shortcut policymaking narrative politically to justify the rerouting of the latter process. In the process leading up to the 2011–2014 EQA system, academic freedom was framed as a value that is protected and defended, whereas the system was designed to only assess the outcomes, in the debated assessment of students' degree projects. This EQA system was said not to assess and thereby interfere with the (HEI internal) processes and preconditions leading up to the educational outcomes (Government Bill 2009/2010:139; cf. Parliament Standing Committee on Education 2010). However, when looking at the implementation, this EQA system did not produce a tangible rise in HEI autonomy, and evaluations have pointed to the further centralisation of quality assurance work within the HEIs (Sørensen et al. 2015). This EQA framework produced a more thorough implementation and enforcement of international and national rules and policies as well as a common set of learning outcomes that became a cohesive and obligatory reference for planning, teaching, and examination in HEIs. In this sense, it appears to have implied less autonomy, rather than the opposite (see also Toots and Kalev 2016).

We wanted to place the political processes leading up to the national 2011–2014 and the 2016 EQA systems in the limelight. In this chapter, we sought to show the attempted framings by the actors involved and concluded that a shortcut and fast-paced (Jessop 2015) policy style was replaced by a more consensus- and dialogue-oriented approach in the latter process (cf. Lewin 2002). In this vein, a relocation of the framing of and within the political discourses leading up to the 2016 EQA system also seemed to occur. We claim that certain non-government organisations, such as the nationally powerful ASHEI and, later on, the ENQA, came to set important and distinctive marks on the policy processes and contributed to the shift that ultimately came to position the 2016 EQA system in a discursively different way.

Expansion and Complexity when Governing Situated Knowledge

Significant in this development is also that the expansion of EQA-ambitions was done by bringing the HEI actors back in, by offering deliberations and giving HEI representatives a place at the drawing board. Such involvement did not result in less evaluation or auditing. Somewhat paradoxically, the HEI deliberations in the second process did not "roll back" state attempts of governing by evaluation. Rather, the earlier observation by one of our interviewed key policy actors draws attention to a plausible explanation: if the so-called quality people, i.e. those with expertise in quality assurance and evaluation, are involved in constructing evaluation systems, "they want to do everything" (PB 7). Thus, this chapter has illustrated the ongoing expansion and the complexity of quality assurance – as well as the importance of "expertise" and thereby of knowledge of and within these processes. Moreover, we have shown how the emerging cadre of professionals that we refer to as "qualocrats" mobilised themselves as power brokers by tearing down the previous boundaries between the subjects and objects of evaluation. This observation is also helpful to understand issues of resistance, more precisely the lack of critical debate concerning national EQA systems. This is a topic that we will return to later in the book.

We find that the analysed Swedish higher education case illustrates how "slow policy", in the form of dialogue and deliberation, is contributing to increased complexity and becoming a functional condition for social acceleration (Rosa 2013). In the beginning of this chapter, we also discussed the wicked problem of governing situated knowledge and turned to Hayek (1945) for illustrations of the risk that externally assessing processes of locally held and embodied knowledge production or acquisition will erode important aspects of such practices. Even if the data analysed in this chapter cannot provide a clear-cut answer on handling this problem, the data indeed point to the political attempts and politically articulated will to (a) assess and thereby (b) govern such processes, albeit by different means and technologies. Such manifestations are the different modes of policymaking and the associated paces for the work of doing governing they entail. Overall, however, we suggest that ideas and reforms on autonomy launched by the centre-right government did not manage to unfetter higher education actors from external accountabil-

ity pressures. On the contrary, these policy attempts appear to provide an example of what Graeber (2015) terms "the Iron Law of Liberalism", which states that:

> any market reform, any government initiative intended to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing the number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork, and the total number of bureaucrats the government employs. (Graeber 2015, p. 9)

Finally

In the upcoming Chaps. 7, 8 and 9, we will unpack these developments in more detail as we empirically study the designs and local enactments of evaluation in HE. We will also show how the evolving group of professionals working with quality issues in the higher-education sector, the qualocrats, are making their mark in these processes of quality assurance enactment. Questions of autonomy, power, and expansion have been accentuated over time, and we will continue to explore how these issues unfold as the 2016 system is designed and put in place. The next chapter, however, focuses on how the debated 2011–2014 EQA system was carried out in terms of its media display and framing of evaluation results from evaluations of study programmes within individual HEIs. The next chapter thereby elaborates on the mediatised activities and work undertaken within the 2011–2014 EQA system and draws attention to how the communications of and with the media were formed and framed by both the responsible national agencies and the HEIs themselves.

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