External Quality Assurance in Finnish Higher Education Institutions

Two cases – The Universities of Tampere and Turku in a new-institutional perspective

Max Julius Eklund
University of Helsinki
Faculty of Social Sciences
Master’s Degree Programme in European Studies
Political Science, Administration and Organisations
Master’s thesis
April 2013
Motivation
The importance of universities providing quality-assurance schemes has increased during the last two decades due to, among other things, an increased tendency in public administration to use evaluations as a tool to enhance efficiency and the changed nature of the state-university relationship. Moreover, we can witness an increased integration of European higher education. Also Finnish higher education has been exposed to these trends and external evaluation and quality assurance systems has become a recurring phenomenon. The objective of this research was to analyse organizational responses at universities to the demand of showing a QA-scheme, and to increase understanding on the role of audits in relation to national and supranational developments, from a perspective of organizational institutionalism. In so doing, attention is put on what kinds of effects and practices a national form of evaluation has, if compared at the organizational level of two universities.

Methods
The methodological approach builds on insights from qualitative methods, new-institutional theory and organizational institutionalism. The empirical materials used consisted of documents and half-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed and analysed through the creation of reference codes in the program ATLAS TI. The reference codes were created according to logics of analytic coding.

Results and Discussion
In the research, four core themes were witnessed. First, in implementing processes or reforms that might be perceived critically in universities, the role of commitment and semantics become of high importance, as does a degree of hierarchy. Second, responding to the demand of showing a quality assurance-scheme and succeeding in audits are not seen to be of high importance by university leadership in that only scarce resources were allocated to the exercise. Third, developing the QA-system was clearly accepted to be a response to European developments but this is hardly an instrument for governance that the Ministry of Education would value in comparison to other instruments. Finally, the recommendations made by the audit teams are not as neutral as they seem, in that they do define what the Universities should accomplish. However, the loosely coupled structure has in many ways lessened many of the impacts and recommendation gained from the audits.

Avainsanat/Nyckelord/Keywords

Säilytspakka/Förvaringställe/Where deposited
Helsinki University Main Library - Kaisa-talo, Fabianinkatu 30, 00014, University of Helsinki

Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information
Table of Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1. The Finnish QA-system in a Finnish and European context........................................................................... 3
   1.2. QA as a part of accountability, efficiency and governing .............................................................................. 9
   1.3. Evaluation and semantics........................................................................................................................................ 11
   1.4. Intention, unintended consequences and bureaucratization ........................................................................ 12
   1.5. Research design .................................................................................................................................................. 15
   1.6. Outline of thesis ................................................................................................................................................ 18
2. THE THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE OF NEW-INSTITUTIONAL THEORY ............................................. 20
   2.1. Early studies of Organisations ......................................................................................................................... 20
   2.2. New Institutional Theory ...................................................................................................................................... 22
   2.3. Organisational Institutionalism and Higher Education Institutions ............................................................ 24
      2.3.1. Universities as Organizations and Institutions .......................................................................................... 25
      2.3.2. Loose coupling in Higher Education Organizations ................................................................................... 26
      2.3.2. Responses to Institutional Pressures – the role of Isomorphism ................................................................. 29
   2.4. Quality Assurance and Institutional Analysis .................................................................................................. 30
      2.4.1. The Institutionalization of Evaluation ........................................................................................................ 31
3. METHODOLOGY AND DESCRIPTION OF CASES .............................................................................. 35
   3.1. Choice of Methods ............................................................................................................................................ 35
   3.2. The Case-study Method ..................................................................................................................................... 36
      3.2.1. Document analysis ..................................................................................................................................... 39
      3.2.2. Exploring evaluation through elite interviewing ...................................................................................... 40
      3.2.3. Choice of Interviewees .............................................................................................................................. 41
4. RESULTS .......................................................................................................................................................... 45
   4.1. The Assessments of the Universities QA-systems .......................................................................................... 45
      4.1.1. The audit process and its results .................................................................................................................. 45
      4.1.2. The Dissimilar Ruling of 2008 ................................................................................................................... 52
      4.1.3. The re-audit of University of Tampere ...................................................................................................... 55
      4.1.4. The audit-teams recommendations .......................................................................................................... 57
      4.1.5. Strategy and Quality Assurance ............................................................................................................... 62
      4.1.6. The Legitimacy Explanation ....................................................................................................................... 64
   4.2. Pragmatic and practical Organisational arrangements .................................................................................. 67
      4.2.1. Necessary evils and loose couplings ........................................................................................................... 67
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENQA</td>
<td>European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERP-system</td>
<td>Enterprise Resource Planning-system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINHEEC</td>
<td>Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSE</td>
<td>Turku School of Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTA</td>
<td>University of Tampere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTU</td>
<td>University of Turku</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Assessments of QA-systems at the Universities of Turku and Tampere……51
1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of universities providing quality-assurance (QA) schemes has increased during the last two decades due to, among other things, an increased tendency in public administration to use evaluations as a tool to enhance efficiency and the changed nature of the state-university relationship. Moreover, we can witness an increased integration of European higher education combined with an acclaimed shift toward knowledge economies in Western societies. Also Finnish higher education has been exposed to these trends and external evaluation of research, teaching and quality assurance systems has become a recurring phenomenon. The success of evaluation, in a broad sense, is supposed to build on an accepted foundation in rational progressivism and development, whereas it has also been considered an embodiment of trend-like intrusion of rational thought into new spheres of social life. The complexity and ambiguity of these ideas – quality-assurance schemes and evaluation praxis – has left, however, room for local interpretation, ritualized use, improvised implementation and a range of possible organizational responses.

Fundamentally, the preoccupation with evaluation is embedded in a two-folded debate. The first is a normative debate about the nature of these changes and who the beneficiaries are. The second one is an empirical and analytical debate about whether changes are taking place on all levels, the degree of these changes, and for what reason change is adopted, with what arguments, and whether it is agency or structure that plays a more decisive role. With regards to higher education and higher education reforms, the evidence regarding the impacts have remained mixed, while theories of organizations are far from having a shared mutual understanding about how organizations react to change, how change takes place – if it takes – and what the impacts and outcomes are. Similar ambiguity remains about the role of structure and agency.

This thesis addresses the theme of change in organizations through investigating a new obligation demanded from Finnish universities in law since 2010, namely, that of having a quality assurance system. When explaining why Higher Education Institutions (HEI’s) adopt QA-schemes, a general analytical distinction can be made between
rational and institutional perspectives. A rational perspective would perceive universities adopting QA-schemes because they enhance their strategic performance in relation to other universities. Much of the literature on the topic of quality assurance in higher education, however, does not seem to find evidence about universities choosing specifically quality assurance as an element in strategic competition (Dahler-Larsen, 1998). Liuhanen (2007), for example, has argued that in Finnish universities evaluations have been used, not only instrumentally and tactically as a rational perspective would assume, but also in symbolic, ritual, conceptual, and interactive manners (Liuhanen 2007, 148–149). Moreover, one can find more evidence regarding unintentional effects in higher education institutions adopting reforms (Weick, 1976; Cerych, et al., 1986; Lane, 1990). Additionally, quality assurance is often demanded by governments, ministries of education or by supra-national agreements but only rarely developed as strategic initiative by universities themselves. An institutional perspective, however, offers a plurality of possibilities with regards to explaining the role, causality and effects of quality assurance. Among other things, organizations could adopt these in order to gain legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), to conform to isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), or by integrating selectively with local practice and tradition, resulting in individual organizations portraying local adaptations (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002, 23–24). Moreover, higher education organizations have been prone to show only partial responsiveness to conflicting demands, maintaining loosely coupled or decoupled structures as a response (Weick, 1976, Orton & Weick, 1990; Sahlin, 2012).

This thesis is consequently focusing on what kinds of effects and practices a national form of evaluation – that broadly speaking seems to be derived from international developments, making institutions comparable and measurable on a European scale – has, if compared at the organizational level of two universities. Universities as organizations and institutions provide a fertile ground to discuss these themes as higher education institutions (HEI’s) have typically been seen particularly resistant to change (Stensaker et. al, 2012, 4) and adopting, among other things, loose-coupling strategies to cope with change (Weick, 1976). Considering that national quality assurance agencies strive for European-wide standardized methods and goals in their effort of making universities comparable and seeking legitimacy, and that we are living in an age of
reflexivity (Beck, Giddens, Lash, 1994) this thesis will address the question in which manner the quality work is carried out at the level of universities. Consequently, the research questions that are analyzed are as follows:

1. What have been the perceived benefits and drawbacks of developing QA-systems, from the perspective of universities?
2. Have audits played a role in bureaucratization or had an impact on the allocation of resources?
3. What kind of organizational arrangements and divisions of work do we see, in practice, developed in response to the demand of showing a QA system?
4. To what degree do the actors’ involved see audits being a response to national and supranational demands?
5. What role do the audits play in the State-FINHEEC-University relationship?
6. In relation to other reforms, what has the impact of audits been on these organizations?

However, before proceeding into these questions in depth, a discussion on the Finnish and European context of QA will be presented, together with earlier research on the topics. These will be followed by a more detailed discussion about the research questions combined with an outline of the research design in the end of this chapter.

1.1. The Finnish QA-system in a Finnish and European context

Evaluation has gained momentum in the field of education in the form of evaluations, assessments, quality assurance, audits and accreditations. Consequently, it is possible to approach quality and how to improve it in HEIs from a range of perspectives. In the context of Finnish higher education, all Higher Education Institutions (HEI’s) have taken part in the first round of auditing in which their quality assurance-systems have

---

1 Quality assurance can be considered an overall term to which accreditation and auditing are sub-concepts that both measure the reaching of objectives. Whereas auditing evaluates reaching of own objectives, an accreditation assesses fulfillment of criteria formulated by an accreditation agency. The Finnish audit is based on the former but resembles accreditation in that the system as a whole is judged to pass or to go through a re-assessment.
been audited by an external evaluation agency. Since the beginning of 2010, with the new university act, having a piloted and tested quality assurance system has become mandatory. The responsibility for assuring the quality of Finnish HEIs, vested in an external agency, was introduced in Finland in 1995 (1320/1995) with the creation of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC). The council started its work as of 1.1.1996, shortly before the first step in the separation of the universities from immediate state steering in 1997 (645/1997). According to FINHEEC, it is an “independent expert body assisting higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters relating to evaluation”. However, in addition to the original task, gradually specified duties were introduced to the original, rather generally expressed, responsibilities regarding assistance in matters of evaluation (see for example 632/1998, also 965/2007 and 794/2009). Simultaneously, the budget of the council has more than doubled in a decade (see Appendix 1).

The first auditions of quality assurance systems in Finland were carried out in 2005 with two piloting studies carried at Universities of Applied Sciences and during the period of 2005–2007, a total of 12 Higher Education Institutions where audited. On the basis of the feedback, a revised audit manual for the period of 2008–2011 was published in November 2007 (FINHEEC, 2007, preface) for the first round of auditions in Finland.

2 The term “audited” used here refers to the Finnish evaluation of quality assurance schemes. It should not be mixed with the common use of the term meaning an examination of or a revision of accounts. In the following thesis, auditing refers to this Finnish practice of “auditing” as the evaluation of HEIs and their QA-schemes.

3 A more loose formulation that Universities ‘must’ evaluate their education, research and impact was already included in the earlier decree 645/1997 but it lacked a clear-cut definition about implementation and responsibilities.

4 The next important change in the state-university relationship in Finland, the new university act (2009/558) that became into effect as of 1.1.2010, is discussed later.

5 Source: http://www.finheec.fi/en.[accessed 7.12.2012]. However, as was pointed out in the external evaluation of FINHEEC, that was conducted in order to determine whether it fills the criteria of ENQA-membership, the independency of the organization exists only in principle. In practice, “FINHEEC is located within the offices of the Ministry, and its staff is formally employees of the Ministry; it uses the support infrastructure of the Ministry, such as IT services, human resource management, payroll and financial management services. It is clear, then, that there is a very close association, in organisational support terms, between the Council and the Ministry.” (ENQA, 2010, 15)
Participating in the auditing has been made mandatory for universities with the new university act\(^6\) and the first round of auditions took place between 2008–2011 and consisted of seven stages (KKA, 2007)\(^7\):

1. Registration for audit of quality assurance system
2. The signing of an agreement between FINHEEC and the HEI in question
3. The collection of audit material by the HEI itself
4. Visit at the HEI by the chair of the audit team and FINHEEC project manager
5. A 2-5 days long site visit by the audit group consisting of three HEI exponents, a work-life representative and a student representative
6. Drafting and writing of audit report
7. Publication of report at the target university

Before the site visits by an auditing team\(^8\), each team of external evaluators undergo a training of one and half workdays as it has been stated that, in principle, it doesn’t matter what kind of institution is audited (Lindqvist, 2007, 53). In practice, however, this formula implies that a self-evaluation is conducted by the universities and this self-evaluation is followed by a site visit of external experts that evaluate and compare the institutions, its practices, processes and documentation on the basis of the submitted self-evaluation documents. Upon conclusions, the audit team will suggest an approval or a disapproval of the QA system to which the board of FINHEEC will have the final say in\(^9\). If a HEI is considered to have shortages in its system, the audit team will revisit the institution in two years’ time. In Finland, with currently 16 universities and 25 universities of applied sciences\(^10\), the quality assurance systems and the auditing of

\(^6\) For so called polytechnic universities, auditions were already mandatory since the decree of 351/2003.

\(^7\) For a chronological overview of relevant laws and events, see also Appendix 2.

\(^8\) The audit-team is appointed by FINHEEC. Generally the group consists of five members of whom three come from either Universities or Universities of Applied Sciences (representing management and administration, teaching and research, and support services) whereas two represent students and work life.

\(^9\) Thus, the Finnish model resembles to a small degree a peer review model in the sense that the evaluation group can consist partly of academics from other universities. However, obviously, it is not a pure form of peer review because the report must be accepted by the board of FINHEEC and because there are also a student and stakeholder representative on the team.

\(^10\) For a population of 5,4 million inhabitants.
these consequently concern a vast amount of teaching personnel, administrative personnel as well as students.

The creation of FINHEEC and the integration of Finnish Higher education into a European context have, however, by many members of the scientific community, been seen as a fundamental shift of the entire system of higher education in Finland. While the auditions were not the first kind of external evaluation - as external evaluations had been already been carried out in the 1980’s (Liuhanen, 2007, 11) - the scope of the phenomenon marked the introduction of a new ideational emphasis on quality (Saarinen 2005; Liuhanen 2007). As Liuhanen (2007, 9) and Simola (2006, 44) observe, there is also a growing concern in the 00s regarding increasing external evaluation. The fear has to do with the level of external interference and new mechanisms of state control of higher education and science and is, hence, regarded threatening academic freedom\textsuperscript{11}. There seems thus be two major contemporary issues regarding how higher education institutions are governed and should be governed (Bleiklie and Kogan 2007). First, a normative debate regarding the nature of these changes, who the beneficiaries are, and second an empirical and analytical debate whether changes are taking place, the degree of these possible changes, the uniformity of change and last, why they are taking place or not. Put in organizational terms, how universities are coping with the demands has remained ambiguous. However, before proceeding to present what a study regarding QA in Finland from a perspective of organizational institutionalism can contribute, I will briefly discuss some of the findings during the last decade. This includes, among other things, various impacts and perceptions of quality assurance, how it has been received by academics, and how it has been viewed by various stakeholders in the process (Ursin 2007; Liuhanen 2007; Kauko 2011; Haapakorpi 2011; Ala-Vähälä 2011).

Kauko (2011), for example, in his research on the dynamics of higher education politics in Finland, from the perspective of agenda setting-opportunities by stakeholders, considers the creation of FINHEEC and the introduction quality assurance as a shift part of a broader trend relating to the idea of knowledge economy, a concept that is used to

\textsuperscript{11}As Isaiah Berlin so famously put it in 1958, there is a negative and a positive concept of liberty. Whether the threat is targeting academic freedom from the inference of others, or the freedom of being you own master, is a discussion, nonetheless, not in the scope of this research.
describe the new relationship between state, society and economy (Nokkala, 2008, 171). In connecting the organization of research and education to ideas and requirements from the point of view of economic growth, Finnish higher education has shifted from being a national project towards increased internationalization, competition and additionally, what’s most important, quality assurance (Nokkala 2008; Kauko, 2011, 69–71). This perspective has been further enhanced in the end of the 00s as the Ministry of Education, in its assessment in 2004 regarding quality assurance, highlighted the role of quality assurance as an important element in the nation’s competitiveness in a global world (Kauko, 2011, 75; Opetusministeriö, 2004). ‘Quality’ has thus become to be seen as being produced also for international stakeholders in the competition for the global knowledge economy (Kauko, 2011, 71). This has arguably also been the case with the increased demands for further coherence in the European Higher Education Area that was agreed upon in the set of meetings by the council of ministers in Prague (2001) Berlin (2003) Bergen (2005). These meetings emphasized increasingly the role of systemized quality assurance for European needs and the importance of enhancing the quality of European HEI’s as an integral part of the Bologna process (Purser, 2007; Kauko 2011, 75; Ursin 2007, 94).

In the aftermath of the Berlin summit in August 2003, the Finnish Ministry of Education established a working group to evaluate the quality assurance mechanisms in Finnish higher education according to the Berlin decision. The members of the working group concluded that the practices vary within a broad spectrum and that further systemization should take place (Ursin, 2007, 13–14; Opetusministeriö 2004, 37–38). In the framework of the process, quality assurance mechanisms have been introduced as a way to create coherence and as a way to gather data and evidence, as part of an overall effort to measure the ‘progress’ and the ‘quality’ of the universities in Europe. Consequently, curriculum managers and regulatory bodies have been introduced, and schools and universities have been recreated and recast, in an effort by governments to identify, to measure and to evaluate the progress of researchers, managers, administrative personnel, as well as, entire institutions.

Also national quality assurance agencies decided to implement further common and comparable quality assurance practices. This was done according to the standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA)
While the original goal of the ENQA was to standardize European quality assurance, researchers have with emphasis argued that “[...] this agenda has also wider implications [...] of standardization and adaptation also in the areas of quality assurance, funding, governance and curriculum.” (Stensaker et al 2008, 2). He states that:

“In what is known as quality audits, the evaluation focus is on the higher education institution as a whole, where the objectives are often coupled to the desire to support universities and colleges in their attempts to define their way mission, their activities and organization, and to stimulate and renew their way of dealing with the expectation of both society and students.” (Stensaker, 2000, 305)

Consequently, quality assurance and evaluation of universities are in their contemporary form not only linked into a European dimension through the Bologna process and the collaboration of national agencies in ENQA but their impact have been larger than just harmonization of degrees. The signing of the Bologna declaration in 1999 thus marked a starting point for greater convergence and standardization of national and international higher education in Europe. The European linkage has also been recognized by Ursin (2007) in his research on understandings and perceptions of quality assurance among Finnish academics and university students. Accordingly, the academic conceptions and opinions of quality assurance viewed the quality discourse to emerge in response to European developments (Ursin, 2007, 7). Moreover, they were perceived of taking the form of management, monitoring and control.

It should, nonetheless, also be noted that in debates about quality assurance promoted at the European level there is also much ambiguity regarding central terms that are used at enhancing, monitoring and developing quality culture; ‘assessment’, ‘accreditation’, ‘evaluation’, ‘benchmarking’ and ‘auditing’ can be recognized, to mention a few12. In the Finnish context, accreditation, benchmarking and awarding “seals of excellence” have not been very common, albeit higher education institutions have had the opportunity to apply for accreditation by international organizations. This has mostly

---

12 The European Commission (2009, 3) for example separates between – auditing, e.g. evaluating the quality of HEI’s, comparing quality at different HEIs in a given area/discipline (“benchmarking”); guaranteeing of pre-defined “standards” of quality are met (“accreditation”); and the awarding of various quality seals, signaling “excellence” in some area.
been used by business schools and universities of applied sciences. The term audited has in Finland been reserved only to HEI’s that have been audited through the process of FINHEEC or a similar European agency; the former, however, being the sole evaluator defined in national legislation and up to date the only evaluator chosen by Finnish universities. Arguably, this can be said to result from that the Finnish auditing has been portrayed to be anchored in a tradition emphasising pragmatic improvement (Liuhanen, 2007, 12) even though FINHEEC itself emphasises work done according to European standards in most of their publications (KKA, 2012; 2008a; 2008b; 2010). The emphasis on pragmatic improvement is also highlighted by the fact that the results of the evaluations are not linked to funding. Nonetheless, rectors respond, in principle, to the ministry of education regarding their auditing results in their annual budget negotiations, as has been pointed out by Ossi Lindqvist, who was the head of FINHEEC from 2000–2007 (Lindqvist, 2007, 35).

The steering of universities by the Ministry of Education was based, until the budgetary reform that entered into force 1.1.2013, on triennial agreements regarding objectives and performance negotiated between each university and the Ministry. Moreover, until recently, the Finnish government stood for 89 percent of the total university funding in Finland mostly in the form of direct government grants (Aarrevaara et al 2011, 245). Since the beginning of 2013 this has been changed so that direct government funding covers about 64 percent of university budgets, including supplementary funding such as paid services and sponsoring13. Of this sum, 75 percent is distributed for financing education and research and 25 percent as a part of strategic funding.

1.2. QA as a part of accountability, efficiency and governing

In a global setting the quality systems and quality mechanisms in different forms have also been understood as a part of broader trend of accountability, efficiency and steering. From an optimistic point of view, quality assurance improves the quality of teaching, research and study programmes while providing information and scrutiny of the usage of public money. While these are functions of quality and accountability, they can also, and this is a basic question in my research, be used as a method of governing.

The complexity of the phenomenon has also resulted in a set of varying replies to the question of - *why has quality assurance in its various forms gained such a momentum in the last couple of decades*. Evaluation has been, among others, been depicted from the point of view of:

1. a tool for educational quality and enhancement
2. a mechanism of governance and compliance
3. a tool of accountability supplementing lacking trust in the institutions
4. a way of enhancing legitimacy for education that is a core asset in the global knowledge economy
5. a mechanism for enforcing supranational policy

The first point of view is the most common rationale in relation to evaluation as it emphasizes improvement and positive effects. This notion has been most typically a theme discussed by the community of evaluators themselves; what kind of evaluation is the best. It has, however, been only narrowly researched from the perspective of the evaluators or from the perspective of the ones that have ordered the evaluation. The second and the third points have been discussed for example from the perspective of principal-agent theory or from foucauldian theorization about evaluation creating a sense of ‘governmentality’. The principal-agent problem of the Finnish government and the Finnish HEI’s has been discussed for example by Rekilä (2006) who found that the role of the Finnish state and ministry of education is drastically stronger in relation to market steering or the steering of the HEIs themself. Similarly, the value-free, pragmatic and rational character of evaluation and its effects on society in general (Power, 2003; 1994), and education in particular has attracted a range of research. Jakobi, for example, has argued that the governments increasing interest in education is connected to the contemporary trend of viewing education as a core asset in the “knowledge economy” (Jakobi et al. 2010, 2). Closely to this, Simola (2006, 45) has characterized the changed role of assessments during the last two decades in Finland as a changed relationship between higher education and the state, or put differently, as the politics of governing. Much of this research has argued that the development should be problematized and discussed with reference to concepts such as the evaluative state (e.g. Neave, 1998), the auditing society (e.g. Power, 2003; 1994) and new managerialism in exchange of constant improvement. In a similar vein, Enders argued that “Political
actors are increasingly inclined to experiment with quasi-market mechanisms in the governance and financing of education in order to strengthen private funding, competition and self-regulation in the field.” (Enders, 2010, 214). His claim relate to the inherent allergy of universities towards market-based decision-making, whereas others have only seen it symptomatic of a larger trend of evaluation. In sum, what the aforementioned authors exemplify is a diversity of approaches that nonetheless focus on some aspect of the knowledge society (Neave, 2006, 14). But as Neave states, this is more of a strength because various strands will eventually contribute to a fuller understanding of the changes. Focusing on only some aspect can thus be justified. Consequently, what we need is a when we talk about evaluation is conceptual rigor.

1.3. Evaluation and semantics

Conceptually, according to Ahonen (2001, 103) evaluation is not auditing of, examination of, or, revision of accounts. Furthermore, it is neither like policy analysis because policy analysis is only interested whether a policy is, strictly speaking, playing a role in reaching the desired goals (Ibid.). Nevertheless, the term has become something of a buzzword since its introduction in public administration in the 1960s. Evert Vedung coined (2008, 1) evaluation as a “semantic magnet” because of its contradictory and multifaceted meanings. Meanings attributed to ‘evaluation’ in general, range from ‘process determining worth and value’, ‘evaluation focused on interventions’, ‘evaluation focused on outputs’, ‘evaluations focused on outcome’, to ‘impact assessment’ and ‘goal-assessment’ (Vedung, 2008, 1–14). Consequently, he has argued that evaluations are in fact a form of government activity that is “monitoring” and “systemizing” (Vedung 2004, 2) and while it is seen on the face of it of resulting in less government, it is in fact resulting in more command and control of institutions under scrutiny (Bröckling et al., 2011). This is close to the line of thought developed by Michael Power who witnessed a similar trend in the 1990’s with regards to auditing and revision of accounts developing in the direction of monitoring institutions, and thus becoming a method of control (Power, 1994, 15).

Similarly, Dahler-Larsen (2003) has developed a threefold distinction of the political character of evaluation. First, evaluation can be conceptualized as evaluation policy
(goals, aims, and how the evaluation is supposed to be carried out). Second, evaluation can be considered as evaluation politics (the political power game of who benefits, who is allowed to define criteria). Third, ‘the political’ in evaluation consists of the dimension relating to the regulation of all human existence and the construction of meaning of ourselves as societal actors. Similarly, Eliadis et al (2010) recognized the power of evaluative organizations in terms of six areas of power; agenda-setting power, structuring power, value-defining power, truth-defining power, power to include or exclude, and in the power in deciding how findings should be disseminated (Eliadis et al 2010, 20–21). This is one of the characteristics of evaluation that will be deliberated in the interviews together with the themes of intention, unintended consequences and bureaucratization.

1.4. Intention, unintended consequences and bureaucratization

The implementation of higher education reforms have caused both intended outcomes as well as unintended results (Cerych, et al., 1986, 243), something which has also been found to hold true for assessment and evaluation in the public sector (van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002). Van Thiel and Leeuw (2002) have reviewed the usage of various performance indicators in the public sector and came to the conclusion that evaluation, performance measurement, auditing and output measurement in the public sector might also lead to “several unintended consequences that may not only invalidate conclusion on public sector performance but can also negatively influence that performance” (van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002, 267). The unintended consequences-claim rests on four core phenomenon that they witnessed in their overview of the literature. According to these authors the increase of evaluative organizations and units has led to increased expenditure of both the audit-type activities, an increase in the monitoring costs of both the state and organizations, as well as, in an increase in number of related administrative personnel (ibid, 269–270). Second, regarding organization in implementation, the measurement pressure can generate dysfunctional effects such as organizational paralysis, lack of innovation, managerial tunnel vision in the form of measure fixation and sub-optimization, that is, that there are sub-strategies that are in contradiction with the overall strategies of the organization (Ibid.). Third, the aforementioned effects have the potential to “jeopardize the effectiveness and efficiency of policy implementation”
A similar argument has been offered by Lane (1990, 36) who stated that organizations cannot adapt to their surroundings in the effective sense because of resistance, randomness, and unintended consequences in educational organizations. Last, a major unintended consequence is related to the fact that measuring in inherently ambiguous and thus it may remain unclear what is actually measured, making also the recommendations arbitrary (Vedung 2008; 2003).

It is, however, relevant to pinpoint that the arguments of van Thiel and Leeuw originate from many observations regarding the overall public sector reforms that where popular in the west in one form or another in the 1980’s and 1990’s. The adoption of private sector techniques of management and budgeting where thus not only aimed at increasing the opportunity to account for performance but also at measuring performance. Through measuring, improving the public sector performance was expected to follow. Consequentially, the replacing of input management was replaced by a results-based orientation. This was also the case in the state-university relationship in Finland in mid-1990’s where the result-steering [tulosohjaus] increased universities responsibility for their activities and finances and thus also left them with more autonomy to take care of the new responsibilities (Haapakorpi, 2011, 13). Procedural autonomy was moreover strengthened in the 00s with the new university act 558/2009 (Aarrevaara, 2012, 144). Yet, at the same time, the financial demands have got stricter while universities have been demanded to attract more external financing and responsibility for their finances (Haapakorpi, 2011, 13) and quality14.

However, modern public sector reforms have been witnessed in a range of countries and higher education systems and cannot automatically be seen to translate as such into other contexts. As Tom Christensen has argued (2012, 644), the adoption of these reforms has varied between countries and adoption has remained fairly heterogeneous. Adoption of global ideas seems thus to result in varying local adaptation and this argument could be valid with regards to the past Finnish higher education reforms and the model of evaluation chosen. This is foremost because the state-university relationship in Finland has generally been characterised as a relationship of trust and dialogue (Hölttä 1995; 30–35, in Liuhanen 2007, 14) but also because the Finnish form of evaluation highlights a tradition emphasising improvement (Liuhanen, 2007, 12).

Also, universities in Finland have witnessed a set of changes but resulting from many overlapping changes; the reforms made in financing in the 90s and the passing of the new university act (558/2009) that cemented procedural autonomy of universities (Aarrevaara, 2012, 144). Moreover, the new university law that became into effect as of 1.1.2010 made the universities persons in the face of law which meant that academics were no longer civil servants of the state but employed at the university.

Nevertheless, simultaneously an increased level of bureaucratization – measured in personnel – with regards to Finnish Universities, has taken place during the last two decades. Some tryouts to analyze this have been made. It has been claimed, for example, that the level of administrative personnel has increased remarkably (Kuoppala 2004 in Ruokolainen, 2011). Departing from Kuoppalas research, Ruokolainen (2011) found that the amount of full-time equivalents\(^\text{15}\) paid by from budgeted means in central administration of 15 Finnish Universities, in comparison to educational personnel, rose by 12,3 percent in comparison to education personnel, for which the amount was 1,1 percent (Ruokolainen, 2011, 49). Moreover, in central administration, the amount of full-time equivalents has increased with 40 percent from 1991 until 2009 whereas full-time teaching employment reduced with 2 percent (Ruokolainen, 2011, 49). In actual practice, however, not all evaluation objectives will translate to outcomes while there will always be outcomes not expressed in objectives. To connect the bureaucratization of Finnish universities to quality assurance would, however, be a hasty intellectual shortcut. At the most minimum level, however, we should witness that an allocation of resources for the communication of a QA-procedures has taken place, as a response to the need of displaying QA-practices (Dahler-Larsen, 1998, 65).

\(^{15}\) The Finnish term “henkilötyövuosi”, is translated as “full-time equivalent” according to the principles of the statistical center. It describes the labour input of a person, converted to a full-time employee. “All paid hours (regular working hours+overtime hours) of an enterprise (corporation) are divided by the average paid hours of full-time wage and salary earners in the enterprise (corporation)”. For more, visit the homepage of the Finnish Statistical Centre, http://www.stat.fi/meta/kas/henkilotyovuosi_en.html
1.5. Research design

A reading of the literature and theories regarding the role of evaluation and quality assurance portrays thus a set of possible alternatives with regards to the role, causality and effects. The FINHEEC, the ENQA and the Bologna process certainly could embody some this dimensions of power and ambiguity. However, the approach applied here is derived from the belief that internationalization, Europeanization and globalization are phenomenon that deserves no special theoretical development. On the contrary, the processes of, for example internationalization, can be understood by studying how higher education organizations perceive and respond to initiatives and developments in the field of higher education. Whether this holds true with regards to supranational elements will be explored. Thus, this thesis is informed by perspectives that claim that policy-making in the field of education is influenced by intergovernmental agreements such as the Bologna process or globalization (Meyer, 2002; Kauko 2011; Stensaker & al., 2008) and their formulation of the term quality (Saarinen, 2005) but considers these only in the Finnish context and at the level of organizations. A typical trait of the Finnish context is, moreover, the big role of the state, emphasizing that Finnish HEIs need typically to respond to demands from the state and the ministry of education, rather than markets (Rekilä, 2006). Consequently, focusing the analysis to the level of organizations seems well suited.

In the context of implementing quality standards worked out in interaction with the FINHEEC and the impact of audits on Universities in Finland, only some research has been made about the effects of evaluation practice\(^\text{16}\) but barely from the perspective of

\(^{16}\)Exceptions to this claim of course exist. Liuhanen (2007), for example, has conducted research on how the evaluations are put into practice and how they are utilized in one old and large and one young and small Finnish University. Ala-Vähälä (2011) has made a web-based survey mapping the differences between evaluations in between a Finnish polytechnic and a Finnish university. Haapakorpi (2011) has compared impacts of the audits through a combination of surveys and interviews but used as cases the University of Helsinki and the University of Tampere, that is, a dissimilar system design. Much of these interviews were conducted end of 2009 and beginning of 2010, before the organization of the university changed dramatically. In this sense, this study adds a longer timespan while viewing these as embedded cases of the phenomenon of evaluation. Moreover, Haapakorpi’s research was associated with FINHEEC and as Liuhanen has stated in her work (2007, 23–24), collaboration with FINHEEC can be considered a handicap in that it risks over-emphasizing and legitimating FINHEECs own work.
organizational institutionalism. Moreover, much research has been made immediately after the audits although in order to find out whether there has been lasting effects in these organizations, a longer time perspective is needed. Consequently, my theoretical approach to institutions and institutional change starts out from the new-institutional assumption that governance and reform mean intervention in a setting characterised by complex institutional structures and evolving patterns of behaviour, meaning and resources. This would imply that the institutional history and culture of these organizations could make a difference for implementation and on the institutional dynamics of change. As March and Olsen (1989, 16) have pointed out, institutional structures and administrative elements can play an important role in providing order and having an impact on the direction of change, whereas Wilson (1989) highlighted that individuals, managers and leaders can play a significant role in the process of implementation of laws, regulation and mission. And as Clark (1983, 183) stated in his seminal work, institutionalized organizations such as universities are particularly capable in resisting change as they include some of the necessary elements of resistance such as organized professionals. One reason for the problems of implementing quality-systems has exactly been said to originate from the culture in educational organization that emphasizes the autonomy of the professionals (Karjalainen, 2004, 3–4). The system of external academic audits should thus be aimed at monitoring and encouraging the emergence of a quality culture.

It is however not certain to what extent the evaluation work is carried out in universities except what is reported in official documents, stating ‘much is done’. Similarly, even if there would be a change in the ideas of quality, “changing beliefs and ideals do not necessarily lead to new practices” as Bleiklie and Kogan have pointed out (2007, 478). This is also because people actively construct meaning within institutionalized settings (Meyer & Rowan, 2006, 6). Moreover, because modern actorhood in the west is authorized by four types of agency; agency for self, agency for other actors, agency for entities that cannot be considered actors, and agency for cultural standards and principles, the participants can act on the basis of a set of reasons (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000, 106–108). The capacities of human agency are thus embedded – informed by rationalization – but also capable of imagining alternative future scenarios (Stensaker et
al. 2012, 13) and make sense and rationalize past events (Weick et. al 2005, 409). Consequently, this view on actorhood will guide the analysis in these two organizations.

Because this study presumes that organizations are situated in normative and cognitive environments, and that the process of evaluation is a dynamic process, it requires historical and interpretative methods (Palmer, Biggart, Dick, 2008, 748). These are fundamentally non-positivist approaches and consequently, the conclusions are historically and spatially specific and thus less generalizable, at least in the empirical sense. A lack in empirical generalizability can, however, be countered with analytic generalizability (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 73–81) which is one of five possible analytic techniques (Yin, 2009, 141–144, see also Methods chapter). Taking into account the work done in the field, this research aims at exploring through qualitative methods, the manifest dimensions of the claimed semantic ambiguity, as well as, the intentional effects of evaluation. Moreover, whether negative side effects have taken place in the Finnish pragmatic tradition of evaluation will be explored. Consequently, the spatial dimensions of this study are grasp only what is labeled auditing in Finland, or more specifically, the evaluation of quality assurance systems of Universities in Finland where two universities function as embedded cases of the phenomenon (Yin, 2009, 50–52).

Consequently, in relation to the previous discussion, and as a reminder, the research themes, which will be analyzed in the documents and which are specified in the interview outline (see appendix 4), are as follows:

1. What have been the perceived benefits and drawbacks of developing QA-systems, from the perspective of universities?
2. Have audits played a role in bureaucratization or had an impact on the allocation of resources?
3. What kind of organizational arrangements and divisions of work do we see in practice developed in response to the demand of showing a QA system?
4. To what degree do the actors’ involved see audits being a response to national and supranational demands?
5. What role do the audits play in the State-FINHEEC-University relationship?
6. In relation to other reforms, what has the impact of audits been on these organizations?

Consequently, as cases, two universities were chosen of which the other represents an exceptional case in that it is one of the few Universities of the 16\textsuperscript{17} that has been re-audited while the other is considered illustrative of a mainstream case. The universities are, however, comparable in terms of size and structure, as they are both, within a Finnish frame of reference, so called mid-sized diversified universities\textsuperscript{18}. Moreover, the interviews were pooled, making them a part of a larger unit of analysis, namely that of organizational responses to QA in Finland. The universities can thus be considered as embedded cases (Yin 2009, 50–52) of the phenomenon of higher education evaluation even if the audits of their QA systems led to different outcomes. The temporal context of this study is the first systematic round of auditions that took place in Finland 2008–2011 and at these universities in 2008 and 2012 because of a re-audition at one of the universities. Both the document analysis and the interviews were carried out in 2012 and 2013.

1.6. Outline of thesis

This introductory chapter has outlined the context and phenomenon of HEI auditing in Finland. Moreover, it has formulated the focus of this study, introduced the recent developments in the field of HE in Finland, its methodological approach, and empirical materials for the analysis. I have also justified the need for this type of research in organizational analysis. In doing so, I have positioned my thesis within 17 organizational institutionalism, focused on organizational responses to contemporary developments in public administration in general, and issues in higher education and quality assurance in particular. The institutional analysis adopted here derives from the argument that

\textsuperscript{17} Other re-audited universities during the first round were, for example, the University of Technology and the University of Art and Design but they were not comparable to the University of Turku in terms of field, size or organization.

\textsuperscript{18} According to Pekkola (2011), this group consists of the universities of Turku, Tampere, Jyväskylä and Oulu. Of these, Turku had in 2008 around 17,000 students and Tampere 15,000 students. The universities of Kuopio, Lappi, Joensuu and Vaasa are considered smaller than these and where consequently left out.
“organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society.” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 340). Because of the pervasiveness of rationalization in the modern world and the interaction between actors and their broader social, economic, and political setting, agents in these organizations have the capacity to act on the basis of either self, others, or cultural principles (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000).

The thesis is structured in five parts. The first chapter introduced the field of higher education in Finland, previous research and recent developments in quality assurance in Finland and Europe. The following chapter will discuss the implications of organizational institutionalism for analyzing higher education institutions and quality assurance. This part will also present related and relevant prior concepts such as isomorphism and loose coupling. The consecutive chapter will present the methodological framework and the qualitative methods chosen for this research, and their strengths and weaknesses. The subsequent chapters will discuss the findings followed by a final discussion.
2. THE THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE OF NEW-INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

In this chapter, some recent developments in institutional theory will be outlined, as well as, findings from earlier research and their contribution to the study of educational organizations. This part will also present related and relevant prior concepts such as isomorphism and loose coupling. Moreover, this chapter discusses the nature of universities as objects of research and what role quality has come to play in higher education. This subject also touches upon the topic how evaluation has become institutionalized and how it has developed in the direction of a system.

2.1. Early studies of Organisations

The earlier interest in the study of organizations can be dated back to late 19th century in fields of economics, political science and sociology. While they shared a similar interest in organizations they, however, differed in many ways what comes to their emergence, recurrence and scope (see for example Scott, 2008, 1–18). The focus on institutions in economics, emerged in the late 19th Austria and Germany as a “[…] one by-product of the famous Methodenstreit: the debate over scientific method in the social sciences.” (Scott, 2008, 2, [italics in original]). These institutional economists, who challenged the notion of universal laws in economics, nevertheless lost the struggle for a hegemonic position in economics (ibid.)19. In political science on the contrary, the interest in institutions dominated since mid-19th century both in the US and Europe. This tradition had in the United States a focus on the study of formal structures, constitutional law, moral philosophy and parliamentary procedures (Blyth, 2002, 296; Scott, 2008, 6–7). The institutional school in both political science and public administration around the turn of the century was, nonetheless, dominantly focused on the origins and structure of

19 Whether Kuhn’s (1962) concepts of paradigm and scientific revolutions are applicable to social sciences in general and political science has been contested. Gunnell (2004) has argued that the behavioral revolution was not a revolution in a ‘Kuhnian’ sense.
organizations and has later been viewed as somewhat atheoretical and inclined towards historical depiction rather than rigorous testing (Scott, 2008, 7–8; March & Olsen, 2006, 5).

While there were some seminal publications in political science and public administration such as Dwight Waldo’s “The administrative state” (1946) - which stated that theories of public administration are also theories of politics (Frederickson & Smith, 2003, 7) - political science in general developed in the direction of structural functionalism. This development that took place after WWII and the beginning of the Cold War lasted to around the 1950’s, making structural functionalism the dominant school before the challenges posed by behaviorists from the 1960’s onwards (Blyth, 2002, 296–297, Frederickson & Smith, 2003, 8–9). All in all, the early institutionalists in political science were less capable of answering to positivistic inquiries of a ‘theory’, namely the ordering of factual material, depiction, explanation, and prediction (Frederickson & Smith, 2003, 4–8).

Similarly, and in many ways overlapping to political science, sociology had a strong mainstream institutional tradition by the turn of the century. In Europe it took the form of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber whereas in the US the early sociological studies where influenced most notably by Herbert Spencer and later by Talcott Parsons (Scott, 2008, 7–8). While the sociological work on the subject is too extensive to summarize in this paper, the core argument is that the origins, ideological roots, recurrence and emergence of their interest in organizations diverged in Europe and the US and between the disciplines. One difference was that the perception regarding organizations changed, shifting from the input-output oriented view towards a view highlighting how organizations operate in a socio-cultural environment capable of constraining and shaping organizations (Scott, 2008, ix). The abandoning of purely scientific theories of organizations was, however, natural in that sense that new models were felt more accurate than their predecessors in describing, solving puzzles and discovering new elements and characteristics of organizational life. In sum, it has been argued that positivist or behavioral social sciences are competitive and irreconcilable with interpretations based on case studies or decisions. Today, however, the positions have reconciled and public administration theory derived from positivist – as well as, behavioral philosophy of science – has been deemed acceptable, sometimes even
complementary (Frederickson & Smith, 2003, 9–11). The latter also supports the choice of theoretical orientation of this thesis, namely, that of organizational institutionalism and institutional analysis.

2.2. **New Institutional Theory**

Common for the main flavors of new-institutionalism is that they mostly emerged in part as a reaction to the behavioral and rational choice perspectives and their focus on moral individualism and bargaining that dominated the field of social science research in the 1960’s and 1970s (Hall & Taylor, 1996, 936; Lane, 1990, 32; Lowndes, 2002, 95). Second, the insight that what happened in organizations had little, or nothing, to do with their objective tasks became another core tenet of institutional analysis. A third commonality in all institutional analysis is that they make statements about the relationship between institutions in the broad sense and behavior while, in addition, offering explanations for how institutions emerge and change (Hall & Taylor 1996, 937).

According to Lowndes (2002, 91) the novelty, or ‘newness’, of this renewed attention for institutions lied in their focus on four aspects. First, they focused both on informal and formal conventions and structures. Second, they accepted the premises that values and power is embodied in organizations. Third, they recognized the shortcomings and possibilities of institutional design. Fourthly, they highlighted that, not only can institutions impact individuals, but that this relationship is an interaction between the institution and the individual.

What comes to the concept of ‘institutions’, Mark Blyth has argued that, while there is no sole definition of what an ‘institution’ is for the various approaches of new-institutionalism, all conceptualizations have tackled one issue in common, namely the production of order (Blyth, 2002, 296). This definition leaves, however, much room for interpretation. March and Olsen’s separation of approaches is thus much helpful. According to these authors (March & Olsen, 1984; 2006, 4–5), the new-institutional approaches to political institutions share many characteristics but differ in how they understand:
1. the nature of institutions, i.e. the setting in which political actors take action
2. the processes that translate structures and rules into political impacts
3. the processes that translate human behavior into structures and rules that establish, sustain, transform, or eliminate institutions.

(March and Olsen, 2006, 4)

Thus, while economic approaches have embraced either a version of rationality in the strict or ‘bounded’ sense, sociological approaches have drawn on ideas from cognitive, cultural, ethno-methodological and phenomenological fields. Similarly, Scott has argued (2008, 45) that the new-institutional turn in political science, left the field divided in two camps, but we can nonetheless recognize three broad grouping of institutional theory based on their analytical elements.

The body of new-institutional theory in social sciences is thus not a unified body of thought or a theory in the formal sense but instead, it consists of a broad set of assumptions depending on the approach in question (Hall & Taylor 1996, 936; March and Olsen, 2006, 4; Scott 2008, 45; Frederickson & Smith, 2003, 67). This can also be seen in applications of new institutional analysis where it has been applied to the study of politics (March and Olsen, 1989), organizations (Meyer and Rowan 1977, Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), and policy analysis (Lane, 1990) to mention a few. Consequently, there is not only much overlapping - in the terminology regarding institutions in what Hall and Taylor boils down to three schools of thought and what Scott (2008, 47) sees as three broad pillars on the basis of analytical elements - but also great variance in their ontology. The conceptualization of Scott (2008) is however similar to that of March and Olsen (2006) and Hall and Taylor (1996). March and Olsen (2006, 4) see institutionalism as a general approach to the study of political institutions which is competing and supplemented by rational actor-perspectives and cultural community perspectives. In Hall’s and Taylor’s elaboration, political science has since the 1980’s witnessed three, rather independently developing, analytical perspectives in political science under the labels of “new-institutionalism”, namely; historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism (Hall & Taylor, 1996, 936). An overall term of “post-Weberian interdisciplinary organization theory” has also
been suggested for all institutional theory since the 1980’s (Frederickson & Smith, 2003, 68).

Some of the aforementioned classifications have however been criticized for not accurately depicting development in organizational institutionalism, meaning institutional analysis of organizations (Greenwood et al., 2008, 1). This can partly be seen to be caused by the fact that new-institutionalism has developed partly overlapping and partly in various directions in sociology, political science, public administration and international relations. Moreover, as has been pointed out, the developments have been different not only in Europe and the US but also in Europe. Consequently, in relation to the study of organizations and public administration, the writers of the SAGE Handbook on Organizational institutionalism (2008) recognize four relevant timespans in the formulations of institutional theory of organizations: foundational years 1977–1983, early years 1983–1991, the years of accumulation 1987–1991 and expansion 1991–2007 (Greenwood et al., 2008, 1–46). The following sections will elaborate the relevant key findings from these three decades in relation to educational organizations.

### 2.3. Organisational Institutionalism and Higher Education Institutions

The models developed by John Meyer, Richard Scott and Brian Rowan during the 1970’s and 1980’s were not the final form of institutional theory and especially within the field of education there has been a need to reformulate some of the core concepts. According to Meyer & Rowan (2006, 2), this is because some of the early theorization is out-of-date because of contemporary developments. They have pointed out that the area of education has witnessed three dramatic changes: first, a greater pluralism in agents or organization providing education, second an increasing emphasis on the role of education in what has been coined as the knowledge economy and third, an increase in tight coupling instead of loose coupling. In relation to the first claim, one can with

---

20 Moreover, regional variations have been said to exist, see for example, the discussion of a Scandinavian approach in organizational institutionalism by Czarniawska (2008) in the SAGE Handbook on Organizational Institutionalism (2008).
ease observe such change in Finnish Higher Education. The second case is relevant in the sense that as we move towards a knowledge intensive society, the lower and higher education systems are expected to respond and demonstrate efficient use and allocation of funds. This discussion, in relation to evaluation, was touched upon already in the first chapter. With regards the third claim concerning loose coupling, the term was originally developed to explain the weak influence of government policy on educational organizations (Weick, 1976; Meyer, 2002). Loose coupling is inherently a concept used to describe the relationships of varying elements to each other and this concept will be further elaborated in the following section regarding the university as an organization. However, with the increased interest in education by the state, schools and universities have become more tightly linked to the influence of government policy. Consequently, what follows is a discussion on what kind of organizations universities are, to what degree they can respond to new demands and what role quality assurance plays in this.

2.3.1. Universities as Organizations and Institutions

According to early theorization regarding educational organizations, universities were rather typical organizations in public administration. Their behavior was governed and specified in laws, strategies, decrees, conventions, and standard operating procedures. Consequently, much of the behavior was routinized either through coercive regulation, authority, or as part of appropriate professional behavior, where the roles where internalized through a process of socialization (March & Olsen, 1989, 21–22). The university remained thus true to Mintzberg’s (1979) classic conceptualization. According to him, the university was a professional bureaucracy. It was bureaucratic, yet, without being fully centralized and where work is done according to scientific standards and practices whilst remaining complex. Ergo, the organization, or its managers, needs a coordinating mechanism that allows for simultaneous decentralization and standardization, which, in his time, rested on the standardization of skills of the workforce (1979, 348–349). But as even he stated, also a professional bureaucracy are drawn towards adhocracies where breaking away from established patterns is the norm (Mintzberg, 1979, 450). Accordingly, organizations with a high level of knowledge workers will be differentiated and specialized and as a consequence,
the typical university organization is highly differentiated and where managers balance on this tension. This is further enhanced as academic work tends to become separated in a mixture of subject areas on the basis of characteristics such as epistemological differences, scholarly interests and history.

The aforementioned characterization, however, leaves out some fundamental aspects of the university as an organization. Universities have been seen to differ from other public administration in four respects. First, because universities are mostly divided according to professional norms, expertise, and the logic of scientific disciplines, they have been seen as particularly resistant to change. Lane, for example, has suggested (1990, 36) that the fate of adaptation of educational policy depends not only on what kind of policy is formulated but that a successful adaptation depends on the nature of the target organization. This is related to the second point. As Pekkola (2011, 40) has noted, the goals and values of science differ from that of the goals and values of university organizations, thus causing a constant dichotomy between the two. The goals of administrative personnel and academics are thus different; leading the universities to typically adopt matrix-structures (Clark, 1983) and remaining loose coupled (Weick, 1976). Third, because the material with what the university works with is knowledge, the arguments and basis for reforms are frequently examined in a highly critical attitude (Stensaker et. al, 2012, 5). Fourth, even when ideas are accepted there is research pointing to those ideas being translated and transformed in order for them to fit the particularities of the organization in question (Sarrico & Melo, 2012, 90–94; Stensaker et al. 2012, 5; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

2.3.2. Loose coupling in Higher Education Organizations

To organize always includes a choice between strong and weak organizational rigidity. Generally it has been stated that while too much of the former can suffocate activity; some level of coordination is nevertheless always required in order to keep the organization together. Because of this, there is always a level of conflict in every organization. Universities, however, have - as I will elaborate in the following - been able to cope with these conflicts through a set of strategies that can be understood through the concept of loose coupling.
Explaining the weak influence of government policy on educational organizations was early on described in terms of “loosely coupled” (Weick, 1976; Meyer, 2002) and later additionally as decoupled, tightly coupled and non-coupled (Orton & Weick, 1990). According to the original idea of loose coupling, a loosely coupled system could be described as a system in which the elements are responsive towards other elements of the system, whereas each element maintains their identity and some level of logical or physical independence (Weick, 1976, 3). In being loosely coupled, they were capable of including competing organizational forms, for example, a form conforming to formal requirements and another more fitting for the organizational culture (Kushner & Norris, 2007, 9). Universities where thus not adopting organizational structures according to, for example functionalist principles, but instead they changed through the process of isomorphism where organizations conformed to the institutionalized norms of government and academic professionals (Meyer & Rowan, 2006, 3). The form conforming to similar organizational models was thus aimed at increasing the chances of survival, to safeguard resources, and legitimacy in the eyes of the surrounding society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) whereas academics could continue with their daily practices. Coupling could, moreover, occur not only between the organization and its surroundings but also between different levels of an organization (Sahlin, 2012, 215). A concrete example of loose coupling is thus “if certain units are formed as a way to take care of rankings, evaluation, and assessments[...]” (Sahlin, 2012, 215). Weick’s theory (1976; Weick & Orton, 1990) about universities remaining loosely coupled, when faced with demands of efficiency, thus adheres to the earlier discussed revelation that much in organizations had little, or nothing, to do with their objective tasks. Weick later went as far as contrasting loose coupling as a theory of its own (see Weick & Orton 1990) in relation to other organizational perspectives such as the institutional theory derived from Meyer and Rowan (1977). However, as he has also admitted, each of these four strands of organizational theory has a “[...] more distinctive paradigm, a more compact theory, and more empirical support than is true for loose coupling” (Weick & Orton, 1990, 203).

In a similar tune, Meyer and Rowan (2002) have suggested in their review of the concept, that not only are the concepts of loose coupling ambiguous, but that they in many ways are not up for the challenge of concepts that could be useful in the research
of education. The concepts of coupling have been recurring in much of theories of the past 30 years as organizations and especially HE organizations have been perceived to cope with the surrounding demands and uncertainty through loose and tight coupling. However, Meyer and Rowan have pointed out that the concepts of coupling and decoupling could be useful in combination with another theory. Sarrico & Melo (2012, 90–95), for example, have suggested that instead of only talking about decoupling and coupling as coping strategies, we could think about coping in general not only through these two strategies but through a third one called translation strategies which puts our focus on local adaptation. The translation perspective thus highlights not only the local contexts and actors, but also how they confront ideas and practices from around the world.

In this sense, universities are not simply organizations but institutions in the sense that they arrange and legitimize broadly based cultural institutions, that is, myths, values and norms. In Weick’s (1976) and Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) work, the hierarchy of schools and colleges was loosely coupled and persistent, in contrast to the earlier held belief that only tightly knitted organizations with close relations between top and bottom held together. They make thus the remark that larger schemes of cultural rules gives collective meaning, or put differently, that cultural rules make up institutions. From a macro-perspective, they highlighted the impact of modernization and rationalizing rules leading to organizational isomorphism. The key explanation is thus to view “educational organizations” as institutionalized organizations, that is, as organizations whose most important constraint was not efficiency but instead, legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; 2006, 6). Consequently, what held organization together were myths rather than efficiency or technical matters, pointing towards the importance of maintaining the organizations legitimacy in the face of the public. Conforming to norms and values was thus seen as the main sources of the legitimacy of educational organizations. Consequently, as was already argued in the introduction, the organizational level and the participating actors might be a sufficient level of analysis for how institutional frameworks adopt. Before proceeding, however, a short overview of how institutions are viewed to respond to demands and pressures will be presented.
2.3.2. Responses to Institutional Pressures – the role of Isomorphism

A central idea related to the previous discussion is the question why organizations tend to be unusually similar in terms of organizational structure. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) extended the reach of Meyer and Rowans research on isomorphism from the macro-level and the societal level in the direction of organizational fields. An organizational field is “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life” (1983, 148). And which “[…] group organizations according to their tendency to establish relationships with one another and according to their regulation by a common set of institutional constraints” (Palmer, Biggart, Dick, 2008, 754). Moreover, DiMaggio and Powell introduced the concepts of coercive, normative and mimetic isomorphism which were three mechanisms through which institutional effects are disseminated21. Thus the main argument became that they do this out of pressure from institutionalized ideas about the right model of organizing.

Consequently, by focusing on this level of analysis, many of the early writers were eager in demonstrating how uniformity in organizational arrangements was a response to influence of the environment and the role of the state (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008, 132). Structural isomorphism thus pointed in the direction of similarity and convergence. It was thus a feature of the bureaucratization process and referred to the emergence and diffusion of similar organizational forms or structural procedures of formal organizing spreading across sets of organizations. After researching on mimetic and regulative isomorphism, research turned to the question of what constitutes (for example the cultural cognitive elements and processes) the logics of fields that guide and outline the behavior and actors (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008, 133).

As studies of organizational institutionalism have evolved, scholars have needed to rethink not only the role of isomorphism but also the role of organizational fields as “organizations are not only set within a field, they are also located within communities.” (Greenwood et al., 2008, 30). By this is meant that communities might play a larger role in formulating the myths and logics at play than was originally thought by DiMaggio

21 Of these, coercive stems from political influence, mimetic from standard responses to uncertainty whereas normative isomorphism stems from professionalization of occupations. (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 150)
and Powell (1983). Parallel, isomorphism has been found on the macro level but the link between the macro-level and national arrangements has also been a contested one (Christensen, 2012). Consequently, whereas the influential perspective on how organization respond to institutional pressures was for a long time that of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), current contributions have introduce a complementary explanation, arguing that individual organizations are capable of translation and local adoption (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Sarrico & Melo, 2012, 90–94). This is because DiMaggio’s and Powell’s (1983) concepts left little room for agency, meaning that for example, voluntary participation, resistance and incompatibility of ideas and organizations are not possible if the isomorphic processes are considered somewhat automatic (Christensen, 2012, 648). This seems also to hold also true with regards to higher education. While European higher education evaluation is formed in very general terms and claims for universal applicability in Europe, the implementation and ideas of the role of evaluation have taken very different shapes in not only in different European countries but Nordic countries as well (Wahlén, 2007). It would thus be hard to argue for clear-cut isomorphic adaptation. Thus, models and solutions are rarely taken at face value but more selectively, occasionally integrating with local practice and tradition (Selznick, 1966; Andersson & Engwall, 2002, 23–24). This is made possible because of the nature of actorhood, as was discussed in the introduction.

2.4. Quality Assurance and Institutional Analysis

As was stated in the introduction of this thesis, when explaining why HEIs adopt new quality assurance practices, a general analytical distinction can be made between rational and institutional perspectives. A rational perspective would perceive organizations doing this because it enhances their strategic performance in relation to others. But as I have argued previously, it seems doubtful that this would be the case. Consequently, an institutional account on quality assurance could thus prove more fruitful. If organizations are not solely responding to the demands of their environments in a functionalist account, but strive to conform to surrounding norms, quality-assurance could thus be seen as a legitimacy-enhancing ritual. Evaluation becomes thus a ritual of verification where rationalized and organized principles act as symbols rather than
cultural notions of efficiency and modernity (Dobbin, 1994, 122). In this sense evaluation is symbolically appropriate (Dahler-Larsen, 1998, 64) and can also be used to compensate and reaffirm organizations that face loose coupling.

In relation to contemporary evaluation, however, the potential uses of evaluations, and results in evaluations, have been limited. Overall, the strategic use have shown greater consistency under the conditions of “conflict and scarce resources” (Dahler-Larsen, 1998, 65–66), a situation which is not entirely a fitting depiction of the landscape of Finnish higher education institutions. In this sense it is not resources that matter most, but normative conformity. Evaluation procedures thus follow logic of appropriateness since evaluation is often demanded in terms of procedure rather than stated in specific criteria, purpose, or follow-up procedure in relation to later decision-making (Dahler-Larsen, 1998, 76–77). Because organizations are generally good at responding to demands about a procedure, we should thus be witnessing at least an allocation of resources to the communication about a procedure.

2.4.1. The Institutionalization of Evaluation

While evaluation - in terms of managing quality through inspection - emerged with the development of industrial production of mass-produced goods in response to the need for systematic assessment of the quality of products (Garvin, 1988, 4) modern evaluative practices where introduced into public administration in 1960s as a reaction and critique of planning (Ahonen et al 2002; Vedung 1998, 22). Moreover, it emerged as a mechanism for the result-oriented analysis and information feedback for the public administration of western democracies and as a part of broader change in different governance doctrines (Vedung, 2008; 2010, 264). In Finnish public administration evaluation has taken many ambiguous forms such as impact analysis, quality assurance, auditing, and forms of ‘impact assessments’, pinpointing to enhanced efficiency, accountability, quality and responsiveness (Horelli, 2006, 61). This multitude of terms led Vedung to state that a wave of evidence-based policymaking and evaluation has grown in strength since the mid-1990s in terms of rhetoric (Vedung 2010, 276; 2004).
This wave which followed a wave of scientific, dialogue-oriented and neo-liberal evaluation, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, is to some degree a renaissance of the first one (Vedung, 2010, 263). Moreover, as a part a part of this fourth wave, a wide range of national, regional and transnational evaluation, accreditation and auditing providers and promoters has sprung up and matured. A similar observation has been made with regards to academic journals and research on higher education (Neave, 2006, 14). The spread of organized evaluation shares in this sense much resemblance with the development of global scripts as described by Meyer (2002). Networks for evaluating higher education have been introduced on a European (ENQA) and Nordic scale (NOQA) matching the increased need for comparable quality with regarding the Bologna process. Accordingly, cultural ideas regarding organizational practice, rules, and new techniques of management, are increasingly spreading around the world as a result of two complex processes; first, because of rapidly flowing, standardized, ideas about organizations and second, because of increased emphasis of managing (Meyer, 2002, 34). The formation of evaluation networks and increased interaction between European countries has thus enabled ideas regarding evaluation to travel in a similar vein as has been argued to happen with managerial-ideas (see for example, Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002).

Parallel to the interrelated development of international and national adaptations of auditing, evaluation and quality assurance in higher education, evaluation has become institutionalized and a core feature assessing the quality of higher education institutions. According to Selznick (1966) institutionalization takes place when an organization becomes aware of its dependence of the environment and that it can only choose action from a set of options that are perceived as legitimate. All in all, the field of higher education has, according to Birnbaum (2000), witnessed seven major fads in HE management systems: Planning Programming Budgeting Systems, Management by

22 Fundamentally, Neave and Vedung are contributing to the revelation already discussed by Kuhn (1962) who witnessed in hard sciences a continuing specialization and disciplinary fragmentation of science since the 17th century. Whereas the discussion about normal science and social sciences, or soft and hard sciences, is another one, the observation by Kuhn of a “constant proliferation of scientific journals” (Hacking, xxxii) is a phenomenon that can also be witnessed in the field of evaluation and social sciences.

23 The phenomenon has also been coined managerialism but the content of this concept varies. Stephen J. Ball, for example, talks about the state’s role shifting from “rowing” to “steering” (Ball, 2008, 194).
Objectives, zero base budgeting, strategic planning, benchmarking, Total Quality Management, and Business Process Reengineering. What we are currently witnessing in Finland does not automatically fall into any of the aforementioned categories but can nevertheless be understood through the concept of a system.

According to Leeuw and Furubo (2008), for evaluation activities to be categorized as a system, four criteria need to be fulfilled. First, there should be a distinctive epistemological perspective in the activities pursued. With regards to this, evaluators as well as academics point out frequently about the Finnish model of evaluation that there exists a certain epistemology, namely, that of ‘enhancement-led evaluation’ (Liuhanen, 2007). Second, evaluations are not carried out by sole-consultants but by evaluators “within organizational structures and institutions” (Leeuw & Furubo, 2008, 159) operating in organizations specified by the government to carry out these tasks. This has been the case with FINHEEC since its creation in 1996 but especially since 2010 when evaluations became mandatory for universities in Finland. Moreover, the criteria of a minimum of one another organization that requests this information also holds true. Third, there should be an element of durability and permanence in the evaluation activities, meaning a high volume of activities and publications. Last, evaluations should be planned in advance, there should be intervals and cutoff dates and the information should be linked to decision-making and implementation processes (Leeuw & Furubo. 2008, 159–160). We can conclude that the activities of evaluation in Finnish higher education adhere to all of the aforementioned criteria even if the level of institutionalization of evaluation - in the broad sense - in Finland, has remained divided into various paradigms as well as conceptual complexities and contrasts (Ahonen, forthcoming, 16). In sum, Leeuw and Furubo (2008) raise the issue of yet other unintended consequences, namely, that evaluation systems can breed new evaluation systems and create routinized systems consisting of single-loop learning processes and day-to-day activities that are irrelevant to true reassessment and evaluation.

24 The characteristics of the system described by Leeuw and Furubo are very much similar to the elements of an organizational field as it has been describe by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). However, because Leeuw and Furubo have developed their concept with evaluation in mind, this conceptualisation was deemed more useful.
In conclusion, this second chapter has discussed the implications of organizational institutionalism for analyzing higher education institutions and quality assurance. This part has also presented related and relevant prior concepts. The following chapter will present the methodological framework and the qualitative methods chosen for this research, as well as their strengths and weaknesses.
3. METHODOLOGY AND DESCRIPTION OF CASES

The previous parts have discussed the current context where Finnish universities operate, the Finnish model of quality assurance, the new-institutional framework, the evolution of evaluation and auditing, as well as, the semantic ambiguity of evaluation. This part will outline the methodological orientation for the analysis, starting from a brief introduction on the pros and cons of qualitative analysis. This will be followed by a presentation of the case study method, document analysis and the possibilities and insights that elite-interviews - structured around themes - can provide for the development of new-institutional theorization regarding evaluations. Also, the documents and the interviews that are used are described, combined with a discussion that has taken into account the criteria of feasibility, appropriateness, suitability, professionalism, ethicality and generalizability of the methods chosen (Denscombe, 2003, 284–298).

3.1. Choice of Methods

The choice of methodology in social sciences can range from surveys, interviewing, and documentary analysis to observation (Denscombe, 2003). While all methods certainly play an important role, the choice of method should be done according to their epistemological underpinning. This choice is usually made between qualitative or quantitative methods, whereas some scholars have argued for the combination of the two for increasing the consistency of research (Read & Marsh, 2002; Yin 2009). For practical and financial reasons, however, this is rarely possible. Because the universities examined cannot be expected to automatically be under the same kinds of institutional pressures (Scott, 2008, 161–163), except analytically, the choice was made to adopt qualitative methods. Moreover, survey-methodology was left out because of its epistemological shortcomings. As we remember from the chapter on new-institutionalism, the theorization emerged as a critique of behavioralism and of the analogy of social and natural sciences, and therefore surveys would not seem
appropriate for analyzing many of the tenets put forth in the new-institutionalist framework. More specifically, as the research problem is more concerned about meaning, surveys would most likely leave out relevant information (Read & Marsh, 2002, 234).

Qualitative methods can range from direct observation, participant observation, and individual interviews to focus group interviews (Devine, 2002, 197). The benefits of interviewing can it their shortest form summarized accordingly: it explores unknown territory where objective tests do not exist, while it can at the same time offer new hypotheses (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2009, 34–35). Others have gone even further in claiming that interviewing and similar qualitative methods can critically examine existing theories; Repstad, 2007, 23). As interviewing is not my sole source of data, I will treat it more as developed by Yin (2009), namely, as one source of data in the case study method.

In relation to participant observation a similar choice, that its, exclusion, was made. While participant observation is suitable in analysing behaviour aimed at remaining hidden, in analysing interaction, and in analysing power structures at workplaces, to mention a few, the shortcomings are greater. Observation demands great knowledge from the researcher, whereas an interview makes clarification possible, something that is rarely possible in observation (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2009, 37–38). For this reason, participant observation was not seen appropriate for this study. As the methods of document analysis and interviewing are both part of the case study method, they are discussed in detail as sub-parts of the case-study method.

### 3.2. The Case-study Method

The case study method, as developed for practitioners, by Yin (2009), has many benefits as a method. Not only does it benefit “from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide the data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2009, 18) but also, that it offers thoroughness in allowing the combination of various methods in collecting and analyzing data. Moreover, it allows the researcher to grasp complex social situations with all their subtleties and intricacies which are often left out in purely quantitative
studies. And, as Yin (2009, 8–10) puts it, the case-study approach is effective in cases where the researcher has little control over the phenomenon, the real-life context, or the events that are being studied. Importantly, it is an empirical method suitable for the inquiry of a phenomenon where a separation of context and phenomenon is either hard or impossible. And because of this plurality of variables, rather than scarcity, the researcher must use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009, 18). Lastly, the case study method adheres to professional standards in coherency and consistency (Denscombe, 2003, 297) in that the procedures have been refined since the 1980’s.

How the case study method differs from some of the other social science methods are hence the questions that it aims at addressing. The method is preferred to answer “how” and “why” questions and in tracing of phenomena over time, as long as the sources are reliable, and the evidence gathering made correctly. In this way the method resembles the historical method used by many new-institutional sociologists except that it adds the potential of using multiple sources of evidence such as participant observation and interviews. Through triangulation and its use of multiple sources of evidence, the method enjoys greater validity (Yin, 2009, 11).

However, like any approach, the method also has weaknesses. Following the role of the researcher, much of the problems connected to the case study method stems from either sloppiness in the methodology, the technical incompetence by researchers or from a lack of rigor (Yin, 2009, 14–15). Moreover, while it manages to trace phenomenon over time, it cannot fully address causality. While this also means that nothing can be fully controlled in the sense of natural sciences, this is not necessarily a problem as everything needs to be controlled to the point of implausibility. In this sense, it is more similar to the experimental method of rival hypotheses rather than randomized medical or chemical tests. Whereas this has the devastating effect that the results are less generalizable in empirical terms, the acclaimed shortfall can be countered. According to Flyvbjerg25 (2001, 77–79) generalizability can be increased by the selection of cases,

---

25 Flyvbjerg (2001) offers in fact a book-long argument on the tension between natural and social sciences so for practical reasons the critique is too lengthy to restate. With regards to his critique on generalizability, he supports it with findings by heavyweights such as Galileo, Freud and Foucault (see for example, Flyvbjerg, 2001, 73–81).
and in this sense, the choice of a deviant case, in terms of audition results, increases the possibility of falsification.

Another important aspect with regards to the case-study method is what constitutes the case and where its boundaries end. In political science much energy has been put into the separation of a single-case study and a multiple-case study (Platt, 2007, 107–109). According to Yin (2009, 19) however, they are in the end merely variations of the same method. Fundamentally, what is most important is that a multiple-case study can offer stronger analytical and empirical strength than a single-case study or a two-case study. Thus, if we perceive audits and evaluations as the grand phenomenon, universities are considered to be correct organizational level of analysis. The choice of a case study was made according to the belief that pressures, such as evaluation and globalization to mention a few, can have quite different consequences under different conditions (Scott, 2008, 161–163). And although the universities chosen are both in some respect unique in that they have a history, a legacy of their own and various outcomes in term of the follow up of the evaluation, they are in terms of state-university conditions in equal terms. Moreover, not only do they share a physical location under the jurisdiction of the Finnish state but also a similarity in terms of overall educational trends, ethnic grouping and type of organization (for more characteristics, see part 1.5 ‘Research Design’).

Indeed, in terms of evaluation-outcome, the universities seem as they would represent one typical and one extreme case in terms of outcome the audition. In the analytic sense the two cases can, however, be considered a replication of the quality assurance-state-university relationship (for more on replication, see Yin 2009, 38). In this sense they are also theory-testing cases in relation to the claim of transnational translation (Stensaker et al. 2008) or that of Kauko’s (2011), seeing evaluation as a tool of governance originating from the development of the Bologna process. Whether theory will hold true, some crucial elements of this should be witnessed. For practical reasons, however, a choice of not including everyone related to the two universities had to be made. Instead, as the universities are governed at the organizational level by rectors, managers and the academic community this research decided to incorporate these as the source of information, on top of the documents that were analyzed.
3.2.1. Document analysis

Documents can establish how certain issues are framed and how the issue is viewed upon by the organization. The preliminary method for this study consisted of an analysis of the documents provided by FINHEEC, the Ministry of Education and by HEI’s selves. This included (see also chronology of relevant events and publications in Appendix 2):

- FINHEEC audit reports from both Universities from 2008
- The 2004 report by the ministry of education regarding the role of quality assurance
- Strategy of University of Tampere 2010–2015
- Re-audit report from the University of Tampere, 2012
- The old and new university laws (645/1997, 558/2009,)
- External review report on FINHEEC (2010)

In addition, some formerly unknown documents on progress since the audits were handed over during the interviews and where consequently put in context with the earlier ones. The documents were analyzed according to the principles of content analysis which in its simplest form reveals not only ideas and values, but also what the writers have seen as relevant and of high priority (Denscombe, 2003, 221–222). While total meaning or closure of is ultimately impossible, it is the drive for meaning that is of key importance in understanding text as text can be seen as a supplement of speech (Derrida, 1974 [1967]). Used in this way, the results of the content analysis presupposed the expected similarities and dissimilarities before the interviews.

Official documents, however, have some shortfalls; they bear the risk of presenting an overtly consistent and unproblematic view of evaluation while they also might hide internal disagreements. In my view, this framing and the exclusion of, for example, news-paper articles regarding the results of the auditions, nevertheless sufficient, as this choice of material sets the focus on the representation and understandings of the
evaluation work in these institutions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, 13). Consequently, the documents were supplemented through interviews.

3.2.2. Exploring evaluation through elite interviewing

This part will discuss the feasibility of elite interviewing as one of the sources of information for the case study method. Subsequently, a summary of how the interviews were conducted will be presented: what are elites and what are they a case of; who was included and why; how they were viewed in light of theory; and lastly; whether they were considered to speak the truth or not. Moreover, the procedures of analyzing interview data are presented.

There is some confusion regarding different forms of interviews. Hirsjärvi and Hurme write (2009, 43–48) about the structured, survey-based and half-structured theme-interviews as the main types of interviews. Another way of categorizing is according to their intrinsic philosophy. Then we could talk about interviewing from a hermeneutical point of view, where focus is put on interpretation, whereas a discourse analytical perspective would analyse how language and discursive practices construct the social world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, 13). While it is not in the scope of this paper to discuss the various ontological underpinnings, the choice of “sample” is relevant. Hirsjärvi and Hurme suggest (2009, 58–60) that one can use either a random sample or, for example snowball sampling. For the purpose of this research, however, this would be rather arbitrary. Instead, the choice follows that of Dexter who chose elites as his sample. In this, he only makes a distinction in non-standardized and standardized interviewing (Dexter, 2012 [1970], 18). For this study, a non-standardized treatment was seen appropriate as the discussed areas of interest are known while; the interviewee’s point of view is more in focus (see for example Dexter 2012 [1970])

According to Dexter (2012 [1970], 18), ‘elites’ can be considered people that are in “important or exposed positions” in relation to the topic of the study. The elites are given a non-standardized treatment in that they are given an opportunity to formulate and discuss the topics freely rather than answering to questions formulated and directed by the researchers assumptions. In addition, what separates elite interviews from
standardized interviews is, that exceptional interpretations or deviant claims in relation to theory that are introduced by the interviewee, may point towards the need to rewrite or adjust theoretical claims (Dexter, 2012 [1970], 19). The latter point made by Dexter is especially relevant in relation to how the interviewees portray and understand the role of evaluations at their universities and in relation to the European dimension and the Finnish state.

Interviewing is also the preferred research strategy when “it appears likely that it will get better data or more data at less cost than other tactics” (Dexter, 2012 [1970], 23). In this study the conditions for conducting interviews where filled; alternative methods of data gathering where considered, and what’s more important, the new-institutionalist framework regarding evaluation offered guidance in the selection of methods and not the other way around (Dexter, 2012 [1970], 24). Interviewing as a source of data came about to be suitable for this study because of four reasons. First, an elite interview as a source of data can provide for in-depth knowledge about evaluations and how they are viewed. Second, a researcher cannot unmistakably deduce actual social practices and realities from supranational trends or through recognizing ideals in organizational strategies or in policy documents. Third, elites are willing to provide information as they might see themselves as experts on the topic, or because of sheer self-complacency. Fourth, as many scholars discussing the impact of ideas admit, most organizational ideals consist of more than one set of values, thus opening up the possibility of competing internal values that do not show up on official documents but that can be expressed in interviews. With regards to anonymity and confidentiality, they were both offered to interviewees. The interviewees also received information about the use, confidentiality and purpose of the research whilst the interviews and the research were conducted according to the ethical principles of research in social sciences (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2009).

3.2.3. Choice of Interviewees

As the population cannot be randomized or stratified, the people chosen for the interviews were chosen according to two criteria. First, individuals mentioned in the “formal” sense in official reports, documents and strategies, that is, “quality
developers”, “quality managers”, and “audition coordinators” where chosen as they could be expected to have highly relevant information (Repstad, 2007, 89). Before they were interviewed, they were asked to tell if they had participated in this, uncontrolled but observed social phenomenon, called auditing (compare Dexter 2012, [1970], 74–75). Second, starting from the first interviews and continuing to the last, all interviewers where asked to name those who they would see relevant to interview. This method, generally known as “snowball sampling”, introduced by Coleman (1958), is a common way of generating a sample from hidden populations that tells us about the personal interrelationships between the respondents (Devine, 2002, 205; Dexter, 2012 [1970], 44). It has its shortcoming, nevertheless, as it runs the risk of offering a set of interconnected people with similar opinions and a sample from which one cannot make statistical inferences. This is not; however, a problem as the nature of this study is more interested in analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization. And while the choice of interviewees could be considered to represent only one view, namely that of the managerial organization and leadership, I see this framing and the exclusion of, for example the views of randomly chosen academics and students, nevertheless sufficient as this choice of material sets the focus on the understandings and insights of the evaluation work in these institutions26.

While there is no guarantee that we can take the interviewees statements at face value, the objectivity of their statements was matched and cross-compared with documents and with each other, in order to reach a more solid ground of evidence. But as the study is not looking at objective reality, but what the statements are revealing about the phenomenon, this is not a direct limitation. As Yin (2009, 102) puts it, interviews are insightful and can provide perceived causal inferences and explanations.

For the interviews, an interview formula and an interview request (appendix 3&4) were created according to the themes outlined (see Chapter 1, section 1.5). The formula, which consists of a set of working hypothesis rather than definite hypothesis, concerning patterns and meanings of evaluation and quality assurance was made beforehand. The questions where formulated according to themes and, moreover, so that

26 Some scholars have suggested asking the interviewees to name individuals who might express disapproved views, or conflicting versions. It was, however, not in the scope of this research to survey these people and consequently this perspective was left out for benefit of getting a good overall picture.
they would proceed from the general to the particular (Dexter, 2012 [1970], 54, 74–75). Before the articulation of the interview formula, key documents as well as most studies done earlier on this topic had been read. The in-depth case study method was, in short, chosen in order to illuminate a hypothetical claim of how ideas and demands in the field of education are implemented. The interviews were focused on the subjective experiences of people working with QA in Finland and their claims will enable either the creation of new hypothesis or to analytically confirm those that have been made by earlier research (See chapters 1 & 2). The conclusions drawn from the interviews were checked and compared to the findings in the documents.

The interviews at the case universities where were conducted during May–June of 2012 and during February–April of 2013. No informants were used, as they can be considered to be only the second-best alternative to real interviews (see for example Dexter 2012 [1970]). While the total amount of interviewees was not known beforehand, the total sum reached 15, as a saturation point seemed to have been reached (see also Appendix 5 for a cross reference table). With regards to interviewees, no new key-persons gaining more than one mentioning was interviewed. At Tampere University, it might be argued that one additional interview (N13) could have potentially yielded new insights regarding the phenomenon of QA at this university. For timely reasons, however, this was not possible. Besides N13, additional interviews would probably not have significantly added new depth to the data. Of the total sum of 15 interviews, 13 were carried out at university premises in either Tampere or Turku while one interview was done via Skype and one took place in Helsinki.

Consequently, immediately after the interviews were conducted, notes and thoughts regarding the topics were made. Observations were also made regarding the unsaid and the symbolical clues not represented in the actual transcript. Moreover, what matters is not only to be fit to understand what is being told, but also to have a framework to “catch the interviewee’s meaning, to perceive the framework within which he is talking” (Dexter, 2012 [1970], 28). In short, the material should contain crucial elements that portray certain outcomes if theory holds true. This was analysed through transcription and the creation of reference codes in the program for qualitative analysis, ATLAS TI. The reference codes were created according to logics of analytic coding, meaning that when themes and relationships of the phenomena were discovered, a label was created.
These labels were then split or merged, depending on the larger theme that they related to. Moreover, statements by the interviewees were separated in subjective and objective components. The codes and categories were, moreover, revisited and compared not only to the data but also to the practical use and with the new data as it was transcribed.
4. RESULTS

The analysis of the identified organizational responses and the impact of auditing consist of four parts. The first part identifies the main similar contents and themes emerging from the audit-reports, while the second and third part describe what organizational arrangements and consequences was witnessed, the impact of evaluations in relation to other changes, and how the phenomenon of QA was seen to relate to supranational elements. In discussing the interpretations and results, quotes from the reports and the interview material are used to illustrate the key elements of the phenomenon. The fourth part synthesizes the previous parts and discusses the main findings and the role of QA in the State-FINHEEC-University relationship. However, it should be noted that even though the parts are outlined in sequential order, the analysis of the interviews and documents is more of a continuous and an interpretative process, and thus the parts are partially overlapping and integrated. And while a comparison of the universities is not the aim of this study, because they are both considered as embedded cases of the phenomenon of audits in Finland, it could not be fully excluded.

4.1. The Assessments of the Universities QA-systems

This part will introduce the results of the audits, the dissimilar ruling of 2008, as well as, the following re-audit at the University of Tampere. In addition, it discusses the recommendations of both audit-teams and to which degree these influenced the respective universities. The last two sections discuss to which extent we can witness legitimizing and strategic elements in the proceedings.

4.1.1. The audit process and its results

The audit reports of these two universities draws from equal arguments regarding the goal of the first round of auditions 2008–2011. The goal was to develop a system that corresponds to ENQA guidelines plus to show that qualified and consistent quality
assurance takes place in Finnish Higher Education. This was also argued to enhance the capacity of Finnish HEIs to compete at global educational markets (KKA, 2008a, 9; 2008b, 10). Moreover, the first round was seen as a good method to gather and channel good practices and enhance their spread in the national context (Ibid.). Whereas the individual reports highlight some university specific issues and priorities, references are made to acknowledged European initiatives and global developments. The need of a quality assurance system is thus not only presented as a response but, moreover, as a core feature for assessing the quality of higher education institutions and an element that ought to be integrated into the working culture and management.

As has already been pointed out, both case-universities were audited in 2008 with the audition of the University of Tampere (UTA) taking place between 14.–16.5.2008 and the University of Turku (UTU) on 7.–9.5.2008. The audition-process was based on the guidelines of the audit-manual for 2008–2011 which was a new edition published in November 2007 as a response to received criticism of the 2005 manual used at the piloting stage (for overview, see Appendix 2). The main criticism that the council had received by that point was that the criteria were experienced as partly overlapping and unclear27 (KKA, 2010, 23). Consequently, the council had made some new specifications on the basis of the feedback of the audit teams, HEIs, and the experiences of the council itself (KKA, 2008a, esipuhe [preface]). The central goals of the first rounds of auditions can be summarized as consisting of three components. First, to find out what kind of qualitative goals the HEIs have set up for their operations. Second, to assess with what kind of processes and procedures it maintains and develops education, as well as, other activities. Last, to assess if the QA-system operates according to its own stated purpose and whether it produces ‘appropriate’ information that can be used for further developing of its performance. In addition, this also included an assessment of whether the QA system leads to procedures that effectively develop quality.

27 The preface in the Finnish version of the audit manual 2008-2011 talked about the criteria being experienced as partly overlapping and unclear [koettiin osittain epäselviksi ja päällekäisiksi] (KKA, 2007, esipuhe) whereas the English version of the same manual only talks about “certain technical precisions and corrections” (FINHEEC 2007, preface). As Finnish is the dominant language of all FINHEEC activity, the former interpretation regarding what kind of feedback the council received was considered more accurate.
The audition reports show that the preparations for the QA-systems where organized within the existing faculties and departments and that the auditions focused on two levels: the HEIs basic tasks, as well as, the whole of the system. This included their scope, functionality, openness, impressiveness, and how the HEI follows up, evaluates and develops its system. Moreover, the audits were aimed at documenting best practices and to promote their adoption system-wide. With regards to the latter, the publication of the report at the publication event aimed at activating “the debate on quality issues, as well as the interaction between the HEIs and their stakeholders” (FINHEEC, 2007, 10).

The audit operationalized a scale based on four criteria to characterize at what stage the QA system of the HEI in question was on: absent, emerging, developing, or advanced. These were used for every sub-target of the auditions which were:

1. Definition of the objectives, functions, actors and responsibilities of the HEI’s QA system as well as the respective documentation.

2. The comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the QA procedures and structures related to the HEI’s basic mission, including:
   
   2.1) Degree education

   2.2) Research/R&D

   2.3) Interaction with society, impact on society as well as regional development cooperation

   2.4) Support services (library and information services, career- and recruitment services, and international services)

   2.5) Staff recruitment and development

3. The integration of the QA-system with management and steering of operations.

4. Participation of staff, students and external stakeholders in quality assurance.

5. Relevance of, and access to, the information generated by the QA-system within the organization and from the perspective of the external stakeholders.

6. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement of the QA system.

7. The QA system as a whole.

   (KKA, 2007b, 10–11)
The audit-groups received documented material regarding these targets from the universities beforehand. This contained documents regarding mission, goal and aims, organizational charts, process charts, documents on stakeholder relations, evidence of good practices and examples of the functionality of the system, among other things (see for example KKA 2007a, 11–12, 2007b, 12–13). In the case of the University of Tampere, the audit-team requested some additional documents to further specify the received ones and their insight of the system. Whereas not all sub-targets are relevant for this study, I will briefly summarize parts that are relevant for the following analysis.

For the first sub-target, that is, the objectives, functions, actors and responsibilities of the HEI’s QA-system, as well as, their respective documentation, the University of Turku was considered to be on an ‘advanced’ level whereas the level at Tampere was seen as ‘emerging’. Reasons for this was that at Turku, the leadership at the level of faculties was seen to set goals and document their practices, but that there were a great level of variation on the departmental level (KKA, 2008a, 20). Moreover, the guidelines at various levels, faculties, departments and units, was seen as a positive element in that they had been defined in such a short time, although it was also seen as a weakness in that, from the perspective of university strategy, the QA-system was not uniform enough (KKA, 2008a, 21). A similar issue was raised in Tampere. According to the audit-team, there was not enough uniformity, which the audit-team perceived as a problem, because this means that university management cannot make sure that objectives are reached (KKA, 2008b, 25). Another factor seen problematic, by the audit team in the case of Tampere, was that responsibility of quality had been expressed as a collective element, rather than specifying or targeting responsibilities for quality. Moreover, the working group that was formed for the audit preparations was temporary (Ibid.). In sum, the documentation and definition of responsibilities was seen clear at Turku, while at Tampere, the team acknowledged some ambiguous and overlapping documentation in addition to that responsibilities were not always clearly defined.

Regarding QA in the area of degrees, under the second sub-target, both Turku and Tampere were seen as ‘developing’. At both universities information about the quality of education was utilized for planning and development. For the audit team at Turku it had remained unclear how the system supported its strategy of quality in degrees (KKA, 2008a, 23). In the field of research, the University of Turku was considered
'developing’ and Tampere as ‘emerging’. Quality assurance in the field of research was, rather unsurprisingly, resting on academic principles of peer review. Weaknesses in both universities was found in how research funding was localized (KKA, 2008a 28–29; 2008b) and that the faculties or department did not have mechanisms of identifying unsatisfactory quality in terms of research. Consequently, what they suggested, among other things, was the development of a code of conduct to recognize these and further systematization of assuring the quality of research activity and the sharing of good practices across disciplines and departments (2008a, 30–31; 2008b, 36). Furthermore, under the second target also stakeholder-relations and societal collaboration and impact were evaluated. In these terms, both UTU and UTA were considered to be at an emerging stage (KKA, 2008a, 32–33; 2008b, 37). UTU was seen as a regional actor but lacked QA-procedures for its societal interaction. Also here the audit-group found that stakeholder relations has been decentralized to different units and departments, an element that enabled taking into account their various needs, but risked a lack of an overall view (KKA, 2008a, 35). Also in the areas of support services, both universities were considered as ‘developing’ while the QA-procedures in staff recruiting and development were seen as ‘emerging’ at UTU and ‘developing’ at UTA (KKA, 2008a, 35–39; 2008b, 41–45).

Under the third sub-target, integration of the QA-system with management and steering of operations, both universities were considered ‘developing’ (KKA, 2008a 40–42; 2008b, 46–49). According to the audit-team, at the University of Turku the management and steering of operations, in the form of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)-system [toiminnanohjausjärjestelmä], was well integrated with the QA-system. Whereas the responsibility of the system lay in the hands of the vice-principal, the operational responsibility lay in the hands of a quality-manager (KKA, 2008a, 40). Moreover, the quality manager and the responsible vice-principal were seen to have a crucial role in the planning and documentation of the QA-system. The point of departure for the system was based on recognized good practices that were documented and because the university is diverse a common practice for all was deemed undesirable (KKA, 2008a, 40). At the University of Tampere, the situation was somewhat similar. The close connection of QA- and ERP-system offered a clear instrument for managing, and the
QA system was connected to university leadership quite well, even if its penetration on the departmental level was seen to need further improvement (2008b, 48–49).

In the framework of the fourth sub-target, that is, participation of staff, students and external stakeholders in quality assurance, both universities were considered ‘developing’ (KKA, 2008a, 42; 2008b, 49). A relevant finding from the point of view of the following analysis is the statement by the audit-team in Turku. They stated that the participation and acceptance of ‘quality work’ of academics and students has been assisted by the renaming of the quality-manual as an operations manual (KKA, 2008a, 43). At Tampere, the interviewees of the audit-team had pointed out that student and personnel had frequently participated in the building the QA-system and in the functioning of the university as a whole (KKA, 2008b, 50).

With regards to the fifth target, relevance of, and access to, information generated by the QA system, the audit-teams stated that the system is on a developing stage at the University in Tampere because of their level of transparency and on an emerging stage in Turku. Contrary to this target, in terms of monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement of the QA system, the judgment was vice versa, meaning that UTU was in a developing and UTA in an emerging stage. In sum, both systems as a whole were judged to be on a level of ‘developing’ system (2008a 52–53; 2008b, 58). A summary is provided in Table 1 below.
Table 1 Assessment of QA-systems at the Universities of Turku (UTU) and Tampere (UTA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Documentation and definition of objectives, functions, actors and responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Comprehensiveness, and procedures of degree education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Comprehensiveness, procedures and effectiveness of research/R&amp;D</td>
<td>UTA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UTU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Comprehensiveness, procedures and effectiveness of societal interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Comprehensiveness, procedures and effectiveness of support services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UTU, UTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Comprehensiveness, procedures and effectiveness of staff recruitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UTU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Integration of QA-system with management and steering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Participation of staff, students and stakeholders in QA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Relevance and access to information internally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UTU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Relevance and access to information externally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UTU, UTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement of QA system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. QA system as a whole.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the basis of this, the board of FINHEEC decided that the University of Turku should pass whereas the University of Tampere needed to be re-audited in two years’ time. The following section will open up this theme before proceeding to issues of legitimacy and organizational responses.

4.1.2. The Dissimilar Ruling of 2008

The University of Tampere did not pass the audition of it quality-assurance system in 2008, which might seem to some extent surprising considering that their result was not far away from that of Turku\(^2^8\). In fact, the university was even considered to be on a higher stage in some targets (2.5 & 5.1) and as it stands out, the audit team suggested of approving UTA but the board of FINHEEC concluded otherwise (KKA, 2008b, 65). As re-audits only target perceived weaknesses, the board decided that the re-audit would focus on targets 1, 6, and 7. Another inconsistency in the ruling was that while the handbooks do not give different weighting to targets – as the targets were evaluated and compared on the basis of the submitted self-evaluation documents and the visit – no explanation for the board ruling was given\(^2^9\). A suggestion has been made that the disapproval was made because some of the preparations for the audit of 2008 were conducted, to some extent, on the basis of the old handbook of 2005. Signs of this has been found in some of the interviews in Haapakorpi’s research (2011, 75).

Moreover, particularly the organizational structure and mixed responsibilities in terms of decision-making were raised as problematic by the audit-team. In retrospect, this criticism, especially regarding the leadership-structure, was, by most interviewers deemed appropriate. In this sense, Tampere University showed some characteristics how a scattered structure and autonomous collegial bodies were poorly equipped to

\(^{28}\) Even if the targets are not numerical, but based on the teams overall assessment, and that the targets were not given weights in the manual, an illustration of how little the difference in the outcome actually was, can be made in numbers. If we give the assessments a score (Absent = 1, Emerging = 2, etc.) and summarize the results, UTA would have received 31 points and UTU 33 points.

\(^{29}\) The interviewees could not recall any specification why the audit teams and the board’s views diverged. Also, since the audit, the website of FINHEEC has changed a set of times, and the press-release from the UTA audit from 2008 has disappeared and the board meetings do not publish minutes. An effort in attaining the press-release through the internet-archive “wayback-machine” was made but to no effect.
process external demands of a system-wide QA-structure in 2008 when given enough freedom. This can be seen in the response regarding the old structure30:

[…] 2008 auditoinnissahan nousi aika selvästi ongelmakohdaksi että organisaatio on aika hajanainen, laitostason yksiköt ovat tulosyksiköitä […] mutta niitä oli 40, jolloin niinku organisaation hallittavuus kaikella tapaa oli aika vaikeet […] (N11)

In contrast to Tampere, an element seen to contribute to the development of a system in Turku, that might have had an impact on the diverging results of the audits, was derived from another source than structure. Foremost much credit was given to the quality manager of that time. Moreover, during the interviews at the University of Turku, an aspect that was mentioned as strength was the previous knowledge from the piloting of quality assurance in six units that was made in 2005. Another element was the previous knowledge from evaluating education that was present in the quality steering group. These aspects were seen to benefit the planning of the university wide quality assurance system:

[…] No työryhmän sisällä - nyt tän laatutyön-ohjausryhmän sisällä - on ollut samoja henkilöitä.. ihan näistä alkumetreistä lähtien, et varmaan sitä tuota niin sitä hiljaisen tiedon siirtämistä sillä tavalla (N9)

[…] todennäköiset 2005, pistettiin pystyyn..nyt en muist ihan tarkkaa aikaa, mutta ei mene paljon pieleen jos sanotaan että silloin perustettiin ryhmä...se oli oikeestaan kaksvaiheinen..et aloitettiin ensin niin että meillä oli tämmön, niinku opetusneuvoston alainen jaosto, […], joka lähti jo vähän aikaisemmin, niinku systemaattisesti, tekemään laatujärjestelmää, niinkun opetuksen - yliopistotoiminta alueelle - Sen jälkeen kun tää auditointimalli selkesi, eli et se onkin koko yliaston toimintaa koskeva ni se jälkeen se nimettiin keskus..siis suoraan […] (N6)

While clear proof of the benefits of previous knowledge is hard to prove, there was, however, another connection that was raised as benefitting in the case of Turku. In the interviews it was pointed out – rather frequently – that the chair of FINHEEC has been both a professor and a dean at the university during a time span of more than 10 years before receiving the position of chair of FINHEEC. Moreover, it was pointed out that the chair has been a popular and frequent speaker in the preparatory years, an element

30 A conscious decision to leave the interview quotes in original language was made out of knowledge that the typical the reader will most likely command the language. Moreover, this enables the incorporation of nuances to another degree.
which supports the claim that Turku University could have been better equipped and informed for the audition, maybe even better connected. As this response to the question whether the chair has had a double role illustrates:

[...] Ei. No hän ollut silloin, hän ei oo aina ollut KKAn puheenjohtaja, eli hän on ollut meidän tiedekunnasssa dekaanina joskus... ja hän ollut silloin dekaanina, tai varadekaanina, kun tääl on ruvettu kehittämään tätä laatujärjestelmää, elikkä 2005... ja niissä tietämissä.. (N4)

Nonetheless, the closeness of the chair of FINHEEC and the university was strengthened by the fact that the chair was eventually chosen as vice-principal on the 8th of June 2012\(^{31}\) and subsequently also as the chair of the quality steering group. Another sign of being better informed is also present in that the claim of the audit criteria changing in the middle of the process was never mentioned, as it was in Tampere. As the revised manual was published in November 2007 and the audits took place in May 2008, knowledge about the piloting and audit procedures could have played a role in the success.

Thus, the early preparations at Turku University point out the importance of early preparations and pilots might help succeeding in later auditions. Whether the connection between the university and FINHEEC was crucial is harder to say. It is true that, for example, the quality steering group was created already well in advance in 2005 (see also section 4.2.1 for a more thorough overview). Then again, also UTA had already in 2005 formed a, though smaller, working group for developing a system. This group was followed by a working group with much the same members in March 2007, which was responsible for the steering of the preparations of the audit. Consequently, the evidence is not clear, however, in that one respondent, for example, claimed that there were fears at UTU about passing because of the decision to have what the audit-team labelled as a “decentralized system”. The aforementioned is not to say, nevertheless, that the University of Turku did not deserve its approval. We now turn to the re-audit of the University of Tampere.

---

\(^{31}\) http://www.utuonline.fi/sisalto/ajankohtaista/pyykko_suominen_ka_reponen_vararehtoreiksi.html
4.1.3. The re-audit of University of Tampere

As it was stated earlier, a re-audition is not a full-scale audition. Instead, in the case of the University of Tampere, it focused on the targets which the council had recognized as in need of development (Targets 1, 6, and 7). A re-audit is in some ways similar to a normal audit in that it follows negotiations, a signing of an agreement, collection of documents, the training of an audit team, a shorter site visit, followed by the writing and publication of a report (KKA, 2007a, 20). The team does not need to be identical but it necessitates one member from the earlier audit-team. The initiative to start negotiations about a re-audit was sent by the rector to FINHEEC in April 2009. Negotiations between the audit-group, the University and FINHEEC took place on 10.12.2009. The re-audit took place on 22.11.2011 and the final publication stated that the University had not made enough progress in terms of the criteria defined after the audition of 2008. Consequently, the board of FINHEEC decided on 28.3.2012 that UTA does not pass the re-audit of its quality assurance system. In-between, however, a new university act had entered into force and moreover, the university had made a dramatic rearrangement of its organization.

Between the audit of 2008 and the re-audit of 2012, the University of Tampere went through of a massive organizational re-molding that was planned during 2008–2010 and that entered in to force as of 1.1.2011. The change comprised, among other things, the creation of 9 schools and 3 separate units instead of the former 40 units. Moreover, it redefined personal and departmental responsibilities while, at the same time, faculties stopped existing. During the re-audition the auditing team recognized the fact that a massive organizational change had taken place, as well as, with regards to study-subjects (KKA, 2012, 4). Interesting was also that there was old practices of reporting, gathering of information, as well as, quality handbooks in use that had not been described as part of the current system. A reason to this was that they were still considered important in some of the units and that they seemed still to exist for some of the interviewees (KKA, 2012, 29, 41). The previous statement highlights how local practices can, at least in the short term, survive an organizational rearranging.

---

32 The earlier organization consisted of 6 faculties, 25 departments and 9 separate units (KKA, 2008b, 17)
Consequently, the failure in the second round was according to the audit-team, among other things, that there were relevant functions that were not documented and that there was no proof of the functionality of the new responsibilities given to individual managers (KKA, 2012, 26–29). The university also received disapproval for not connecting its quality system to strategy and also the lack of follow up at the system-level (KKA, 2012, 36). Moreover, the leadership received criticism for not giving uniform guidance in making the documents (KKA, 2012, 33). This was no surprise considering that it was in the interviews pointed out that creating such documents was not considered of a very urgent importance in relation to all other aspects that organizational change conveyed with itself. The following response illustrates this well:

[...] tää 2011 auditointi tuli ihan - ikään kuin siihen, siihen päälle ja kesken, siihen koko prosessiin ja sittenhän ne asiat voi vaan kuvitella että minkälaisessa myylleryksessä oli henkilöstö silloin ja me, ei haluttu pain..tota heitä oikeestaan rasittaa sillä auditoinnilla ollenkaan. Noh se oli kyllä tietoinen valinta tällai tehden mutta olis siinä semmosta meidän taitamattomuutakin siinä mielessä mukaan että, me vähän nonchalleerattii sitä, tai protestoitiinkin tietyllä lailla sitä KKA:n niinkun tällasta järjestelmapohjasta ja dokumentaatioon pohjautuvaa, hyvin raskasta, niinkun laadunvarmistusjärjestelmää, että kyl me tietoisestikkin sitä kritisoitiin ja, ja ei haluttu niinku lähtee siihen ja tunnustettiin se että ei meillä oo missään tapauksessa aikaakaan tähän että me nyt priorisoidaan tämä oma uudistus (N15)

Consequently, reasons for this were that the re-audit was seen as badly timed and to some degree unimportant in relation to the other ongoing changes. In sum one could say that the inflexibility of the audit-model proved critical for determining UTAs success in that the decision of not passing UTA was made on 11.9.2009 and while FINHEECs guidance states that a re-audit must take place in approximately 2 years’ time, this timespan left no room to take into account changes such as the new university act, a new leadership, and additionally, a restructuring of the entire organization. And while the Finnish audits have no stated sanctions, the ruling left this issue, according to some, in limbo. This does not mean, however, that the audits are purely ritualistic as the following section on recommendation and their implementation will highlight.
4.1.4. The audit-teams recommendations

While we can see that the Finnish model of audits is said to be derived from the standpoint of the universities themselves, the audit-reports were, nevertheless, suggesting a set of changes and making some recommendations. This included, among other things, further systematization, taking strategy more into consideration, and specifying responsibilities, as well as, the role of external stakeholders in quality assurance. Similarly, the suggestion for more sharing of good practices appears regularly in the documents. For example, information produced by the QA-system was not always recognized as useful at both universities (KKA, 2008a, 51) while that faculties and departments had their own operational manuals was considered as something to give up. This, however, is in stark contrast to the earlier mentioning that diversity is an asset and strength. Diversity is in fact raised as a potential challenge for fulfilling university strategy and for management in general (KKA, 2008a, 52–53). Moreover, in the case of Tampere, diversity in departmental documenting practices was mentioned as an area where further systematization would bring clarity from the point of view of the QA-system (KKA, 2008b, 26, 64). In the audit-reports, one can thus sense a constant tension between the inherent state of affairs leaning towards heterogeneity and the managerial or external demand of homogeneity that, as was stated earlier, is a central tension in all organizations, especially HEIs.

The majority of the interviewees were of the opinion that the audition was made according to the standpoint of the university itself and that the audit-teams were well prepared. This is in contrast to the findings of Haapakorpi (2011, 74) in that most of the interviewees did not point out anymore that the audit team had not familiarized themselves with the information submitted to FINHEEC. This could however, be connected to the changes in personnel and that longer time has passed since the audition than in the interviews of Haapakorpi. And as it was pointed out in the introduction, there was a certain expectation that this would be the case as it is so frequently pointed out that there is a Finnish tradition that derives its legitimacy from being enhancement-led. Moreover, this was to be expected because of the choice of interviewees and the snow-ball sampling method.
However, although the judgments of the audit-teams were seen as accurate, there were also signs of that the teams in 2008 hadn’t fully understood some elements of the organizations, as characterized below:

[…]. Ihan oikeita havaintoja olivat mutta sitten niinkun totta kai me oltiin aika kriittisiä joidenkin asioiden suhteen jotka liitty juuri tähän - se oli erityisesti tämä yhtenäisyys / [kautta] olemassa olevien, niinkun kulttuuristen erojen huomiion ottaminen, että siellä oli niinkun sellasia sävyjä oli, raportissa. Et tota onks tää toimiva laatujärjestelmä kun täs on niin paljon sitä paikallista joustovaraa[...][N6]

Moreover, at both universities, there were some critical views about the audit-teams expertise and background, as exemplified below:

[…]. Mut sitten oli ihan selvästi nähtävissä et kyl sieltä nousi niinku niiden, niiden arviointiitimien ihmisten omat taustat, taustat esille, joku tuli semmosesta ammattikorkeakoulusta jossa oli otettu joku - jonkun konsulttien avulla, joku bisnesmalli - malli sellasenaan käyttöön ni se oli ikäänukin, hä.. - hänelle sit se ideaali miten yliopiston laatujärjestelmän pitää toimia ja meidän tämmönen niinkun tiedelähtöinen ja näitä autonomisia yksiköitä kannioittava malli oli niinku hyvin etäinen. Sitten oli taas sellasia yliopistotaustaisia ihmisiä jotka näki tän juuri kiinnostavana - piirteenä - et se ei ollut mitenkään niinku yhtenäinen semmonen [...][N6]

[…]. mut et edelleen minusta, niissä keskusteluissa joissa mä liikun - kyl mä tiedän nykyisen rehtoriston kantoja - niin niiden auditointiryhmien kokoonpanoa ei pidetä olleenaan parhaana mahdollisena. Et siellähän on liian vähän tätä vertainsäköystä ja liian niinku keskeisenä kriteerinä jotakin näyttää olevan joku yleisemi, laatujärjestelmä-asiantuntemus. Et se…niihin ei luoteta. (N14)

The criticism of the team’s suggestions being less uniform than is revealed in the final reports plus that there is doubts about their expertise, is thus a rather critical disapproval of the legitimacy of the audit in general. The criticism consequently clashes with the claims of FINHEEC about that the enhancement-led evaluation is recognized as a procedure that supports the HEIs “own work and autonomy” (FINHEEC, 2007, preface) and in which HEIs remain responsible for the quality of their own operations. While the latter is true, the former is in the light of the audit reports and interviews, less straightforward. Thus, in principle, universities can decide on their own QA-system, which is then evaluated by the audit team, trained by FINHEEC. The criteria, however, and following evaluation seem not to be as neutral as they are presented. As Dahler-
Larsen has pointed out (2007, 25), evaluation criteria may help to determine what actors should strive to accomplish in a given activity and this is clearly seen in the reports. Thus, even if it is recently pointed out that the assessment is done according to the universities own premises, we can witness a standardized view about how to organize quality assurance systems. Consequently, if we think about the Finnish universities and what the evaluations suggest in what the organizations should accomplish, a logical next step is to ask whether the audits had a more lasting impact on these universities. These issues will first be discussed in relation to the theoretical claims followed by a description of actual changing practices in the following section.

The recommendations for development, put forth in the reports of 2008, were to some degree alike but on the other hand diverging. In the case of the University of Turku, some of the core recommendations (KKA, 2008a, 56–57) were guidance and follow up on PhD students, clarification in how to guarantee the quality of degrees, further strategic management and support of R&D activity, and further emphasis on societal interaction and stakeholder relations. Moreover, a more conclusive connecting of overall university strategy and the QA-system, developing practices of spreading good practices, as well as, developing indicators and a knowledge base for strategic management and was recommended. In the case of Tampere, the core recommendations were that the ERP-system should be developed so that the leadership would receive better information for managing the organization, that documentation should be unified, and that representations of the system should be systematized. Moreover, the responsibilities between departments and faculties should be clarified, as should the responsibilities for the QA-system. In addition, the departmental self-evaluations should be more critical, there should be a better way for leadership to give feedback to units as well as students. Lastly there should be codes of conduct for increasing societal impact and relevant stakeholders should be defined (KKA, 2008b, 64).

Accordingly, the reports should become incentives to develop the organization in the direction of the recommendations. However, as the aforementioned exhibits, and as it was pointed out at both universities in the interviews, the suggestions where more of a general rather than particular nature, and as such, offering more of a direction instead of distinct guidance. Consequently, also at UTA some of the recommendations were initiated, even if the legitimacy of the board’s ruling was perceived critically. Moreover,
the working group taking care of the preparations of the audit at Tampere was formed only temporarily and only shortly beforehand. This points to that the audit was considered of low priority. A similar priority was given during 2011 because the university had gone through a massive reorganization. The interviews supports this interpretation but as one of the interviewers pointed out, there was already awareness in 2008 that a new university act was coming and furthermore, a new leadership was elected as a result of the elections in February of 2009, only half a year after the ruling of the board of FINHEEC on 11.9.2008. Thus, while the recommendation did not spawn into clear initiatives, they did have an effect on the formulation of the new strategy, a work that started to take shape in the spring of 2009. The filtering of recommendations is well presented in the following quote:

[...] auditoijien yksi huomio oli tämä että, että meillä on niinkun kovin... kovin tota, niinkun, siis kun... kun on kovin paljon tämöstä kollegialista johtamista ja sit vielä pienet yksiköt ni se, se edellytys semmoseen, niinkun strategiseen kehittämiseen on aika heikko, ja tämä sama huomio me tehtiin sitte siinä omassa strategiatyössä että, että kun on siis tarpeen tutkimuksen vahvistamisen takia, hakea tehokkaamin toimivia sisäisiä yksiköitä, ja joissa myös sitten sitä taloudellista joustovaraa löytyy enemmän kun semmosest pienestä, et ehkä tän verran niinkun sillä auditoinnin, ensimmäisen auditoinnin tuomalla tiedolla oli yhtyettä sit siihen meidän strategiatyöön jossa sitten vähitellen kristallisoitu se, että tässä ei auta määritellä mitään yliopiston tutkimuksen painoaloja, koska vaikka ne kuinka rajattais, ni se meidän organisaatiorakennettain mahdollista niiden kehittämistä. (N13)

Consequently, the audit provided at least food for thought with regards to the organizational remolding and the preceding strategy work. At Turku, members of the quality steering group pointed out that after the auditions their meetings became less frequent, from an almost monthly basis in 2008, to every couple of months in 2009, to around four times per term a year later on. Whereas meeting frequency is no perfect display of perceived importance, some interviewees also pointed out that the focus of the steering group changed after the auditions into developing the recommendations and how to integrate these (N8 & N10). This could also have to do with a belief at that time that the model and criteria would remain the same for some time onwards, and in this sense the report became an incentive to proceed with the recommendations. Yet, as time passed, the knowledge of coming reforms, the decision to form a consortium with Turku School of Economics (TSE) and the implications of these increased and the leadership...
changed, the ambition and priority of the reports seemed to decrease and they become either integrated in the normal procedures or subordinate to strategy:

[...] Et tota noin, toki, täytyy tunnustaa että näissä vuosittaisissa sopimusneuvotteluissa ni aika vähän enää vuoden 2008 vuoden 2009 auditointiraportteihin palataan, niinku suorana ja sellasenaan, että toki ne asiat kulkee siellä mukana mut ne on tänne sit jo integroitu meiän omaan kehittämistomintaan ja omiin tavoitteisiin [...] (N1)

[...] Kun tehtiin, nyt tää, sanotaanko, nykysenkaltanen strategia ni siinä oli kymmenen vuotta et yliopisto ei ollut niinku tavallaan uudistanut sitä strategiaa ollenkaan et siinä kohtaan tapahtu niinku sellanen merkittävä muutos tosiaan että se strategia nostettiin ihan oikeeks semmoseks niinku keskeiseks niinku toimintaa ohjaavaaks dokumentiks et se on nyt noussu ihan eri tasolle et nyt meil on tosiaan kun tää toiminnanohjaus-järjestelmä otettiin käyttöön niin siinä sitten me pyritään [...] ihan oikeesti jalkauttaa se strategia sitte ihan tonne lautostason vuosisuunnitelmiin. (N3)

Much of the analyzed development since auditions seems thus to support that the audits and their recommendations remained of second order importance to many other changes but they also highlight the emergence of formulated strategies as the main operating procedure. Moreover, the above examples do exemplify that the audit-exercises cannot fully be judged as purely a formality. However, whereas showing that the recommendation really exist as an integrated processes, as N1 suggest is, nonetheless, impossible to prove or dispute. But it might also be irrelevant:

[...]joo kyl siin ihan selkee jatkuvuus on et tota nähdään et vaikka, mites sen nyt sanos, joo, on toki, koska ei voi ajatella sillä tavalla että yliopistoissa tehtävä työ niinkun, laututyötähän tää on ollut jo ennen tätä laatujärjestelmää mikä on niinku tehty että meillähän on ollut tietty periaatteet, niit ei oo vaan ollut aukikirjotettuna et millä niinku tsekataan ja varmistetaan toiminnan laatua niin tietty pysyy vaikka laki muuttuu ja vaikka yliopistot yhdistyy mutta sitten...sit se että nyt ollat olla että useissa yksiköissä missä, oh, muutokset on ollut, niinku nihin käytännön toimenpiteisiin, niinku hallinnon puolella, ainakin niinku aika isoja, niin me toimitaan ihan laadukaasti mutta meillä dokumentaatio menee tällä hetkellä ehkä vähän jäljessä että pitäis vaan dokumentoida nyt ne asiakirjat niinku uuteen malliin, nää laatuaasiakirjat.. [N4]

The aforementioned claim is illuminating in two ways. Firstly, and as it was pointed out in other instances, the university as an institution might already incorporate one of the oldest quality assurance mechanism going back to the middle ages in the form of peer review. Second, the QA-systems demand of documenting, while lagging in temporal
terms, seems to be penetrating the organisations lower levels of administration. Another sign of the audits having an effect still having an importance can be seen in that UTU made in 2010 a vast update of relevant documents. This was done in response to that the documents were seen as outdated because of the forming of the consortium and the new university act. In sum, the audit recommendation did, however, loose much weight in relation to strategy, a development that will be elaborated next.

4.1.5. Strategy and Quality Assurance

As it was stated in the beginning of this research, from a rational perspective, universities would adopt QA schemes because of instrumental, tactical or strategic benefits in relation to other universities. In relation to this argument, there was only little to support the claim. It is clear that FINHEEC itself, in its publications use the argument frequently that quality assurance schemes are supposed to safeguard quality that is seen to be a core asset for increasing performance, a factor in international and national competitiveness, as well as, international attractiveness (FINHEEC, 2007, 7).

In the interviews, much of these arguments were perceived as less relevant. The University strategy, which instinctively should be a major device for tactical and strategic use, was mentioned in the interviews as the core document steering the mission and tasks of the university. Still, the usability of the audits or the QA-system had little, or no, specified relevance in the strategies analysed. And as it happens, the University of Tampere was, in fact, in its re-audit, criticized of not having connected the QA-system to strategy in more than one sentence (KKA, 2012, 26–27). Similarly, at Turku, strategy was said to lead all action but the QA-system in itself was not seen to have been an asset of any particular interest. The following response, when asked about why quality-assurance of quality work was not mentioned in the strategy for 2013–2016 the response was revealing:

[...] Ei, ei. Se löytyy, löytyy sieltä niinku itse asiassa, yllättävänkin monestakin paikasta, jos ihan vaikka laittaa sanahaun et "laatu" tai "laadukas" tai tänkaltainen. Ni se kulkee siel mukana et määritellään mitä turun yliopiston näkökannan mukaan on laadukas tutkimus tai laadukas opetus tai laadukkaat tukipalvelut tai näinedespäin eli se kulkee määritelminä siellä mukana ja tuota laatutyötä on myöskin se että miten ne
Consequently, separating quality assurance as a separate part was not seen as relevant for strategy as quality is already known to inherently exist in what the organization does. Equally, quality in broad terms was accepted as a competitive advantage but this was rarely seen to have anything to do with the actual QA-system and more with having good researchers, research teams, external financing, and all that is needed to attract, support and keep them.

Moreover, the view that competition and budgetary scarcity would be an accurate depiction of the state of affairs was accepted by some, but the connection of the QA-system was not seen as relevant to it. As it was stated earlier, the past head of FINHEEC has claimed in a publication of the European Council that quality assurance in Finland (Lindqvist, 2007, 35) plays a role, in principle, in the annual budget negotiations between the Ministry of Education and Universities. In the interviews, however, this was not affirmed. A senior figure that had insight into the proceedings of the budgetary negotiations recognized that its value in strategy and competition was indirect in producing information for arguments, but in any case, not as dramatically relevant:

With regards to Lindqvist’s claim, it might thus be that his wording has only been an unfortunate choice of words because it is true that result assessment, in the framework of strategy and management by objectives, is discussed in the budget negotiation between the ministry of education and the HEIs. This has, however, little to do with the audits and their assessment of quality. The aforementioned indirect element was also the present in internal relations at the university but almost to the point of irrelevance:
This clearly points out that strategic behavior might play a role in the overall functioning of the university in that the leadership aims at foretelling the demands by the ministry but not that QA would play a particularly major role in the negotiations.

Another relevant point with regards the strategic argument is the fact that QA-schemes would be initiatives of universities themselves but this was not the case. Instead, it was the shift from that the responsibility of the quality of the universities was vested in themselves (KKA, 2007, preface) to universities being obliged (2009/558, KKA, 2010b, 7) that has had a major influence in developing the QA systems. Thus, as the rational argument seems to rest on a weak fundament, we now turn to the legitimacy-explanation.

4.1.6. The Legitimacy Explanation

As was pointed out in the theory chapter, Meyer and Rowan, (1977) anticipated that what held organizations together were myths rather than efficiency or technical matters, and moreover, that they aimed at avoiding evaluation of their core activities. Besides, the inherent ambiguity of evaluations enables that they can be used as a façade to tell the public that policies and the way things are run are examined and scrutinized. Consequently, maintaining the organizations legitimacy in the face of the public became of highest importance, where conforming to norms and values becomes the main source of the legitimacy. This was seen in that it was highlighted that processes need to be documented in order for critical evaluators to see what we the universities are doing and that what is done can be accepted of high quality also by outsiders:

 [...] Mut tietysti se tulee sitte siitä että ku voi sanoa että joku ulkopuolinen puolueeton taho on arvioinnut ja todennut että toiminta on laadukasta niin antaahan se vähän enemmän painoarvoa ku siihen että me itte vaan kehuttais että juu juu kyllä meillä on erinomaisen hienot laatu

64
And consequently, as it was pointed out, the autonomy of units and departments has remained, whereas the process in itself increases the appearance of a rational organization which in turn minimizes demands for accountability. In this sense it is also a legitimacy claim in which we can recognize both a local and international element:

 […] Se on oikeestaan niinku sitä meiän arkee, ja sitä on ollu jo aikasemminkin mut nyt me vaan ymmärretään se, että okei, et tää on oikeesti sitä laatutytätä mut et jos me myös dokumentoidaan se näin, niin sit me voidaan tarvittaessa näyttää se että tätähän me tehdään. (N4)

This can be seen put into practice in that one of the audit teams remarked that the documented practices, their structure and leadership was seen as rather ‘new’ but based on established conventions (KKa, 2008b, 26). Correspondingly, with regards to international legitimacy, it was stated that:

 […] No periaatteessa tietysti sitä kautta että kyllähän meidän täytyy pystyä osoittamaan mahdollisille, tota noin, ulkomaisille opiskelijoille ja tänne rekrytoitaville tutkijoille ja opettajille että tää on hyvä ja laadukas toimintaympäristö et kyl se niinku sitä kautta tää laatu on tärkee. (N3)

 […] Siit oli hyvin paljon keskustelua että onko se uskottava kansainviljesty, siis yliopiston puolelta sitte mä muistan että meillä oli tämmöisä tapaamisia toisten, suhteellisten yliopistojen äähmm, laatupääliköitten kanssa niin sit me keskusteltiin täst et mitä teidän yliopisto aikoo tehdä, Koska jos sä otat suomeksi sen niin pystytkö sä sitte todellakin käyttämään sitä sun ulkomaiset partenereiden kanssa et onk se uskottava. Et se koettiin sellai, kyl siin oli niinku paineita toisaalt ottaa kansainvälinen et jotta sitä vois käyttää näissä kansainvälisissä suhteissaan ja näyttää että meidät on nyt arvioitu ja tää on tää sisteemi suomessa mut sit käytännön syistä ilmeisestikin suurin osa meni ainakin, ensimmäisellä kierrokseilla suomenkieliseen auditointiin. Et oli jopa ihmisiä, muistan et jossain tilaisuksissa jotka sano et ei sitä pitäisi edes, et kaiken pitäisi tapahtua englanniksi jotta sitä voitais näyttää ulkomaillekin. (N7)

Subsequently, while it is true that a QA-scheme had to be adopted out of reasons of formal coercive isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 150) – that would come to take the form of the new university act 558/2009 in the years following the audits – there was no purely rational reason why the universities would have needed to put their ‘scarce’ resources into this exercise if there wouldn’t have been an element of legitimacy at play. Similarly, self-interest was not the case, as interviewees at both universities stated that the university would have probably not embarked on exactly an exercise like these themselves. Moreover, during 2008, for example, as we have
learned, there was no budgetary sanctions hidden in the bilateral negotiations between the ministry and universities according to witnesses, but still both universities went through the process which was described by most of the interviewees at both universities as heavily time-consuming and burdening. Therefore, while the universities are heavily dependent of the state and the ministry of education and that there were no formal sanctions, but there was a normative demand, so to say.

Another example of this can be seen in that at Turku University there were serious talks in the working group before the audition of 2008 about performing it in English. Doing it in English was to seen to enhance international credibility or, as was pointed out in the interviews: *could be used in the international relations of the university*. The legitimacy argument is, moreover, relevant in the case of Tampere University, where the views of unjust practices and the following un-acceptance of the audit led to a situation where Tampere university will do it again with FINHEEC because of the argument that not doing with FINHEEC again would be interpreted as a sign of not being capable of filling the criteria or so to say, of being a university “not good enough” to perform in the audition-model of FINHEEC. In this sense, the legitimacy of audition is quite tangible in concrete examples where failure, no matter unjust by some, has to be responded to with success. Similarly, succeeding in English could be seen as something that could be taken out of the national context and used at the international level as a source of legitimacy and a symbol for quality.

In sum, even though legitimizing claims were vital parts for adopting a QA-scheme, the demands of having QA-systems had, nonetheless, a recognizable impact in the form of various organizational arrangements and responses. And as DiMaggio and Powell have pointed out (1983, 150), just that some changes seems as largely ceremonial, does not indicate that they would be inconsequential. Foremost, we must avoid thinking, that the QA-systems where adopted solely because of legitimacy or appropriateness and that these will solely explain why they were adopted. Responding to the demands was managed, rather logically, in both universities by designating either a vice-rector or a rector to be in charge of developing a system. What they faced in developing the system, was however different. I will discuss organizational responses in the following.
4.2. Pragmatic and practical Organisational arrangements

Alongside the discussed connection of QA-systems to strategy and legitimacy, another theme emerges, that of actual organizational responses and conducts. This analysed configuration teaches us more about the loosely coupled structure of universities and how this affected the effort to develop a QA-system. As was already pointed out in the theory chapter, a major problem in analyzing direct and indirect impacts of the audits derives from the nature of HE-institutions themselves. Not only are they infused with professional values and a strong operational core but they are open social systems in interaction with society (Clark, 1983). Moreover, the earlier sections showed how the legal and technical requirements of a QA-system seem to have shaped these organizations, but not in entirely similar ways (compare DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 150). Additionally, as was earlier discussed, organizations are generally good at responding to demands about a procedure and this seems to be the case with regards to the audit. However, what was witnessed was more than just an allocation of resources to communicate about a procedure (compare Dahler-Larsen, 1998).

4.2.1. Necessary evils and loose couplings

A key issue in management, structure and organization of higher education relates to the question of how responsive the elements of the educational system are to implementation and management. Whereas there was skepticism and criticism of the audit decision and procedure at both universities, a difference could be, on the basis of data, be witnessed in how work was organized. Leadership at both universities acknowledged that the audit was to some extent a “necessary evil” but they diverged, however, both in how they decided to organize the preparations.

The articulated starting point at both universities was a quality assurance system that is not separate and that respects the autonomy of faculties and departments. Equally, interviewees at both universities highlighted that they have a strong tradition of autonomous faculties and departments, which in practice means some degree of loose coupling from central steering in these:
In addition, it was a conscious decision:

"...se oli niinku ihan strateginen linjaus että, meidän käsityys laatujärjestelmästä ei ole sellanen et se on niinku joku erillinen järjestelmä. (N14)

However, while the point of departure was similar, they responded in dissimilar ways with regards to how to organize the preparations. At UTU, the process began around 2003–2004 and the quality steering group was created around 2005. Reasons for this was not only that FINHEEC was conducting its first audit-pilots, but also that it became clear that FINHEEC would not only evaluate education, as it had been thought in the beginning of the 2000s (N6). The quality steering group consisted of a network of so called ‘quality contact persons’. Later, this group would come to play a very central role in the audit process (N8, N10).

However, while the quality steering group was formed at this time, the preparations and leadership of the actual preparations for the audits were, in retrospect, viewed to have rested greatly in the hands of the quality manager and the vice principal. This was recognized by some of the interviewees as well as the audit team in 2008:

"Yliopiston ylimmällä johdolla on laadunhallinnasta selkeä strateginen kokonaisvastuu. Operatiivisen tason vastuu on puolestaan laatupäälliköllä, joka vastaa asioiden valmistelusta, esittelystä ja tehtyjen päättösten toimeenpanosta yhdessä tiedekuntien ja erillislaitosten johtajien sekä laatuyhdystenäkön kanssa, joilla on myös operatiivisen tason vastuu.”

(KKA, 2008a, 40)

The steering group had a representative from all major faculties and units but the guidance of the preparations was fairly structured in that units received clear guidance from the quality manager in what was supposed to be documented, how, and with what schedule. And as it was stated earlier, much credit was given to the quality manager of that time for advancing the preparations. In this sense the quality manager might have
been playing the role of ‘whip’, most notably known from parliamentary politics, in that the manager was assuring that discipline in the preparatory process was followed. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that the formulation of contents remained, according to interviews, in their own hands.

At UTA the responsibility of steering the preparations was similarly also in the hands of a vice-principal who led a working group consisting of himself and 4 higher administrative personnel. The group started its work as of 15.3.2007 and followed a previous working group formed in 2005 that had the responsibility of developing a system. The degree of continuity is exemplified by that the vice rector had acted as the head of both groups. Moreover, as the above shows, the working group did not consist of members from all 40 units but the work was, as the name inclined, steering the work of other workgroups. Also here, the point of departure was recognized good practices that were documented because the university is diverse; a common practice for all was not considered desirable (KKA, 2008, 40). Moreover, there were other working groups but the organization was not in the same sense top-led because a higher level of autonomous preparations was given. An essential element was also that there existed a multiplicity of opinions also in the leadership:

[…] ei varmaan ollu kauheen paljon yksiköiden kollektviisia mielipiteitä. mut tota..kyllähän ne vaihteli niinku välttämättömästä pahasta jotenkin hyvään kehittämisvällessä...ne mielipiteet..ja myös se että onko..tehdäänkö tässä laatujärjestelmää vai tehdäänkö niinku auditointia varten jotain. Sekin oli..sekin oli tota..siitäkin oli hyvin erilaisia mielipiteitä, eikä vaan yksikköasolla, myös yliopiston johdossa. (N14)

Thus, in contrast to Turku, there were also doubts in the leadership about the necessity of the audit. The following quote is lengthy but it sets forth glimpses of how the quality steering group at Turku differed in their view about the audit:

[…] sillä tavalla mietittiin että, et siellä ohajusryhmässä nimenomaan että tarjotaanko joka tiedekunnalle, joka yksiköllä semmonen samanlainen spaluuna johonka ne tekee sen vai annetaanko vapaus tehdä siitä oman näkönen yksiköissä ja turun yliopistossa sitte juurkin taas tä tää tiedekuntien vahva autonomian mukaan niin niin päätettiin että oikei, jokainen saa tehdä niinkun omanlaisensa mutta että kuitenkin tähän sisälllysluetteloon tulis tehdä se. Ja, ja, silloin toisaa sitä tehtiin kyllä sitä auditointia, ja sitä haastattelu varten, tai auditointia varten siis, niitä kirjoja että yksikköasolla oli hyvinkin paljon niinku, varmaan, tätä yleistäkin keskustelua että mikä tän tarpeellisuus on ja tehdäänkö tätä nyt niinku
Consequently, not only did the steering group have a more uniform view about the process but also the actual practice of how it was conducted diverged from that of Tampere. And again, is should be noted that at the level of leadership, it was pointed out that the system should not be some kind of a separate entity at both universities but, in sum, the practice and conduct diverged. In retrospect, the recommendations more easily visible impact in practical arrangements (see also 4.1.4) consisted of an extra element in the yearly reporting of the departments:

[...] No ei oikeestaan et sen mä voisín vaan sanoa et se millä me silloin kun tää meidän laatujaärjestelmän nyt pantiin pystyyn että millä me tavallaan niinku myytän se sitte tonne organisaatio ni oli vaan se että eihan tässä tule mitään uutta muuta kun se elementti että ennen kun tehdään se vuotunen raportointi ni ennen kun ruvetaan sitä seuraavaa vuotta suunnittelemaa ni katotaankin se edellisen vuoden raportti ja mietitään että löytyyks sieltä elementti että ennen kun tehdään vuotunen raportointi ni ennen kun ruvetaan sitä seuraavaa vuoden suunnitelmessa [...] (N3)

And the use of an action manual:

[...] mhm, kylä näkin että tota et kyl se aika hyvin on mennyttä että sitä käytetään kaikilla organisaatio tasoilla ettei et siinä mielestäni on kyllä tapahtunu aika merkittävä muutos et mun mielestäni et kyl se ihan oikeesti on tää toimintakäsikirja [epäselvä] yliopiston laatukäsikirjaan et se on semmonen mikä menee kyllä ihan koko organisaation ihan sinne oppiaetetöllä asti et siin on kyl ohon tapahtunu merkittävä muutos. (N3)

The above discussed organization of work in the form of quality steering groups and quality contact persons underlines the role and importance of creating commitment among the fairly autonomous units. This issue was also seen in that responsiveness of the system as a whole was created with the creation of team-based form of organizing, across academic departments and faculties and central administration. At Tampere on the other hand, much freedom was left to the many faculties of preparing and describing their local system. As the audit-team of that time identified:
Strategisten tavoitteiden saavuttaminen pohjautuu tulosyksiköiden omiin strategioihin ja niiden pohjalta luotuihin toimintasuunnitelmiin ja toimintaan. Yliopisto seuraa strategian toteutumista eri tavoin, muun muassa sisäisten tulosneuvottelujen, tuloksellisuuden arvioinnin ja muiden arviointien yhteydessä. (KKA, 2008b, 19)

In Tampere the demands of responsiveness and the creation of commitment to system-wide QA did not take root and as it was stated earlier in the theory chapter regarding loosely coupled organizations, they can be surprisingly stable and durable over time. All in all, a clear-cut commitment was not strived for because trust in that the units would deliver what was requested of them.

While the loose coupling concept normally puts our attention to how culture and institutionalized norms provide stability and order in an organization, in the case of Tampere it highlights how it affected why a certain mode of organizing was chosen. The scattered structure which had so far provided stability was not fully suitable to face a demand of a system-wide QA-system which demands a degree of systematization. Likewise, this way of organizing work did, as it seems, reduce the levels of resistance towards the exercise unlike what was the case at the University of Turku.

4.2.2. Resistance to Change

The understructure of universities has been said to resist change because of professional norms, expertise and the logic of scientific disciplines. At Tampere University the preparatory process seems to have caused less of a disturbance; seemingly because the process was started later but, importantly, because units were allowed to act independently which led them to produce QA-material from their perspective, and not from a system-wide perspective. As one interviewee pointed out about 2008:

[…] kylhän se siis…se väistämättä kuormittaa, kuormittaa niinkun kirjoittamistyöllä näitä jotka valmisteli tekstejä ja sitten johtajia ja joitakin johtoelinten jäseniä, siinä, että et aika paljonhan niissä luonnoksissa oli korjaamista […] (N14)

The attitude seems thus to have been something more of a laissez faire-approach which moreover faced less resistance because it wasn’t very hierarchical. Consequently, some of their work was not suitable as such for the documenting process, unlike Turku where
the units followed a more guided process in which the documentation of practices was made according to given guidelines. Moreover, the demand of QA at Tampere seems to have been viewed as of lesser priority, or more precisely, seen as work not linked to core work (KKA, 2008b, 50). In sum, the personnel saw clear reason to criticise the audit.

Contrary to Tampere, at Turku the demand seems to have caused more debate. As it was noted earlier, because universities work with knowledge, perceived intrusion often faces resistance. And this was clearly seen before the audition of 2008 at Turku where interviewee pointed out that:

[…] meidän yliopistossa se kritiikki oli hyvin vahva, et kun meillä sattuolemaan ihmisiä jotka tutkii itse sitä, et yliopiston lehdissä ja seminaareissa ja kaikissa nous hyvin voimakkaasti esille niiku täätä on vaan niinku, niinku tällallen niinku paholaisen juoni niinku koko laatutyö. (N5)

[…] kun ajatus ei ollut mitenkään niinku itsestäänselvä täällä yliopistoyhteisön jäsenille että tääs on mitään järkeä […] (N6)

Thus, as the demands of a QA-system were perceived as illegitimate structures, they didn’t automatically increase the “commitment of internal participants and external constituents” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 349). And as the earlier lengthy quote pointed out, the discussion varied on different organizational levels. In sum, facing ‘robust’ criticism about the illegitimacy of documenting practices and portraying the QA-system of the university needed, nonetheless to be responded to as this can be potentially harmful in organizations deriving their authority from legitimacy. Consequently, what the leadership of the university, unlike, Tampere, decided to do was a form of a translation strategy.

4.2.3. Translation Strategies

At the University of Turku, the requirement of going through the audit was perceived critically. In the interviews, at least, a two folded criticism was recognized. One point of criticism related to a perceived increasing of useless work whereas the other had elements of an evaluation-critique derived from sociology of knowledge, pointing in the direction of increased accountability, new-managerialism, lacking trust and compliance.
From the perspective of leadership, that acknowledged that the exercise was a necessary evil that had to be carried through, even in a challenging environment:

“[…] siinä nähtiin et ne on niinkun, ööh, se koko laatupuhe sillä tavalla kun se oli tulossa yliopistoihin, et se on niinku nyt lainaa tuolta yrityselämästä ja sellasta joka..jolla ei ole mitään erillistä tarvetta yliopistossa,,ööh..ja siihen liittyy tää epäluottamusaspekti, eli juuri tää kontrollinäkökulma, eli tuota, et se on osa tämmöstä managerialismia jossa siis niinkun, eeh, lähdetään tarkemmin kontrolloimaan sitä mitä, mitä yliopistot tekevät. Eli et se asenneilmasto oli tämänkaltainen ja sen jälkeen niinkuin, eeh, se keskeinen asia tietysti oli miettiä että miten niinkun tän tyypissä asenneilmastossa pystytään kuitenkin sit järkevästi lähtemään eteenpäin ja tota saamaan tää organisaatio toimimaan tarkoituksenmukaisella tavalla. (N6)

The resistance was also acknowledged by the audit-team in 2008. They claim, regarding the development of the operations, that:

“[…] preliminary work would have possibly been hastened, and resistance lessened, if it would have been talked about an ERP-system and operations manual instead of a quality-assurance system”(KKA, 2008a, 41)

Consequently, the latter exemplifies well the capabilities of the evaluation-vocabulary. As it was pointed out in the theory chapter, evaluation has proved to be an inherently ambiguous term. This can was also seen in that the documents from Tampere derived of an understanding of ‘quality’ defined at the various units that were developed on the basis of the respective functions in question, whereas, in Turku the report emphasized the freedom of units in having some degrees of variation. The choices made in Tampere come also through in the audit-reports. The team had pointed out that Tampere University has used the term “quality system” in their documents instead of the FINHEEC auditing manual term “quality assurance system” (KKA, 2012, 16). Moreover, they state that the term “quality” has generally been sparsely used in the documents (KKA, 2012, 30, 41). Reasons given for this, among other things, was the organizational re-molding that will be discussed in the coming section 4.2.4.

But in order to cope with the criticism, only the leadership at Turku needed to specify the semantic meaning of what was being done, or at least the semantics in the ritualistic use. The following response to the question whether the audit process faced resistance at the university characterizes this well:
The response demonstrates how – through changing the connotation of what was to be done – was employed to increase commitment. And as we know from decades of social psychology, implementation and acceptance of new ideas increases through participation (Starbuck, 2006, 128). But as it was pointed out in the interview with members of the quality steering group, the ones who are working with the quality-issues are using the right vocabulary whereas it was acknowledged that people not heavily participating might not acknowledged that what they are doing is “quality-work”. Correspondingly, the renaming of the quality manual to an operation manual assisted in making the personnel participate and accept quality work (KKA, 2008a, 43). This was also pointed out in the interviews where some accepted that in order to increase the commitment of the personnel; the semantics of the exercise had to be reworked. This was seen to have reduced the criticism but as the audit-team pointed out, the terminology seemed to have remained unclear to parts of the students and personnel (KKA, 2008a, 46).

In sum, because the model of UTU left less freedom in formulating their own view about quality to the sub-units, the uniformity of the audit model had to be “sold” and re-conceptualized to the organization as the model was facing more resistance than at UTA where the sub-units where doing their ‘own thing’, so to say. However, contrary to the dystopian fears at Turku, an interviewee pointed out that things have, nonetheless, remained the same after the audits:

[...] Meil on niinkun, eeh, monien asioiden suhteen, tiedekunnilla on ihan omat, ollut omat poliikkansa [pre-2010 and pre-2008] ja on edelleenkin itseläisiin ja itseläisissään [in 2012] (N6)

While this is not fully true, as the discussion on the influence of the QA-recommendations on strategy pointed out, the depth and gravity of these changes is
nevertheless another discussion. Moreover, whether the changes have been more dramatic than the response reveal is not, however, in the scope of this particular research as this would have demanded a focus on academic personnel and their perceptions. In short it could be said, nevertheless, that the views held at Turku at that time by the personnel seem to fall in line with the findings of Ursin (2007) in that they acknowledged exactly these two elements in quality assurance: on the one hand enhancement, on the other, control.

4.2.4. Audits in relation to organizational changes and the New University act

As time had already passed since the first round of auditions at these universities, the longitudinal perspective had strengths in that it can help tracking changes over time. Simultaneously, however, as it happens, the University of Turku formed a consortium with the Turku School of Economic (TSE) that came into effect as of 1.1.2010, Tampere University went through an organizational restructuring that came into power 1.1.2011 and both of these changes took place in the context of the new University act (558/2009) that came into power as of 1.1.2010. The new university law, as was stated in the introduction, gave the universities a new status and responsibilities, among other things. This makes the exclusion of other reforms and changes harder both analytically and empirically in relation to that of the audits. For this reason also the themes of organizational rearrangement and the new university act were touched upon in the interviews.

As it was briefly summarized in the discussion of the re-audit of the University of Tampere, the University of Tampere went through of a massive organizational transformation between the audits. The transformation was planned during 2008–2010 and a new board had been elected on February 2009. On October 2010, the strategy work at the University was finalized and the final decision that entered in to force as of 1.1.2011. The change covered, as stated, the creation of 9 schools and 3 separate units

33 The consortium can be considered a mixture of synergic integration and a forming of a new institution. Or as the ministry of education called them in 2007, a strategic federation (OPM, 2007, 14).
instead of the former 40 units\textsuperscript{34}, a redefinition of personal and departmental responsibilities and the winding down of the existing faculties. The reform of the University of Tampere is drastic in light of theory because shortcomings of traditional decision-making in academia has been suggested to be complemented with cross-departmental collaboration that aims at increasing the ability to “engage in collective problem-solving and cooperation” (Meyer, 2002, 543). If we think that the failure of 2008 was not purely just an unjustified ruling by the board of FINHEEC but also a failure of coordination, the interviews pointed out, however, that this was never as a viable option or that it took place before the reform. Any clear-cut explanation for this was not provided but it seems that a decentralized organization, in which the units already enjoyed broad autonomy, some broad-based collaboration was favoured. As one interviewee exemplified:

\[
\text{[…] kyl siellä ehdotettiin vähän tän kaltaista organisaatiota jo silloin mutta sil ci ollut mitään edellytyksiä mennä läpi siinä vaiheessa. (N14)}
\]

Instead, the election of a new rector and board combined with the knowledge of the new university act was seen as favorable to follow through such a massive organizational change:

\[
\text{[…] Mä sanoisin että uus yliop.. yliopistolakiuudistus mahdollisti tän organisaation. Kyl, siis olis ollut pakko - tai pakko ja pakko - mut et sanotaan et se ed.. vanha organisaatio ei - ei ollut paras mahdollinen - vanhaan aikaankaan. (N14)}
\]

\[
\text{[…] Ennenkuin yliopiston organisaatio muttii niinku sitä organisointitapaa niin tuli yliopistolaki 2010 joka toi uuden statuksen, vastuun ja hallituksen. Ja sitten uusi hallitus teki strategian jonka myötä rakenne laitettiin myös uusiksi. (N11)}
\]

Moreover, as was the case with the successful audit in Turku in 2008, the reform at Tampere did not cause broad protests as the personnel was, from a managerial point of view, committed since the strategy work that started in the end of 2008:

\[
\text{[…] me tehtiin sitä niin yhdessä - siis me sitoutettiin tää porukka siinä vaiheessa siihen. Ja sitte toinen on tietysti aina tämmönen pakon sanelema tilanne että saatiin kaikki ymmärtämään ette meil on aika vähän}
\]

\textsuperscript{34} The earlier organization consisted of 6 faculties, 25 departments and 9 separate units (KKA, 2008b, 17).
Whereas the new university law made possible the re-organization at Tampere, its impact in Turku on quality assurance was seen diverging on varying organizational levels:

[...] Voi vaan arvella että uus yliopistolaki ni se...se tota ni saattaa niinku meidän kokonaisuuteen vaikuttaa - laatujärjestelmä mielessä - mutta ei se yksikkö- ja laitostasolla samalla tavalla vaikuta. Että nämä sisäiset systeemit toimii pitkälti samaan tapaan kuin ennenkin. Mut hallintotasolla tottakai siellä sit..siellä on sit eri mittareita mitä tota ni mahdollisesti ei oo ennen ollut [...] (N9)

Similarly, the forming of the consortium between UTU and TSE was not seen to have had a drastic impact. An aspect that made the unification of the QA practices easy was that the both Universities had been audited in 2008 and moreover, that the new quality manager of the university had served earlier at TSE.

[...] vähän uudenlainen laki ja uudenlainen, uusi, yliopisto mis on kauppakorkeakoulu mukana niin niistä asioista mitä on silloin on tehty ja mitkä silloin on saatu alulle ja mitä on aikanaan molemmissa yksiköissä erikseen auditoiu niin että kyl siitä niinkun vinha apu ja ilo on ollu että ne on jo alotettu jo silloin ja tehty. (N1)

In this relation it was interesting to learn that in the fusion of the University of Turku and the Turku School of Economics (TSE), the respondents saw no contradiction in the cultures of the two universities or varying practices. This might be explained by the fact that the business school remained loosely coupled in relation to the rest of the university, even to that point that they were thinking about accreditation, generally a type of evaluation that in many instances has been considered unsuitable for universities. A potential explanation for this can rest in the fact that the school remains loosely couple in relation to the rest of the university, with its own website and programs and also accreditations.

In sum, as we learned about how the audit-teams recommendations were taken into consideration in the first part of this chapter, we can acknowledge that at Tampere the recommendation might have been taken into account in the formulation of the strategy but all in all, as the interviewees pointed out themselves, the organization had little resemblance with the one that was audited in 2008. With regards to Turku, the recommendations were integrated to the point as was discussed earlier. Moreover, the
forming of the consortium seems not to have had a drastic impact from the point of view of quality assurance at this university. However, as it was pointed out in the methods section, conducting case studies is suitable for the inquiry of a phenomenon where a separation of context and phenomenon is either hard or impossible. With regards to these organizational changes in relation to the recommendation of the audits, nonetheless, a clear conclusion of causality and effect is hard to reach.

4.2.5. Bureaucratization and Costs

The observed costs of audits that emerged in the interviews consisted of three components: burdensomeness (mental and timely), personnel, and financial. Nonetheless, no extra personnel were hired, either for the audits in 2008 or the re-audit of 2012. The only measure that was chosen to analyse whether audits where related to bureaucratization was in the form of described costs during interviews. After all, because the interviews targets informed elites, they should have knowledge about related expenditures.

Interviewees at both universities considered the audits as burdening for the entire community. Primarily this was because he self-evaluation reports were made for the first time, and the practices had to portray and visualized a consistent system. The following responses from both universities illustrate this well:

[…] Yks ongelma silloin ensimmäisessä vaiheessa oli ajan puute ja se että oli jouduttu tekemään, oli joudutut tekemään kaikki tasot, oli tehnyt sitä työtä niinku vähän yhtä aikaan, et oli tavallaan, se ei ollut niinku top-down vaan se oli bottom-up ja se oli tavallaan sellasta päällekkästä tekemistä ja ihan niinkuin kertakaikkiaan päällekkästä niinkuun dokumentointia oli alussa liikaa (N10)

[…] Tietysti se on, niiteen prosessien läpikäyminen on kuormittava yliopistolle ja jos ihmiset ajattelee että se oli se auditointi, niinku, jos ihmiset samaistaa niinku sen auditointiin, siinä tapauksessa auditointi on kuormittava koska se pistää yliopiston kyl miettimään omaa laatujärjestelmäänsä.. (N7)

[…] että kun monet koki että kun tämämenen laatujärjestelmä, että tää on kauheen iso työ ja raskas työ ja tietysti se toimintakäsikirjojen niinku laatiminen olkin, et se oli aikamoinen ponnistus. Mut sitte se,niinku siihen varsinaiseen laatujärjestelmään ei tullut tavallaan mitään uutta kun
In short, the high demand of documentation in the Finnish auditing system was seen to demand a lot of work. Moreover, the fact that there was varying levels of commitment made the task harder:

 [...] se melkein sitten edellytti päätoimista työskentelyä koska siinä sitten muutamassa vuodessa tän koko sen... yliopiston kun luotiin kun luotiin tää koko arvoste... laadunvarmistusjärjestelmä niin se oli aika työläs... työläs prosessi... varsinkin kun ajatus ei ollut mitenkään niinku itsestäänselvä täällä yliopistoyhteisön jäsenille että täs on mitään järkeä... [...] (N6)

In relation to the above, somewhat surprisingly, at the re-audit in Tampere, the audit teams interviewees pointed out that burdensomeness of general administration was perceived of having decreased (KKA, 2012, 31). Consequently, this seems to support that the reform was successful from this point of view. Obviously also, that all 39 units in 2008 had been doing overlapping work with regards to the documentation of their QA-practices might have also contributed to a lessening of administrative burdensomeness (KKA, 2008b, 26).

With regards to the amount of persons being burdened by the audits, only one approximation was received and that was in the case of Tampere. There, an estimated 100 people of the total 2500 members of staff was burdened by the audits. Since then the workforce has been cut through early retirement and natural wastage to around 2200 of which around 260 are professors. At Turku, a similar rather insignificant increase was hinted upon;

 [...] mä mietin yliopiston tasolla et no ehkäpä silloin auditointia ennakoiden pystytään kyl näyttämään et pienoinen henkilötyömääriin lisäyski, tai henkilötyövuosien mut tota noin, nippanappa et vois edes monikossa puhua että henkilötyövuosi on ehkä ollut se työvaikutus kaikkineen. [N1]

Consequently, regards to financial costs, most interviewees pointed out that temporarily, the audit might have lessened the available working time. At the University of Turku, it was only as of 2010 when a decision of a full-time quality manager was done.

---

35 http://www.uta.fi/esittely/yliopiston_esittely.html
Beforehand, QA was made on a 50 percent work contribution. Also in Tampere the QA-tasks were secondary to the responsible personnel’s total working time.

In sum, what was witnessed was that the audits were to some degree burdening but that no clear connection to increased amount of administrative personnel in universities took place. Even the recommendations made by audit-teams seem to have been integrated or forgotten but no separate administrative unit running was found. Audits at both universities were taken care of with available resources and personnel. The fact that the process did not require additional resources might also be an indication the audits and portraying a QA system were not considered of high importance in relation to other functions. In terms of costs, then, what can be said is that the most minimum level was reached, in that an allocation of resources for the communication of QA-procedures took place as a response to the need of displaying QA-practices (Dahler-Larsen, 1998, 65).

4.3. The Bologna Process and Quality Assurance

The responses regarding the connection of developing a quality assurance system in Finland and the start of the Bologna process show a clear awareness of this connection among the interviewees at both universities. And as it was pointed out in part 4.1.6, a need of being perceived legitimate on the international stage has taken root at universities. As was pointed out earlier, the academic conceptions and opinions of quality assurance viewed the quality discourse to emerge in response to European developments (Ursin, 2007, 7) and taking the form of management, monitoring and control. Among the administration and leadership interviewed, the need of showing a legitimate process in Finland was acknowledged, as was the acceptance that the audit form did introduce a new level of formality:

[…] Tottakai sen taustalla oli se että meidän pitä missä esimerkiksi suomessa, joka on riittävän uskottava euroopanlaajusesti […] Mutta, niinkun valtaosalle suomalaisista yliopistoista, ni sit tämä aikaa, tää ajatus formaalista, formalismasta laatujärjestelmästä oli kyllä täällä aika lailla uutta (N6)
And as it was admitted, an initiative to develop systemic quality assurance procedures would have probably not taken place on the initiative of the universities themselves:

 [...] kyl siin niinkun niin selvästi ööh, kaikkialla oli se tarve ikäään kuin vastatata tähän, tähän tuota eurooppalaiseen vaatimukseen...Eli et se, ehh, ei myöskäänä niinku keskushallinnon tasolla meillä ollut ikään kuin sellasta tarvetta ajatella että nyt, nyt niinkun tarvitaan formaalimpaan tietoa, tai niinku formaalimpi malli joka varmistaa niitä yliopiston sisäisiä prosesseja. [...] en..usko että vastaanvanlaista prosessia olis tapahtunut ilman tätä eurooppalaista kuvioa. Koska siitä intressiä ei olis ollut, siis yliopistoissa eikä opetusministeriötätasolla. (N6)

 [...] kun alettiin keskustelemaan auditoinneista ni kyllä mulla on hyvin vahva mielikuva sitä että ensimmäiset tilaisuudet joissa KKAsta tuli, silloinhan oli tää opetusministeriön työryhmä oli myöskin, joka miettii kansallista laadunvarmistusjärjestelmää, se laitettiin mun mielestä sen Bergenin jälkeen pystyyn niin tota se työryhmä esitys, se tuli yliopistolle, ja yliopiston piti lausua siitä, se käsitteili sitä, ja keräsin näkemyksen yliopistolta, ööh et mitä mieltä me ollaan täst esityksestä ku siinä esitettiin ni että joku auditointi systeemi tulis ja yliopistojen tarteht tehdä laatujärjestelmä ni siinä se kytkettiin kyl selkeesti Bolognan prosessiin ja sit kun tuli KKAan tilaisuudet sen jälkeen missä mietttiin että miten täätä nyt käytännössä tehdään niin niissäkin kyllä muistan että jotkuhan sano et "meillään on ollut näitä arviointeeja et eikä näät nyt riitä", ni siel sanottiin et täätä e vastaa nyt sitä mitä niinku tavallaan tulee täält Bolognan prosessista et meidän täytty nyt mukautua näihin kansainvälistiin kriteereihin ja niin edelleen. Et kyl mä sanoisin et se pitää aivan paikkansa et sitä varten luovuttiin siit tavallaan, kun siirryttiin näihin auditointeihin ja säännölliseen, ja tietyn väliajoin tehtävään samanlaiseen, samantyyppiseen arviointiin.. (N7)

It is noteworthy that the above quote goes as far as to state that even the ministry of education would have not went through with developing a QA-system. Whether this holds true will be discussed in the following part. However, even if it introduced a new level of formality, the claim that it is a new form of management and control was not clearly supported:

[...] Ei siel Bolognan prosessissa varmaan se tilivelvollisuus oo ollut mutta et voi olla heijastus uus-managerialistisesta mut me tehdään tätä omista lähtökohdista et tota... ja siin täytty olla tarkkanen ettei synny vääää mielikuvaa [...] (N5)

Thus, it seems true that the QA exercises have been introduced as a way to create coherence among the varying HE-systems in Europe. On the other hand, the Bologna
process was, however, not considered as the only source for an interest in QA, but a
general trend towards accountability was recognized as well:

[…] Kyl se varmaan niinku liitty v siihen mut sanotaanko että se sen Bolognan
prosessin kautta tuli näkyväks et varmaan se on siis semmonen ihan tota
tämmönen globaali ilmiö kaikkien yliopistojen toiminnassa ja sehän on
oikeastaan käynnistynyt siitä että kun semmosen, mitä nyt sanois, reipas
viistoistavuotta sitten niin ihan globaalisti kaikki tota niinku valtiota rupes
kiinnittämään yliopiston toimintaan ihan eri tavalla huomiota, eli ruvettiin
niinku miettin enemmän sitä että kun tonne työnnetään noin pirusti paljon rahaa
ni mitä me saamme sieltä ulos? […] (N3)

It is noteworthy that also the above quote raises the issue of QA in relation to the state-
university relationship as was the case above. The role of audits in this relationship will
consequently, be discussed in the subsequent paragraph.

In sum, the findings were consequently in line with the findings that a need of showing
a systematic testing of quality emerged in response to European developments and that
the importance of enhancing the quality of European HEI’s is an integral part of the
Bologna process (Purser, 2007; Kauko 2011, 7, 75; Ursin 2007, 94). However, as the
previous discussion so far has pointed out, the loosely coupled structure has, at least
lessened, many of the fears of a new mode of governing. Also the, to some degree
temporary impacts, and the relative importance of other reforms, dilute the severity of
this claim. It is true that some recommendations from the audits have been taken into
account and a level of legitimacy on the European and global stage is valued, but on the
basis of the interviews conducted, utilizing the audits and their results was seen
seemingly hard and many ways ambiguous to put into practice.

4.4. Audits, FINHEEC, the State and Universities

The fourth part contributes to the previous parts and discusses the main findings and the
role of QA in the State-FINHEEC-University relationship. As it was stated in the
introduction, quality assurance is often demanded by governments, ministries of
education or by supra-national agreements but only rarely developed as strategic
initiative by universities themselves. As the preceding part showed, many of the
respondents acknowledged that the QA exercises have been introduced as a way to
create coherence in Europe. However, when asked about the relationship of audits in relation to the state, Ministry of Education, FINHEEC and Bologna, the replies imply that audits and creation of QA-schemes seems to be no more than a legitimizing response, rather than a conscious move towards developing another instrument for governance. Moreover, in relation to the budgetary negotiations, the audits and QA-schemes were recognized of having no significant role. However, the views about the roles of the ministry and FINHEEC diverged.

As it was pointed out in the introductory chapter, FINHEEC itself highlights its independent status as an expert body assisting HEIs and the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters relating to evaluation. And while it’s independent status exists more in principle that in practice (ENQA, 2010, 15), in that the council is located in the ministry of education among other things, the composition of the audit-teams was seen to underline a certain distance of the Ministry, FINHEEC and the audit-teams. These responses regarding the earlier development of the audit-model portray this – as well as the search for proper criteria (see also part 4.1) – well:

 […] et siinähän oli sellanen vaihe et kun ensimmäinen versio kun ehdotettiin auditointia niin KKA olis tullut auditoimaan vaan koulutusta ja silloin esimerkiksi […]meidän työryhmän oli sitä mieltä että eihan ne vois pelkästään tulla koulutusta katsomaan, elikkää pitäis katsoa yliopistoa kokonaisuutena - mikä sit tapahtu - et se kehitettiin et kyl siinä mielessä et KKA silloisen tota näkemyksen mukaan niin tota pystyi niinku rasapainoihealmaan siellä jossakin yliopistojen ja ministeriön puolivälissä - et e si ollu kummankaan taskussa tietyllä tapaa.. (N7)

 […] Mun mielestä ne on selkeesti erilliset toimijat et KKA koittaa niinku suodattaa enempi täät europpalaist keskusteluun, niinku suoraan, eikä OKM:n kautta niinku yliopistoihin […] (N5)

But all in all, the role of FINHEEC certainly increased in that audits by FINHEEC or some other actor have become mandatory. The normative suggestions to conduct an audit, put forth by the Ministry of Education, were more typical before audits became mandatory:

 […] semmosii vitsejä heiteltiin yhdessä vaiheessa kun tota kolleegoita kans parista muistakin yliopistosta että tota siinähän vaiheessa, nythän se on asetuksessa – laissa - asetuksessa taitaa olla.. Et yliopiston täytyy käydä jonkunlainen tällainen auditointi läpi, ääh, tai jonkun toimittama auditointi ja KKAKin on olemassa mutta siloinhan se ei ollut minkään
näkösessä asetuksessa eikä laissa että sinä oli lähinnä tämmönä Ministeriön, *vinkki*, ja sitte KKAn kirje että haluatteko auditoiminin, niin joidenkin kolleegeiden kanssa siin naurettiin että tässähän on se vaihtoehto et en halua. Mut et ei kukaan meistä sitä vaihtoehtoon ottanu..

(N7) (italics added)

Consequently, universities were suggested to incorporate a practice and procedure that the ministry of education saw a vehicle to respond to the European need of systematizing higher education (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This is what would come to be enforced by law. This also seems to support the argument put forth in the preceding section about the relationship of Bologna and the audits. Yet, it is true that the Ministry of Education has also been seen eager to develop accountability, but this has not been connected to the audits or into showing a QA-scheme:

[...] Eli et se on ihan varma että tuota ilman tätä – ilmankin tätä eurooppalaista kehitystä – niin tää tulosten seuranta olis vahvistunut mitä nyt sitten opetusministeriö on alkanu, tai alko harrastaa jo silloin kun nää KOTA-tietokannat rakennettiin, ja pikku hiljaa näälä tuloksellisuuskriteerit tuli yliopiston rahotukseen ja nythän ne on sitten niinku voimalla [1.1.2013] tulossa siihen, siihen niinku rahoituksen perusteeks tän, tän uuden mallin. Et siinä niinku aidosti katsotaan tulosta et se ei oo semmosta niinku neuvotteluissa käytävää peliä jossa sovitaan tavoiitteista mutta tulokset on sitten se keskeinen vaikuttava asia...Ja tämä varmasti olis tapahtunut ilman tätä eurooppalaistakin mallia. Eli se on se toinen näkökulma siitä niinkun laadusta, et se on ikään kuin tää tulosten kautta - tarkastellaan sitä laatua - mut sitten tässä auditoinnissahan kohteen oli se että miten, miten niinku yliopistot pystyy niinkun seuraamaan sitä omaa, omaa koneistoan että...ja jotta se pystyy sitten niitä tuloksia tuottamaan, eeh. ja tämä...tämä ikäänkuin tämmönä niinkun näkökulma, sen huomion kiinnittäminen siiihen laadunvarmistusjärjestelmään ei niinkään siihen laatuun, niin sitä ei varmaan spontaaniisti nyt missään tapauksessa tapahtunut...koska se oli kanssa aika vaikea, vaikea niinkun tämmönä ajatus että miksi siitä kukaan olisi kiinnostunut. Että eikös se nyt se että mitä tulee tulokseseksi ole kuitenkin se tärkein, tärkein asia – ja tätä keskustelua käytiin aika paljon. (N6)  

Consequently, the steering of universities seems to have moved more in the direction of measuring performance instead of putting energy into negotiations. And consequently, as we know in retrospect, the financing model that entered into power as of 1.1.2013, only 25 percent of direct funding is given as a part of strategic funding but this does not take

36 The KOTA-database is a database run by the Department of Higher Education and Science Policy at the Ministry of Education. Its development started already 1981 and since 1997 its resources has been offered online. Since 2010 onwards the data has been offered at the Vipunen-portal which provides statistics and indicator-based data about education in Finland.
into account the audits or their results in any way. This thus supports the claim that because the Ministry of Education has other tools of governance, it hasn’t been very interested in connecting the audit-exercise to this. However, also a diverging view was offered:

[...] Tota. Kyl se, kyl se auditointi oli opetusministeriön vuoks tehty. Et me oltais varmaan arvioitu - me olt..saatiin muutamaa vuotta aikaisemmin lopputulokset meidän tutkimuksen arvioinnista esimerkiks, ja meillä oli se vanha hallinnon arvionti joka oli niinku yliopistolähtöistä - niinku yliopiston johdosta lähteneitä - ja varmaan jotain tota opetukseen liittyvää arviointia olis tehty joka tapauksessa - ehkä jopa tää johtamisjärjestelmän arviointi - mut ei sitä oli KKAlta tehty, ei me oltais pyydetty KKAlta...Tai ainakaan niinku sitä arviointikäsikirjaa niinku lähtökohtana siiven et miten me haluttais meidän arvioinnin. Kyl se oli niinku opetusministeriöstä päin, tullut. (N14)

The two aforementioned responses thus connect the demand for a QA-scheme to the new university funding that entered into force 2013. The new funding arrangement has a part handed out on the basis of traditional quality criteria such as degrees and publications and consequently the argument is that in order for Universities to be capable of responding to this claim, their processes had to be checked and hence systematization in terms of these processes was needed. If this line of reasoning holds true remains, nonetheless, an open question.

All in all, most of the responses do, however, seem to support the earlier claim that the audits have been only put forth for a European audience. Moreover, conducting audits were ‘suggested’ by the Ministry of Education in the time period before they became mandatory. Thus, even if it was pointed out that the audits might be useful in producing arguments for the negotiations; this loses relevance in that the budgetary negotiations have lost some of their influence because the Ministry has moved towards measuring performance. This clearly points that grand role of the state in Finnish higher education has not disappeared anywhere (see for example Rekilä, 2006). Moreover, it highlights the claim that strategic behavior might play a role in the overall functioning of the university in that the leadership aims at foretelling the demands by the ministry but not that QA would have played a particularly major role in this respect.

37 This is not to say that there wouldn’t have been also some positive effects of the audits. For example, the standardization of bureaucratic processes, sharing of good practices, and the usability of the manuals in introducing new workers were most frequently mentioned.
5. DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to analyse organizational responses at universities to the demand of showing a QA-scheme, and to increase understanding on the role of audits in relation to national and supranational developments, from a perspective of organizational intuitionalism. This was done through analysing documents and conducting elite-interviews at two case studies, focusing particularly on how the audit processes were organized, what consequences the audits had, and which role they play in the relations to other actors as well in relation to organizational restructuring and the new university act. In the documents and interviews analysed, four core themes were witnessed. First, in implementing processes or reforms that might be perceived critically in a University, the role of commitment and semantics become of high importance, as does a degree of hierarchy. Second, responding to the demand of showing a quality assurance-scheme and succeeding in audits are not seen to be of high importance by university leadership in that only scarce resources were allocated to the exercise. Third, developing the QA-system was clearly accepted to be a response to European developments but this is hardly an instrument for governance that the Ministry of Education would value in comparison to other instruments. Finally, the ruling of the board of FINHEEC, contrary to the audit-groups suggestions, highlights how something that up to a point had been evaluation policy became evaluation politics. In addition to this, the recommendations made by the audit teams are not as neutral as they seem, in that they do define what the Universities should accomplish. However, the loosely coupled structure has in many ways lessened many of the impacts and recommendation gained from the audits. Accordingly, to re-examine the research questions outlined in chapter one, and to summarise the key findings and interpretations from the analysis, certain observations can be highlighted. These will be presented in the aforementioned order.
5.1. Implementation, Commitment and Semantics

A relevant finding of the study was that even if the two Universities went through the audits of their QA-system in 2008 with fairly close results, the varying ways of organizing the preparations had recognizable impacts. The case study thus illuminates how departing from a similar point of departure – how to create something system-wide with fairly autonomous faculties and departments – but choosing to prepare for the audits using a different approach – had a significant role in succeeding in the first round of audits. So whereas these organizations were driven to incorporate QA-procedures defined by a prevailing systemic view about proper QA-work at universities, institutionalized in society, the actors in these organizations had the capacity to act in varying ways (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Jepperson, 2000).

Because University of Tampere chose a decentralized model – with the argument that the 40 autonomous units will understand the needs of a system-wide arrangement – the units delivered documentation and examples of QA work to central administration that varied from ‘exemplary’ to ‘horrendous’. Therefore, because the units were doing their own thing, there was no need for resisting this exercise. The working group preparing for the audit seems thus to have been either too small, or respecting the autonomy of the units to such a degree, that the overall image remained unclear for the audit-team. Also the outdated decision-making structure was seen to have contributed and that no full time quality manager was designated. All of this, however, does not change the fact that the audit-team recommended letting the university pass, whereas, the board concluded otherwise.

The University of Turku, on the other hand, derived its system from a similar point of departure in that the autonomy of faculties and departments needed to be respected. The operationalization and arranging of work was, nonetheless, done differently. The results highlight the large role that the vice-rector, the quality-manager and the quality steering group played in the preparatory phase. Not only was the quality steering group much larger and diverse than the 5 person working group at the University of Tampere but also the vice-rector and the quality manager were motivated in delivering a systemic view and succeeding in the audit. But as it was pointed out in 4.2.2, at the University of Turku, the preparatory process was already earlier facing much more resistance that was
witnessed at the University of Tampere. In reducing resistance, the solution was enabled by the ambiguity of the term of evaluation and assessment. By re-conceptualizing and translating the meaning of the audit-exercise as ‘nothing new’ and as only an extra yearly reporting procedure, resistance was reduced. Thus, resistance originating from the culture in educational organizations that emphasizes the autonomy of the professionals was reduced by harnessing the ambiguity of the term and selling the process as something different. While this reduced resistance and increased commitment, also the role of a quality manager acting as a ‘whip’ and enforcer in pushing through the documentation into the direction of the formality, seen legitimate by FINHEEC, was raised as an important element. Similarly, the role of commitment seems to have played a major role in pushing through with the drastic re-arrangement of the University of Tampere.

The aforementioned exemplifies well what has already been raised by Wilson (1989) who highlighted that individuals, managers and leaders can play a significant role in the process of implementation. The case studies show how management succeeded in creating commitment and reducing resistance for the audits by shifting to a more accepted semantic meaning of what the audit was about. In the introduction it was stated that the preoccupation with evaluation is embedded in a normative as well as an empirical and analytical debate. Whereas this thesis focused on the latter, the above discussion could be contemplated upon from the perspective of the former. But as it was witnessed, many of the recommendations of the audits where to a large degree temporary or relatively unimportant in relation to other reforms, and this consequently dilutes the severity of this claim. In sum, the aforementioned should also be seen as an obvious strength of the qualitative method was that many of the semantic ambiguities, the role of committing personnel and the problems faced in implementing demands of having a QA-scheme could have not been grasped through a quantitative analysis.

5.2. Quality Assurance, Strategy and Costs

Another relevant finding is that the costs of the audits and resources used for preparation and follow-up, unlike the expectations, were rather small. Similarly, this seems to have been the case also with benefits in that sharing of best practices,
systematization of bureaucratic practices and usability of documents in introducing new colleagues were recurring mentioned. It is true that there were hidden secondary costs, or negative consequences, in the form of burdensomeness, prioritization of the audit process over other work, and a tiny allocation of resources in terms of full-time equivalents. However, what was observed was that when time has passed since the auditions, praxis such as updating relevant documents (UTU) or writing documents in the first place (UTA) are of lesser importance in relation to what the interviewees perceived as core tasks. Much of the analyzed development since auditions seems thus to support that the audits and their recommendations remained of second order importance to many other changes.

Subsequently, while it is true that a QA-scheme had to be adopted out of reasons of formal coercive isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 150) – that would come to take the form of the new university act 558/2009 in the years following the audits – there was no purely rational reason why the universities would have needed to put their ‘scarce’ resources into this exercise if there wouldn’t have been an element of legitimacy at play. It could even be argued that it would have been foolish of university leadership to put additional resources on the exercise there were no immediate budgetary sanctions. In this sense, the research found no clear connection between audits, the need of showing a QA-practice and the bureaucratization of Finnish Universities (Ruokolainen, 2011). What was witnessed was to a large degree the most minimum level of allocation of resources, that of communication of QA-procedures as a response to the need of displaying legitimate QA-practices (compare Dahler-Larsen, 1998).

That more resources were not used implies that basic structural needs and strategy were more important. Thus, it might be that university leadership behaves strategically in relation to the ministry of education, but contrary to what a rational perspective would expect, quality assurance and audit results were not harnessed as an argument for more funding (in the case of universities) or as an argument for adjusting budgets (from the perspective of the ministry). Moreover, it seems that the Ministry of Education has been more interested in developing other indicators and methods of governing instead of connecting these to the audits or quality assurance in this form. This seems to support

---

38 This is especially the case when the benefits are hard to translate into clear financial benefits
the claim that the audit done by FINHEEC are foremost, as was pointed out in the interviews, purely a systematic ritual of portraying to the European scene that there is a quality assurance practice in Finland.

5.3. Ministry of Education, Bologna, the State

With regard the third central element, the developing the QA-system was clearly accepted to be a response to European developments but this has hardly proven to be an instrument of governance that the Ministry of Education would value high in comparison to other instruments. In light of the analysis, the Bologna process can thus be accepted as the initiation of systematic quality assurance in Finland. This supports the findings of previous research done about the influence of intergovernmental agreements in Finland (Kauko 2011, Ursin 2007, Saarinen, 2005) and with regards to other countries (Stensaker & al., 2008; Purser, 2007).

However, on the basis of the organizational responses we can see, and in relation to the possibilities of agentic actorhood, that filling the formal criteria of the European guidelines, or quality assurance in the framework of the Bologna process, is no simple top-down process. Importantly, the possibilities of universities and personnel to fill the formal criteria while still maintain organizational diversity highlights this. In this sense, analyzing how ‘quality’ is being produced for international stakeholders is of lesser interest if the universities remain loosely coupled in relation to this trend. This also supports the claim that how internationalization, Europeanization, globalization and how they affect higher education institutions are phenomenon that deserve no special theoretical development. In sum, processes of, for example internationalization, can be understood by studying how higher education organizations perceive and respond to initiatives and developments in the field of higher education.

5.4. The Problematic Ruling and Loose Coupling

Finally, the problematic decision by the board of FINHEEC, contrary to the audit-groups suggestions, highlights how something that up to a point had been evaluation policy became evaluation politics. There seemed to exists, still in the beginning of the
first round of audits, some vagueness about evaluation policy (what the goals and aims where). Because of the ruling of the board of FINHEEC to re-audit the QA-system of Tampere, and contrary to the audit-groups suggestions, what up to that point had been ambiguous evaluation policy became evaluation politics about who is allowed to define criteria. This subsequently raises a relevant issue related to legitimacy.

The first one concerns the legitimacy of FINHEEC and its criteria used in the first round. At the first round of audits, the model was supposed to have already been piloted and tested. However, my data suggests not only changing guidance and unsaid priorities of the used targets but it also points out to design-flaws in that the model was not capable of taking into account major structural changes taking place in the Finnish higher education landscape. The lack of flexibility to take fundamental structural changes into consideration can be judged as a severe weakness in the model of the first round of audits.

The criteria, moreover, and the following evaluation seem not to be as neutral as they are presented. As Dahler-Larsen has pointed out (2007), evaluation criteria may help to determine what actors should strive to accomplish in a given activity and this is clearly seen in the reports. Thus, even if it is recently pointed out that the assessment is done according to the universities own premises, we can witness a standardized view about how to organize quality assurance systems. In retrospect, however, we can witness that what the evaluations recommended the organizations to accomplish, had a less of a lasting impact on these universities. The experiences from the first round of audition at these universities thus pinpoint to a degree of terminological confusion and misconception at the beginning of the round.

5.5. Strengths, Limitations and Future Research

This research sought to grasp a set of complicated phenomena and an obvious strength of the qualitative method was that many of the semantic ambiguities, the role of committing personnel, and the problems faced in implementing a QA-scheme could have not been grasped through a quantitative analysis or a pure exercise in document analysis. Interviews in this research have provided insightful information and provided
much food for thought regarding causal inferences and explanations. However, a perceived weakness is of course that because budgets of the respective organizations were not analyzed, the connection of the ‘negative side-effect argument’ to actual budget remained superficial in that it rested on the statements of the interviewees.

Obviously, the longitudinal perspective adopted has strengths and weaknesses. For example, because of the time passed, there is automatically the chance of error in the interviewees rationalizing events and forgetting the chain of events. Also, the snow-ball sampling method did, in the long run, not prove optimal in that a set of names, who did not perceive themselves of having an important role, was suggested. As was pointed out in the methods section, the case study method is considered suitable for the inquiry of a phenomenon where a separation of context and phenomenon is either hard or impossible. With regards to assessing the relative impact of the new university act and the organizational changes at both universities in relation to the audit recommendations, this proved to be the case. Nonetheless, many of the aforementioned findings would have not been discovered if the research design would have been disqualified already at an early stage purely because the challenge of separating context and phenomenon.

The scope of the research was limited to two case-universities and temporally the first round of audits in Finland, instead of resorting to an analysis of ideational change in FINHEEC documents or analyzing how the audit-team operates and uses power in defining worth, value and credit. Moreover, because the universities chosen were so called mid-sized diversified universities, some variation in cases could be done. Is, for example, a smaller university less prone to have elements of resistance? For future research, these could be interesting topics to research. Moreover, the fact that FINHEEC has gone through an evaluation of its own activities points in the direction of some degree of self-referential looping in the evaluation system, where legitimacy is sought through new and new evaluations (see for example, Leeuw and Furubo, 2008). Future research could also extend the research by adopting an even longer approach and examining the first and second rounds of audits. Also the fact that formulated strategies seem to have gained new importance as the main steering document should be scholarly interest. Each of these rounds alone deserves more research.
6. REFERENCES


Ahonen, Pertti (forthcoming) Arviointitoiminnan institutionalisoitumisen erityispiirteet Suomessa.


KKA (2008a) Turun Yliopiston laadunvarmistusjärjestelmän auditointi. *Korkeakoulujen arviointineuvoston julkaisuja 11:2008*


98


Olsen, Johan P. and Maassen, Peter (2007) European Debates on the Knowledge Institution: The modernization of the University at the European level in Maassen, P. & Olsen, J.P. (eds) University Dynamics and European Integration Springer: The Netherlands


100


7. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Budgetary means of FINHEEC 2000–2012

FINHEEC Budget 2000–2012

**Authors note:**
The chart was made on the basis of information provided by FINHEEC until the year 2009. For years 2000–2003 the numbers consist of both budgetary means from the Ministry of Education and income from evaluations (for details, see KKA 2004, 16–17). For the years 2004–2007, the budgeted means are approximations. This is caused by the fact that the numbers provided by FINHEEC itself are ‘approximations’ (KKA, 2007c, 15). The figures for 2008–2009 (see KKA, 2010c) are no longer labeled approximations by FINHEEC and these where budgeted from “HEI-development-money” from the department of education- and science-policy at the Ministry of Education (KKA, 2010c, 14). The figures of the budgeted means for the period of 2010–2012 come from the Ministry of Finance.\(^{39}\)

### APPENDIX 2: Chronology of relevant laws, acts and reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1320/1995</td>
<td>Asetus korkeakoulujen arviointineuvostosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>645/1997</td>
<td>Yliopistolaki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>632/1998</td>
<td>Laki vapaasta sivistystyöstä</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>351/2003</td>
<td>Ammattikorkeakoululaki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Ministry of Education Committee Report on QA in HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Pilot audits at two Universities of Applied Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005–2007</td>
<td>Try-outs of audits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>965/2007</td>
<td>Valtioneuvoston asetus korkeakoulujen arviointineuvostosta annetun asetuksen muuttamisesta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.–09.05.2008</td>
<td>Audit of University of Turku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.–16.05.2008</td>
<td>Audit of University of Tampere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.09.2008</td>
<td>FINHEEC decision to re-audit UTA in approx. 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>794/2009</td>
<td>Valtioneuvoston asetus korkeakoulujen arviointineuvostosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>558/2009</td>
<td>Yliopistolaki / New University Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.04.2009</td>
<td>Initiative by Rector of starting negotiations of re-audit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.12.2009</td>
<td>Negotiations of FINHEEC, UTA and the Audit-team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2010</td>
<td>New University Act entering into force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2010</td>
<td>The forming of a new Turku University entering into force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.2010</td>
<td>External review of FINHEEC for ENQA-membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.01.2011</td>
<td>New organization of Tampere entering into force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.03.2011</td>
<td>Negotiations of and signing of re-audit agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.11.2011</td>
<td>Re-audit of University of Tampere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.03.2012</td>
<td>Decision of not to let Tampere University pass the re-audit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 3: Interview request

Haastattelupyynnö (SPECIMEN: Privacy data and contact details removed)

Helsinki, XX.X.XXXX

Arvoisa titteli, nimi,

suomalaisten yliopistojen laadunvarmistusjärjestelmien ulkoiset auditoinnit saatiin päättökseen noin vuosi sitten jolloin myös toinen kierros aloitettiin. Olen päättänyt ottaa Teihin yhteyttä koska tutkin Suomalaisen ulkoisten auditointikäytännön mekanismeja ja vaikutuksia osana Eurooppalaisia käytäntöjä yhteiskuntatieteeseen pro-gradu tutkielmaani varten. Tutkielma sai alkunsa Helsingin Yliopistolla toimineessa tutkimusprojektissa ”Transnational Governance of Higher Education” joka päätyi viime vuonna.

Akatemisessa keskustelussa, Korkeakoulujen arviointineuvoston tapahtumissa ja julkisuudessa on tuotu esiin runsaasti erilaisia näkökantoja auditoinnin luonteesta, vaikutuksista ja kehittämistarpeista. Keskeinen kysymys tutkielmani onkin, millä tavalla Bolognan prosessisävyksien saanut laadunvarmistukset on juurtunut osaksi suomalaista korkeakoulujärjestelmää ja minkälaisina vaikutukset ja muutokset näyttäytyvät laadunvarmistuksen parissa toimiville.


Toivoakseni haastattelunne voisi sijoittua vielä tämän vuoden maalis-huhtikuun väliselle ajalle. Haastattelujen nauhoittamista varten toivoisin Teidän varaavan aikaan noin tunnin verran ja luottamukselliset tutkimushaastattelut tehdään keskustelumuotoisina teemahaastatteluina. Toiveenne huomioitavissaan haastattelussa on mahdollista käsitellä joko suomalaisen laadunvarmistuksen yleistä kehitystä tai keskittyä tarkemmin vain teidän yliopistoonne.

Haastattelut suoritan itse ja lisätietoja tutkimuksestani voi kerraastä kysyä joko minulta, maisteriohjelmani koordinaattorilta tai pro-graduni ohjaajalta.

Vastaustanne kiitollisena odottaen,

Max Eklund
firstname.lastname@helsinki.fi
puh. 050 123 4567
Valtiotieteellinen tiedekunta, European studies-ohjelma
Helsingin Yliopisto

Contact details to contact person 1 (privacy data removed)  Contact details to contact person 2 (privacy data removed)
APPENDIX 4: Interview Outline

Intro

- Aineiston käyttö
- Kuvauks hankkeesta
- Materiaalin käyttö: anonymiteetti, nauhoitus, temaattinen käsitteley

Taustatiedot

- Työura ja rooli yliopiston ulkoisessa auditoinnissa ja sisäisessä laadunvarmistuksessa
- Ilmiön kehitys uran aikana

Auditoinnit ja laatutyön organisointi

- Laadun ja laadunvarmistuksen eri määritelmiä ja painotuksia
- Auditointiryhmän raportti
- Laatutyön organisointi
- Laadunvarmistuksen edut (esim. kehittäminen) ja haitat (esim. kuormittavuus)
- Auditointimateriaalin palaute ja sen käyttö
- Arviointiraporttien käyttö ja rehtori (mm. Liuhanen, 2007)
- Käsitykset laadusta laadun kehittämisenä ja toisaalta kontrollina (mm. Ursin, 2007)

Yliopisto, valtio ja laadunvarmistus

- Valtion, OKM:n, KKA:n ja yliopiston suhde
- Valtion määrärahojen jako ja laadunarviointi

Laadunvarmistus, globaali kilpailukyky, kansainväliset sidosryhmät ja Bologna

- Viestinnällinen merkitys
- Laadunvarmistukset, auditoinnit ja kansainvälistyminen
- Laadunvarmistus ja Bolognan prosessi

Tulevaisuus

- Yliopiston laadunvarmistuksen kehityslinjat tulevaisuudessa

Haastattelumateriaalin kattavuus

- Yliopiston laadunvarmistuksen keskeiset henkilöt.
- Yliopiston auditoinnin keskeiset henkilöt.
### APPENDIX 5: Cross-reference tables of suggested and concluded interviewees

#### Table 1 Overview of suggested and concluded interviews at one University

Authors note: As the observant reader might already have noted, N13 should have been interviewed according to the snowball-methodology. The person in question was, however, not a part of the organization under scrutiny. Similarly, this should have been the case with N11. Nonetheless, as more than one person in similar positions had already been interviewed and because there were signs that the person had more of a ceremonial responsibility than actually being in charge of operations, the person was left out.
Table 2 Overview of suggested and concluded interviews at another University

Authors note: In the case of the other case university, some respondents did not perceive themselves of having a very important role in the audits or with quality assurance at their university. N7 and N15 are examples of this; they did however suggest some names which enabled the follow-up according to the method. N12 and N13 were not part of the case-university and were consequently left out. N13 was mentioned as a person with insight but was for timely reasons not able to be taken into account. In addition there was one person not interested in participating, one who declined to suggest names for further research, and one person abroad.

APPENDIX 6: Original text from audit-reports in Finnish

[...] toiminnan kehittämisessä alku vaiheessa työtä olisi mahdollisesti nopeuttanut ja vastarintaa vähentänyt, mikäli laadunvarmistusjärjestelmän sijaan olisi puhuttu toiminnanohjaus-järjestelmästä ja toimintakäsikirjoista. (KKA, 2008a, 41)