WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO GRASP THE IMPACTS OF THE PORTUGUESE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM?

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Abstract

This article analyses the impacts of the Portuguese quality assurance system on academic cultures, using the Cultural Theory proposed by Douglas (1970, 1982) and developed by Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky (1990) as an explanatory framework for Portuguese academics’ preference formation in relation to quality assessment. The Portuguese higher education system has been undergoing a change of paradigm by moving from traditional collegial system to a legal framework influenced by New Public Management. The former institutional context, where academic collegiality was the basis of democratic decision, promoted the egalitarian way of life, where the group dimension is stronger. However, recent legislation has promoted two different logics. On the one hand it has decreased the influence of the group dimension by favouring individualistic values and beliefs. On the other hand, it has reinforced the grid dimension through greater concentration of power and separation of roles of universities and polytechnics, thus promoting the hierarchic way of life. The new legislation framework has produced changes that have strongly modified traditional governance structures and mechanisms and are likely to affect academics’ perceptions of quality assurance processes and impacts as much as they influence the development of beliefs and values.