

EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS IS POLITICAL, YET POLITICS IS NOT A UNIVERSITY'S JOB

Fundamental Values in the European Higher Education Area

Crăciun Daniela – CHEPS, University of Twente
Ethical Forum - 1.12.2022, University Foundation, Brussels

GOVERNMENTS OFTEN TREAT UNIVERSITIES AKIN TO POLITICAL COMPETITION

But threats to fundamental values in higher education come from many
directions

Fundamental Values in the EHEA

- Underpinned the **Bologna Process since the outset**
- Spelled out in the **Paris 2018 Communiqué**:
 - (1) institutional autonomy,
 - (2) academic freedom and integrity,
 - (3) participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and
 - (4) public responsibility for and of higher education
- **Rome 2020 Communiqué** reaffirms commitment of “promoting and protecting our shared fundamental values in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation as the necessary basis for quality learning, teaching and research as well as for democratic societies”

Overall, competing pressures in higher education

- Higher education contributions to society are not taken for granted anymore (**responsibility of HE**)
- Growing pressure on higher education to prove relevance in solving grand societal challenges and contributing to reaching SDGs
- Austerity and decreasing public funding for higher education (**responsibility for HE**)
- Erosion of respect for expertise & universities considered contributor to societal divides → HE “the new political cleavage in Europe” (Bovens & Wille, 2017)
- Calls for democratization & social inclusion in HE **through participation of students and staff in governance**
- Political pressures and distrust threatening **institutional autonomy** and **academic freedom**

WHAT IS THE URGENCY?

Why are fundamental values, especially academic freedom, on the policy and political agenda?

Why should we care?

“Fundamental Values challenged in recent years in some of our countries” (EHEA, 2021)

Global Academic Freedom Index – 2022 Update

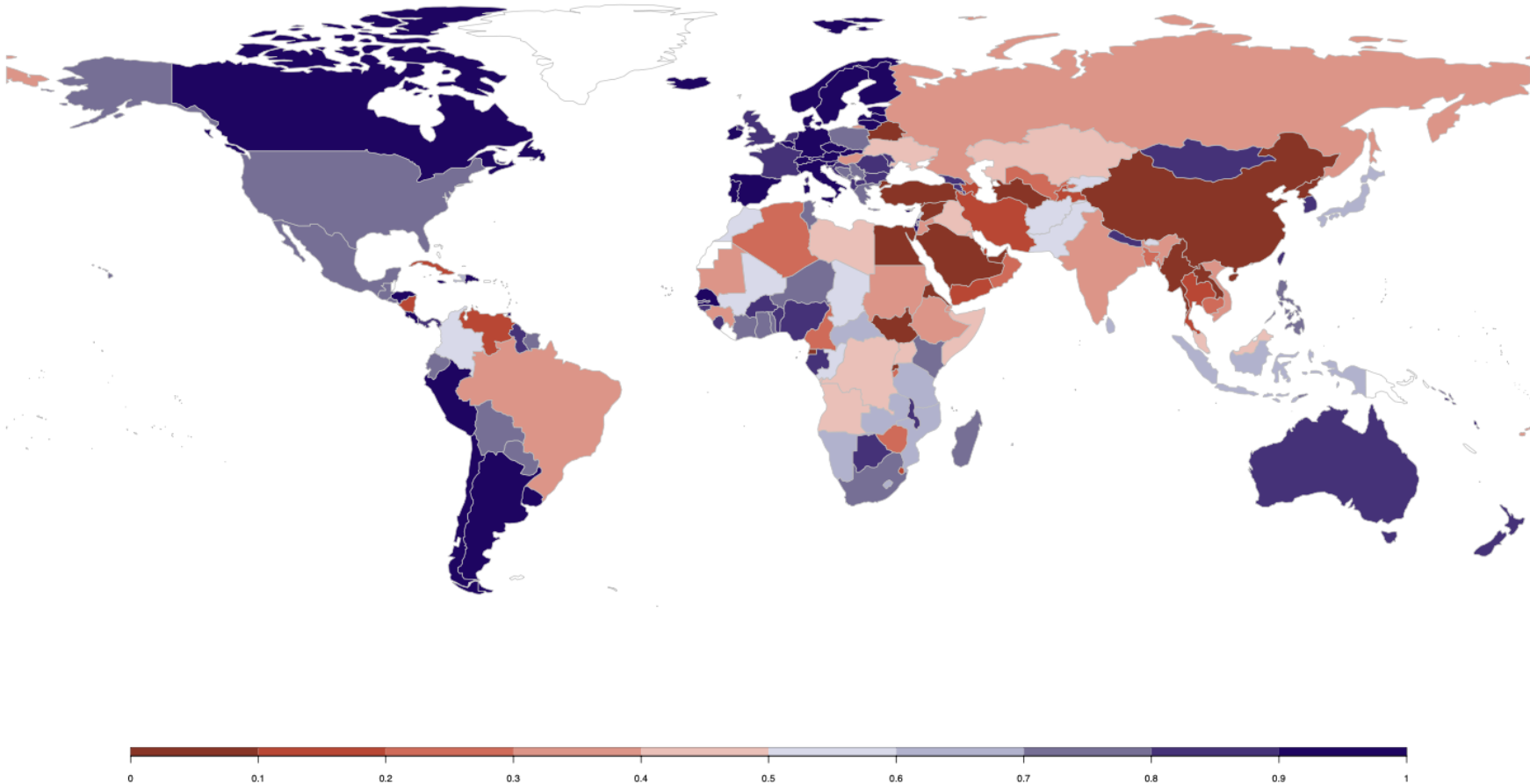


Figure 1: The state of academic freedom in 2021 (0-1, low to high)

FALSE IMPRESSION 1

Academic freedom is a problem only in non-democratic states

EUROPE

Democracy – and academic freedom – are under attack

Monika Steinel 27 March 2021

EUROPE

European Ombudsperson needed ‘to defend academic freedom’

Brendan O’Malley 17 June 2021

HUNGARY

Stop playing politics and focus on academic freedom

Pál Nyiri 21 June 2021

TURKEY

Torture, prison, dismissal used to silence academia

Brendan O’Malley 25 September 2021

NETHERLANDS

Universities offer psychological support to threatened experts

NL Times 16 October 2021

GERMANY

Defending academic freedom needs decisive political leadership

Andreas Fulda 07 October 2021

NORWAY

New government seeks to tighten control over universities

Jan Petter Myklebust 20 October 2021

FALSE IMPRESSION 2

A narrow conception of Europe

Academic Freedom Index

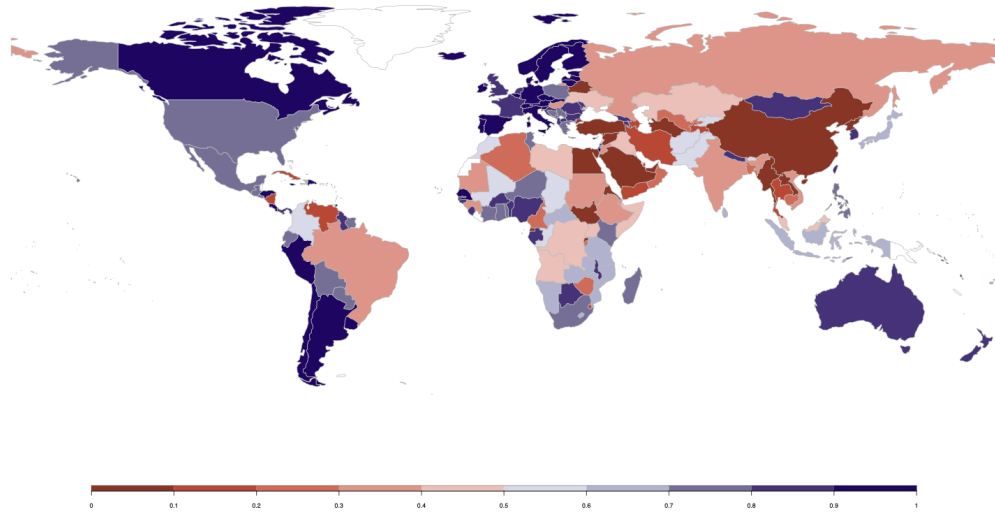


Figure 1: The state of academic freedom in 2021 (0-1, low to high)

EHEA





Statement on Academic Freedom

This text, developed by the BFUG in consultation with a range of experts and stakeholder organisations, aims to outline a shared understanding of academic freedom for the EHEA, and to provide a first basis for the future development of indicators.

Academic freedom is an indispensable aspect of quality learning, teaching and research in higher education as well as of democracy. It is a necessary condition for higher education institutions to produce and transmit knowledge as a public good for the benefit of society. It guarantees academics and students the freedom of thought and inquiry to advance knowledge through research and to exchange openly, as well as the freedom to communicate the results of research within and outside of the framework of academic institutions and programmes.

(...)

Although academic freedom is intrinsic to quality higher education, it is not a value that can be automatically assumed. Rather the interaction of the different elements and conditions that ensure that academic freedom is operationalised need to be constructed, regularly assessed, protected and promoted.

**Academic
freedom as
central to
quality higher
education &
health of
democracies.**

WHAT MECHANISMS DO WE HAVE TO SAFEGUARD FUNDAMENTAL VALUES IN HE?

Developments in policy and practice at European & national levels

(Focus on academic freedom)

National Level

- In the Netherlands, **academic freedom understood as having 3 dimensions** (Robert Dijkgraaf/MoE, European Parliament Keynote, 2022):

- (1) Freedom to contribute
- (2) Freedom to doubt
- (3) Freedom to be more than one thing at the time

- **Protections of academic freedom focused on:**

- (1) Zero tolerance for harassment – Safe science platform
- (2) Defend & promote freedom of all (diversity, equity, inclusion)
- (3) Promote debate & dialogue between science/academia & society – National center for public engagement

“Academic freedom not bound by national borders” (Dijkgraaf, 2022)

BECAUSE PROBLEMS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM DO NOT STAY WITHIN BORDERS

Need for a broader response

European Level

- Started by the Bologna Process, but now multitude of actors involved (e.g., European Commission, European Parliament)
- Focus on measuring and monitoring
- Threat of fragmentation of efforts
- Beyond naming and shaming, no clear idea what the consequences for infringements on fundamental values might be
- Idea to link fundamental values to quality assurance processes

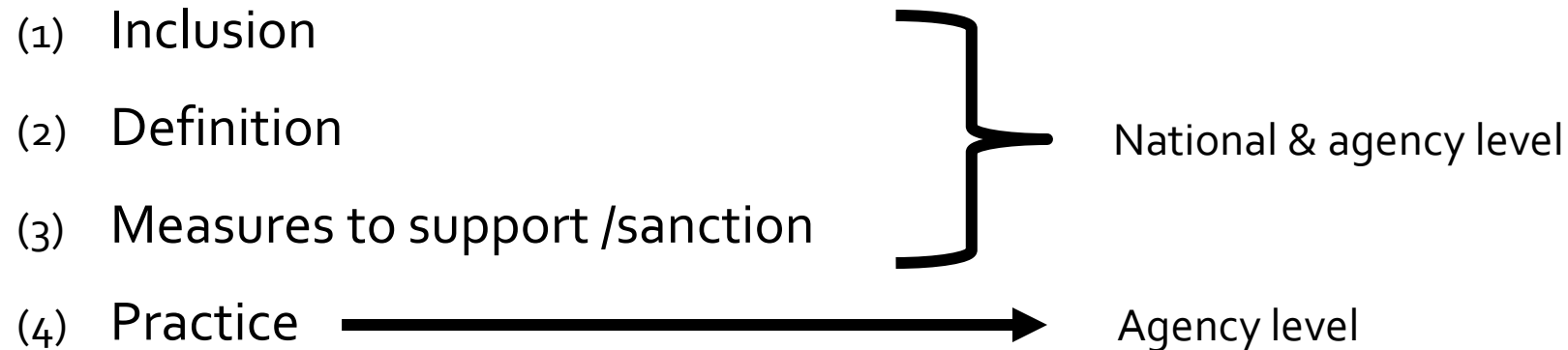
IF QUALITY & VALUES ARE SO INTRINSICALLY LINKED...

What role do fundamental values play in quality assurance?

A study on the relationship between fundamental values of HE and QA

RQ: What role do the **fundamental values** of higher education play in the framework and practice of quality assurance in the EHEA?

- **Study design:** de jure & de facto review (regulatory analysis & survey of QAAs)
- **Cases:** 50 QA agencies (EQAR) in the 49 EHEA member states
- **Review focused on:**



Meta-synthesis of Findings: *De jure* analysis at national level

Question 1: Are fundamental values included in national level regulatory provisions for quality assurance?

Short answer after analysis of country fact sheets: Yes, in some (n=17).

Meta-synthesis of Findings: *De jure* analysis at national level

Question 1: Are fundamental values included in national level regulatory provisions for quality assurance?

Short answer: Yes, in some (n=17).

Question 2: Are fundamental values defined in relevant quality assurance regulatory provisions? If yes, how are they defined?

Short answer : None identified.

Question 3: Are there concrete quality assurance measures to support respect for fundamental values? Are there concrete quality assurance provisions to sanction the lack of respect for fundamental values?

Short answer: None identified.

Meta-synthesis of Findings: *De jure* analysis at agency level

Question 1: Are fundamental values included in agency level regulatory provisions for quality assurance?

Short answer : Yes, in many (n QAAs= 27).

Question 2: Are Fundamental Values defined in relevant quality assurance regulatory provisions? If yes, how are they defined?

Short answer: None identified

Question 3: Are there concrete quality assurance measures to support respect for Fundamental Values? Are there concrete quality assurance provisions to sanction the lack of respect for Fundamental Values?

Short answer: None identified

Meta-synthesis of Findings: *De facto* analysis at agency level

Question: Are Fundamental Values included in the accreditation and evaluation practices of quality assurance agencies?

Short answer: In some agencies (n=12)

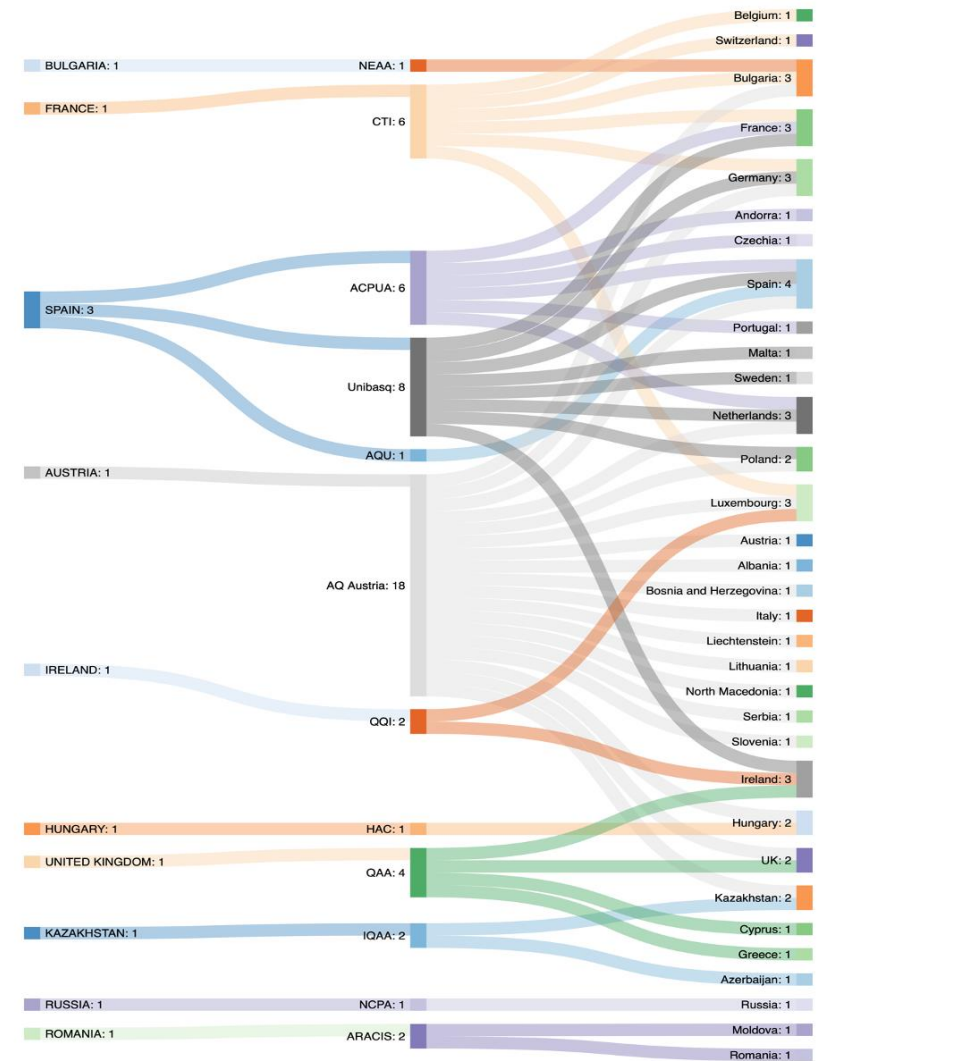
Academic freedom and integrity (n=11):

AIC, AQ Austria, AQU, ARACIS, HAC, IQAA, NCPA, NEAA, QAA, QQI, Unibasq

Name of country of origin of QAA: # QAAs which include fundamental values in practices

Name of QAA: # Countries in which they operate

Name of country: # QAAs operating in country



TENSIONS

- **European & national level:** How much power would the ESGs 3.0 have in safeguarding academic freedom ?
- **National & agency level:** How much power can QAAs have in safeguarding academic freedom when governments, who are supposed to offer protection, are the ones that violating fundamental values in higher education?
- **Agency & institutional level:** Should institutions be punished for issues that are out of their control? Would monitoring fundamental values become a mere bureaucratic exercise/legitimizing tool?

ALTERNATIVES?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

Questions & comments

Contact: d.craciun@utwente.nl

Craciun, D., Matei, L., & Popovici, M. (2021) [A Study on the Relationship between the Fundamental Values of Higher Education and Quality Assurance](#). Council of Europe.

Craciun, D. (2022) [The link between quality assurance and fundamental values: Understanding academic freedom in a wider reference framework](#). Th&Ma, Issue 1 /2022, Zorgen voor kwaliteit.

Matei, L., Craciun, D. & Potapova, L. (forthcoming) [Measuring fundamental values: indicators, tools and initiatives. A Mapping Report](#).