The latest volume in the Routledge International Studies in Higher Education series, Accountability in Higher Education takes an in-depth look at accountability initiatives around the world. Various evaluations, reporting schemes, and indicator systems have been initiated both to inform the public about higher education performance and to help transform universities and colleges and improve their functioning. This edited collection provides a comparative analysis of the promises, perils, and paradoxes of accountability, and the potential effect on power structures and higher education autonomy, trust, and the legitimacy of the sector.

Part I describes how accountability is perceived and understood in different regions of the world, identifies some of the most common elements in established accountability initiatives, especially related to quality assurance, and provides direction for possible future development. Part II focuses on responses to new demands for accountability at institutional, national, and international levels, and provides practical guidance for handling accountability going forward, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between international development, government strategies, and organizational change.

This volume is a must-have resource for HE managers, administrators, policy makers, researchers, HE graduate students, and those interested or involved with HE accountability practices.

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The interest in the potential, performance and productivity of higher education in the last couple of decades has brought accountability and quality issues to the forefront of the political agenda in a number of countries throughout the world. The potential of higher education as a means for transforming the economy to meet the requirements of the knowledge society, the social and cultural significance of universities and colleges worldwide and the increasing resources spent on higher education, are only some of the drivers behind this development. Thus, governments and other stakeholders are increasingly asking whether higher education is functioning efficiently, whether the sector is an effective tool for stimulating the economy, whether students learn enough during their studies, and whether universities and colleges can support national aims of modernisation of, and innovation, in our societies. Accountability and quality issues are important to study because they in relation to this development have two functions. First, accountability measures and quality assurance schemes are means to provide information about how higher education manages to deliver with respect to these aims. Second, they are also means that may change both the structure and content of higher education. The first of these functions deals with the legitimacy of higher education. The second deals with the adaptability of the sector: whether and how it is responsive towards the new societal demands put upon it, and the potential consequences of such a change on the cultural and historical role of universities and colleges. The current book offers both a global and practical oversight of current challenges faced by higher education while it, at the same time, provides theoretical reflections that give insight into the possible long-term consequences for the sector.

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Why a Book on Accountability?

One of the most profound changes in higher education during the last couple of decades is the increasing interest in accountability. This interest has risen due to a number of factors: mass higher education has increased the expenditure and interest in the sector leading to concerns about how resources are used and value for money. Strong political and ideological beliefs related to the creation of the ‘knowledge society’ have in addition drawn new attention to higher education as one of the key elements supporting this transformation.

A key element in the many reform and change initiatives that has taken place worldwide is the need for increased institutional autonomy. However, increased institutional autonomy has not meant that the society has stepped back with respect to how the sector is organised and led. On the contrary, various evaluation and accountability systems have been developed that pose new challenges not only with respect to ‘feeding’ these systems with information but also concerning how such systems may change essential characteristics of higher education, including how quality should be measured and the legitimate role of the sector in the broader society. The result has been a rise of both external and internal accountability mechanisms in higher education. Externally, this has taken place through the build-up of new monitoring schemes, quality reviews, reporting systems and even new funding and governance initiatives. Internally, it has been developed by the launching of institutional systems for performance assessment, quality systems and the build-up of various management information systems. The increase in external and internal accountability is further strengthened as the whole sector is becoming internationalised with the emergence of new supra-national standards, guidelines and agencies in which accountability is a key underlying driver.

Since accountability schemes may have a dramatic impact upon higher education, there is a need to study and to better understand how these schemes work and the role they are filling, not only within the sector but in the wider society as well. Since accountability is supposed to be a means of improving the legitimacy of the sector externally, the effect of such systems should, as
a consequence, not exclusively be assessed by the effects within the sector. Hence, our approach to an analysis of accountability in a global perspective is three-dimensional and cuts across different levels of analysis.

First, we argue that there is a need to understand the ‘instrumentality’ concerning accountability schemes around the world; what such schemes look like, why they are established, identifying the actors and agencies involved, and studying how various schemes may strengthen, but also change, the ways the sector is governed and which groups and actors are influential in this process. By doing this we want to go beyond the often-normative statements and positions surrounding discussions about accountability. This is the ‘power’ dimension of the analysis.

Second, there is a need to develop a broader context for understanding the effects of accountability schemes in the knowledge society, including: how the information created by these systems is enacted and interpreted; and how these interpretations may change the values and norms of higher education. Is the information used by different stakeholders in their interaction with higher education? Is the information used by the sector itself improving the functioning and performance of education and research? This is the ‘quality’ dimension of the analysis.

Finally, there is a need to learn more about whether and how accountability schemes actually enhance the (compensatory) legitimacy of the sector in a wider perspective, not least in an international setting so that we might improve our understanding of a key condition for the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education. Is accountability an issue that is increasingly taken out of a specific national and historical setting and applied in a more context-free globalised perspective? Do we see the emergence of universal accountability mechanisms and are such mechanisms seen as legitimate in a global setting? This is the ‘trust’ dimension of the analysis.

Through this three-dimensional analysis of accountability schemes and trends, the aim of the book is to start a process of de-constructing the accountability concept and to provide the reader with more insight as to what accountability is for, how it works and whether the promises of accountability schemes and initiatives outweigh the problems. In trying to get a grip on the accountability concept we have employed both a multi-disciplinary and a multi-stakeholder approach. Hence, the different chapters in the book draw on state-of-the-art knowledge from higher education research; but also from political science, sociology, international relations and other social science perspectives. We have also attempted to find authors representing the many interest groups involved in various accountability initiatives throughout the world. Contributors having close affiliation with research in the sector dominate among our authors, but the book also includes authors who represent the new intermediate agencies involved in accountability processes and even authors who represent the view of higher education institutions. We think this
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A joint collection of perspectives and positions has strengthened our ambition to provide a comprehensive overview of current issues concerning accountability in higher education.

The Structure of the Book

When talking about accountability, we often apply taken-for-granted perceptions of what accountability is, how it should be defined, and the relevant entities and properties of the concept. Hence, in the following chapter an inventory of the accountability concept is developed that includes attempts to trace the historical origins of accountability and the links to interrelated concepts such as ‘quality’ and ‘trust’. This general framework has two purposes. First, it serves as a point of reference for the different chapters in the book. Second, it makes the book more integrated and easier to grasp from the perspective of the reader.

An Overview of Accountability Schemes in Different Regions

Although our three key interest dimensions related to accountability—instrumentality, quality and trust—cut through all chapters in the book, we have organised the book in two parts. In the first part, we present a more comprehensive overview of developments in key countries and regions throughout the world. In chapter 3, Jeanette Baird provides an overview of both historical and recent developments in Australia. This country is indeed an interesting case because it was among the first to launch new initiatives concerning accountability as part of an overall change in the governance of higher education. The ambitions and developments relating to the increased internationalisation of Australian higher education, partly as a result of this policy, make the chapter an interesting case of how accountability issues go beyond the realm of the nation state.

In chapter 4, Gerald Wangenge-Ouma and Patrício Langa demonstrate that accountability issues are indeed becoming a global concern. Although they do not claim to have covered trends and development throughout the African continent, the authors show, by providing examples from countries such as Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya, that accountability is intimately related to public attempts to ensure the responsiveness of higher education; and to ambitions to transform higher education institutions into important players in economic and social development. In their chapter, they indicate how the international dimension also influences domestic policymaking, not least through actors such as the World Bank.

Chapter 5 is on China, an emerging key player in higher education and a country increasingly interested in accountability, both as a way to compare itself to the rest of the world as well as creating a more dynamic domestic higher
education system. As Shuiyun Liu demonstrates in her chapter, accountability is a growing concern in China which is tightly integrated with ongoing reforms of the higher education system. Liu also illustrates how accountability schemes can be used for different purposes, including more symbolic uses, and she discusses what sort of trust the current accountability system is actually promoting.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on accountability in the European context. Chapter 6 addresses developments in Eastern Europe. Though Europe is increasingly becoming united through stronger economic and social integration, those countries located in the eastern parts of this region are still influenced by their political history, thus making the starting point for an interest in accountability rather different from the countries in the western parts of Europe. As Paul Temple points out, the transformation of higher education in Eastern Europe is formidable. By focusing on the two largest countries in this region, Poland and Romania, Temple demonstrates that the starting point regarding accountability is very different in each country, although this does not always influence the means and instruments involved in the process. In his chapter, Temple discusses the political initiatives and policies regarding accountability in light of both the path-dependency of these countries, their current challenges regarding balancing expansion and quality and the growing influence of the international dimension on domestic policies.

In the related chapter 7, Andrée Sursock continues the discussion of how accountability is influenced by increasing internationalisation exemplified by the Bologna process. Even though the Bologna process can be seen as regional integration and not as an example of globalisation as such, the fact that more than 40 countries have signed up to participate in the process indicates its significance. In this setting, accountability is often understood as a means to enhance trust beyond the individual country. Using illustrative examples of the developments in Denmark, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, she demonstrates how the whole accountability debate has been transformed since the early 1990s and how supra-national and international agencies and players are increasingly influencing the accountability schemes developed.

In the last two chapters in this section of the book, we change the focus from Europe to the Americas. In chapter 8 by Maria-José Lemaitre, we learn more about the increasing role played by accountability in higher education policy-making in Latin America. Again, the changes are rooted in the transformation of higher education from historical institutions that emphasise professional education, to the training of key personnel in the public sector to become more important players in economic development with greater emphasis on research, innovation and privatisation. Lemaitre provides an impressive overview of developments in a number of countries in the region
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• 5

and shows how accountability is closely intertwined with quality assurance in this region and that many stakeholders do see the relevance of these schemes despite some identifiable negative effects.

In the final chapter in the first part of the book, we turn to the United States. In chapter 9, Robert Zemsky provides a very interesting insight into the debates, arguments and actions relating to accountability in a higher education system characterised by a high degree of decentralisation, autonomy and diversity. This chapter focuses in particular on the policy debates that frame many of the initiatives taken in the United States and show some of the challenges related to establishing well-functioning accountability schemes despite the high-profile political attention and interest. As demonstrated by Zemsky, accountability can indeed be a power game that negatively affects the public interest.

International Trends, Challenges and Responses to Accountability Initiatives

In the second part of the book, we go beyond specific national and regional settings and focus more on the emerging trends and challenges caused by the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education. Of particular interest in this section is the interplay between student mobility, the growing international market for higher education and the ways in which higher education institutions may respond to both national and international pressure for accountability. In chapter 10, Robin Middlehurst discusses the dynamics involved when the growing field of cross-border higher education challenges domestic regulations and established local accountability schemes. Middlehurst underlines the importance of understanding the new networks involved in global accountability initiatives and how cross-border education can be seen as an important driver for increasing standardisation of accountability schemes across national borders.

Chapter 11 then provides a particular case of both more global accountability schemes and increasing standardisation. This feature emerges as Alberto Amaral and Maria Rosa trace the historical developments and ongoing transformation of the audit schemes organised by the European University Association (EUA). This scheme began as a membership tool for institutional improvement and development, and it has over time been pressured, through its involvement in various network activities, to adapt to procedures and processes more acceptable to an accountability perspective. As suggested by Amaral and Rosa, this should not be seen as an isolated case. There are also other trans-national policy initiatives that, in the coming years, will probably add to the growing significance of a more globalised view on accountability.
How should higher education institutions respond to this growing demand for accountability, in both national and international terms? This is the topic discussed in chapter 12. William Massy identifies different strategies that institutions and their leaders might choose in order to survive in a mass, market oriented and ‘mean’ higher education environment. Informed by a clarification of the different theoretical and analytical positions that could be applied in this situation, Massy argues the need for a combined response, not only paying attention to external demands but also accommodating internal development needs. He argues that what he labels ‘deep adoption’ is perhaps a strategy that, in the long run, might benefit the institutions the most, although short-run benefits, especially related to the new external accountability demands, may be scarce.

Finally, in chapter 13, we start the process of nesting together the insights offered by the different authors and revisit the possible interactions between accountability, trust and power. Perhaps not surprisingly, new questions arise as to how we could understand the rapidly developing field of accountability. However, we also think that some answers have been identified in the quest to deconstruct accountability: emphasising the need to re-think some of the ways in which accountability is currently accomplished.
Introduction

Accountability is a fascinating topic to explore. It is fascinating because there are so many meanings attached to the concept. It is fascinating due to the fact that accountability is related to some of the key changes that higher education is currently undergoing. Finally, analysis of accountability is intriguing in that it may shed some light on the development of higher education and the future status of the sector in our societies.

In higher education, some words and concepts attract special attention because they are interpreted in particular ways. Such attention may arise because the given concepts create positive connotations among recipients. Hence, it is not difficult to find articles where concepts such as quality, autonomy or integrity are perceived as important key characteristics of higher education. Accountability relates to all of these, not least since the concept also could be interpreted as a synonym for being responsible, answerable, explicable, understandable, comprehensible and interpretable, according to a standard dictionary in English (Oxford American Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1996, p. 12).

Of course, the meaning of accountability is often dependent on its context, and since higher education traditionally has been a national responsibility, a consequence is that accountability has usually been interpreted in a particular national context (Burke, 2005; Trow, 1996). However, as part of the changes higher education is undergoing, the increasing importance of internationalisation and globalisation is perhaps the most noticeable element. As a consequence, higher education institutions around the world find themselves in a situation where they are no longer only accountable to stakeholders within their own country but also to the international community at large. Some of the developments that feed this increasing interest in a more ‘global’ embeddedness of accountability are the steadily growing number of international students, international academics or guest professors, the impact of global
businesses and industry, international newspapers performance rankings of universities, establishment of international quality assurance schemes, joint degrees, strategic partnerships and consortia and numerous others. Since much of the expansion of higher education is now taking place internationally these are the ‘new’ issues that will increasingly be on the agenda of universities and colleges; and that, in various ways, will direct the attention towards accountability. To what extent, and in what way, higher education institutions should deal with these developments is fast becoming one of the greatest challenges faced by institutional leadership. One thing seems clear though; escaping this challenge is not a viable strategy because the environment that surrounds universities and colleges has become ever-more demanding (Gumport, 2001).

Those critical of the transformation of higher education, and of the recent claims about accountability, often argue that accountability is not a novelty in the sector and that accountability claims have been raised in the past without dramatic consequences for higher education (Mortimer, 1972; Trow, 1996). This is true but it can still be argued that internationalisation and globalisation represent a new development (Huisman & Currie, 2004). For one thing, while national authorities have traditionally had a central place in various accountability schemes around the world, it is claimed that new stakeholders are creating a higher education sector that can be characterised as incorporating continuously expanding multi-actor, multi-level and multi-subject governance networks (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). Part of the reason for the rise of such networks is related to changes in governmental policy. Increased institutional autonomy has provided universities and colleges with more space for creating their own development and destiny. This has also meant that institutions are linking up with new actors, new markets and new contexts. At the same time, numerous studies of change in higher education also remind us that this sector tends to be ‘path-dependent’ (Maassen & Olsen, 2007): heavily influenced by national, cultural or institutional particularities and history. As such, one can anticipate an interesting development with creative mixes as to how accountability schemes appear as a combination of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’, and with mixes of various national and international elements.

The outcome of this process is interesting for all students of higher education. It says something about whether and how higher education is changing; whether there can be something to learn from how others interpret and organise their accountability schemes; to what extent internationalisation and globalisation also means standardisation and uniformity; and whether accountability schemes manage to deliver what they promise: trust in and legitimacy of the sector. The ambition of this chapter is to start a process that leads to the development of a conceptual framework that paves the way for a more thorough empirical, international and comparative analysis of account-
Accountability

The chapter starts by tracing the origins and developments of accountability, its various meanings and forms, before suggesting some simple criteria that can be used as benchmarks for analysing accountability in a more global perspective. By illustrating the diversity in the design and organisation of accountability schemes in some countries, we offer some speculations as to future trends in the accountability area together with some reflections on the issues central to this book.

Tracing the Origins and Developments of Accountability

According to Bovens (2006, p. 6) the word *accountability* is of Anglo-Norman origin, semantically very close to the meaning of accounting or bookkeeping. Hence, the first trace of the concept dates back to William I of England who in 1085 asked property holders to render ‘a count’ of their possessions (Dubnick, 2002, p. 8). In other words, the origin of the concepts hints towards a more technical process.

Of course, in later democratic societies accountability schemes were designed to go the other way: citizens held the politicians accountable through electoral processes (although taxation systems still require accounts of wealth). The growth of the state, of bureaucracies and of the services that the state provides have, over time, led to growing scepticism as to whether the old model of citizens electing representatives who in turn hold civil servants accountable, is viable (Day & Klein, 1987, p. 51). The argument is that the state is far too complex and modes of delivery are sometimes so difficult to understand that accountability must be developed through other means.

With the emergence of ‘New Public Management’, ‘managerialism’ and the ‘Reinvention of Government’ one can argue that it was exactly with respect to accountability that such schemes were legitimised. Accountability became both an instrument and a goal (Bovens, 2006, p. 7). The consequences are familiar to those interested in public policy in general and higher education in particular. Since the mid-1980s, there has been a transformation of the state from being ‘protective’ towards its own bureaucracy and service-providers to becoming more ‘evaluative’, paving the way for what some have termed the audit society (Power, 1997). The logic underpinning a number of the schemes developed is that growing complexity must be met with greater clarity in individual roles and responsibilities in service delivery. In higher education, the traces of this development are noticeable in various parts of the world. Evaluation and assessment were, historically, activities organised within universities and colleges at a local or department level with the aim of improving teaching and learning activities (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004). However, new external and national schemes were developed with the aim of making the institutions take responsibility for providing information to the public.
on performance and effectiveness, often combined with the establishment of national regulative framework and independent agencies with a particular responsibility for accountability of the higher education system (Stensaker & Gornitzka, 2009). In sum, this development has led to what some label a ‘re-regulated’ world (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p. 5) in which the states may claim that governance is taking place at arm’s length, although for those who must adjust to the new rules, standards and regulations, the situation is not perceived in a similar way. Protests against what many perceive as burdensome and bureaucratic reporting has as a consequence increased during the last decade (Considine, 2002).

*The Symbolic and Normative Dimensions of Accountability*

To protest against being held accountable for one’s actions may nevertheless be a rather risky move. Currently, accountability is one of those words that it is difficult to argue against because of the positive symbolic values of the concept. For example, when going through U.S. legislation proposed to the Congress, Dubnick (2002, p. 3) found that the word accountability occurred in over half of the proposed legislation in each two-year term. Accountability is today often used as a ‘rhetorical tool to convey an image of good governance… [and] has become an icon for good governance both in the public and the private sector’ (Bovens, 2006, p. 7).

Such symbolic aspects of the concept are underpinned by popular understandings that interpret accountability as taking place when public services have high quality, at low cost and are performed in a courteous manner (O’Connell, 2005, p. 86). It is perhaps such normative understandings of accountability that create particular challenges for higher education: first, because quality is usually a highly contested phenomenon within the sector with heated debates as to the nature of quality; second, because the economic costs associated with higher education, and the production of higher education services, are poorly specified and understood. Finally, higher education is a sector where performance is usually hidden from the public eye, where performance may not be difficult to measure, but difficult to interpret (are high failure rates at examinations a result of high academic standards or poor teaching?), and where good benchmarks are hard to come by. No wonder, then, that rankings of universities are a fast-spreading phenomenon with the promises of quick and easy-to-grasp responses to at least some of these challenges.

Methodological criticism aside (Harvey, 2008), the problem with rankings is that they also usually target only a small proportion of the many potential stakeholders of higher education—the students—while other constituencies may or may not feel that their needs are met. Hence, for higher education institutions, the challenges relating to accountability are that they must develop
combined ways and means to respond to and be relevant for what Burke (2005, p. 23) has called the accountability triangle of state priorities, academic concerns and market forces, or to what Jongbloed (2007, p. 134) labelled the triple bottom line of corporate social responsibility (people, planet, profit). To be able to deal with the conflicting (and often normative) expectations of this triangle will in most instances also require a great array of skills if we are to master the symbolic aspects of accountability.

Accountability and Trust

It is not difficult to agree with Burke (2005, p. 23) that accountability is about finding a good balance between conflicting demands and expectations and that higher education institutions should ‘serve all while submitting to none of these imperatives’. However, while one could easily interpret this as a more technical process, one should perhaps rather see it as a process in which to find a level of trust between higher education and its environment.

The notion of trust, in this respect, is interesting because it is in many ways the antithesis of accountability. If two parties totally trust each other, there is in principle no need to establish an accountability scheme. This situation can be said to characterise the historical ties between the state and higher education in some countries, especially in continental Europe (Maasssen & Olsen, 2007). Of course, the key advantage of trust between two parties is also that one does not need to spend a lot of resources and energy on accountability issues (Zucker, 1986). Hence, several authors argue that it is exactly because the level of trust between higher education and the environment has deteriorated that many accountability schemes have been developed in various countries. Power (1997) has argued that we have seen a transformation of professional exchange relationships from being based on a tacit (normative) pact to increasingly being based on explicit (rationalistic) audits and other accountability measures. The aspect worth noticing here is that although many accountability schemes have been launched to promote trust in higher education, they rarely discuss the different theoretical perspectives as to how trust may be achieved. Stensaker and Gornitzka (2009) have argued that in principle one can distinguish between two perspectives for achieving trust:

- The rationalist-instrumental perspective on trust is based on the assumption that individuals will follow the logic of consequentiality. If otherwise not induced to do otherwise, individuals will pursue their self-interest and maximise their own utility. Trust is established through the existence of independent actors and auditors who can be trusted by all parties involved in a relationship, which then is assigned to check the quality of higher education. Trust will develop as an effect of control. Procedures, standards,
rules and regulations established by the independent auditors are then the proxies of trust, which is established on the basis of thorough analysis of how procedures and standards are followed. This perspective fits well with newer forms of how accountability is achieved.

- The normative/cognitive perspective on trust sees trust established by the existence of strong norms and expectations as to what is appropriate behaviour of various parties involved in a relationship. Such strong norms are internalised by all actors that are involved in creating trust because it is taken for granted that everybody should and will follow norms and rules. Trust is achieved when institutions, over time, demonstrate accountability through the results and outcomes produced. The reputation a given university achieves will then become a proxy for trust. Whereas the problem of trust is seen as an issue of control and incentive in the rational-instrumental perspective, it is from a norm-based institutional perspective seen as a question of appealing to common identity and socialisation and acting according to what is appropriate. This perspective fits well with historical forms of accountability that develop more incrementally over time.

At the same time, these two perspectives and their variants may also be combined in various ways; they sometimes blur and overlap. For example, a stakeholder will normally not engage in ‘blind trust’ but will use a combination of calculative (if available) and norm-based judgements pointing to the possibility that trust, and accountability, is a ‘hybrid phenomenon’ between calculation and predictability on the one hand and goodwill and voluntary exposure to risk, on the other (Bachmann, 1998, p. 303). Hence, the balancing act concerning accountability is not only about balancing the interest of many stakeholders in higher education but also to realise that auditing, monitoring and accountability schemes may in fact undermine rather than build trust (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p. 13). Identifying, analysing and understanding which schemes do the latter are, therefore, crucial tasks, not only for politicians but also for researchers.

**Accountability Forms: An Inventory**

However, before starting any analysis there is also a need to provide an overview of the different forms and ways in which accountability is provided. A review of the literature discloses that this is no easy task. In a broad term, accountability is in principle owed to all people, groups or institutions that are or will be affected by what the accountable actors are doing. Such a broad understanding is nevertheless quite meaningless since it dilutes accountability beyond enforcement and reasonable levels of expectation (Trow, 1996, p. 231).

Trow distinguished between two central dimensions of accountability
Accountability

First, between external and internal accountability, where the first notion relates to the obligation universities and colleges have towards their supporters and funders, and the second relates to how well different parts of the institution are performing, how and whether people work towards the mission, and how units and people work to improve the quality of their activities.

The second dimension is between what Trow labelled ‘legal/financial’ and ‘academic’ accountability. The first notion relates to the obligation institutions have, for example, to report on how resources have been spent and whether institutions are acting in accordance with the rule of law. The second notion relates to the obligation the institution has to inform about teaching and learning activities. Although the different types of accountability offered by Trow make sense, one could still criticise this typology for not being very clear-cut and mutually exclusive. For example, academic accountability may come in both internal and external versions.

A more detailed typology is offered by Vidovich and Slee (2001) who also started by identifying four different forms of accountability: upward, downward, inward and outward.

By upward accountability Vidovich and Slee implied any forms of accountability that take the form of a principal–agent relationship including bureaucratic, legal and procedural means. Downward accountability includes the responsibilities of the principal towards the agent, which, translated into higher education, could imply a number of collegial mechanisms. Inward accountability relates more to how individuals, professionals or disciplines adhere to ethical or professional standards, while outward accountability, according to Vidovich and Slee, implies how institutions respond to markets, users and clients in higher education, including the political arena.

Yet another typology is offered by Leithwood, Edge and Jantzi (1999) who pointed to the meaning of the information provided for accountability purposes and differentiated between descriptive, explanatory and justifiable forms of accountability. As Romzek (2000, p. 22) noted, this also hints at the inevitable political dimension found in almost any accountability scheme.

However, one could argue that all of these forms of accountability appear rather stylistic. They do not manage to capture the complexities of how accountability today takes place. As posited by Harvey and Knight (1996), we are currently in an age where we face delegated accountability; for example, previously state-regulated higher education systems are distributing the responsibilities to new actors and agencies in what they term a ubiquitous accountability mode. Bovens (2006, p. 21) echoed this view by underlining that changes in governance schemes have implied that traditional forms of accountability are transformed; for example, by the establishment of new intermediate agencies and bodies consisting of representation from both external, internal, academic and legal/financial constituencies. The result is
more *diagonal* accountability forms, which sometimes replace, and at other times add to, existing horizontal or vertical forms of accountability.

In addition, it is also possible to note a tendency towards the blurring of a number of the stylistic forms of accountability identified above. While diagonal forms of accountability also may be interpreted as a blurring between traditional vertical and horizontal forms, it is also possible to identify a possible blurring between traditional legal/financial and academic forms of accountability. An example here could be the new systems and schemes for internal quality assurance that higher education institutions are often required to establish. In such systems, legal requirements concerning stakeholder participation; the need to conduct certain kinds of evaluations and assessments contributes to undermine the traditional boundaries between more administrative and more professional accountability. Another example of blurring between various accountability forms can be found when increased institutional autonomy actually strengthens the links between external and internal schemes. This development may go both ways. Universities may want to develop evaluation and reporting systems, for example in research, that match national or international priorities within a given research field. On the other hand, state authorities or external funding agencies may develop specific research assessment schemes and criteria that are copied internally by institutions and, consequently, function as a form of accountability (Whitley & Gläser, 2007, pp. 7–9). Finally, with the emergence of university rankings, international benchmark studies and report cards, and international agencies’ standards and routines, the distinction between the national and the international forms of accountability are also becoming blurred (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000; Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Drori, Meyer, & Hwang, 2006).

The result is that the emerging networks consisting of multi-actor, multi-level and multi-subject governance schemes are increasingly matched by ‘accountability networks’ having the same characteristics (Harlow & Rawlings, 2006, p. 5).

**Assessing Accountability Schemes**

The analysis so far points to the fact that accountability is an increasingly complex phenomenon and that it is difficult to draw exact borders as to what may be described as accountability and how accountability schemes may be assessed. Some perhaps would argue that relevant systems imply giving reasons for a specific conduct (Roberts & Scapens, 1985), while others would perhaps perceive valid accountability schemes as providing convincing excuses (Kirk & Mouritsen, 1996). If being accountable means to be responsible to everyone, then accountability becomes a relative concept in which the assessment is a result of individual stakeholder perceptions.
An alternative way forward is to understand accountability as part of the continuous dialogue in a democratic society. If accountability is perceived as a dialogue between two (or more) parties, the underlying logic is that the social relation between these two parties should be conducted, organised and assessed in certain ways (Bovens, 2006, p. 9; Jang, 2006, p. 167). Bovens (2006, p. 12) also suggested the exact criteria structuring such a social relation. According to him a relationship qualifies as a case of accountability when: (a) there is a relationship between an actor and a forum, (b) in which the actor is obliged, (c) to explain and justify, (d) his conduct. (e) The forum can pose questions, (f) pass judgements (g) and the actor may face consequences.

The interesting point with these specifications is that accountability is developed from being merely ‘statements’, ‘results’ or ‘reporting’ to some kind of interactive debate and dialogue between those held accountable and those that are holding them accountable. While specific top-down accountability schemes with little social interaction can probably still be labelled ‘democratic’ if they are designed as a result of a fundamental electoral process, one could argue that recent changes with respect to accountability may hamper the civic dialogue forming the glue of a truly democratic society (Day & Klein, 1987, p. 248). In view of the importance usually given to institutional autonomy, academic freedom and the potential unintended consequences of poorly designed, bureaucratic and compliance-oriented accountability schemes in higher education (Elton, 1988), the specifications offered by Bovens may be perceived as more valid, fair and relevant in that both parties involved in the process have a say.

Still, this does not mean that the scheme offered by Bovens is beyond criticism; for example, the criterion concerning ‘consequences’ may be problematic. From a civic society point of view, the concept of sanctions is perhaps not the best way to foster an open and honest dialogue between two parties. In fact, it may actually create incentives to deny responsibility (Harlow & Rawlings, 2006, p. 4) and, as a consequence, may hinder potential improvement of performance as a result. It can, therefore, be argued that this criterion should be excluded when assessing accountability schemes and that the assessment, instead, should address the overall outcome of the dialogue in forms of improvement, change and performance gains.

Based on our discussion so far, some characteristics of how accountability systems could be assessed are suggested:

- Accountability schemes should be perceived as relevant by central stakeholders.
- Accountability schemes should contain fair judgement of performance.
- Accountability schemes should be open for feedback and dialogue.
- Accountability schemes should stimulate trust.
National Variations: Common Trends?

A question one should ask is, of course, whether it is possible to find empirical evidence of accountability schemes matching all of these characteristics? Can we also find some common trends that go beyond national particularities? Since the current book has ambitions to provide some answers to these questions, we will in this section only provide some possible examples as to the variations that still seem to exist in this field.

A starting point here is undoubtedly the number of contributions on quality assurance in higher education and research (Ewell, 2007, 2008; Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004; Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Rosa, 2007; Whitley & Gläser, 2007). Although quality assurance undoubtedly is part of any accountability scheme, there are relatively few studies that try to broaden the perspective beyond quality assurance (for some exceptions, see Burke (2005) on accountability in the United States and Currie, Deangelis, de Boer, Huisman and Lacotte (2003) on a study of globalisation and university responses). However, if increased accountability is a result of changing governance of the whole higher education sector, then one could argue that all elements and processes that are taking place between those being held accountable and those asking for accountability in principle are part of an accountability scheme. It is then an empirical question as to which parts of the activities are considered important for achieving accountability. For example, while accreditation in the United States in general is considered as an important accountability mechanism both by states and institutions (Ewell, 2008, p. 106), this mechanism may not be seen as so important by elite institutions such as Harvard, Princeton or Yale that may rely on other measures.

If we search for accountability schemes that may fit the four assessment characteristics above, it is difficult to find examples of countries that have implemented schemes that match all the characteristics. However, there are examples of schemes that may be said to address particular dimensions. One possible example can be found in New Zealand where performance contracts are a key instrument in the overall governance of the system (Goedegebuure, Santiago, Fitznor, Stensaker, & van der Steen, 2008). New Zealand is an interesting case because this is the country that perhaps, at one point, went furthest in implementing ‘New Public Management’ governance arrangements but where this arrangement is now being softened and applied in a more pragmatic style. The introduction of performance contracts can be seen as an attempt to solve the efficiency-effectiveness dilemma in higher education (Gornitzka, Smeby, Stensaker, & De Boer, 2004) and as a way in which governance and accountability is becoming more integrated. The advantages of a contract in relation to accountability is that it has the potential to introduce a fair judgement on performance, in which the objectives set, which the institution is held accountable for, are negotiated between the parties and
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that institutions may influence how targets and objectives are set. Depending on how contracts are negotiated, this mechanism also opens up for feedback and dialogue, although one should be aware that those with the rewarding or sanctioning power are usually the stronger part in any negotiation process. Hence, the possible effects of the new contract arrangements in New Zealand can be seen as an interesting case for further research.

A second example of a country in which more research on accountability could be interesting is Norway, where the national accreditation scheme has the multiple purposes of regulating public and private providers, ensuring institutional autonomy and improving the quality of teaching and learning at the same time (Stensaker, 2004). The logic of the institutional accreditation scheme is that accreditation provides institutions with more autonomy. An example is that accreditation as a ‘university’ means that all decisions to establish or close study programmes at all levels (bachelor’s, master’s, doctorate) are given to the institutions themselves, implying that programme accreditation is not needed. This system can be seen as an attempt to design a ‘high-trust’ relationship within the sector while it is also intended to ensure equal conditions for public and private providers; to deal with the tendency towards ‘academic drift’ in the system where a number of colleges want to be upgraded to university status; and to create a scheme with minimal bureaucracy (Stensaker, 2004). Hence, while one could imagine that tendencies towards academic drift could have been dealt with by policy-makers alone, the Norwegian system regulates institutional behaviour within a context of quality assurance. Although the Norwegian system currently is perceived as relevant to key stakeholders in the sector (Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, Westerheijden, & Stensaker, 2008), it is interesting to analyse whether this is also the case in the long-term.

Finland provides yet another possible example of a scheme in which trust building is a key characteristic. While most accountability schemes around the world have some aspect of systematic comparison between institutions, or a standard procedure that every higher education institution has to go through, as a key element, Finland has chosen a different approach since ‘there has been no social need to define certain evaluation processes, accreditation or approval of institutions or degrees other than as approval’ in the country (Välimaa, 2004, p. 122). As a consequence, evaluation purposes and methods can vary considerably from institution to institution both with respect to research and education. The targeted and cooperative design of the evaluations in which institutions are actively influencing the whole evaluation process seems to have created a national accountability system in which ‘less is more’: at least when it comes to the administrative and bureaucratic consequences related to accountability. In the national evaluation agency (FINHEEC), there are only a handful of people employed full-time and the system is based upon a number of academic working groups or committees that provide academic legitimacy.
Considerable effort is also given to training and increasing the professionalism of evaluations conducted (Välimaa, 2004). Thus, one could argue that the scheme has been designed to fit the existing mode of trust in Finnish higher education, with the potential to stimulate it further. Whether the country may maintain this approach in the future given the increasing international pressure for more accountability is a key question for further research.

Given the examples above it is also interesting to note the on-going changes taking place in the country most widely known for its extensive national accountability scheme, the United Kingdom. While this country is characterised within the literature as having established a very ‘strong’ accountability scheme with a wide array of evaluations, surveys, reporting schemes and performance indicators, there is evidence that the emphasis on accountability is being transformed (Harvey & Newton, 2007, p. 236; see also chapter 7 this volume). The causes for the noted changes are both related to the costs associated with the accountability scheme and to the growing awareness that accountability should also contribute to improvement of teaching and learning. Harvey and Newton (2007, p. 242) argued that this tension is illusory. They argue that accountability and improvement are not two ends of a single continuum as has been proposed in the past but that accountability and improvement are two separate dimensions of quality assurance. They propose that upcoming accountability schemes should be open to the possibility that there is much accountability in demonstrating improvement in the sector. In recent years, and with the establishment of the Higher Education Academy (an institution set up to stimulate teaching and learning in UK higher education) and with the ambitions of a ‘lighter touch’ with respect to accountability, the UK, at least rhetorically, seems to be on the move towards a changed accountability system. The latest example of this can be found in a report from the funding council in the UK where it is stated that ‘we have been surprised by the amount of measurement information we collect and disseminate...[and] that any new measures should be subject to our sector impact assessment process to review possible unintended consequences, check the balance between burden and public value and ensure measures capture the full range of benefits we want to encourage’ (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE], 2008, p. 5). This statement hints at the importance of relevance, trust and fair judgement and indicates that reflection about how accountability systems actually work is not only an academic concern but, increasingly, a political one as the creation of new measures ‘can be problematic and contentious’ (HEFCE, 2008, p. 17).

Tendencies to build accountability through a more dialogue-based approach can, in addition, be found within the European Union system both in general through ‘accountability networks’ (Harlow, 2002; Harlow & Rawlings, 2006) and in higher education through the ‘Open Method of Coordination’ (Stensaker & Gornitzka, 2009; Westerheijden, 2007). However, it should
be underlined that all of the examples found above have elements and effects that may run counter to ambitions of building trust, stimulating dialogue, and establishing fair judgement and more relevant accountability schemes (see also chapters 10 and 11 this volume). Hence, if we want to label the developments in accountability based on the examples above, ‘hybridisation’ and ‘complexity’ easily come to mind.

**Unresolved Issues**

The few empirical examples provided above only give a glimpse of the variations and developments in accountability and should be perceived more as an appetiser to the more thorough empirical chapters in this book. What we do know is that accountability schemes are continuing to develop throughout the world and this expansion of accountability measures is perhaps the most dominant trend that is creating the new hybridisation and complexity. We also know that developing accountability schemes often contain both hard and soft elements, they combine internal and external needs, the distinction between national and international elements is blurring and there is an increase in the number and types of stakeholders interested in holding higher education accountable. No wonder that Fisher (2004, p. 495) argued that accountability is becoming the ultimate principle for the new age of trans-national governance régimes, where the exercise of power transcends the boundaries of the nation-state and crosses the public-private border. The ambition of this book is to establish a more comprehensive overview of how different regions and dominant countries are dealing with and responding to these challenges. Three issues are of particular interest.

First, we need to know more about the technical efficiency and effectiveness of current accountability schemes. How can different measures and initiatives become better integrated and how can more meaning be attached to current accountability schemes? More user-friendly information, either in the form of combined information from independent measures, or interactive designs allowing users to customise information on an individual basis are most likely developments (see also HEFCE, 2008, p. 7) but we also need to be aware of other possibilities and options. Not least, the link between accountability and quality is of crucial importance, where we also need to address the technicalities of criteria and indicators. The current swing towards emphasising ‘learning outcomes’ and results can be interpreted as a reminder of how important the link between accountability and quality is; but we need more empirical investigations as to whether various accountability schemes can actually deliver on these issues in the future (see also Ewell, 2008, p. 117).

Second, despite the emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness, the underlying argument in this chapter is that accountability is far from merely being a technical exercise. The interesting aspect concerning the current developments in
accountability is that technological designs may hide power struggles concerning how higher education should develop in the future. Hence, there is a need for empirical investigations as to whether the recent re-framing of accountability schemes actually implies a change towards more ‘user-friendly’ and trustworthy schemes. Who are the winners and losers of this process? From other fields, we know that our re-ordering world is marked by more, not less, rule-making (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000). We also know that ‘soft’ regulation may have potentially hard consequences (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). With respect to accountability, new actors, not least from the private sector in the form of rankings, may enter into the accountability game and change the rules of how the game is played (Stensaker & Gornitzka, 2009).

Finally, we need to know more about how and to what extent accountability actually enhances the legitimacy of (and trust in) higher education. One potential consequence of current developments with respect to accountability is that there is an emergent ‘market’ for accountability. With numerous providers of accountability, and increasing complex ways and methods to demonstrate accountability, the question is what consequences this might have for higher education. If institutions, countries or states ‘buy into’ the accountability scheme that suits their interest best, the result need not be increased legitimacy, at least not if the benchmarks are more global. On the other hand, more customised schemes may also offer value-for-money for institutions, governments and users of higher education. The issue emerging is, in other words, that accountability schemes increasingly are faced with the same requirements concerning accountability as they traditionally have imposed upon others. The tensions arising in the aftermath of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006) in the United States is just one example to be mentioned. And while some perhaps may suggest that it is about time the controllers take their own medicine (Neal, 2008), the issue at stake is really about trust in higher education.

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Introduction

In the introductory chapter of this book we suggested that accountability is far more than just a technical exercise to demonstrate the outcomes of higher education. Although we do need to understand the instrumentality of various accountability schemes, we also need to understand these schemes in a broader context that displays the potential power struggles involved in the establishment of new schemes; whether such schemes actually manage to provide the information the public wants from the sector; and whether the accountability initiatives taken strengthen the legitimacy and trust in higher education in general. In this closing chapter we will explore these issues in more detail.

Emerging Forms of Accountability

The various geographical chapters in the book disclose a variety of approaches to accountability in different countries and some striking similarities as well. Even though we do not claim that our empirical investigations have provided the full picture of the developments in accountability throughout the world, evidence from significant countries in different regions suggests that specific historical, cultural and political characteristics are being matched by convergent views as to the purpose, organisation and forms of accountability.

A first common trend is the increasing governmental interest in accountability throughout all the countries and regions analysed. Regardless of whether we talk about China or the United States, Australia, Latin America, Europe or Africa, it is still the government that can be identified as a key player in the new initiatives taken in the field. As such it is the external or upwards forms of accountability that seem to dominate.

Even though internal accountability schemes do exist in several regions, these are hardly seen as valid forms or ways of organising accountability. For example, the NSSE-survey in the United States attempts to address issues related to teaching and learning that should be of interest to both students and their parents (and even institutions of higher education). However, these
actors seem disinterested in the information offered. As Robert Zemsky points out in his chapter, it seems to be a tough job to change this situation. The role of government is, in some regions and countries, matched by private accountability producers, such as university ranking lists; but the dominance of these schemes seems to be located mostly in Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. The fact that institutions from these countries also occupy the top positions on these lists is part of the explanation. However, even in countries where ranking lists are considered important, governments are still very active in the accountability game.

A second trend identified in most of the countries analysed is the emergence of special agencies in charge of producing information used for accountability purposes. These agencies are often established by government initiatives and are supposed to provide information for an unspecified market consisting of prospective students, their parents and future employers. The set-up of the agencies, what sort of information they are to provide, is in most cases a matter for the government to decide; although claims are regularly made that these initiatives are taken ‘on behalf’ of the unspecified market. Agencies have a variety of other purposes. In Latin America and also in Eastern Europe, an important rationale is to provide some control with emerging private providers of higher education, especially if such providers can be characterised as degree mills not offering their students a proper product. In Western Europe and in Australia, agencies are also concerned with internationalisation issues, either within the region as in the case of the Bologna Process in Europe, or outside the region as is the case of Australia. Interestingly, in line with the growing importance of governments, there is evidence that agencies that have traditionally been more closely linked with higher education institutions are being transformed or replaced by public agencies, as shown in the case of the UK and Australia. Although the United States is still sticking to the old system, it is worth noting that this system was much criticised by a governmental commission suggesting that there might be changes in the future.

A third trend noted is that accountability in most countries is associated with quality assurance procedures. There are indeed a number of accountability measures identified in the various countries and regions, such as funding instruments, developmental contracts, research indicators and legal obligations; but the core accountability instrument is still quality assurance. Among these, accreditation is the form that seems to emerge as the dominant procedure. Certainly, throughout Europe, in the United States and in Latin America accreditation is the main instrument used to achieve accountability, with indications that Australia and Africa are in the follow-up mode. As suggested above, in some countries there are obvious reasons why accreditation is the preferred tool. In deregulated higher education systems such as those in Eastern Europe or in Latin America this is a much-needed means to maintain public faith in the various new providers entering the field. However, as
Paul Temple underlines in his chapter on the developments in Romania and Poland, there are also opportunities lost as a consequence of the dominance of accreditation schemes. While there indeed are attempts to create accreditation schemes that are more improvement oriented, this usually does not mean a diminishing role for the control aspects associated with this instrument.

Assessing the Emerging Schemes

In the earlier chapter in this book, we suggested four criteria to be used when attempting to assess accountability schemes; namely, relevance; fair judgement; the possibility for feedback and dialogue; and their ability to stimulate trust. How well do these criteria match the systems scrutinised in the countries and regions covered in this book? The short answer is not very well.

With respect to relevance, we have already noticed what seems to be a gap between the information provided by the new accountability schemes and the target audience for the information provided: the prospective students, their parents and future employers. The information problem seems to be a multifaceted one. First, in a massified higher education system the target audience may have very diverse information needs to which the more standardised accountability schemes may have problems responding. A second problem is that most accountability systems have been designed without the involvement of these actors; hence their needs are only addressed indirectly. A third issue is that although information may be available it is not necessarily used. As noted by Jeanette Baird in her chapter on Australia, while quality assurance may result in an array of reports on various higher education institutions and their study programmes this information is usually not the type of reading preferred by these stakeholders.

The problem of lacking involvement, not only by students, parents and employers but also by higher education institutions, is in addition a problem that impacts on the fair judgement criteria. As reported in the chapter by Andrée Sursock, in Europe only a minority of the national interest organisations have been involved in national discussions on quality assurance developments that have taken place in the last decade. In China, Shuiyun Liu sees the lack of involvement as even more noticeable resulting in an accountability system that can be suspected of merely paying lip service, rather than providing real value, to the public. As such one could argue that the ‘compacts’ being developed in Australia, where institutions may negotiate performance targets with the authorities, have the potential for developing more fair criteria of judgement. Of course, the issue of involvement should not be interpreted out of context. As underlined by Maria-José Lemaitre, in Chile, 37 dubious higher education providers have been closed down since 1990; a result that probably could not have been achieved if the institutions themselves had more influence. However, the fairness issue could be coined differently. As demonstrated
by the ‘Measuring Up’ initiative in the United States, it is possible to develop accountability schemes where the public authorities themselves are scrutinised and not only the institutions of higher education. Although the ‘Measuring Up’ initiative could be criticised for some of the same methodological problems that other accountability schemes are also accused of, it is still a reminder that the current situation, where a ‘principal’ checks on one of the ‘agents’, could be re-designed. That the ‘Measuring Up’ initiative seems to be the odd case out does not exclude other countries and regions from thinking in similar ways, which can bring on new arguments to the debate about what ‘fair judgement’ in accountability really means.

In the different chapters offered, it is hard to find much evidence of accountability schemes characterised by open forms of feedback. The most common form of feedback requested from the higher education institutions is information about the steps taken to address points of criticism made in the publicised quality assurance reports. Typically, this ‘dialogue’ is usually not labelled as ‘feedback’ but as ‘follow-up’: indicating both the uni-directional nature of the dialogue and what types of actions are seen as appropriate by the institutions. In this sense, the delegated accountability mentioned in chapter 2 is clearly visible but with the interesting consequence that accountability in this way blurs responsibilities and roles. For example, at a European level the universities are represented by an arm’s length organisation, the European Universities Association (EUA), rather than more directly through rectors’ conferences. Staff associations are having difficulties being seen as an important interest group and student representation is through the work of ESU, which is probably the closest of the pan-European organisations to the group it represents. Within different countries around the world, quality agencies, for example, are often more overtly influenced by government requirements or initiatives than they are by the concerns of institutions, academics and students. It takes a very mature and confident agency, maybe with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the UK as an example, to seriously engage with these stakeholder concerns. It is notable that other agencies, which might also have reached this mature stage, such as those in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, France and Australia have been, or are in a process of being reconstituted toward a more controlling brief. In the United States, the opportunity for real dialogue is also possibly receding, given the Spellings Commission’s demand for tough-minded dialogue leading to a charter of accountability.

In his chapter, William Massy argued that the mantra for accountability should be to ‘follow the trust’ (or lack of it) and whether instrumentalist or cognitive approaches to accountability they need to be informed by close contact between the accountability principal and the institution. Without trust, the possibilities for goal alignment recede and the likelihood of empty compliance, spinning and outright resistance increase. With trust, on the other hand, managerial responses to accountability are more likely to be constructive and
to become more effective over time, to the benefit of both the institution and
the accountability principal. There are two issues here: first is the ability to
generate trust in the system by ‘external’ stakeholders (public, employers, gov-
ernment/finance ministries), in the sense of trust that the system is producing
what is needed for a reasonable cost. Second, is trust within the system; that
is, that institutions and their staff are trusted (without undue interference) to
deliver the education and research they have been delegated to deliver. The
onus in both cases has fallen on the quality agencies to stimulate trust and the
evidence suggests that this has been a bridge too far for them given their brief
and structure. For example, as Sursock in her chapter reminds us, the bur-
geoning accreditation mechanisms provide public trust but only to a certain
degree, namely threshold standards; and repeatedly, employers, for example,
maintain that this is inadequate. In China, the Quality Assessment of Under-
graduate Education scheme concluded that 96.4% of the evaluated institutions
are excellent or good, which is very different from the public reputations of
higher education institutions.

Trust is indeed a function of the evaluation process and when these are
conducted unsatisfactorily, the result if often an ‘Us-versus-Them’ approach.
As mentioned, this seems particularly to be the case in China and Liu, in her
chapter, notes that Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education could
be seen as a control-based rather than trust-based accountability scheme.
The result is that institutions respond in an untrustworthy way, falsifying
materials and rendering the methodology unreliable. A similar situation has
arisen in Africa. At independence, African universities were trusted to deliver
‘development’ without having to be policed, or disciplined to do so. Gradu-
ally, as Gerald Wangenge-Ouma and Patrício Langa point out, the trust was
withdrawn with a shift from an accountability régime driven by ‘public expec-
tations and trust’ to one of “public” and private expectations and mistrust’.
Temple also stated that, in Eastern Europe, trust plays little part in the usual
accountability-through-accreditation processes; academic leaders have no
delegated authority. Even the hitherto benign and trusted EUA institutional
evaluation programme risks distrust as it follows the European Standards and
Guidelines requirement to publish reports and is also being used as a vehicle
for national evaluations. Baird, in her chapter, more optimistically, suggested
that AUQA had been moderately successful through the audit process in
stimulating trust in the accountability of Australian universities, rather than
blanket confidence in their quality, in contrast to the CQAHE assessment and
ranking process, which was high stakes and lacking in transparency.

In sum, our assessment of the various accountability systems examined in
this book is that most of them are not building trust in the higher education
system. In some instances this is a result of poor design as when institutional
accreditation in Mozambique was given for an indefinite period without
any procedures for re-accreditation. Clearly, in the case where the system
is de-regulated, any accountability scheme should be designed accordingly. However, for most schemes reported upon the tendency is that trust seems to be an element not taken seriously by those designing them. Although most accountability schemes indeed are established under the argument that trust and legitimacy should be an expected outcome of the initiatives taken, there is no evidence of this reported in this book. Hence, in this way the accountability schemes are themselves not accountable to the public. If we follow the somewhat cynical observation provided by Zemsky, perhaps the whole debate about accountability means little in practise; at least it seems that the public confidence in U.S. higher education is totally unaffected by any criticism raised. If it is indeed true that trust is unaffected by accountability, is it just a battleground for power and influence?

**Accountability: Just a Power Game?**

If we are to investigate the question of whether accountability indeed is a battle for power we should start by identifying the actors and driving forces involved in the game. So far, both governments and their agencies can be said to play an active role, at least when it comes to initiating new accountability schemes. History and tradition are still factors that influence the starting points for the new dynamics brought on by the pressure for more accountability. The U.S. case is an interesting one in this respect. While the federal government has argued for the need for reform strengthening the accountability of the higher education institutions, nothing much has really happened with respect to actual measures taken. There seems to be a paradox concerning accountability where accusations about poor performance, quality and relevance of the sector do not affect the trust the public seems to have in higher education. Within the sector, one can also note a tendency that the really prestigious institutions are those that are most negative about engaging in various accountability measures. The lack of involvement in the NSSE survey by very prestigious institutions is just one indication (a feature reflected in the initial refusal of Oxford and Cambridge universities to engage in the National Student Survey in the UK). If we turn to Latin America we find similar examples, as when the prestigious institutions refused to recognise reviewers from less prestigious universities.

In countries and regions where universities have less symbolic and cultural capital to draw upon, they seem to be more exposed to various external initiatives as indicated by the chapters on Australia, Africa, China and Eastern Europe. In these regions and countries higher education has increasingly been perceived as a sector vital for economic development by the governments. Typically, in these cases we also note that accountability measures are increasing in numbers and forms and involve much more than the traditional quality assurance schemes. Performance measurements, contracts or performance
management and new funding schemes are usually initiatives that accompany this emphasis on economy and relevance.

When discussing issues about power it is also difficult to ignore the increasing significance of internationalisation and globalisation on accountability. Europe is a special case in this respect with the Bologna Process as one particular form of internationalisation and globalisation. When accountability becomes an issue beyond national borders this affects the public-private dynamics the most. First, one can notice that internationalisation increases the importance of private actors involved in the accountability game. Such actors can be private quality assurance associations and agencies such as ABET (the US-based accreditation agency in engineering) that start to operate across national borders. In Europe, there are meta-associations such as the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQA) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) (the umbrella organisation for all national quality assurance agencies in Europe) that develops new standards and guidelines as to how quality assurance and recognition of such procedures across national borders should be conducted. An interesting development is also reported by Alberto Amaral and Maria João Rosa when they note that the audit procedures operated by the European University Association (EUA) perhaps is slowly transforming from what initially was a developmental procedure to a more formal accountability process. Private actors are perhaps most visible in the ranking game: providing what seems to be easy comparative information about the performance and quality of higher education institutions in a standardised way.

Second, as reported in several contributors to this volume, internationalisation and globalisation affect what is perceived as appropriate policy in the accountability area; and where we can identify the spread of certain policies and measures throughout the world. The public-private dynamics is, in this respect, related to the existence of what we might label as ‘meta-policy’, recommendations as to what is seen as proper decisions and actions supported by private consultancies or international organisations. As reported by Wangenge-Ouma and Langa, the influence of the World Bank and similar organisations is still considerable in Africa and the discussions about accountability seem to strengthen their impact in the region. Also, in Europe, the existence of what Sursock labels as ‘cut-and-paste’ policy is very noticeable, not least with respect to how accreditation has been spread in Europe during the last decade. That being said, we should also acknowledge that internationalisation and globalisation issues are sometimes used as an excuse by national governments to increase the legitimacy of certain policies. For example, ‘European’ policies in some Eastern European countries provide legitimacy to national policies because the former are regarded as being more trustworthy. The result is that Eastern Europe, as Temple states, is ‘becoming like everywhere else’ without evaluating whether the measures takes are the best for
the region as a whole. Hence, internationalisation and globalisation tend to ‘discipline’ both national actors and the international players stimulating the emergence of the ‘meta-policy’ noted above.

A key aspect of the issue of power, accountability and internationalisation is the difficulties that arise when one tries to develop an overarching perspective of the interplay between these entities. As pointed out by Robin Middlehurst in her chapter on cross-border higher education we are, here, facing a ‘web of accountabilities’, illustrating what was mentioned as diagonal accountability schemes in chapter 2. From this perspective, the important dimension is not whether accountability is provided by public or private providers but the legitimacy of the measures taken and the acceptance a given accountability provider gets from the network of other providers involved in the same game. This is why Middlehurst also claims that presence on the international arena and specialised knowledge about these new accountability arenas are essential for the long-term survival of higher education institutions with international ambitions and profile. The twist is, of course, that such networks may develop their own logic as to what counts as valid accountability measures and that the end result may not necessarily create more trust in the sector by the potential consumers.

**Accountability and Trust Revisited**

The most interesting issue we are left with is then whether all the accountability initiatives identified in this book has created more trust and added to the legitimacy of higher education? There are different ways to answer this question. One way of responding is by claiming that accountability is impossible to analyse without considering the changes in how higher education is currently governed and that accountability schemes are so intertwined with governance that is impossible to differentiate between the two. As Wangenge-Ouma and Langa argue, various accountability schemes can both be seen as measures paving the way for future reforms in the sector, or as integrated in reforms as ways of finding out whether outcomes and results are accomplished or not. Here, we could even employ a broader developmental perspective and to portray modern accountability measures as embedded in more overarching modernisation processes. One could argue that this is indeed the case also in China, Latin- and South-America and Eastern Europe. Hence, in this perspective the outcomes of accountability should not be measures in isolation but seen as integrated with the results of other developmental processes in society. Given the expansion of higher education throughout the world, the massification of the sector and the current internationalisation and globalisation of higher education, the answer is that higher education is hugely successful and that this shows that the general public indeed has much confidence in higher education.
Another answer can be given if we take the perspective of those often seen as the key consumers of most current accountability schemes; prospective students, their parents and future employers. In this book there is not much evidence that current schemes are seen as very relevant for these stakeholders and that information from various schemes is important for them. As Zemsky point out in his chapter, U.S. higher education is trusted but not understood by the general public with the implication that all accountability measures taken are not producing information that is conceived as useful. Is this because most current schemes are ill-designed and do not address the important issues? At least it seems like a paradox that, even though we indeed can identify quality assurance as the most common accountability mechanism in use, it is information concerning reputation that seems to interest the general public. Given the high profile of governments in the current set-up of accountability schemes, one could argue that much of the activity is related to national authorities' own need for accountability. The activities in this area could then be understood as a way to legitimise the need for further reform and policy change. Since there is always room for improvement in how higher education is performing, the need for more reforms can also be defended. The trust enhanced in this perspective is related to the role of public policy as vital in securing the quality and relevance of the sector.

A final perspective that can be identified is related to what seems to be ‘alternative’ accountability schemes developed *ad hoc* by students and other stakeholders in the sector. The growing importance of what seems to be more personalised accountability schemes often established by individuals using new technology as a way to disseminate information on higher education is a sign of distrust of existing schemes. As Baird reports from Australia, even in countries that must be characterised as advanced when it comes to the existence of comprehensive accountability schemes, these alternative schemes are popping up. A possible way to understand this development is by looking at the type of information these new schemes offer. Typically, these new schemes are peer-rating sites addressing issues related to teaching and learning experiences: issues on which the standard accountability schemes described in this book rarely focus. However, as Massy argues in his chapter on the strategies institutions may apply to adapt to different accountability régimes, the belief that accountability and improvement are incompatible entities should not be taken for granted. If higher education manages to develop serious processes aimed at improving the core teaching and learning processes this is perhaps the best way to respond to the alternative accountability schemes that are now appearing. Hence, what Massy labels as ‘deep adoption’ is really nothing else than taking teaching and learning seriously by allocating the necessary resources and developing proper rewards in line with academic values and student needs. Hence, there may indeed be a close relationship between quality assurance and accountability; but then both national authorities and
higher education institutions need to change the functioning of many current quality assurance schemes. Unless there is a movement towards core teaching and learning issues, accountability will just be a power game stimulating neither quality nor trust.