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Who embodies the Evaluative State? Programmatic elites in the Chilean and the Colombian policies of quality assurance in higher education

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Based on the Programmatic Action Framework (PAF), this article presents a comparative analysis of the Chilean and the Colombian policies of quality assurance (QA) in higher education. Despite their instrumental commonalities, these policies actually reflect two contrasting approaches to quality: a flexible approach in Chile versus an excellence-based approach in Colombia. The article shows that both policies were initially developed by programmatic elites formed by prestigious academics who shared a common policy program, and that the contrasting approaches to quality of these policies arises from the divergent evolutions of the original policy programs: the policy of QA was subject to an instrumental layering in Chile while, in Colombia, it followed a path-dependent evolution. The study shows that sociological perspectives like the PAF can provide a more complete and dynamic understanding of the Evaluative State that takes into account the instrumental and the social dimensions of quality-related activities.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Higher education has undergone deep transformations in the last 40 years. One of these mayor changes has been the shift from close State control to more remote forms of supervision that were supposed to give universities more autonomy to regulate themselves. This new mode of regulation, which is the main manifestation of the rise of the Evaluative State depicted by Guy Neave (2012), has led to the proliferation of national systems of quality assurance (QA), expression that refers to the set of institutions and instruments that participate in the ongoing process of evaluating higher education systems, institutions, or programs (Vlasceanu, Grunberg, & Parlea, 2007). As one of the latest trends in higher education, QA has become a proliferous subject of research since the early 1990s. However, most of the literature on this theme has concentrated on its technical features and, by implication, has overlooked the power struggles that result from or are embedded in QA. In this context, alternatives perspectives that shed light to the politics of quality could nourish the debate about quality-related activities in higher education and, by doing so, are likely to provide a more complete and dynamic understanding of the Evaluative State.

In this article, I suggest that the Programmatic Action Framework (PAF) has the potential to unearth the underlying dynamics of the policy of QA in higher education. Originally developed to explain the reforms of health care policy in France and the United States, this framework is now being used to understand the transformations of other policy sectors. This article aims to push further the transfer of the PAF to other sectors than health care by applying it to higher education, a sector where it has not been systematically used so far.

Moreover, the PAF has been mainly used to explain policy change and stability in developed countries in Western Europe and North America. But, as it was shown by Lauren Lecuyer (2018) in her doctoral dissertation, developing countries situated in geographical regions such as Latin America are empirical scenarios where this framework can be tested too. Thus, this article will use the PAF to offer a comparative analysis of the evolution of the Chilean and the Colombian policies of QA in higher education from 1990 to 2018.

This case selection corresponds to the study of most likely cases (Lijphart, 1971) insofar as both policies are structured around analogous instruments - on one side, a licensing mechanism which controls the minimal standards of quality of new institutions or programs and, on the other side, accreditation for academic programs and institutions - but actually rely on different approaches to quality: a flexible approach in Chile versus an excellence-based approach in Colombia. Therefore, the article attempts to answer the following question: Why do similar policies of QA in higher education have such contrasting approaches to quality?

The rest of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a brief literature review that brings to light the shortcomings of the technical-rational approaches that have dominated the research on QA in higher education. The third section is dedicated to the theoretical framework and shows how the PAF can bridge the gap between the technical and the social dimensions of QA. The fourth section presents the empirical methodology of the PAF. Based on the theoretical and methodological groundwork laid in the two previous sections, sections 5 and 6 retrace respectively the Chilean and the Colombian policies of QA, and show that although both policies were shaped by programmatic elites during the 1990s, they then followed different directions. The article concludes by discussing the implications of this findings for both the research on QA and programmatic action.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on QA in higher education has been growing during the last 30 years and has generated a profuse literature that can be divided into three main categories. The first one contains the publications that provide thick descriptions of QA devices at both the institutional and the policy levels. In the form of descriptions of the processes (Bogue, 1998) and the national experiences of QA (Dill & Beerkens, 2010; Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007) or through technical literature that is intended to guide practitioners of quality evaluation (Martin & Stella, 2007), this category offers an extensive panorama of the common features (Van Vught & Westerheidjen, 1994) and the particularities (Billing, 2004) of QA regimes.

The second category comprises the publications that assess the operation of QA systems in terms of their impacts (López et al., 2015; Steinhardt et al., 2017) as well as the challenges that they are confronted to (Rosa & Amaral, 2014; Seyfried & Reith, 2019).

The third category includes the publications that see quality from a symbolic and a political perspectives. While the former stresses the importance of the symbols, rituals

(Barrow, 1999) and organizational cultures (Mårtensson, Roxå, & Stensaker, 2014) which are used to make sense of ambiguous concepts such as quality, the latter analyzes the potentially conflicting definitions of quality (Harvey & Green, 1993), the power struggles (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Morley, 2003) and the resistances to QA (Anderson, 2006; Lucas, 2014).

Despite the fact that the third category provides a valuable angle for understanding QA, it has been overshadowed by the two others. Indeed, the study of quality in higher education is still dominated by technical-rational approaches and, consequently, the symbolic and the political dimensions of QA have not received as much attention as the issues related to its technical features and effects (Blanco Ramírez, 2013). This sort of technical bias represents a serious limitation of the dominant approaches to QA in the sense that treating it “as if it were a purely technical process” (Skolnik, 2010, 4) can lead to an analytical impasse: Considering QA as an ideologically neutral and politically indifferent object and, by implication, forgetting that it is a “part of a broader series of agendas associated with neo-liberal policy prescriptions that valorize market rationality” (Jarvis, 2014, 164).

Just like any other policy instrument, QA should be considered as “a device that is both technical and social, which organizes specific social relations between the State and those it is addressed to, according to the meanings and representations it carries” (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2005, 13). Therefore, alternative perspectives that bring the technical and the social dimensions of instruments together can offer an view of QA against the backdrop of the changing relationships between higher education institutions, State authority and market forces. The following section will explain why the PAF is one of these perspectives.

3 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The central premise of the PAF is that “groups of individuals, sharing a similar analysis of a policy problem sustaining a common policy change program (including policy orientations, policy frames, and policy instruments) giving them a collective identity and behaving strategically as a collective actor, can be main drivers of policy change” (Hassenteufel & Genieys, 2020, 2). To be considered as programmatic groups, these groups of individuals must meet four main conditions: they have to be in direct contact with the policymaking apparatus; they must create a subjective social identity; they must develop a policy program that brings the members of the group together; and they have to behave strategically in order to increase their power for the sake of both supporting their policy program and achieving greater authority in a given policy sector (Bandelow, Hornung, & Smyrl, 2020).

Programmatic groups can be found in different configurations depending on their degree of internal homogeneity and their longevity in the policy process. There are at least three different types of programmatic groups. A programmatic team constitutes a programmatic group with low internal homogeneity that participates in the policy process for no more than 2 or 3 years. A programmatic coalition is also a programmatic group with low internal homogeneity but, contrary to the previous case, it has greater

longevity in the policy process. Finally, a programmatic group that has strong internal homogeneity and participates in the policy process for 10 or more years is a programmatic elite (Hassenteufel et al., 2010).

Programmatic elites are worth pausing for a moment because they are the programmatic groups that have the highest chances of imposing their policy program. Indeed, a strong internal homogeneity and an enduring participation in the policy process are both the defining features of this type of programmatic groups and the factors that play in favor of achieving the targeted policy change. A strong homogeneity arises not only from a coherent policy program built around “general policy goals”, “shared formulations of problems to be solved”, “a common diagnoses of the failures of existing policies”, “articulated arguments that justify preferred policy changes”, and “agreed measures and instruments to accomplish the changes” (Hassenteufel & Genieys, 2020, 8); it also comes from shared biographical and professional linkages between the members of the programmatic elite. An enduring participation in the policy process is the result of having the sufficient resources (intellectual, institutional, situational and tactical) to define and execute the content of a given policy, and engaging in a learning process that concerns the main policy issues, the policy tools as well as the explicit and implicit rules that structure the interactions within the policy field.

Based on these theoretical foundations, how can the PAF bridge the gap between the technical and the social dimensions of QA that exists in the literature? At the core of this framework is an explanation of policy change centered on potential actors of change whose collective identity and chances of achieving change are intimately associated with the technical features of their program as well as their career trajectories and biographies.

On the technical level, the PAF puts the technical dimension of public policy in the limelight when it assumes that a policy program - which, as it was shown, is made of technical elements such as general objectives, diagnoses, arguments and instruments - not only defines the social identity of the programmatic group but also the likelihood of its success.

On the social level, just as any other sociological theory of policy change, the interactions between individuals and groups are the main independent variable of the PAF. However, in the case of programmatic elites, explaining collective action on the basis of biographical ties and shared professional experiences distinguishes the PAF from other policy process theories in the sense that the biographical information of the individual programmatic actors determines the collective identity of the group - how the alliances are built - and the content of the collective action (Hornung & Bandelow, 2020).

By explaining policy change in terms of the technical and social elements that produce groups capable of collective action, the PAF thereby has the potential to analyze the technical dimension of a given policy as well as its underlying social dynamics. Applied to the study of QA policy, this framework is capable of using the technical features of the policy as a starting point to retrace the collective strategies that account for its characteristics and its evolution. The next section will explain how the

technical and social dimensions of QA intervene in the empirical application of the PAF.

4 | METHODS

This article is based on a doctoral research dealing with the evolution of accountability in higher education in Chile and Colombia. Following an inductive approach, a first round of interviews was conducted on the basis of a strategy of maximum variation of actors intimately familiar with the QA instruments in each country such as the members of the national agencies of QA, and the persons working in the QA offices of several higher education institutions. These interviews revealed that both policies were characterized by an elitist policymaking style and by the involvement of prestigious academics in their early stages of development.

Based on these early findings, the preliminary conceptual framework was adapted in order to introduce the premises of the PAF. Two main hypothesis were formulated to explain the contrast between the approaches to quality of the two policies. First, a programmatic elite was the main actor involved in the formulation, the adoption and implementation of the policy of QA in both countries during the 1990s (H1). Second, since 2000, the policy program of the programmatic elites have evolved in different directions (H2): In Chile, the original policy program was altered as a consequence of the exclusion of the Chilean programmatic elite from the policy process, and the growing interdependence between accreditation and indirect public funding of higher education (H2a), while in Colombia, the original policy program was maintained by the actors who replaced the programmatic elite (H2b).

These hypothesis then were tested on the basis of the methodology of the PAF, which is summarized in Figure 1. It consists of six stages that are carried out in parallel in order to single out the potential programmatic actors, assess whether they form a homogenous programmatic group that has a common policy program, and study how this group participate in the policy process and with what means.

Identification of key individuals	
Positional Analysis	Who are the key positions holders?
Sociological analysis of individual trajectories	What are the career trajectories of the key positions holders?
Analysis of the existence of a programmatic group	
Discourse analysis	Do the programmatic actors have a coherent policy change program?
Relational analysis	Do the programmatic actors have a strong identification with the group?
Analysis of the power of a programmatic group	
Analysis of the policy process	How does the programmatic group participate in the policy process?
Strategic resources analysis	What are the resources at the disposal of the programmatic group?

FIGURE 1 The empirical analysis of the PAF

Source: Genieys and Hassenteufel (2020).

The data used in the empirical analysis comes from biographical information, official documents, scientific articles and semi-structured interviews with former and current officials of the national QA agencies (18), members of the QA offices of different higher education institutions (33), and researchers specialized on higher education policy (7). As it will be shown in the two following sections, the evolution of the policies of QA and, in particular, the change - the Chilean case - and the continuity - the Colombian case - of the original policy change program of the programmatic elites were retraced on the basis of these qualitative data.

5 | THE CHILEAN CASE: FROM THE RISE OF THE PROGRAMMATIC ELITE TO THE INSTRUMENTAL LAYERING

The Chilean saga of QA in higher education officially began on May 10th, 1990. On this date, which was the last day of the military dictatorship that ruled the country since the 1973 coup d'état, the Organic Constitutional Law of Education (Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza, LOCE) was published in the official gazette. Among other changes, this law introduced a new regulatory system for higher education: The examination regime established in 1980, a system in which the eight universities created before 1980 provided external supervision for new private institutions, was replaced by a system structured around a licensing mechanism coordinated by the Higher Council for Education (Consejo Superior de Educación, CSE), a new public agency that was mainly formed by representatives of academic and research institutions.

There were, however, two main problems with this new system. First, neither the old nor the new administration had a plan for implementing the new regulatory system. Second, the new democratic government showed little sympathy for this system because it was perceived as an heritage of the dictatorship. In an attempt to find alternative policy options, the government established the Commission for Study of Higher Education (Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior, CEES) in May 1990. This commission, which consisted of 22 academics and university managers, released a report in March 1991 that advanced specific recommendations, particularly for quality-related issues: Higher entry barriers to the sector, and an accreditation device that combined institutional self-regulation and external oversight were some of the key proposals (Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior, 1991).

Even if the report provided a framework for an alternative policy formulation, the government did not implement it. Indeed, the constitutional nature of the LOCE, which required a majority of 4/7 of the votes in congress to approve any modification to the legal framework, secured a veto power for the rightwing parties in the opposition. Face with this obstacle, the government decided to use the framework established by the dictatorship to strengthen the public regulation of higher education (Interview 18 Chile).

In this context, three key actors were appointed to the CSE in July 1990. José Joaquín Brunner, who was the director of the CEES, was selected as the vice-president of the council in 1990; given the fact that the Ministry of Education declined the presidency of the council, he acted as a de facto president until 1992. Iván Lavados, the deputy director of the CEES, was also appointed to the council and served twice as its

vice-president (1992-1994 and 1996-1998), and María José Lemaitre was nominated as the executive secretary and remained in this position until 1998. They had worked together in independent academic centers throughout the 1980s - Brunner had led a research unit dedicated to the evolution of higher education in the Chilean branch of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, while Lavados and Lemaitre had been members of the Organization for University Development - and were already recognized as prominent figures in the community dedicated to the investigation of Chilean higher education. These actors formed the Chilean programmatic elite of QA.

In the following months, the programmatic elite progressively constructed a policy change program around a common goal : bringing order to higher education. The work done for the CEES provided the formulations of the main problems to be solved - the de-regulated expansion of the higher education system and, especially, the low levels of quality of new private institutions - as well as the diagnoses of the failures of the existing policies - the examination regime¹ had been overwhelmed by the increasing number of institutions - of the program.

In addition, the programmatic elite relied on the expertise of Herbert Kells - an international consultant on self-regulation in higher education, and former associate director of the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in the United States - to flesh out the procedures and quality criteria of the institutional licensing mechanism. Kells not only walked the three actors through the technicalities of QA, but his participation in workshops on institutional self-regulation also helped the CSE to increase the awareness of the licensing mechanism across Chilean universities.

In addition to the common policy change program, the autonomous nature of the CSE also strengthened the collective identity of the programmatic actors. Indeed, Brunner managed to convince the members of the council that they were participants of an autonomous academic board rather than representatives of the organizations that appointed them (Salazar, 2013).

Under the guidance of the programmatic elite, the licensing mechanism was fully operational soon after the creation of the CSE. The overall procedure was divided into three stages: an approval stage by which a new institution may initiate activities; an assessment stage, for a minimum of 6 years and a maximum of 11 years, with yearly progress evaluations and comprehensive reviews every other two years; and a judgement stage in which the CSE either grants full autonomy to the institution or closes it down.

By 1996, the CSE was already the “key institution of the regulation of Chilean higher education” and was “recognized as having the authority and expertise to lead not only the new “market-oriented” institutions but the systems as a whole” (Cox, 1996, 39). Since the institutions that were subject to the licensing mechanism had weak internal organization and limited political influence, the CSE established itself as the dominant actor of the policy process. However, by the end of the 1990s, there was a growing unease with the limits of the policy of QA. The licensing mechanism provided

¹ The private universities created before 1992 were given the option to remain under this regime.

regulation for new private institutions but public institutions as well as the newly-autonomous private ones were free from any kind of external QA (Lemaitre, 2004).

In this context, accreditation for academic programs was perceived as the next step in the policy of QA, an idea that was gaining momentum thanks to the creation of accreditation pilots by professional associations and the Council of University Rectors (Consejo de Rectores, CRUCH), the organization that reunites all the public universities and the private universities created before 1980 (Salazar, 2013). An external factor also played in favor of the introduction of accreditation: In 1998, the Program for the Enhancement of Quality and Equity in Higher Education (Programa de Mejoramiento de la Calidad y Equidad en la Educación Superior, MECESUP), funded by the World Bank, was launched.

As for the licensing mechanism, the programmatic elite played a pivotal role in the policy process associated with the creation and the implementation of accreditation. After they served their tenures at the CSE, Brunner, Lavados and Lemaitre enjoyed robust academic and political legitimacy. Thereby, they were appointed to the National Commission for Undergraduate Education Accreditation² (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado, CNAP) in February 1999. Brunner and then Lavados chaired the commission, which included 12 academics nominated by them, while Lemaitre secured the position of executive secretary. The mission of the CNAP was to conduct experimental accreditations for undergraduate programs prior to advancing a proposal of a comprehensive system of QA. It was granted great autonomy and substantial financial support to accomplish this goal (Interview 19 Chile).

The CNAP set up a procedure of accreditation soon after its creation. This procedure “focuses on the evaluation of inputs and processes linked to the definition of expected learning outcomes for the different fields, and it involves self-evaluation and external review by national and international peer teams” (Lemaitre, 2004, 92). The accreditation was voluntary and awarded for a period of 2 to 7 years, after which programs have to renew it.

The experience of the programmatic elite was a considerable asset for advertising the new instrument. The three actors used their connections with managers of the most prestigious institutions in order to convince them to participate in the experimental program of accreditation. By doing so, they created the perception that the accreditation was a very selective club. In addition, they conveyed the message that accreditation was a key police objective that could bring additional funding opportunities. The implicit association between accreditation and funding was crucial to raise awareness of the new instrument across institutions and, in particular, the private ones which were reluctant about more regulation. This strategy was successful because almost 300 programs applied for accreditation in a short period of time (Lemaitre, 2004).

² The National Commission for Graduate Education Accreditation (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Posgrado, CONAP), also created in 1999, had a more limited role than the CNAP because the evaluations carried out by the National Commission for Scientific and Technologic Research (Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica, CONICYT) were already the landmark for accreditation for graduate programs.

In August 2002, the CNAP released a proposal of a comprehensive system of QA. The proposal included the creation of a new agency with a similar organization than the CNAP that would have two main responsibilities: coordinating the accreditation of programs and institutions, and supervising the operation of the private agencies in charge of the accreditation of specific undergraduate programs. In the following months, the government transformed the proposal into a bill which was submitted to legislative revision in April 2003.

Between April 2003 and November 2006, when the QA Act was finally published in the official gazette, a paradoxical phenomenon took place. On the one hand, the technical dominance of the programmatic elite continued to grow stronger with the increasing number of application for program accreditation and the introduction of the voluntary institutional accreditation in 2004; this new accreditation was an evaluation of standards of high quality that was done on the basis of both internal and external assessments.

On the other hand, the political leverage of the programmatic elite shrank when the bill went into the legislative readings. Since the CNAP did not have influence among the rightwing parties of the opposition, the negotiations in congress were led by members of the Ministry of Education and, in particular, by Pilar Armanet, the head of the higher education division from 2000 to 2006. Not only she secured the votes of the representatives and senators of the center-left coalition, but she also used the new mechanism of indirect public funding for new private institutions - a project that was being discussed at the same time than the QA bill and was decisive for the expansion of private universities - to talk the moderate sectors of the opposition into supporting the QA bill (Interview 12 Chile).

After a three-years-long legislative process, the QA Act (law 20 129 of 2006) was approved in October 2016. Although the principal elements of the proposal elaborated by the CNAP made it to the final text, several key modifications were introduced. One of the most significant changes introduced was the interdependence between accreditation and the Government-backed student loans (Crédito con Garantía Estatal, CAE). Indeed, according to law 20 027 of 2005, the CAE was intended exclusively for students enrolled in institutions accredited in accordance with the system established by the QA Act.

The enactment of the QA Act represented a turning point for the programmatic elite. The National Commission for Accreditation (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, CNA) was created to replace the CNAP³ but the programmatic elite was not appointed to the new agency. One of the programmatic actors remembered this episode as follows:

“The problem was that, when the law was passed in 2006, the government decided that it was good that there was no continuity.” (Interview 10 Chile)

³ The mandate of the CNAP was extended until 2007 in order to conclude the accreditation processes that were initiated before the creation of the CNA.

Indeed, a former rector of a regional public university with limited experience in QA was appointed chairman of the commission. The other members of the CNA's had also scarce knowledge in QA. It is likely that the nomination of actors who had not been involved in previous QA experiments was an attempt made by the Ministry of Education to convince the more reluctant sectors of higher education that the CNA was a new institution (Salazar, 2013). In any case, the CNA became a forum where the representatives of different sectors of higher education defended their particular agendas (Interviews 13 & 14 Chile) rather than an autonomous academic body, as it was originally intended.

From then, the policy of QA went downhill. Without the expertise of the programmatic elite and under increasing pressure from external interests, the CNA's approach to quality became more and more flexible. During the investigation on the CNA executed by one of the committees of the Chamber of deputies, Emilio Rodríguez, the CNA's president from 2007 to 2010, admitted that "the levels of exigency fell to lamentable levels" (Cámara de diputados de Chile, 2013, 119). In the same vein, Gonzalo Zapata, the first executive secretary of the commission, stated that "one of the first things that was lost was the fundamentally academic nature of the processes, the system allowed itself to be influenced by political and institutional pressures, and rigor went to the ground" (Cámara de diputados de Chile, 2013, 133).

The investigation concluded that linking QA procedures with the CAE without ensuring rigorous accreditation mechanisms was one of the structural problems of the QA Act. The independence between accreditation and indirect public funding was not only a threat to the rigor of the CNA but also encouraged institutions to seek accreditation by all possible means, including the illegal ones.

Indeed, the aforementioned investigation began in December 2012 after the Eastern Santiago Prosecutor's office revealed that Eugenio Díaz, a long-time member of the CNA who chaired it between April and December 2012, and the presidents of two private universities were being investigated for bribery and money laundering. As a consequence of this, the CNA was brought into lasting disrepute and the ability of the QA policy to regulate the higher education was severely questioned (Interview 18 Chile).

In fact, one of the main objectives of the higher education reform promoted by Michelle Bachelet during her second presidency (2014-2018) was to strengthen public regulation. In addition to the substantial modifications applied to the 2006 QA Act, the reform (law 21 091 of 2018) introduced new institutions of control and coordination such as the Superintendency and the Undersecretary of higher education.

In summary, the policy of QA in Chile can be retraced through the analysis of the rise and fall of the programmatic elite, whose main features are summarized in Figure 2. The exclusion of this collective actor from the policy process and the growing interdependence between accreditation and the CAE account for the particular way in which the policy evolved: The transformation of the policy program of the programmatic elite corresponds to a layering, a situation where "new rules are attached to existing ones, thereby changing the ways in which the original rules structure behavior" (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, 16).

Identification of key individuals	
Positional Analysis	María José Lemaitre; José Joaquín Brunner; Iván Lavados.
Sociological analysis of individual trajectories	Researchers specialized on higher education who worked together in independent academic centers during the 1980s.
Analysis of the existence of a programmatic group	
Discourse analysis	Regulating higher education through mechanisms that combines internal and external evaluations.
Relational analysis	Strong identification with the policy program; Collective academic identity.
Analysis of the power of a programmatic group	
Analysis of the policy process	Leading role in the CSE (1990-1998) and the CNAP (1999-2007).
Strategic resources analysis	Knowledge of the Chilean higher education; political connections with the center-left ruling coalition; expert opinion of Herbert Kells.

FIGURE 2 The Chilean programmatic elite

6 | THE COLOMBIAN CASE: A PATH-DEPENDENT POLICY

In Colombia, the saga of QA also began in the early 1990s with the promulgation of two legal texts. The first one was the 1991 constitution, which stated in the article 67 that "it is the responsibility of the State to regulate and exercise the supreme inspection and surveillance of education in order to ensure its quality". It also declared in the article 69 that "university autonomy is guaranteed. The universities may define their own directives and be governed by their own statutes, in accordance with the law".

The second text was the law 30 of December 1992. The article 53 of this law created "the National System of Accreditation for Higher Education Institutions, whose fundamental objective is to guarantee that the institutions that are part of this system meet the highest quality standards". The National Council for Accreditation (Consejo Nacional de Acreditación, CNA), was established to coordinate the system of accreditation. After three years of preparatory work, the CNA was officially established in July 1995.

The CNA consisted of 7 academics who had extensive experience in university management and higher education policy: Emilio Aljure, who between 1977 and 1978 had been the rector of the National University, the most prestigious public university in the country; Ramsés Hakim, rector of the National University from 1978 to 1980; Carlos Hernández, academic vice-rector of the National University between 1992 and 1995; Luis Orozco, academic vice-rector of the University of Los Andes, the most

prestigious private university; Pedro Polo, advisor to the rector of the Pontifical University Javeriana, the second most important private university in Colombia; Rafael Serrano, rector of the Industrial University of Santander between 1985 and 1992, and former board member of the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education (Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior, ICFES) from 1988 to 1992; and José Revelo. These prestigious academics formed the Colombian programmatic elite of QA.

In addition to their extensive experience and knowledge of the Colombian higher education, many of them had participated in the elaboration of the law 30 of 1992. In fact, Luis Orozco wrote the study that was used to assess the decree 80 of 1980, which was the cornerstone of the previous legal framework for higher education, and had been a member of the technical commission that drafted the law 30 (Interview 29 Colombia). Pedro Polo also played an important role in the conception of accreditation because, soon after the promulgation of the new law, he chaired a non-official commission consisting of representatives of 10 elite universities⁴ that developed the processes and quality criteria of the accreditation system. One of the international experts who were invited to this commission was Herbert Kells who, as it was said before, also provided advice to the Chilean programmatic elite (Interview 30 Colombia).

Under the guidance of Orozco and Polo, the CNA quickly consolidated a program of change around a general objective: to implement the constitutional mandate of university autonomy. This program was articulated around a clear formulation of the problem - the old legal framework infringed the institutional autonomy - and a diagnosis of the failures of the old public policy - the decree 80 of 1980 focused only on monitoring higher education institutions and failed to guarantee high levels of quality. Thereby, they set up a voluntary accreditation system orientated towards quality enhancement. One of members of the programmatic elite recalls:

"From the beginning we embraced the idea that the CNA was going to recognize the conditions of high quality and no something else. [...] In other words, we literally assumed the sentence that you have just read from the law 30 [article 53] as the principle and the identity of the CNA"(Interview 28 Colombia).

In a report published by UNESCO, two of the members of the programmatic elite described the accreditation system as follows:

"In Colombia, the *Accreditation of Excellence* is a voluntary process and temporary in nature (accreditation is granted for periods ranging from three to ten years at a time). The system is set up in such a way that it preserves university autonomy as set forth in the National Constitution. This process,

⁴ National University, University of Los Andes, Externado University, Pontifical University Javeriana, University of Antioquia, Pontifical Bolivarian University, University of Valle, EAFIT, University of the North, and Industrial University of Santander.

comprising self-, external and final evaluation, leads to the State's acknowledgment of high quality" (Revelo & Hernández, 2003, 13).

By 1998, when the first program accreditations were granted, half of the council members were replaced by academics with similar backgrounds. The CNA's regulations dictated that once 2 and a half years of the term of the first generation of councilors have elapsed, at least 3 councilors should be replaced. In this way, the new members (Edgar Díaz, José Giraldo and Bernardo Restrepo) were groomed by the old ones and embraced their policy program.

In the meantime, a mandatory accreditation for programs certifying the compliance of minimal standards was being developed and its coordination was entrusted to the CNA. This specific accreditation was initially applied to teacher training programs (decree 272 of 1998) and later to health and engineering programs (decrees 792 and 097 of 2001, respectively). This instrument paved the way for the introduction of the control of minimal standards for both institutions and undergraduate programs, known as the qualified registry (decree 2566 of 2003), which is awarded for a period of 7 years, after which programs and institutions have to renew it.

The policy program of the programmatic elite played a crucial role in the conception and implementation of the new QA instrument. Indeed, the guidelines and processes developed by the CNA were used by the Ministry of Education to create the qualified registry and the excellence orientation of accreditation was thereby replicated in the control of minimal standards of quality. The technical secretary of the CNA affirms:

"The qualified registry was created on the basis of quality criteria that were very similar to those used in accreditation. They do not have the same structure and are not identical, but they correspond essentially to the same quality factors taken into account in accreditation." (Interview 27 Colombia).

Since then, the Colombian policy of QA has been steered by two institutions. At the base level, the National Intersectoral Commission for QA (Comisión Nacional Intersectorial de Aseguramiento de la Calidad, CONACES), which falls under the authority of the Ministry of Education, has been in charge of the qualified registry. At the superior level, accreditation for programs and institutions⁵ is coordinated by the CNA, an institution that has conserved its academic independence over the years despite the fact that it relies on the Ministry of Education for financing its administrative operation. Indeed, the academic autonomy of the CNA has preserved the programmatic elite's policy program. The academics who have been appointed to the CNA since 2000 have defended the collective and academic identity of the council (Interviews 31, 32 & 33 Colombia) and, in some cases, have received the support of elite universities to prevent the Ministry of Education from modifying general orientation of the system of

⁵ Institutional accreditation was introduced in 2003 on the basis of the criteria and procedures used for programs accreditation.

accreditation (Interview 29 Colombia). This does not mean that the original program has remained unchanged; rather, the CNA has been updating the operational features of accreditation in order to meet the new demands of the sector (Interviews 33, 34 & 36 Colombia).

However, the relative continuity of the original policy change program has not exempted the policy of QA from problems. Even if the qualified registry was constructed on the basis of the excellence orientation of accreditation, there has not been an alignment between the two instruments. Contrary to the initial expectations, not all programs and institutions that comply with the minimal standards of quality have eventually reached accreditation. Instead, the policy of QA has divided the higher education institutions into two groups: On the one hand, a group of elite universities mainly situated in the three main cities (Bogotá, Medellín and Cali) which represents 20% of the total institutions, and, in the other hand, a group of regional universities and non-university institutions - technological institutes and professional training academies - which has to settle for the renewal of the qualified registry.

This situation is not *per se* a contradiction of the policy program because, as it was already stated, accreditation was meant as a recognition of excellence. Nonetheless, as it was shown in the Chilean case, the recent association between accreditation and economic funding opportunities⁶ might jeopardize the foundations of the system. Until then, given that the initial decisions made by the programmatic elite - whose characteristics are summarized in Figure 3 - have had an influence on later choices, the Colombian policy of QA represents a path-dependent process.

Identification of key individuals	
Positional Analysis	Emilio Aljure; Ramsés Hakim; Carlos Hernández; Luis Orozco; Pedro Polo; Rafael Serrano; José Revelo.
Sociological analysis of individual trajectories	Academics with extensive experience in higher education management and policy.
Analysis of the existence of a programmatic group	
Discourse analysis	Enhancing quality through excellence oriented mechanisms that respect institutional autonomy.
Relational analysis	Strong identification with the policy program; Collective academic identity.
Analysis of the power of a programmatic group	
Analysis of the policy process	Active participation in the conceptualization and implementation of accreditation (1990-2000).
Strategic resources analysis	Knowledge of the Colombian higher education; connections with elite

⁶ Being enrolled in an accredited institution is the principal condition of the public programs created since 2014 to provide financial support to students: Ser Pilo Paga; Generación E; ICETEX student loans.

universities; expert opinion of Herbert
Kells.

FIGURE 3 The Colombian programmatic elite

7 | CONCLUSION

This article used the PAF to retrace the evolution of the Chilean and the Colombian policies of QA in higher education. In both cases, programmatic elites formed by renown academics were the leading actor in the early development of QA. But, since 2000, these policies followed different directions. In Chile, the exclusion of the programmatic elite from the policy process and the connection between accreditation and funding mechanisms were responsible for the instrumental layering that changed the original policy change program. In Colombia, although the programmatic actors left the key institutional positions, not only their policy change was defended by their successors but it provided a basis for the other QA instruments of the policy, which represents a path-dependent evolution. This growing divergence explains the contrast between the respective approaches to quality.

The findings of this article prove that the PAF has great potential to overcome the instrumental bias that persists in the literature on quality in higher education insofar as it provides an explanation of change that focuses on the technical elements that produce collective identity and action. In others words, it uses the technical dimension of quality-related activities as a starting point to identify and retrace their underlying social dynamics. The PAF thereby provides a more complete and dynamic understanding of the Evaluative State in Chile and Colombia.

Moreover, by presenting an empirical application of the PAF to a policy issue in higher education systems of two developing countries, the article confirms that the PAF can be used to study the evolution of other policy sectors than health care and, especially, that it can be applied to countries outside Europe and North-America under the condition that the particularities of the political systems and subsystems of these countries are identified beforehand.

Given the space constraint, this article focused almost exclusively on the features and evolution of the programmatic elites and, by implication, did not provide an analysis of the characteristics and resources of the collective actors that supported and challenged the dominance of the programmatic elites in the policy process. Since the question of the political competition is a central issue in the PAF, the effects of change on the collective actors who produce it - especially when change jeopardizes dominance as in the Chilean case - must be carefully analyzed in future publications.

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