

19.4.2025

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**Title**

Debated Legitimacy : Accreditation in German Higher Education / Janosch Baumann and Georg Krücken

**Publication year**

2019

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education policy. - 32 (2019) 1, S. 29 - 48

**Inventory number**

48010

**Keywords**

Akkreditierung ; Evaluation ; Qualitätssicherung

**Abstract**

We analyze the debated legitimacy of formal accreditation procedures in Germany and give reasons for why accreditation as compared to other higher education reforms has not gained legitimacy over time. Conceptually, we combine two perspectives that put the issue of legitimacy at the forefront of analysis: sociology's new institutionalism and Luhmann's work on the legitimacy of procedures. Using the first approach, it is clear that in particular the external, macro-legitimacy is debated. Following Luhmann, it becomes obvious that the requirements for legitimacy of procedures at the internal, micro-level requirements are hardly met. For the two approaches, we give reasons why this is the case. After a brief overview of the German accreditation system, we illustrate the contested legitimacy by reconstructing the perspectives of professors who are members of the academic profession and central individual actors in the accreditation system. Empirically, we draw on collective statements in the broader accreditation discourse, participant observations of different procedures, expert interviews with professors and a survey with more than 1900 professors who acted

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as peers in accreditation processes. We finally assume that the reasons for the debated legitimacy are manifold and not limited to the inherent properties of the accreditation system. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)