Evaluation has been an intrinsic matter of function and scientific production of higher education institutions, especially universities. The chief purpose of higher education evaluation is to learn. The goal is the learning of all stakeholders involved: their access to supplementary knowledge and to a new learning prospect. The purpose of higher education is the integral characteristic of what makes higher education appraisal unlike from other kinds of evaluation as part of the quality assurance. While assessing, the stakeholders involved learn to comprehend, to give a value and to draw inferences on their own learning practices as a part of quality assurance. Indeed, quality assurance is often seen as a guarantee, in other words it derives its legitimation from the need for the supervision of the increasingly large organization that is the university. Evaluation proves to be the tool for quality assurance. This debate has been transformed into a pillar of international debate on the university, accompanied by a rich bibliography. During the last two decades, evaluation became a significant component of higher education policy at national, international and global level.

The significant growth of number of students enrolled in higher education institutions in the recent past decades has caused an unprecedented expansion of higher education systems. The rapid and constant social, economic and technological mutations and international competition make the importance of qualitatively well-educated citizenry and labor forces very decisive. The global demand for higher education is likely to reach about 260 million by 2025. In recent past, private higher education institutions, once a trivial fragment of the higher education landscape, have occupied a sizeable share of the market. The private higher education across nations is not identical. There are institutions for profit and non-profit with differentiated sizes and patterns. The disparity exists within private institutions, and between public and private institutions. The type of regulation for private higher education sector is important in a milieu marked by the politics of governance besides discourse on implementation of quality
assurance. Can this growth and demand transform into productive outputs? The answer can be found in the value of higher education measured by its quality.

In recent epoch, we can observe two global trends: globalisation and regionalisation. Globalization has developed a powerful impact on the development of higher education and imposes new challenges for the organization (standards, financing, regulations). Systems of higher education tend to detach from the national models and adopt a more “global” orientation. Regionalisation is also another important trend. Europeanization is an example and it is not unique. In this context, European Higher Education Area (EHAE) is under construction through Bologna Process (http://www.ehea.info). However, for the enhancement of this process, trust between countries is needed. In order to establish trust, transparency, openness, comparability and quality assurance are some of the necessary tools. It means that quality assurance is a key point of EHAE. Its development is well structured and regulated through European Network of Quality Assurance (ENQA) (http://www.enqa.eu) and the framework of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) (http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/). The importance of ENQA and ESG is well demonstrated in the European texts of this volume.

Nevertheless, quality assurance is not only a European peculiarity. The implementation of quality assurance is one of the recent and most decisive transformations of higher education tangible globally. Different higher education systems are trying to develop assessment tools (internal and external) to improve the quality of teaching, research and extension activities, and these are either based on experiences of selected countries or are extensively country specific. We also know that higher education is an intricate phenomenon which makes it challenging to describe quality. It is seen as a system, process, interaction, outcome, etc. While introspecting all facets, the questions about the quality that comes forefront are: what does it constitute, how to warrant and how to measure it?

Harvey and Green (1993) in their article, ‘Defining quality’ in the journal Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, differentiate quality across four types: quality as excellence, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money, and quality as transformation. It means that quality is defined in terms of different targets. In the first case (excellence), quality is understood as a procedure for the promotion of the first or at least the best. In the second case, quality is linked to the ability of an institution to set goals and implement them. In the third case, quality is seen as efficiency, in other words as a relationship between cost and efficiency. Finally, in the fourth case, it is understood as the ability for transformation.

It is obvious that the first case (excellence) is consistent with the view of quality as a ranking mechanism. The rational of the rankings is based on this desire of excellence. However, another facet seems to us more imperative. The focus of excellence presupposes an outlook of the institutions as individual units in competition with each other and whose objective is pre-eminence (excellence). The logic of the rankings, that is to say, of excellence, essentially push the institutions, as isolated units, into competition with each other, the prize for which is a
personalized distinction. Considering this, the rankings are significant and despite their weaknesses, they have an international resonance and strongly influence the decisions of many governments. The divergence between resonance and scientific critique is a contradiction, which is worth investigating.

The quality movement that started in developed countries has spread to the developing and least developed nations too. It is well understood that the objective of right to higher education access will not achieve its aim unless the right to access higher education of good quality is not provided simultaneously. Higher education must be available and accessible but also acceptable and adaptable. Evidence over the past decade has revealed that efforts to expand gross enrolment ratio in higher education must be accompanied by educational quality in order to achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

The call for quality in higher education upstretched from its own components like effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability. The rising unemployment and lower rate of returns to higher education degrees raised issues of its productivity and germaneness. The studies that scrutinized this pessimism crossed the simple input-output relationship. The need for quality for optimum utilization of scarce resources has encompassed quality in terms of learning, learning environment, content, process, competitiveness and outcome. The definitions of quality in higher education has never been static. It has always been dynamic and open to transformation and evolution based on information, facts, changing contexts, and innovative considerations of the nature of higher education’s challenges.

The quality assurance procedures that were often dependent on national directorial traditions have gradually tended to converge and led to a setup of common tools and standards. Countries under a centralized system tend to impose a uniform and general model while decentralized systems give greater freedom to universities to set up their own quality. International rankings of universities also contribute to impose a set of transnational standards and values, which is also being considered as indicative by the stakeholders. The present book tries to look at the quality assurance mechanism, international rankings and its impact in both absolute and comparative fashion in context of eleven countries from different parts of the world.

We take this opportunity to place on record our deep gratitude to all the contributors to this volume. Their scholarly chapters on the country of their specialization will significantly contribute to the existing body of literature on the subject. We also express our thanks to the reviewers of the country chapters. Finally, thanks are due to our publisher Studera Press for extending all kinds of co-operation and bringing out the book within the stipulated time frame.

The Editors