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The Institutional Isomorphism in the Context of Organizational Changes in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This article deals with the institutional theory and isomorphism, from the processes of organizational change in higher education institutions. In a first phase, we analyze, through a questionnaire, the situations and causes of change in higher education institutions (HEI), more precisely in the field knowledge of Physical Education in Colombia. Afterwards, through a multiple case study, we analyze both the pressures of the environment that force HEI to change and the types of isomorphism. The results show the existence of the three types of isomorphism in a process of change where the National and Institutional governments exert coercive pressures. Other HEIs in similar situations exert mimic isomorphism while Specialized groups within HEIs, exert normative isomorphism.

Introduction

The reconfiguration of the Economy and the society in the world, thanks to the globalization and Information and Communication Technologies development, has permeated higher education and has forced universities to face change processes to response to the new demands of an increasingly competitive market. HEIs have gone beyond traditional missionary axes such as training, the creation of knowledge and social projection, which claim to ensure compliance with other tasks that did not exist in the past such as innovation, labor insertion, virtuality, internationalization and the contribution to countries development (Casani & Rodríguez, 2015). The paradigm where the State was the best guarantor to satisfy the basic needs has been changing over time. Today there is a new model where the market is the best way to allocate resources in almost all human life fields, but the Higher education has not been an alien to it. The market concepts have been introduced in the new university policies, generating a transformation in HEIs, being not only training institutions, but also organizational actors with competence in national and international scope (Morey, 2004; Vaira, 2004; Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Avila & Knight, 2005; Salinas, 2005; Bengoetxea, 2012; Fernández & Bernasconi, 2012; Casani & Rodríguez, 2015). In this effort to maintain and be competitive in the market, the institutions accept and legitimize certain practices developed by other organizations in the field, which is known as institutional isomorphism. This concept emerges from the institutional theory and refers to the homogenization in organizations, where the unity- organization is forced to resemble to the others involved in the same environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

However, in the specific context of higher education, more specifically in the field of knowledge of physical education, studies are scarce. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the internal and external institutional pressures that force higher education institutions (HEIs) to change, and what type of isomorphism occurs. Hence, we developed a multiple cases study (Stake, 1998; Yin, 2003) with three higher education institutions that are undergoing or have undergone a change process. Each case corresponds to a stage of change according to Lewin (1947) three phases model (unfreezing, change, refreezing). We analyzed how Higher Education Institutions have developed their change processes, emphasizing in the causes that have motivated those process changes. This article makes a contribution to knowledge from a theoretical framework, which might be useful for the academic community about institutional isomorphism in its relationship with organizational change and Higher Education, being a starting point for future research.

Additionally, arise implications for higher education institutions managers and for higher education system and accreditation agencies leaders, in terms of generating guidelines that can lead the permanent change processes, product of the environment pressures. We present the main literature findings on institutional theory to explain both change process and isomorphism types that organizations can face (coercive, mimetic and normative).

Then, we present results of each case analyzed in the empirical study from the specific category of institutional isomorphism. Finally, we discuss about the propositions that are generated as a result of these theoretical and empirical studies.

The Institutional Theory in the Framework of a Change Process

The institutional theory starts from the acceptance and legitimacy of certain practices in organizations, which, therefore, are adopted to face environment competitive pressures. In this sense, it predicts that organizations tend to imitate behavioral norms of other actors in the field. According to DiMaggio & Powell (1983) the concept of organizational field is very important since it is used to denominate those organizations that constitute a recognized area of the institutional life. That is to say, they produce similar services or products and have both structural and connectivity equivalence. In this sense, they consider that the fields are institutionally defined or structured through a process of four components:

- a) The increase in interaction between organizations.
- b) The emergence of rapidly defined inter-institutional structures with coalition patterns.
- c) The increase in the flow of information between organizations.
- d) The development of mutual knowledge among the participants of the organizations.

In this way, a line of work is generated, incorporating various organizations that seek to find market policies, social groups, practices and organizational forms, which serve as orientation and constitute a globalized organizational behavior that is appropriate and legitimate inside the field. It is difficult to carry out a change process from this perspective since the goals can be changed or new practices can be developed, but in the long term, the organizational actors build a homogeneity environment that limits their ability to change. The organizations would not respond to their own environment but to the responses of an organization environment. In this sense the change would be the exception, not the norm. Hence, a process undertaken by an organization in a particular way, would be questioned for trying to be out of its status quo (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 2006; Hessels & Terjesen, 2010).

The process of homogenization in organizations is known by literature as institutional isomorphism, where a unit (organization) in a given population is forced to resemble other units that face the same environmental conditions. In this sense, the organizational characteristics are modified seeking to increase the compatibility with environmental characteristics (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In light of this theory, the change is presented according to the institutional context and from three types of pressures:

- a) Coercive isomorphism: Occurs when the formal and informal pressures exercised both within the organization and from other organizations according to the culture and society. Because of its regulatory and financing role, the State has a coercive power in organizations, especially in the public ones, and sometimes, the organizational change is a response to its mandate. Standardized procedures and behaviors that are considered legitimized by society are adopted, creating a common environment that can affect many aspects of the behavior and the structure of the organization.
- b) Mimetic isomorphism: this type of isomorphism occurs when the goals and procedures of the organization are unclear or ambiguous, and tend to imitate behaviors of other organizations to face similar problems. They respond to the uncertainty from the example, following the organizations of its field that they perceive as legitimate or successful.
- c) Normative isomorphism: it is associated with professionalization in the sense that methods and working conditions are defined from a group of members who share a profession. This group establishes a cognitive and legitimate basis of occupational autonomy and exerts coercive and mimetic power just like organizations. University specialists and professional work networks are two aspects of the professionalization that can generate isomorphism, by defining and promulgating roles and conducts of organizational and professional behavior that are rapidly disseminated.

In educative scenario Meyer & Rowan (2006) make their contributions by applying this theory so that learning can be generated around the relationships with other institutions that are vital in society, what restrictions would take place and what the institutions would face if they try to change the existing institutional order. The policies of the organizations that regulate the educational system¹ in the training processes, and recently in issues of

¹ In the case of Colombia, it is the Ministry of National Education that regulates the minimum quality conditions for the running of higher education programs, in accordance with the Decree 1295 of 1994. The National Council of Accreditation is the body responsible for reviewing, organizing and inspecting the processes of institutional accreditation and programs in accordance with the established guidelines.

quality assurance, can generate a pressure making that the change in the higher education institutions are conducted in the same line to response to such policies and thus, enable both the running of programs and the recognition of both institutional and programs accreditation. This situation is generating global models of society that define internationally the concept of university (Fernández & Bernasconi, 2012).

It is to recognize the coercive power exerted by the Ministry of National Education upon higher education institutions, and these latter ones on the academic units. Institutional and programs accreditation is a subject of interest for many institutions, given the guarantees and supports that the Ministry offers to the accredited institutions. There is a circumstantial issue, recently generated for the bachelor's degree programs in Colombia, because the Article 222 the National Development Plan 2014-2018 (Congreso de Colombia, 2015), forces to bachelor's degree programs to be accredited in high quality education. This increases the frequency of situations of change related to the quality of their programs.

Similarly, in relation to the trends shown up in the environment, and recognizing that there are HEIs with more experience, but for some others -with less experience – the path could be uncertain, having opted by imitating behavior patterns of other HEIs on their field. In this way, the more experienced HEIs exert a mimetic power over the ones with less experience. Furthermore, the work networks and the academic groups emerged inside the HEIs are recognized, given the fact that they foster behavior patterns that the HEIs legitimate and accept, resulting in a normative isomorphism. Such situation leads us to lay out the following research question: At what extend do the national and the institutional government, through the quality assurance policies of the Ministry of education and the National Accreditation Council, exert coercive, mimetic and normative pressures on higher education institutions?

Method

A qualitative multiple case study has been developed in accordance with the guidelines of Stake (1998) and Yin (2003). We selected three institutions, one for each phase of change, according to the Lewin (1988) model (unfreezing, change and refreezing).

Selection of Cases

In a first phase of the empirical work, we applied a questionnaire to managers of higher education institutions that have active programs in Physical Education in Colombia. The aim is to identify, in a general way, situations and processes of change. Based on the results, we selected three cases taking also into account the following criteria in accordance with Rodríguez, Gil & García (1996) y Stake (1998):

- Interest and willingness of the higher education institution to participate in the study
- The Higher education institution as a learning scene and a place that would give the possibility to understand the phenomenon studied
- Possibility of establishing a good relationship with the informants, given the inter-institutional relationships as academic peers
- Possibility of having the three perspectives on situations of change: preparation, change and implementation

Quality and Objectivity

In order to ensure the quality and objectivity of the study, we used methods that apply to the case studies such as construct validity, external validity, reliability and triangulation (Stake, 1998; Patton & Appelbaum, 2003; Yin, 2003; Martínez, 2006). In the same way, we designed a protocol based on the guidelines of Stake (1998), Yin (2003) and Martínez (2006) with rules and procedures to guide field work. In certain circumstances it is desirable to have a protocol in a case study, but in the multiple case study it is essential to increase reliability (Yin, 2003). Based on the conceptual structure from literature review, we selected the topics and we prepared a list of general and thematic questions that guided the procedures to collect the information that made possible the study of each case. The main elements that we took into account for the quality and objectivity of the study are summarized in Table 1.

We use the concept of analytical generalization (Yin, 2003) with the intention of generalizing a theory in a certain number of cases that fulfill similar characteristics (HEIs with active programs in Physical Education).

We are not talking about a statistical generalization, typical of quantitative studies, but we do present a deep description of a context of cases, which together, strengthen the information and generate a theory.

Table 1. Methods to Measure the Quality and Objectivity

| Method | Developed process |
|--------------------|--|
| Construct validity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rigorous literature reviews to define the variables to study isomorphism in a process of organizational change -Establishment of the chain of evidence allowing other researchers to reconstruct the case -Nearly simultaneous collection of information and analysis processes -Diversity of key informants for the same issues: managers, professors, students -Frequent feedback with informants -Review of the final report of each case by key participants |
| External validity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Selection of cases with potential knowledge about the phenomenon studied (organizational change) and with different characteristics: phase and situation of change -Logic of the replication from the concept of analytical generalization of Yin (2003) -Integration of perspectives and approaches on organizational change |
| Reliability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Design and use of case study protocol -Development of databases with information from the various sources of evidence -Ethical commitment of the researcher with time, dedication and activities with the informants -Consideration of ethical aspects in the collection and analysis of evidence |
| Triangulation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Various sources of evidence -Various informants to analyze the same issues -Analysis of data in different spaces, hours and contexts -Views of other researchers |

Source: own elaboration from Stake (1998), Patton & Appelbaum (2003), Yin (2003), Martínez (2006), Villarreal & Landeta (2010).

Analysis and Data Collection

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews that were applied to various informants such as managers, professors and students of the selected HEIs. In accordance with literature findings and especially, models used by Hultman(1995), Raineri (2001), Pardo & Martínez (2005), Lewis (2006), Guowei (2007) and Soparnot (2011), we designed a questions guide to direct the interviews. The interviews were directed in a flexible way, according to the population group (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

The interviews applied to the managers lasted 75 minutes approximately, but 40 minutes to teachers and students. For the institutional isomorphism category, we applied questions as it is shown in the Table 2:

Table 2. Questions for the Institutional Isomorphism Category

| 1. Manager 2. Professor 3. Student | Questions Guide | Main Variable |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| 1 | What is the role of Ministry of National Education and National Council of Accreditation in the organizational change process? | Coercive isomorphism |
| 1 | What has been the role of the institutional government (the HEI itself) in the organizational change? | Coercive isomorphism |
| 1,2,3 | Are there work groups / networks that promote behaviors in professors / employees / students? | Normative isomorphism |
| 1 | Do you consider that there are other HEIs in a situation similar to yours that have acted in the same way? | Mimetic isomorphism |

The interviews were transcribed through the speech logger voice recognition program, assigning a name and a consecutive number to each file with the purpose to identify them easily. Subsequently, we read, classified and selected documents for the analysis; later, we read the texts of the interviews several times to identify initial categories. The analysis process was done following the guidelines of Boeije (2010) and Marshall & Rossman

(2010) which consists on segmentation and reduction of data through categories or groups that were emerging inductively, a process known as coding. For this, we follow three phases: data organization, generation of categories and themes, interpretation of the data and writing of the report. As a support strategy, we used the program atlas.ti for qualitative data analysis, which allowed us the collection, organization and coding of the information about the interviews. In the same way, we took into account aspects such as respect for the privacy of the participants, the willing to participate, clarity and confidentiality of information through an informed consent document signed by participants of the study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Results

We present the results of each case referred to institutional isomorphism. In order to maintain anonymity, we will refer to the case (CASE 1, CASE 2, CASE 3), not to the name of the HEI. It is also important to note that sometimes we extracted quotes from the interviews, which were named with acronyms for better organization and easy location. The acronym structure is the following: Ca.Ebx-n, where "C" means case, "a" is the case number, "E" means interview, "b" indicates whether the interviewee is a manager (D), teacher (P) or student (E), "x" is the interview number and "n" refers to the line on which the quote is located in the transcript of the interview. Table 3 shows the list of interviewees for each case with their respective code, profile and cited lines:

Table 3. Codes, Profile and Appointments Interviewed

| Code | Case | Profile | Cited lines |
|--------|--------|--------------------------------------|--|
| C1.ED1 | Case 1 | Director of academic unit | 13-22-30-35-43-55-65-70 |
| C1.ED2 | Case 1 | Program Director | 35-36-37-38-39-40-45-58-60-61 |
| C1.EP1 | Case 1 | Tenure Professor | 12-13-18-19-24-36 |
| C1.EE1 | Case 1 | Student | 4-12-14-31-42 |
| C2.ED1 | Case 2 | Director of academic unit | 3-23-40-47 |
| C2.ED2 | Case 2 | Program Director | 8-19-39-40-76-84-89 |
| C2.EP1 | Case 2 | Tenure Professor | 1-11-17-18-23-26-28-30-31-35-49 |
| C2.EP2 | Case 2 | Professor with fixed - term contract | 9-16-17-46-48-56 |
| C2.EE1 | Case 2 | Student | 3-10-20-23-26 |
| C3.ED1 | Case 3 | Director of academic unit | 10-22-33-35-40-44-49-54-69-72-76-77-85-96 |
| C3.ED2 | Case 3 | Program Director | 1-8-21-32-35-37-44-46-51-62-64 |
| C3.EP1 | Case 3 | Tenure Professor | 4-7-14-15-40-41-42-47-50-51-53-60-73-76-79-87-92-93 |
| C3.EP2 | Case 3 | Tenure Professor | 3-6-12-15-17-27-30-32-33-35-44-46-57-61-67-70-77-83-86 |
| C3.EE1 | Case 3 | Student | 4-8-12-32-34-41-43- |

Description of the Cases

The selected cases are HEIs recognized by the Colombia National Education Ministry with active programs in the physical education knowledge field (PEKF), two of them belong to the public sector and one to the private sector. These HEIs offer undergraduate degree programs in physical education with diverse profiles formation, such as teaching, physical activity and health, training and sports administration. Within their administrative structures, HEIs have a director of program, Councils and support committees.

The Academic Council and the curriculum committee are authorities for decision-making. For teaching, research and extension processes, they have full-time and part-time professors. In the public sector, professors are recruited by a public merit contest whereas in the private sector the HEIs have an internal recruitment process, defined by the same academic unit. In large percentage, the teaching process is in charged by adjunct professors. In relation to the situations for change, the three HEIs are devoted to the high quality programs with the aim to renew the accreditation granted by the National Ministry of Education, represented by the National Council of Accreditation. From the continuous improvement perspective, they are alert to the environment demands to make the adjustments or the adaptations when necessary.

Situations of Change: Quality Accreditation and Curricular Adjustment

HEIs can voluntarily² submit to a process of high quality evaluation of their programs, for which they follow a guideline proposed by the National Council of Accreditation (CNA, acronym in Spanish). Such process includes internal evaluation (self-evaluation) and external evaluation (academic peers of CNA). The CNA presents report to National Education Ministry (MEN, acronym in Spanish), on which MEN grants the certification or not. This certification is granted for seven years. Before its expiration, HEIs may request re-accreditation. This process consists then of doing internal evaluation with all the population groups of the HEIs (professors, students, graduates and employers) through surveys and / or interviews and give a report called “master document” which contains factors and characteristics that give an account of program quality conditions. After, entering the master document into an electronic platform provided by the MEN for that purpose, one, two or sometimes three academic peers of CNA visit the institution to verify such conditions and issue their concept to MEN. Factors and characteristics to evaluate quality condition programs, are shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Factors and Characteristics for the Accreditation of Programs

| Factors | Characteristics |
|---|--|
| Mission, institutional and program project | -Mission and institutional project -Educational program project -Academic and social relevance of the program |
| Students | -Selection and entry mechanisms -Students admitted and institutional capacity -Participation in integral training activities -Student and academic regulations |
| Professors | -Selection, link and permanence of professors -Faculty Statute -Number, dedication, level of training and experience of professors -Professional development -Encouragement to teaching, research, artistic and cultural creation, extension or social projection and international cooperation -Production, relevance, use and impact of teaching material -Remuneration by merits -Teacher evaluation |
| Academic processes | -Integrality of the curriculum -Flexibility of the curriculum -Interdisciplinary nature -Teaching and learning Methodologies -Student evaluation system -Student's works -Evaluation and self-regulation of the program -Extension or social projection -Bibliographic resources -Computer and communication resources -Teacher support resources |
| National and international visibility | -Insertion of the program in national and international academic contexts |
| Research, innovation and artistic and cultural creation | -Training for research, innovation and artistic and cultural creation -Commitment to research, innovation and artistic and cultural creation |
| Institutional welfare | -Politics, programs and services university welfare -Permanence and student retention |
| Organization, administration and management | -Organization, administration and management of the program -Communication and information systems -Program management |
| Impact of graduates in the environment | -Graduates follow up -Impact of graduates in the social and academic environment |
| Physical and financial resources | -Physical resources -Program budget -Resource management |

Source: guidelines for accreditation programs CNA (2013)

²Since 2015 the process is mandatory for the degree programs of the country in accordance with the National Development Plan of the government.

The first case, corresponding to the preparation for change phase, is a high quality re-accreditation program process. This HEI has been placed in this phase because it is developing activities that will lead to change. This change will happen when HEI obtains the re-accreditation certificate. The second case corresponds to a program accreditation. This situation is similar to the first case, but the HEI has submitted to this process for the first time. This HEI is in change phase because they have already completed the master document and have received visit of peers from CNA to verify the quality conditions. They are awaiting the final concept, at which point the phase of change would end and the implementation phase would begin. The third case is about a curricular adjustment, that is, a modification to curriculum. This institution is in the implementation phase because the adjustment has already been approved and put into operation. That is, there are already students of the program who are being trained under this new version.

The Institutional Isomorphism in the Preparation Phase for Change (CASE 1)

This institution has been developing activities addressed to the re-accreditation of the program, being this the situation of change that is analyzed. From the specific analysis of institutional isomorphism, it is evident that the national Government, and specifically, the National Education Ministry (MEN), exert pressure that forces institutions to change. This pressure type is known in the literature as coercive isomorphism. In the case of bachelor's degrees, accreditation is no longer voluntary. It is a requirement whose non-compliance leads to the cancellation of the offer of the program, which is clearly recognized by managers, professors and students. However, leaving aside the regulations, the MEN has also exerted an influence that fosters the route of accreditation because it assigns greater resources for institutions that have this certification: *"Institutional accreditation is not mandatory, but one goes to the bottom of things and you say yes, because if you are not accredited institutionally, you will not be able to have students of the program "ser pilo paga"³, international agreements, greater and better resources, mobility, participation in Colciencias⁴"* (C1.ED1-55)⁵.

Additionally, the institutional government, that is, the HIE itself, also exerts an influence to maintain the program's re-accreditation. This HEI is looking for institutional accreditation, which demands a certain number of accredited programs: *"if the program is not re- accredited, it closes and would be a program less than the minimum necessary to the high quality re-accreditation of the institution"* (C1.EE1-42). Mimetic isomorphism has also been evidenced in this case, given that there are other national and regional institutions that have been referent in the processes developed by the program. At the regional level, the behavior patterns of the University of Antioquia have been followed to take actions based on those patterns, especially in relation to accreditation processes and the creation of programs. The *Instituto Tecnológico de Antioquia* is also a referent, since they achieved institutional accreditation with no high financial resources, which becomes a motivation for the process that the HEI of this case is carrying out.

Institutional Isomorphism in Phase of Change (CASE 2)

It is recognized that the national Government, according to its regulations, exerts an influence that forces to a change; even though the program had already opted voluntarily for accreditation. According to the norm of the National Development Plan, the accreditation is mandatory. Therefore, not getting that accreditation is a risk to the survival of the program: *"this will ensure that the program can continue, because it was already an obligation, it was not an option as it was before"* (C2.ED2-40). It is also recognized that the institution itself exerts an influence for the programs to be accredited: *"the university is being prepared for institutional accreditation, a multi-campus accreditation, so what happened was that we, more or less in a way, quotation marks, voluntary, we had to get the accreditation, then we are accrediting ourselves because an accredited university has to have accredited programs "* (C2.EP1-11). This pressure from national and institutional

³ "Ser pilo paga" is a program of the National Government that gives the best students of the country, with less economic resources, access to accredited Higher Education Institutions of high quality. For more information, visit: <http://aprende.colombiaaprende.edu.co/es/pilopaga/91610>

⁴ COLCIENCIAS is the Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation of Colombia that is responsible for formulating, guiding, directing, coordinating, executing and implementing the public policy on science, technology and innovation.

⁵ As explained at the beginning of the Results section, these acronyms correspond to the coding assigned to the interviews. For this case, C1.ED1-55 means case one, interview to manager 1, line 55 in the transcript.

governments to get accreditation and the consequences that it could have not doing so, is admitted not only by managers, but also by professors and students: "*oh juemadre⁶, if they do not get accreditation, we leave, we are all affected*" (C2.EE1-20).

On the accreditation process, the program has analyzed other institutions that may have similar conditions and could offer some guidance in the process. This shows a certain degree of mimetic isomorphism: "*we did a review of the institutions that were doing accreditation ... we are going observe other institutions that have already advanced in a certain way so that we do not have to start experimenting*" (CD.ED2-105,10). In the same way, we have noted certain behaviors that fit into normative isomorphism. Physical Education is a very diverse field and leads to configuration of groups by specialization that, in certain way, seek to have people in each area. In this case, there has been a trend towards physical activity for health.

As we can see, this case presents the three types of isomorphism. However, the coercive power exerted by the National and Institutional Government is common on the three population groups. Therefore, it has a greater relevance and incidence on educational community, especially in the managers who must make decisions upon these pressures.

Institutional Isomorphism in the Phase of the Change Implementation (CASE 3)

Clearly, from managers, professors and student's perspective, the change in this case is due to the pressure exerted by national and institutional governments. "*in the university all the training plans were put on the list. They said, this batch goes first, the first academic units that have to stick to these projects, ... we were on the first batch*" (C3.ED2-32), this involved the teachers to a point that they felt themselves pressured to do it: "*the pressure, there was some pressure, well let's say, as if something had to be done on a specified length of time. Well, like recorded time, then, you have to do it because the time is running out. I do not remember why the time was key to present that to the ministry*" (C3.EP1-92).

Some aspects related to the mimetic isomorphism were shown from both the organizational and individual level: "*there are people who are not capable of going alone to talk to someone, they have to go with someone else, as if he/she were an umbrella, or as a need of mimicking. I mean, I am not the only one, we are 2, 3, 7 I do not know how many*" (C3.EP1-93). At the organizational level, this institution has been a reference for others: "*outsiders are always recognizing us ... because they notice the training potential of our professors and heir training ... at a national level we are a reference and internationally they also know us*" (C3.ED2-64). This institution also examines other peer programs, especially other faculties of the same university, with the aim to implement some developments they have had in their processes, for example the monitoring of the programs that professors must deliver.

Normative isomorphism also happens in this case. It is evident that disciplinary groups try to achieve certain patterns of behavior from their specific knowledge and have marked views from pedagogy, physical activity for health, sports training, leisure, and sports administration. Situation that has been noticed, not only by managers and professors, but also by students: "*assuming you are from the pedagogical field, but I am from physical activity field. then you want to include 4, 5 subjects of pedagogy, but I want less pedagogy subjects because I want my room in physical activity and health*" (C3.EE1-43) "*they are like academic tribes, there are egos, there is knowledge, sometimes we, the academicians, take ownership of the knowledge, we take ownership of the knowledge and of the people. Hence, we become ghettos and here it happens commonly. We belong to the ghettos of leisure, those ones of administration, the others of physical activity and health*" (C3.ED1-33). There are even subgroups in the same disciplinary groups that defend their particular interests, those of critical pedagogy versus constructivist pedagogy; those of health promotion vs. hygiene habits, those of community vs. business administration, those of formative vs. competitive training, there are also those who follow them because they believe they are the ones who know: "*there are those who think they have the truth and others believe them*" (C3.EP1-47). Managers say that this marked specialization of groups, has made the dialogue difficult: "*in the university, this specialization does not give room for academic discussions, because everyone believes to have the truth where he/she is and what he/she researches. That makes the conversation very difficult*" (C3.ED1-35).

It also seems to be groups around the change: "*the collective has different groups, some actors of those groups who support the leaders of change, evidently we are very prone to change*" (C3.EP2-77). "*another group that*

⁶ Colloquial expression to express surprise or concern.

strongly criticizes the change and want to disrupt. The same community consolidated towards them. Since they did not want to participate, they excluded themselves; in that sense they themselves have had to adapt to the processes” (C3.ED2-51). It can be noted then that the three types of isomorphism were presented in this case, being perhaps the coercive and normative those of greater presence, due to the pressures of the institutional government and the formation of specialized groups, respectively.

Discussion

The literature has shown how the intense globalization has permeated higher education, forcing HEIs to face the change processes constantly, and meet the demands of the environment (Casani & Rodríguez, 2015) and survive in an increasingly competitive market where the HEIs, beyond their missionary processes, have become organizational actors. National and institutional government policies are increasingly demanding and are generating a series of challenges for these HEIs. Meyer & Rowan (2006) mention how these policies have recently been directed towards the high quality accreditation of programs and institutions, which was also evident in the empirical study, being this one of the most frequent and important situations of change in HEIs. In fact, the three CASES of the study are in the context of high-quality accreditation of their programs. CASES 1 and 3 are re-accredited programs and CASE 2 is seeking to achieve this certification.

Thus, the accreditation of high quality corresponds to the situation of change in CASES 1 and 2 whereas CASE 3, Which is the result of these same demands related to conditions of the quality of the programs, a curricular adjustment that also meet the demands given by the environment to be maintained under the established quality criteria and conditions is analyzed. It is also found in the literature that one of the most common causes of change is the need to meet the trends of a competitive and globalized environment (Nadler & Tushman, 1997; Raineri, 2001; Guowei, 2007; Hoogendoorn, Jonker, Schut & Treur, 2007; Sandoval, 2014). It was evident in this empirical study, where the national government forced the HEIs to carry out changes according to the new regulations that states how the programs and the institutional government must work to be competitive in the higher education environment. It could be said that the main cause of the aforementioned changes comes from the policies established by the Government, through the Ministry of National Education and the National Council of Accreditation. In the end the pressures exerted by the IES itself seek to meet those same government policies. DiMaggio & Powell (1983), from the institutional theory, it is said that a type of coercive pressures from the same organization and/or from other organizations might be exerted. Likewise, they recognize how the State, in its regulatory role, exerts a coercive power in the organizations. Clearly, this type of isomorphism was evident in the three CASES, where the national and institutional government has forced the HEIs to change.

The mimetic is another type of isomorphism that occurs when there is a tendency to imitate behaviors of other similar organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This type of isomorphism was also evidenced in the empirical study. When the HEIs face similar processes caused by the same environmental pressures, they tend to follow those who may have more experience. The University of Antioquia is an institution that other HEIs take it as a reference because of its vast development. In that sense, some of the HEIs analyzed have been following its progress, especially in quality accreditation processes and creation of programs. Another evidence of mimetic isomorphism was presented in cases 1 and 3, which have to do with the participation of the HEIs in the Association for Faculties of Physical Education, Recreation and Sport Network (ARCOFADER) in which the new regulations and the trends of the area are shared among them. Therefore, they establish some behavior patterns that arise from those discussions.

The last type, the normative isomorphism, is associated with the previous two because it has to do precisely with the coercive and mimetic power that can be generated by groups that, in their institutions, enjoy great prestige because of their specific profession or knowledge, generating therefore the enactment of behaviors and roles that others follow afterwards (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This type of isomorphism could be seen more evident in CASES 2 and 3, from the specific and differentiated groups made up towards pedagogy, physical activity for health, sports training, sports administration, and leisure and recreation.

In sum, the coercive pressures exerted by the national and institutional government were evident in the three CASES. However, the mimetic pressures were more evident from the behavior patterns of other HEIs and academic networks; while the normative type was presented from specialized groups inside the HEIs. Based on that, the following propositions are formulated:

P1: The national and institutional government, through the quality assurance policies of the Ministry of Education and the National Accreditation Council, exert coercive pressures on HEIs.

P2: The processes of change followed by more experienced HEIs and the participation in academic networks exert mimetic pressures on HEIs in their environment.

P3: The existence of specialized groups within HEIs exert normative pressures.

From the cases studied, the following figure presents a general perspective of the type of pressures that force HEIs for a change:

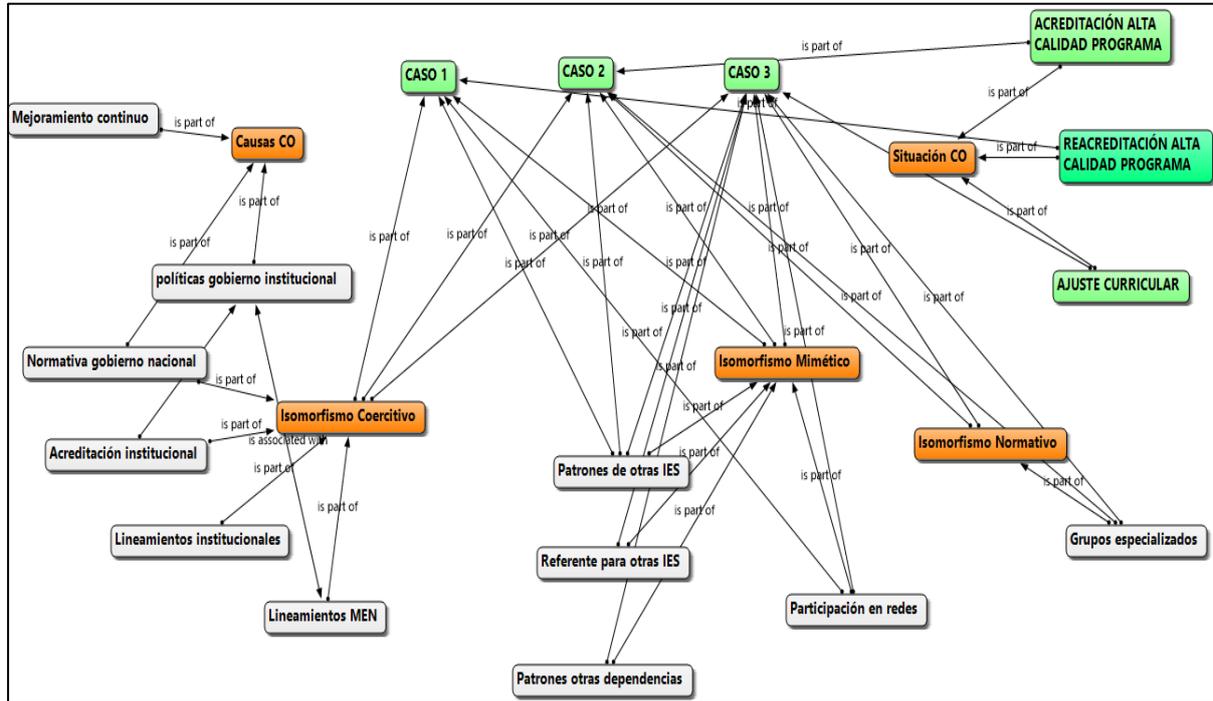


Figure 1. Pressures that Force Change in the CASES Studied
Source: own elaboration

Conclusions

The process of change in the HEIs was analyzed from the institutional theory, referring to the practices that the organizations adopt to respond to the pressures of the environment, imitating behavioral norms of other actors of the field that face similar situations. This behavior leads to a process of homogenization in organizations, identified as institutional isomorphism. It can be a coercive type, from internal and external pressures; mimetic, when it is intended to imitate other organizations; or normative, when the pressure is exerted by a collective of members who share the same profession.

In the empirical study the three types of isomorphism were evidenced, being the more evident and stronger the coercive type. Clearly, the coercive pressures come from the policies of the national government through the Ministry of National Education, represented by the National Council of Accreditation, and from the institutional government, the HEI itself. This latter exerts a coercive pressure in an effort to achieve or maintain the institutional accreditation. The mimetic pressures come from other HEIs that go through similar situations due to the demands of the environment, and tend to imitate patterns of behavior. It is important to say that the academic networks also exercise mimetic pressures in HEIs. Finally, the pressures of normative type come from the creation of specialized groups with specific interests of knowledge, which favors certain behaviors that others try to follow.

It is important to highlight the concept of organizational field by DiMaggio & Powell (1983) which is used to refer to the set of organizations that share similar structures and processes, and that was assumed and applied to refer to higher education institutions in the field of knowledge of physical education. Based on the literature review, we pose a research question that seeks to identify at what extent the national and institutional government, through quality assurance policies, exerts coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures on HEIs. After the results of the empirical study, this could be answered by providing a set of propositions as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Initial and Final Proposals

| Initial proposal | Compliance in cases | Final proposal |
|--|---|---|
| P: The national and institutional government, through the quality assurance policies of the Ministry of Education and the National Council of Accreditation, exert coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures on HEIs. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Pa: The national and institutional government, through the quality assurance policies of the Ministry of Education and the National Council of Accreditation, exert coercive pressures on HEIs. Pb: The processes of change followed by more experienced HEIs and participation in academic networks exert mimetic pressures on HEIs in their environment. Pc: The existence of specialized groups within HEIs exert normative pressures. |

From the findings, both in the theoretical analysis and in the empirical study, we propose a model that enables managers and academics, to understand a process of change from the perspective of the external and internal pressures that motivate such change (see Figure 2).

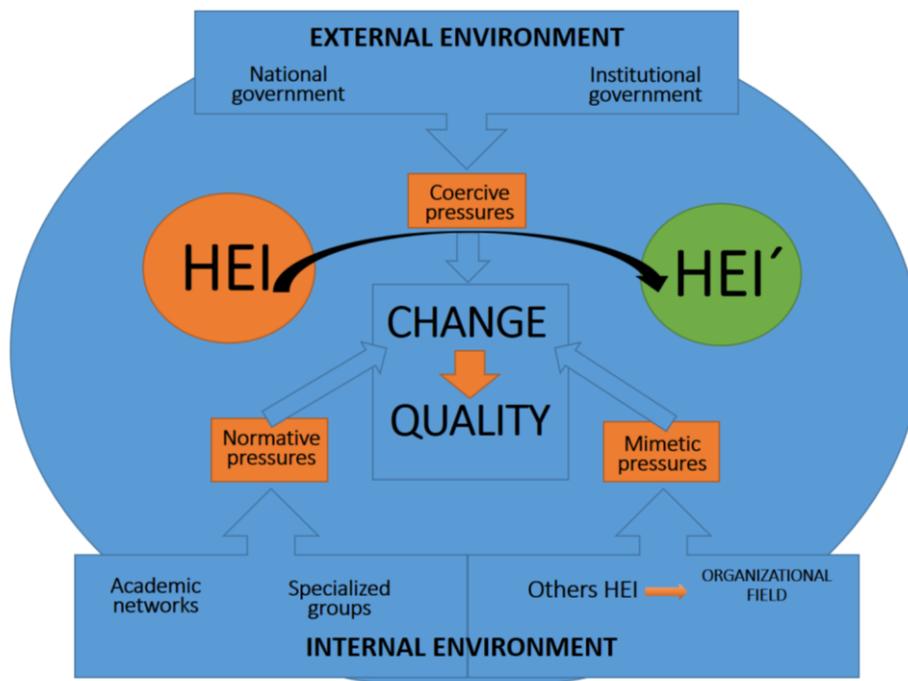


Figure 2. Process of Change in HEI from Institutional Isomorphism
Source: own elaboration

The work is not exempt from limitations. The study is focused on HEIs in the field of knowledge of physical education, leaving out other HEIs that do not have programs in this field and that could be in similar conditions. Likewise, the geographical segmentation of the three HEIs analyzed, located in the region of Antioquia, Colombia, limits the possibility of analyzing the context of the country. As a result of the directive implications, given the conditions of the context of HEIs and the pressures of the environment that oblige them to undertake changes continuously, underlines the recommendation to governing bodies of the higher education system and the accreditation processes to include in the guidelines for advancing qualified registration processes or high quality accreditation of programs and institutions, a guideline for leaders on the preparation, development and implementation of organizational changes in their institutions. In terms of future lines of research, given the fact that the subject in the field of knowledge of physical education has been unexplored, this work can serve as a starting point for many research works that could advance in the analysis of the resulting propositions. Likewise, a study could be developed with cases from other regions of the country, and even from other fields of knowledge.

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