

A photograph of three young adults walking on a paved path outdoors. On the left is a man with a beard wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt. In the center is a woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a light green t-shirt and a dark floral-patterned jacket. On the right is a man with glasses wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and carrying a black bag. The background shows trees and a street lamp. The image is partially obscured by a large orange diagonal shape on the left side of the slide.

PH LUZERN
PÄDAGOGISCHE
HOCHSCHULE

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Shifting Grounds

Higher Education Development and the
Changing Meaning of Quality in the AI Era

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weitergeben.

Overview

- ❖ Context and Relevance
- ❖ Research Question
- ❖ Methodological Approach of the Study
- ❖ First results
- ❖ Conclusion and outlook



Context and Relevance

- digitalisation has reshaped higher education in waves
- what “quality” means has shifted over time
- research rarely examines how the quality discourse itself has evolved
- this study reconstructs these shifts through policy analysis



Research question

Which definitions of “quality” dominate in different phases of digitalization in HE and how does these meanings shift with emerging technologies?

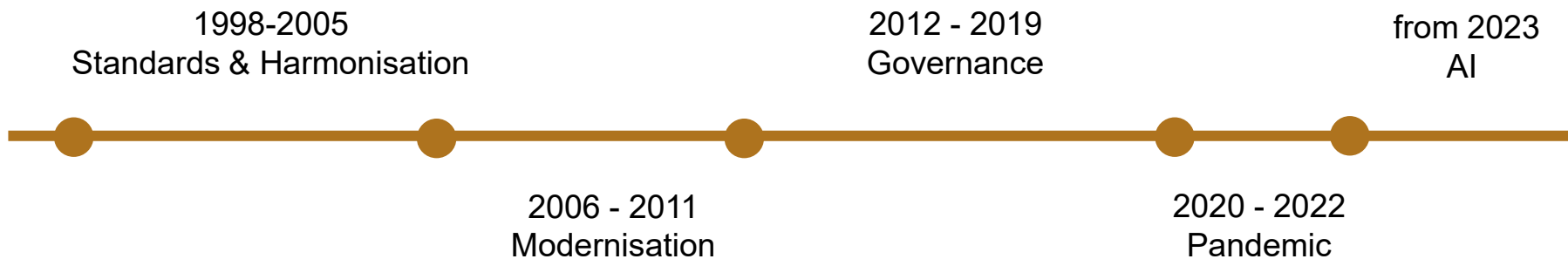


Methodological Approach of the Study

- Policy corpus (1998–2024) from international organisations
- Discourse-analytical reconstruction (SKAD, Keller, 2011)
- Field-theoretical analysis of discursive positions (Bourdieu)
- Reconstruction of discourse phases
- Integration with Harvey's (2024) quality dimensions

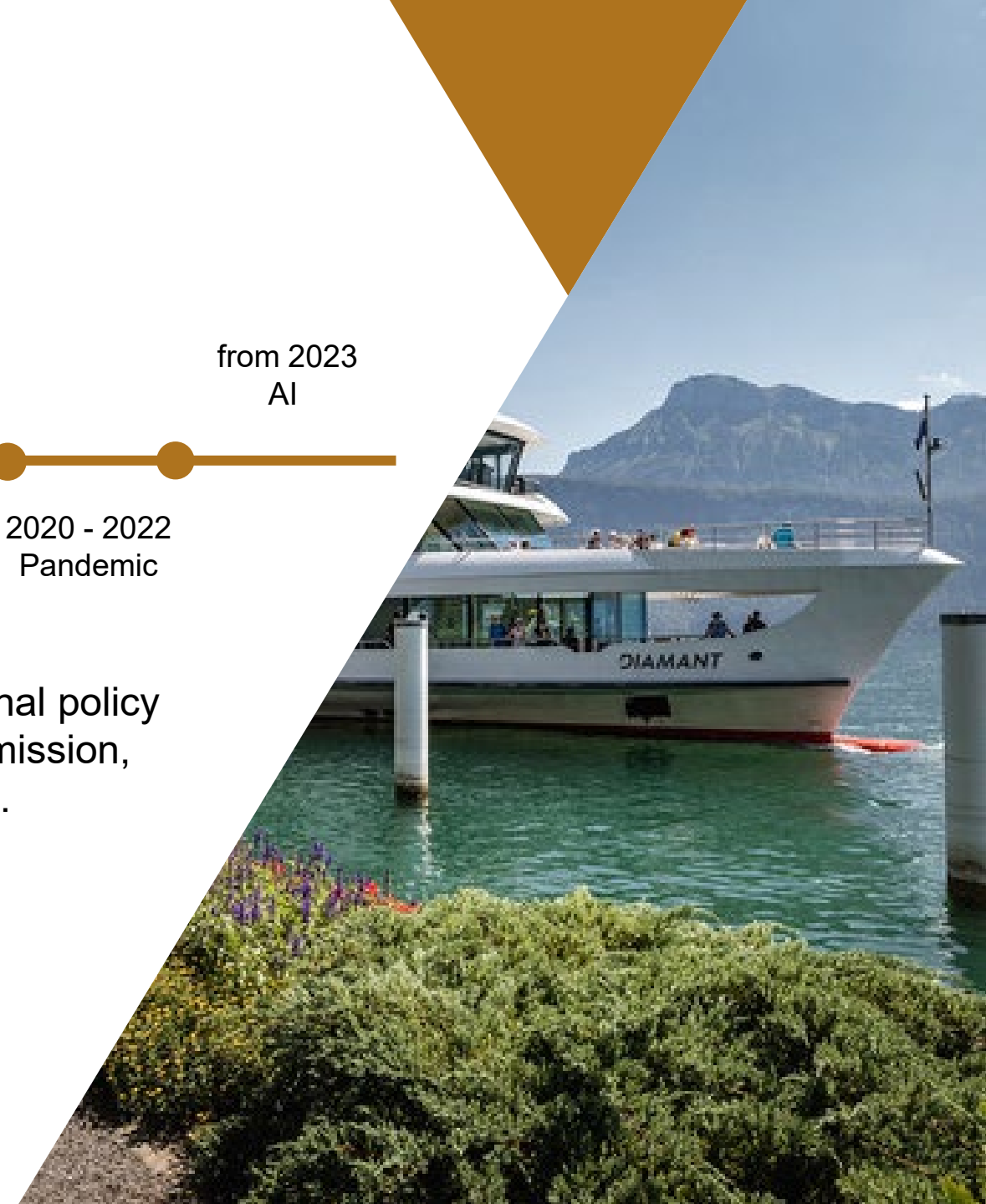


First Results



These phases are **empirically reconstructed** from international policy documents – including OECD, UNESCO, the European Commission, ENQA/EQAR, the EHEA/Bologna Process, EADTU and ICDE.

Across all five phases, we see a clear shift:
from **standardisation** → **modernisation** → **governance** → **crisis resilience** → **epistemic responsibility in the AI age**.



Integration Harvey 2024

Harvey dimension ↓ / Phase →	1998–2005 Standards & Harmonisation	2006–2011 Modernisation	2012–2019 Governance	2020–2022 Pandemic	from 2023 AI & Epistemic Quality
Excellence / Standards	●●●	●	●	–	–
Consistency / Process Quality	●●●	●	●●	●●●	●●
Fitness for Purpose / Compliance	●	●●	●●●	●●	●
Value for Money / Accountability	●	●●●	●●	●	–
Assurance Logic	●	●●	●●●	●●	●●
Quality Culture	–	–	●●●	●	●●●
Transformation – Enhancement	–	●	●●●	●	●●
Transformation – Empowerment	–	–	●	●	●●●
Ethical Quality	–	–	●	●●●	●●●
Epistemological Quality	–	–	●	●●	●●●

- = weak presence in the discourse
- = medium presence / recurring theme
- = strong / dominant framing of quality in this phase
- = not or hardly visible



discursive positions

State–institutional control
e.g., Bologna Follow-Up Group,
European Education Ministries

1998-2005
Standards & Harmonisierung

2006 - 2011
Modernisation

Economic–modernising organisations
e.g., OECD, the European Commission,
and early UNESCO ICT/OER initiatives

Quality assurance agencies
e.g., ENQA, EQAR, EUA,
and national accreditation agencies

2012 - 2019
Governance

Hybrid crisis field
e.g., OECD COVID-19 reports,
UNESCO crisis guidance,
institutional emergency responses

Epistemic authorities
in the AI discourse
e.g., UNESCO's AI Ethics Panel,
the OECD AI Expert Group, and
transnational AI governance networks

2020 - 2022
Pandemic

from 2023
AI & Epistemic Quality

Across the five phases, a clear pattern becomes visible:

the discourse shifts **from state control** → **to modernisation** → **to QA governance** → **to crisis-driven hybridity** → **to epistemic authority in the AI era.**



Key insights from the study

- Quality is not technical – it is epistemic and normative.
- Quality definitions shift across five phases:
State control → Modernisation → QA governance →
Crisis resilience → Epistemic authority in the AI era.
- Dominant actors change over time, reshaping what “quality” can mean.



Implications for higher education

- Quality cannot be reduced to standards or efficiency.
- Ethical and epistemic questions must be integrated into digital strategies.
- Institutions need structures that strengthen judgement, responsibility and accountability.
- Quality in the digital era = epistemic responsibility.
- Universities and faculty development units are not only responding to these discourses — they are also part of producing them

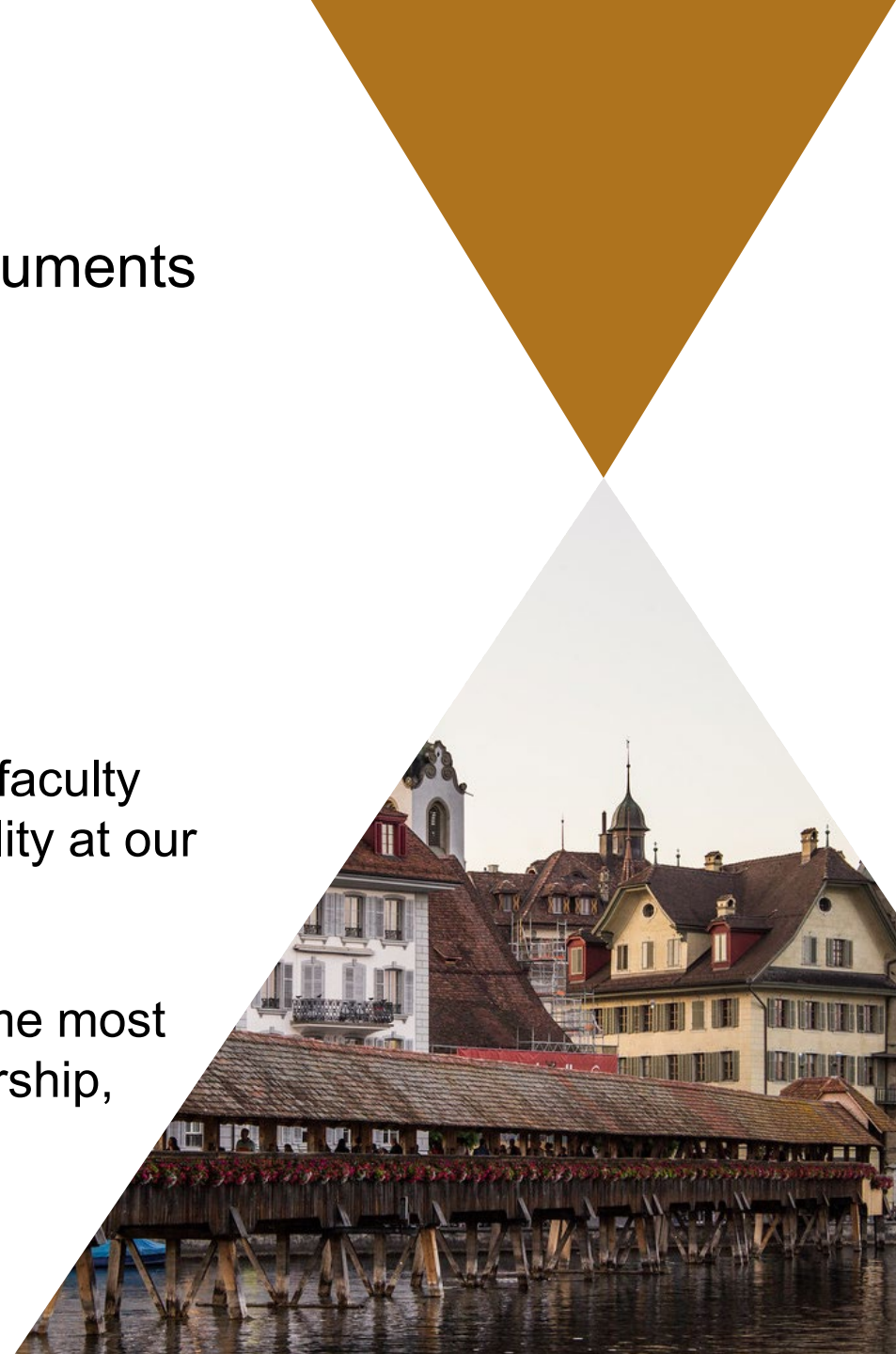


Outlook and questions

- ❖ Next step: extend the analysis to institutional documents and field data

Questions (for you):

- If quality is shaped by those who define it—how do we, as faculty developers, contribute to shaping certain definitions of quality at our institutions?
- What aspects of quality in teaching and assessment become most important—when AI challenges traditional notions of authorship, integrity and knowledge?



References

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A group of four young professionals (two men and two women) are standing on a balcony or walkway overlooking a body of water. In the background, there is a stone tower with a conical roof, likely a historical building. The scene is bright and sunny. A large, semi-transparent orange triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text.

Thank you for
your attention.