

Magalhães, A. and Amaral, A. "Portuguese Higher Education and the Imaginary Friend: the stakeholders role in institutional governance." *European Journal of Education*, 35.4 (2000).

Over the last few decades, many states have been changing their relationship with higher education institutions, by moving from a strict state control to a model of regulation via de-regulation. The steering instruments and processes have been also changing in the same direction: institutional autonomy, quality assessment, accountability, etc.. It is in this framework that the concept of "stakeholder" assumed the importance that it presently has. This concept, as it refers to a third party acting between the two main ones, the community of scholars and the society's interests, is anti-humboldtian by nature. In Portugal one can also see the rise and political deployment of the concept of stakeholder. However, it seems that in the Portuguese case, the influence of external stakeholders, in the sense of a third party, in institutional governance, is much more like the conversation and attitudes children have with their imaginary friends, with their all "wish it was true" features, than a consistent presence: either imagining to hear what confirms their perceptions or ignoring what they do not want to see.