

*English summaries**

(in alphabetical order)

Maurizio Ambrosini, *La valutazione delle riviste sociologiche: riflessioni a valle di un serrato dibattito (Evaluation of Sociology Journals: Reflections after a Tight Debate)*

The article examines the debate on the evaluation of Sociology Journals, which has in recent years become quite heated. It discusses the issues related to the use of bibliometric criteria: the relationship between circulation and quality; the transition from individual to collective; the objectivity of evaluation procedures; the reliability of the available bibliometric criteria. It concludes that bibliometric indicators can be useful instruments in the evaluation on the scientific journals. It suggests, however, that it is important to consider other criteria as well: editorial continuity and circulation; accreditation based both on the composition of the organisms that guide and produce the journals, and on the process of anonymous revision; finally, the effective internationalization, expressed in terms of impact of foreign articles.

Andrea Bixio, *Noterelle sull'irrazionalità: l'attuale sistema di abilitazione (Notes on Irrationality: the Current System of Qualification)*

The essay presents considerations on the logic of some of the current regulations of examinations for certification, indicating the elements irrationality contained within.

Andrea Bonaccorsi, *La valutazione della ricerca come esercizio riflessivo nelle società democratiche (The Evaluation of Research as an Exercise in Reflection on Democratic Societies)*

The evaluation of research in human and social sciences has been subject to intense criticism in recent years. Several authors argue that research in these

* A cura di Melina Rosenberg.

fields is radically incommensurable and should not be subject to any kind of measurement. Based on Bourdieu and Foucault, these contributions suggest that research evaluation is a subtle device for controlling ideas and reducing the potential for dissent and radical critical work on society, under an apparently objective and neutral scientific methodology.

The paper takes issue with these reconstructions and suggests an alternative theoretical path. First, commensuration is integral part of modernity. The effort to make social reality more measurable has historically been part of a process of emancipation, trying to reduce the power of traditional, implicit and opaque sources of knowledge. Second, scientific communities can reflexively find an agreement on what is quality of research and which are the criteria for its identification in practice. Third, while there is no question that research is incommensurable by nature, yet it is possible to transform purely qualitative judgments by experts into measures that can be subject to inter-subjective comparisons. Based on several streams of literature in sociology, the paper suggests that the tensions induced by evaluation are potentially beneficial to human and social sciences.

Roberto Cipriani, *È scoppiata la valutazione. Una proposta: il criterio della «non prevalenza»* (*The Evaluation Explosion. A Proposal: the Criteria of «Non Prevalence»*)

We could say that an explosion of evaluation has taken place in the sociological panorama (and not only). This has a double meaning: in the sense of a new, innovative, almost revolutionary, phenomenon, but also to indicate that the almost contemporary activation and processing of evaluation has put the university (and school) system in crisis, highlighting faults, delays, incompetence, little familiarity with technology and communication practices, internal and external contradictions, evident flaws, unavailability to communicative action («habermasian» and not), the ascendance of technocracy, dissimulated corporativism, masked self-reference, presumption of no judgments, muddled structures, lack of observance of implementation times, and especially self-determined deadlines. The panorama is bleak, but something has been changing. It is advisable to avoid the tendency to use only qualitative or quantitative data. It is most important to always keep present the criteria of «non prevalence», meaning giving attention to every possible type of information, indicators or factors, which accompany and characterize the context and content of a study. The risk is otherwise that a scarcely relevant detail can become the only (or almost only) referential parameter, without the considering its significance in the context.

Ivo Colozzi, *Il problema metodologico del referaggio: cosa vuol dire «valutare» un saggio* (*The Methodological Problem in the Evaluation of Scientific Publication: What it Means to «Evaluate» a Scientific Essay*)

The paper proposes first a «guide» to the practice of refereeing, presenting some prominent examples of «how» are evaluated the products submitted for

publication in journals. The examples allow understanding what are the procedures used and the profiles on which assessment is required (originality, structure, data correctness, accuracy of references, etc.). Are then presented some of the most significant problems that the vast literature on peer review has highlighted, in particular: how effective it is, that is able to detect misconduct (falsification of data, plagiarism, etc.), how much is fair, that is able to avoid the creation of systematic discrimination against certain groups of researchers or non-conventional shapes and innovative research, how efficient, ie not responsible for slowing the spread of new research and overloading the best researchers.

Antonio Fasanella, *Valutazione e validazione: qualche considerazione sulla VQR 2004-2010 (Evaluation and Validation: Some Issues in the Vqr 2004-2010)*

The paper offers a methodological reading of the process of the Italian research quality evaluation 2004-2010 (Vqr 2004-2010). In particular, it addressed the issue of peer review in political and social sciences areas (Pssa), with specific discussion on the criteria of selection of reviewers and the product-reviewers matching. On this points some omissions are found out in the final report of Pssa Vqr (2004-2010), that presents a lack of care on the side of accountability. The paper proposes a more thorough analysis in order to explore possible bias in the data-base, so they can be eliminated. Only then the Pssa Vqr (2004-2010) final report results could support university research sound policies.

Lella Mazzoli, *Per una metacultura della valutazione, fra saperi nazionali e pratiche disciplinari (A Meta-culture of Evaluation, between National Knowledge and Scientific Practices)*

The research evaluation in Universities is strictly connected with the cultural idea on this term shared not only in the academic field. The present debate underlines a conflict between different models of categorization and judgement probably going through our history and not only these days. The evaluation cultures are observed using a distinction that sociology of communication establishes between two classical and opposite models. The syntactic model and its idea of mechanical measurement and data transmission and the pragmatic model, pointing out that communication has to be observed ad a relational reality. This distinction is used to understand in the same way the evaluation of scientific knowledge, underlining that in evaluation as well as in communication we can't ignore quantitative and qualitative aspects. It has to be used a sort of hybridization between digital and analogue elements.

Mario Morcellini, *Eutanasia di un'istituzione... Il cortocircuito riforme/valutazione sulla crisi dell'università (Euthanasia of an Institution... The Short-circuit of Reforms/Evaluation in the Crisis of Universities)*

The essay analyses the mix of regulations, major and minor reforms, developed by multicolor policies to evaluate the university system, or to use the

modern rhetoric, to reform it. In observing the compulsive reforming, certain standard characteristics are revealed in the creation of the regulations. Such as: the syndrome of «the new», the «lightness» of intervention on the universities when the echoes of the previous regulations had not yet gone silent; the lack of effort to make the reforms inter-operational. The consequence of this is that the emotional factor multiplies, positions are radicalized, and a symbolic picture of continuous emergency is created.

Notwithstanding this, universities have not obstructed this evaluation. It is to be noted that the positive outcome of this process works only when there is a strong investment in autonomy, but of which the policies and the more extreme supporters of a mystic of evaluation show no convincing trace. This compromises the hope that the evaluation will spearhead a cultural development of the entire system.

Mauro Palumbo, *Chi ha paura della valutazione cattiva? (Who is Afraid of a Negative Evaluation?)*

Evaluation of universities (like of any other structure or service) is neither negative nor positive. It depends on how it is performed and on the use it is intended for. In the case of Italy, it has been seen, often not incorrectly, as a way to reduce the margins of the universities' autonomy, also because of the consequences attributed to it. It has not helped, either, that there has been overlapping (to not say confusion) in the goals of accreditation and premium next to those of accountability and learning. This essay proposes to bring the evaluation of universities in closer connection with the universities' missions (didactic, research, local support) and with the different stakeholders in consideration. The aim is to not pursue a self-referencing logic that is often common to both opposers and supporters of the university evaluation. The essay concludes with a few proposals for a good and useful evaluation, which, given the times, have a good possibility of being ignored or disregarded.

Carlo Pennisi, *L'importanza di una riflessione futile (The Importance of a Futile Reflection)*

The paper highlights the need to link any talk about the evaluation of university system to the question of its institutional autonomy. Missing such reference, or the distortion of the evaluation made by L. n. 240/2010 on the basis of L. n. 150 /2009, scatters all efforts made by universities so far, in order to make the evaluation practices an instrument of their institutional development. The future outcomes of this process appear to some extent alarming.

Emanuela Reale, *La valutazione della ricerca e il cambiamento dell'università (The Evaluation of Research and the Changes of the University)*

The paper analyses the transformations of the evaluation of the University, with a focus on research evaluation. Over the last decade, in fact, some very important steps strengthening the structure of the evaluation in Italy, were im-

plemented; first the creation of specialized Committees, and afterward an Agency, identifying new functions and assigning tasks and responsibilities. The mentioned changes impacted the existing processes, primarily those of research evaluation, and the consequences that such an assessment could have on the behaviour of universities and individual professors and researchers who operate within them.

Luisa Ribolzi, *Valutare l'università: una sfida non solo per l'Anvur (Assessing Universities. A Difficult Task for Many Actors)*

National system to evaluate universities started in Europe at the very beginning of 80's. In that period the growing number of students and the consequent changes in their composition moved the universities from «quality as a fact» to «quality as a problem». In the same time, the need for accountability was a challenge both for the governance and for the Governments, that adopted two different model of evaluating: a direct control or a control through a national independent agency. This paper, starting from Italian experience of Anvur, defines the aims of evaluating universities and research, related to the social role of higher education. It presents the actors, contents and methods (the «who, what, how») of the evaluation process, based on quality assurance and internal assessment, enhancing both technical and cultural problems and perspectives of an issue quite new for Italian universities.

The recent introduction by law of research assessment in the Italian academic system has triggered a wide debate especially focused on its weakness and paradoxes as well as its potential negative effects on disciplinary autonomy and freedom of research. Contrary to this vision, in this paper I argue that evaluation mechanisms should be welcomed in those disciplinary fields – as sociology in Italy – which for historical, cultural and political causes have not been able to organize themselves as scientific communities, i.e. as communities of practice grounded on peer control and evaluation. The paper offers a brief sociological analysis of the social organization of Italian academic sociology, highlighting the deleterious effects on scientific communication and value recognition fostered by its segmentation in mutually exclusive, sometimes conflicting sometimes colluding, corporate groups (so called «component»). Far from being an assault on its freedom and autonomy, a state-backed system of evaluation may be instrumental to the creation and legitimation of a disciplinary culture of self evaluation and value assessment according to transparent, institutionalized and not provincial quality standards.

Marco Santoro, *Per (ri)valutare la sociologia, in Italia (To Re-Evaluate Sociology, in Italy)*

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Alberto Silvani, *Un nuovo scenario per la valutazione della ricerca universitaria (A New Scenario for the Evaluation of University Research)*

The growing attention on research evaluation in universities has underlined the importance of having a data system of information able to both sustain the decision-making process, and allow its use for different and not always converging purposes. Promoting excellence does not always coincide with the need to guarantee high quality and availability in an increasingly competitive environment. The «system dimension» is not considered for what it actually signifies, both at an internal and external level of the university. The article underlines the «internal evaluation», the procedures and choices that are maturing in the Italian context, starting with the recognition of the phenomenon promoted by Crui, and taking into consideration three very different examples. These examples differ in organizational aspects, and are considered based on their development and their motivational drive. The conclusions underline how the scenario is constantly evolving and needs to take note of the changing forms and ways of communication. This includes a process that leads to the realization of the scientific results to disseminate. The hope is to avoid the risk of confining evaluation activity in a contradictory and partial environment, and open it to the progression of knowledge.

Elena Valentini, *Ritorno al passato? Il cortocircuito riforme/valutazione nel campo delle scienze umanistiche e politico-sociali (Return to the Past? The Short-circuit Reforms/Evaluation in the Area of Humanistic and Political-Social Sciences)*

The theme of evaluation is approached based on a reflection on the most evident criteria that have transformed the university system into a perpetual «construction yard». At a first glance, these criteria go from the attitude of politics on the universities' problems, to the extremism of reforms with no self evaluation, which creates inevitable multiple and hyper regulating. The risk is to return to the past, paradoxically because of the same issues that initiated the evaluation system, such as autonomy and quality. The future challenge lies on

how well and how much evaluation will actually be perceived as a strategy for cultural development of the system, and if the position of the «evaluation institution» will stop being viewed as another «Court of Auditors». The sensation of constantly being under exam is widespread, with dangerously distortive effects on quality. This is quite clear in the difficult obstacle course that social sciences are facing for the recognition of their specializations.

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