

EVALUATION AND THE EUROPEAN MANAGEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE *

VALERIA PINTO[†]

A new dawn of boundless development is imagined at the beginning of the Millennium. The aim of the Lisbon Strategy is to turn the European Union, by 2010, into “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”¹. This transformation has been planned for long time since the fall of the Berlin wall (see Jacques Delors White Paper) and it is now turned into action through an explicit planning: the mutation of *society* in *knowledge society* and of knowledge in a strategic resource of a brand new neoliberal Europe, by a “third way” centered on the concepts of workfare, active social state and inclusion. In order to face these new challenges properly, it is necessary “to make the education and training systems of the European Union a world quality reference by 2010”. The construction of an “European Research and Innovation Area” is a mandatory pre-condition of the project.²

The coordination between the different State members does not take into account any type of integration among the different research systems and any kind of transfer of sovereignty. It is based only on the implementation of a series of statistical operations to rate and rank the different performances, in order to encourage a competition between the national systems of innovation. As Isabelle Bruno pointed out, the Lisbon strategy aims at enhancing “the continuation of the European construction, with different means – means that are no longer legal or diplomatic, but managerial and disciplinary.” The rationalization of the European Research Space goes through putting in competition the research and educational systems, through codified practices and tests, so they could learn from one another and the stronger could emerge from this confrontation. It is a competition that

* The following article reprises, with some integration, parts of Pinto V. *Valutare e punire. Una critica della cultura della valutazione*, Napoli, Cronopio, 2012.

[†] Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the University “Federico II” of Naples, Italy.

¹ Lisbon European Council, 23-24 March 2000. Presidency conclusions.

² Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on youth mobility.

appears unanimous on the principles (sometimes it's called "coopetition"), in which every actor within the process is supposed to motivate the others to do better. "The challenge is not to reduce social and economic, territorial inequalities, but to recognize 'champions', 'competitiveness pole', 'centers of excellence', able to face American and Japanese competition in the race for patenting and brain recruiting. This project explicitly proposes to create a 'common research market' and for this task, it entrust national governments to establish and manage an institutional, administrative, legal, regulatory, fiscal, social and cultural 'environment' positive for the development of this market"³.

The area of activity is broader, but largely overlapping the more defined "Bologna process" whose results are now plain for all to see as Slavoj Žižek has summarized them. "In the European Union, the ongoing Bologna reform of higher education is one great concerted attack on what Kant called the 'public use of reason'. The underlying idea of this reform, the urge to subordinate higher education to the needs of society, to make it useful in relation to the concrete problems we are facing, aims at producing expert opinions meant to resolve the problems posed by social agents. What disappears here is the true task of thought: not only offering solutions to the problems posed by 'society' (the state and capital), but to reflect on the very form these 'problems' take, to re-formulate them, to discern a problem in the very way we perceive such problems. The reduction of higher education to the task of producing socially useful expert knowledge is the paradigmatic form of the 'private use of reason' in contemporary global capitalism"⁴.

A knowledge policy is strategically necessary in this mutated scenario, a policy aimed at erasing everything that diverges, in terms of power, energies and

³ Bruno I., "La recherche scientifique au crible du benchmarking. Petite histoire d'une technologie de gouvernement", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 55-4bis, 2008, 5, 28-45, 40, 42; for a deeper analysis, see also Ead., *Déchiffrer l'Europe compétitive. Etude du benchmarking comme technique de coordination intergouvernementale dans le cadre de la stratégie de Lisbonne*, doctoral dissertation, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris, 2006, II, 684.

⁴ Žižek S., *Living in the End Times*, London:Verso Books, 2010 ("Afterword to the Paperback Edition. Welcome in Interesting Times!"), 411.

money, from the planned transformation of knowledge into “competitive edge”⁵. Knowledge management and management intelligence are essential tools (really close to the systemic of information technology) for the efficient organization of every system of production and they are consequently applied also to the production of knowledge⁶. According to this approach, imperative is to cut unnecessary costs and remove the obstacles to the conversion of knowledge in knowledge economy. In this sense, the final purposes of knowledge management - i.e., the capture and transformation of intangible and tacit knowledge in knowledge available for the system, the extraction, in various forms and at various levels, of stored knowledge from individuals⁷ - are also the goals of science organization. Multiple mechanisms are deployed in order to minimize knowledge stocks and every disturbing element to its logistic flows. Automatic and semi-automatic devices of exploration, monitoring and data analysis aimed at separating relevant information from “noise”; technics to capture rules and “hidden” models inside enormous knowledge storages; practices of rating, ranking, computing and control: an entire set of instruments more or less precise are needed to divide, within knowledge itself, inactive wastes from “those cell in which quality is generated”⁸. As a result, those kinds of knowledge that can be transmitted and acquirable only through huge efforts and long periods of time, because of their level of complexity, stratification, equivoccity, are considered as faults in the system. They receive the same treatment of every knowledge that remains unique, personal, subjective (in other words, every type of knowledge that endures objectification as general sharing and exchangeability) and it is going to perish with its bearer.

⁵ See, critically, Boisot M., *Knowledge Assets: Securing Competitive Advantage in the Knowledge Economy*, Oxford, 1998.

⁶ For a complete bibliography, see Pinto V., ““Larvatus prodeo”. Per una critica del sistema della valutazione” *Iride. Filosofia e discussione pubblica*, XXV, 2012, 3, 475-492; Ead., “La valutazione come strumento di intelligence e tecnologia di governo”, *Aut Aut*, 360, 2013, 16-42.

⁷ See Nonaka I., *Enabling knowledge creation: how to unlock the mistery of tacit knowledge & release the power of innovation*, Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2000.

⁸ CRUI Foundation, *CAF Università. Il modello europeo di autovalutazione delle performance per le università*, 2012, 14.

Leaving aside the simplistic divisions between a vertical-monistic and an holistic-reticular⁹ organizational paradigm, it is clear that there is a connection between this project of systematic extraction and control and the Taylorist revolution, occurred at the beginning of the XX century. According to Frederik Taylor, a constant and accurate observation was necessary to highlight every step of the production process and to escape randomness and vagueness, expunging all the articulation considered slow, unnecessary, inefficient and consequently organizing in a systematic series those regarded as fast and rational. This process was crucial in order to avoid the irrationality and approximation that characterized past labour organization, based “on tradition, knowledge transmission through imitation, abuse and discretion”, and generally to exceed the uncertainty of a productive process, in which it was possible to recognize the beginning and the end of the process itself and not its internal dynamics. Here, the “evaluating gaze” had to “sanction (...) any deviation from the norm”¹⁰. In this sense, Taylor’s *Scientific Management* can “be regarded as a complex project of evaluation although it does not bear the same name” and, on the other hand, it is clear that evaluation is strictly connected to the idea of a scientific management of the production of knowledge, able to work “as a leverage for (...) a mechanical and causal re-taylorization of non economic fields”¹¹. The principle of *bringing together* – “you may develop all the science that you please, and you may scientifically select and train workmen just as much as you please, but unless some man or some men bring the science and the workman together all your labor will be lost” (Taylor) – can be seen from the opposite point of view: it is necessary to put together science and its performance, otherwise science itself will be lost. So, knowledge is lost – also in the very financial meaning of the word – when it is not transformed into product and result.

⁹ Cfr. Demichelis L., Leghissa G., Eds., *Biopolitiche del lavoro*, Milano: Mimesis, 2008; Nicoli M. “Regimi di verità nell’impresa postfordista”, *Esercizi Filosofici*, 5, 2010, 65-77.

¹⁰ Nicoli M., *Sorvegliare e produrre. Potere, filosofia e soggetto nelle organizzazioni aziendali*, doctoral dissertation, Trieste University, 2009-2010, 49, 47.

¹¹ Höhne Th., *Evaluation als Wissens- und Machtform*, Giessener Elektronische Bibliothek, 2005, 26-27, <http://geb.uni giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2005/2105/pdf/HoehneThomas_Evaluationt.pdf>.

Beyond all the different assessment instruments deployed, science applied to science (in the sense of a scientific organization of scientific labor focused on observation, control and “automatic assessment”¹²) is based on the presumption that equates science to scientific outcome, an idea that derives from the general assumption of correspondence between activity and result. All the evaluation system are always concerned with the measurement of performances, activities, but the object of the measurement is always just the result of these performances and these activities. This is the only way in which it is possible to “measure everything”. In the case of science and scientific research, the key point is the diffusion of the scientific outcomes through publications. Although the identification of science with scientific literature is neither undisputed nor neutral, the belief that knowledge representation through temporal series of research products reflects the level of activity is now essential to the effective management of the knowledge system and it corresponds with the general principle of knowledge as a “freely exchangeable” asset.

Leaving aside all the rethorics about creativity, management of knowledge, as any other management, recognizes knowledge only to the extent that it is possible to codify and reproduce it. So, knowledge, “as the taylorist proto-workman (...), is conceived as something that can be objectified and alienated from its author¹³”. In the knowledge production process through knowledge – where new knowledge is deployed not just to reinstate the starting conditions of the process, but also to extend and innovate previous knowledge, in order to keep active the conditions that justify its diffusion and its reutilization in broader contexts¹⁴ – what exceeds the exchange dimension or escapes it becomes a threat

¹² Dujarier M.-A., “L’automatisation du jugement sur le travail. Mesurer n’est pas évaluer”, *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, 128-129, 2010, 1, 135-159.

¹³ Gravili G. & Turati C., *Organizzazione emergente e tecnologie elettroniche di coordinamento*, Proceedings of the seminar “La comunicazione nell’economia d’azienda. Processi, Strumenti, Tecnologie”, December 18, 1999 Ancona, 19.

¹⁴ See Felt U., “University Autonomy in Europe: Shifting Paradigms in University Research?”, Roversi-Monaco F. et al. Eds *Managing University Autonomy. Shifting Paradigms in University Research*, Bologna, 2004, 30.

to the process and an example of anarchy. There where every individual manages his or her own knowledge autonomously and independently, according to his or her own personal conceptualization, “the general framework of collective knowledge management is completely lost, and knowledge diverges rapidly”¹⁵.

The new concept of knowledge within knowledge society implies a radical epistemological transformation: from a “truth oriented knowledge” to a “utility oriented’ knowledge about what works”¹⁶. This is the famous transition from *Mode 1* to *Mode 2* of knowledge production. Unlike the old model, the new one is characterized as “transdisciplinary rather than mono- or multidisciplinary”; as “carried out in non-hierarchical, heterogeneously organized forms which are essentially transient”; “not being institutionalised primarily within university structures”; tied to “close interaction of many actors throughout the process of knowledge production” and also to “a wider range of criteria in judging quality control”¹⁷. In this knowledge-based economy, where knowledge is more and more perceived as “innovation” and “development”, what is really essential is not the increase of scientific discoveries, the spread of new perspective or the impulse to change theoretical approaches: what really matters is how individuals, groups and organizations are capable of integrating their current knowledge¹⁸.

Within the *Mode 2*, languages and interpretative categories are required to deal with the complexity of factual situation and to solve issues recognized and

¹⁵ Camussone P. F., Cuel R., *Knowledge management e modelli organizzativi: la scelta tra accentramento e distribuzione delle responsabilità*, paper AIDEA 2003, <<http://fandango.cs.unitn.it/~rcuel/docs/Paper-Aidea-03-Adecco-Camussone-cuel.doc>>.

¹⁶ Bleiklie I., *Integration and Public Steering*, paper presented at the Regional Seminar “Globalizing Knowledge: European and North American Regions and Policies addressing the Priority I Issues of other UNESCO Regions”, 5-6 March 2007, Paris, 15

¹⁷ Gibbons M. et al., Eds., *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*, London–Thousand Oaks–New Dehli, 1994, VII. Cfr. Bleiklie I., “Organizing higher education in a knowledge society”, *Higher Education*, 49, 2005, 31-59. A sort of “revisionist” approach towards the shift to Mode 2 as a spontaneous evolution of science is proposed by Bonaccorsi A., “New Forms of Complementarity in Science”, *Minerva*, 48, 2010, 4, 355-387.

¹⁸ See Gibbons M., *Engagement with the Community: a new basis for university autonomy in a knowledge society*, Proceedings of the Seminar of the Magna Charta Observatory “Managing University Autonomy. University autonomy and the institutional balancing of teaching and research”, Bologna: Bologna University Press, 2005, 126.

imposed by society. For example, a Philosophy Department (“oriented towards truth”) is destined to disappear; but its members ought to be sufficiently flexible and “smart” to recycle themselves in a Medical Department (or School) as useful providers of medical ethics.

Within *Mode 2*, the new social role of knowledge establishes a bilateral relationship between knowledge and society: on the one hand, knowledge “invades society” with its continuous series of discoveries and, on the other hand, “it is now invaded also by countless demands from the side of society”¹⁹. There are further developments of this model: the theorization of *Mode 3* is characterized by a greater inclusion of non-institutional private actors within the process of knowledge production and their free interaction in “Innovation Networks and Knowledge Clusters [...] for knowledge creation, diffusion, and use”²⁰. At the same time, the model of triangulation between university, industry and government elaborated by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff – the famous “Triple Helix”²¹ – has been extended with the theorization of a “Quadruple Helix”, that widens the interaction to “media-based and culture-based public” and to civil society. A further degree of complexity (and of rethorical exploitation) is represented by the idea of a “Quintuple Innovation Helix” that adds the environmental sustainability to the previous dimensions²². These ideal systems animate explicitly the European framework programmes, e.g., the new *Horizon 2020*.

¹⁹ Gibbons, *Engagement with the Community*, *Ibidem*, 131.

²⁰ Carayannis E.G., Campbell D.F.J., “Mode 3 Knowledge Production in Quadruple Helix Innovation Systems. 21st-Century Democracy, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship for Development”, *SpringerBriefs in Business*, 2012, 3.

²¹ Etzkowitz H., Leydesdorff L. Eds. *Universities and the Global Knowledge Economy: A Triple Helix of University-Industry-Government Relations*, London, 1997; Etzkowitz H., Leydesdorff L. “The Dynamics of Innovations: From National Innovation Systems and “Mode 2” to a Triple Helix of University-Industry-Government Relations”, *Research Policy*, 29, 2000, 109-123; Leydesdorff L., Meyer M., “The scientometrics of a Triple Helix of university-industry-government relations (Introduction to the topical issue)”, *Scientometrics*, 70, 2007; Lucio-Arias D., Leydesdorff L., “The Dynamics of Exchanges and References among Scientific Texts and the Autopoiesis of Discursive Knowledge”, *Journal of Informetrics*, 3, 2009, 3, 261-271.

²² Carayannis, Campbell, *Mode 3 Knowledge Production*, *Ibidem*, 5.

These theorizations aim at breaking “the individualistic closure of the docent”²³, the self-referential character of specialized knowledge that affects sectorial basic research, which is normally dominated by internal needs and “in which the researcher defines the research problem, directs the research process and communicates findings to the public through scientific publication”. On the contrary, the transdisciplinary model imagines a framework in which “the customer or end-user takes part in the definition of the research problem, monitors and takes part in the research process and may influence when and how the results are communicated”²⁴. This theoretical approach based on “more democratical [...] forms” of higher education and on “involvement in more contextualized forms of research”²⁵ has found a vivid representation in the “civic republican theory of governance for knowledge production” by Steve Fuller, who imagines a control of science through “forums” and “consensus conferences”, in which scholars, out of their elitistic environment, are forced to answer to social requests and “to inform the people”. According to this approach, all individuals are encouraged to intervene on the creation of the research agenda²⁶. The telematic consultations on knowledge policies established by the Monti Government in Italy – for example, the deliberative polling on the conservation of the legal value of the degree or the assessment questionnaire on the priorities of *Europe 2020* – are clearly dependent from these consensus based approaches.

It is clear that the boundaries between the different areas of expertise are gone. The new development within this framework regards the role of universities: in the past, universities had the monopoly of knowledge production; now, in the age of economics and knowledge society, universities are treated with suspicion. According

²³ Cammelli M., Merloni F. Eds. *Università e sistema della ricerca. Proposte per cambiare*, Quaderni di ASTRID, Bologna, 1996, 6.

²⁴ Bleiklie, *see* note 16, 47.

²⁵ Nowotny H. et al., *Re-thinking Science: Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2001, 80.

²⁶ Fuller S., *The governance of science: ideology and the future of the open society*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000; Id., “Governing science: a reply to critics”, *Futures*, 34 (2002), 459.

to what is known as the “knowledge paradox”²⁷, universities are affected by two conflicting dynamics: an unprecedented increase of their importance (which is strictly connected to the unusual proliferation of campuses) and a dramatic downfall of their prestige. Universities are asked to legitimize themselves, to respond to the call for quality evaluation, transparency, curbing costs – “in order to justify the autonomy they are entrusted with through objectively assessed results”²⁸.

The application to universities of the so-called New Public Management²⁹ has introduced in Western Countries more and more strict commercial and businesslike dynamics, through structural reforms aimed at substituting the classical control made by the national State (centralized), to a private-based management (decentralized), characterized by a focusing on the figure of the consumer-user and a stable inclusion of all the stakeholders. According to this framework, for example, the executive director of the Conference of the Italian University Rectors presented to the academic community the project for a new university “capable of ensuring certainties to all the clients (first of all the students) and the stakeholders (employees, local governments, national state, world of work and collectivities in general) with regard to its ability to obtain results that will meet the declared and promised objectives”³⁰.

The logic consequence of this decentralization is “the need of arranging proper structures of control and assessment of the accountability of all the affected parties”³¹. The concept of accountability is essential to this discourse. It arises from the Corporate Social Responsibility theories and it “comes from the idea

²⁷ Bleiklie I., Byrkjeflot H., “Changing knowledge regimes: Universities in a new research environment”, *Higher Education*, 2002, 519.

²⁸ Rebori G., “Gli obiettivi della valutazione: miglioramento della qualità, trasparenza delle informazioni, efficienza ed efficacia dei processi”, Casciotti C. Ed., *La valutazione: un indispensabile strumento di garanzia e di governance*, CRUI, Roma, 2003, 31.

²⁹ Bleiklie I. “Justifying the Evaluative State. New Public Management Ideals in Higher Education”, *European Journal of Education*, 33, 1998.

³⁰ Stefani E. Ed., “*CRUI Foundation, La valutazione della qualità: uno strumento al servizio del sistema universitario*” Università di Venezia Ca’ Foscari; Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; EU-FSE; in collaboration with CRUI, 2003, 9.

³¹ Riccaboni A., “Alcune riflessioni sui primi risultati del Progetto VAI”, Casciotti C. A. T. *La valutazione: un indispensabile strumento di garanzia e di governance*,

that managing is a trustworthy task based essentially on a binding contract in both moral and financial terms”³². There is however a huge difference between this concept of accountability and the necessity of responding for tasks or actions in the exercise of a profession, which is connected to an “ethics of responsibility” (leaving completely aside the idea of addressing the call of moral conscience). Even those who do not reduce the concept of accountability to mere (financial) bookkeeping, enhance the idea that this notion, within university framework, assumes a strictly bureaucratic and, at the same time, businesslike meaning: “although ‘accounting’ may exceed bookkeeping in the sense that it is not merely a matter of money, it is the principle of cost and benefit that acts as a principle of translation. Cost-benefit analysis structures not only the University's internal bookkeeping but also its academic performance (in terms of goal achievement) and the social bond with the University at large. The social responsibility of the University, its accountability to society, is solely a matter of services rendered for a fee”³³ (this is the only way in which services are supposed to have a meaning for those who pay the fee, in the words of Stefan Collini: “no paying, no meaning”).

Finally, the crushing of the ivory towers of the self-referential academic culture through the reference to brand-new shared values is just an unconditional surrender to the only acknowledged self-referential system: the market. The principle of accountability enhances the role of those stakeholders who are strong enough to affect decision-making processes by imposing their own interests (while other, not so well defended, interests are left without protection at all). This self-referential system uses its own set of new “absolute values” to define the so-called “quasi-market” of research, or the “intellectual market” as assessors now use to label it³⁴.

³² Pezzani F., *I controlli delle gestioni pubbliche*, Proceedings of the seminar, December 2-3, 1999, Perugia, Banca d'Italia, Rome, 1999, 484.

³³ Readings B., *The University in Ruins*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, 32.

³⁴ See Bianconi L., *L'esperienza bolognese*, paper presented at the International Seminar “Evaluation in the Human Sciences: Towards a Common European Policy”, December 12-13, 2008, Bologna.