



**Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference
of the Journal Scuola Democratica**

REINVENTING EDUCATION

2-5 June 2021

VOLUME III

**Pandemic and Post-Pandemic
Space and Time**

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

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**Pandemic and Post-
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ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"
Via Francesco Satolli, 30 – 00165 - Rome, Italy

Edited by

The Organizing Committee the 2nd International Conference of
the Journal Scuola Democratica

<https://www.rivisteweb.it/issn/1129-731X>



Published by: ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

Via Francesco Satolli, 30 – 00165 – Rome, Italy

Published in Open Access



This book is digitally available at:

<https://www.scuolademocratica-conference.net/proceedings-2/>

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How to cite a proceeding from this Volume. APA citation system:

Author, N., Author, S., (2021). Title, in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica "Reinventing Education", VOL. 3, Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Space and Time, pp-pp*

ISBN 978-88-944888-9-0

Title **Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” – Reinventing Education VOLUME III Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Space and Time**

This volume contains papers presented in the 2nd International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” which took place online on 2-5 June 2021. The Conference was devoted to the needs and prospects of Reinventing Education.

The challenges posed by the contemporary world have long required a rethinking of educational concepts, policies and practices. The question about education ‘for what’ as well as ‘how’ and ‘for whom’ has become unavoidable and yet it largely remained elusive due to a tenacious attachment to the ideas and routines of the past which are now far off the radical transformations required of educational systems.

Scenarios, reflections and practices fostering the possibility of change towards the reinvention of the educational field as a driver of more general and global changes have been centerstage topics at the Conference. Multidisciplinary approach from experts from different disciplinary communities, including sociology, pedagogy, psychology, economics, architecture, political science has brought together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate constraints and opportunities for reinventing education.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and interdisciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners’ mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 800 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on research, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Space and Time

A Premise

Papers in this third volume deals with the Covid-19 pandemic which is having an enormous impact on education systems worldwide. Policy makers, teachers, school managers, parents and students have been called to the reinvent their way of 'doing school'. At the same time, the governance of the education system and schools' organizations have been exposed to unprecedented tensions.

Within a short period of time, radical changes had to be introduced, simultaneously, at various levels of the school system. At national and regional level, there has been the need to rethink the way in which teachers are recruited, engaged and managed. National assessment and evaluation systems have been suspended or redefined in their uses by school actors. The ways through which institutes were managed and organized had to be rethought, passing in a very short time through an on and off of dematerialization and hyper-normativity of time and space. Within schools, managers and teachers have been called to redefine the role of digital technologies in their didactic, as well as in their relationships with families and students. In some cases, these set of changes led to experience novel and unexpected daily proximities, in other prevailed a context characterized by distance and unsatisfactory relationships. Managers and teachers have been asked to re-invent their professionalism to rethink their organizational, didactic and relational competences. Students and families, on their side, have been called to rebuild and reimagine new way of being at school, re-inventing the spaces and time of schooling and the way in which they relate among each other and with teachers.

The pandemic emergency has been a lens revealing intersections and structural tensions among various level and actors of the education system, but also allowing opportunities of changes thanks to the exogenous shock. At the same time, it must be considered that the emergency is interacting on pre-existing inequalities and contradictions. The pandemic clearly revealed the deep disparities of educational opportunities associated to students' life and housing conditions, beyond their access and uses of technological devices. Remote teaching and the enactment of an 'emergency didactic' has exacerbated learning difficulties for underprivileged students (children facing material deprivation, students with migratory background, students with special needs or disable, etc.). The interaction between the pandemic and pre-existing inequalities created different contextual conditions for actors' agency, orienting toward different directions the pandemic's transformational potential.

Higher education systems have been affected too: in constant evolution due to constant transformations of society and changed functions of knowledge, universities have undergone a structural

change along with pandemic times. Simultaneously, the growing relevance of knowledge for the economic development of the capitalistic system has profoundly affected higher education systems, characterized by the neo-liberal approach which has subject of increasing critical analysis.

However, Higher education systems are starting to be affected by other somewhat inevitable changing processes due to the evolution of knowledge and the consequent forms of its transmission. These forms have to be necessarily new both because of the availability of new instruments and the increased need to develop interpretative models of a constant and often unpredictable change. In this juncture the university might assume a renewed central role. At Higher Education System level, the growing use of digital instruments is envisaged in order to cope with the rising of the management rates of the training offer as well as to answer to the growing differentiation of user categories. A feasible consequence could be the increasing of the already pressure for the differentiation among the universities, with the related social implications.

At individual university level, it is foreseeable the demand for university involvement in tackling the problems of society and the economy will increase. And this at global, national and local level. From an organizational point of view the most significant feature is represented by the accumulation of traditional and new tasks that do not seem to be possible to manage. Whatever form the higher education systems will come to take, it remains that a central point to be clarified concerns the management of change. It will be the market that will impose its rules and the universities will organize themselves individually within the invisible enclosures that will guide their policies (with predictable growing social and territorial differences), or instead the State will choose incentive policies to direct its training system. It remains that in a condition of uncertainty and constant change the university's roles multiply and become – at least potentially – more and more central. It can therefore be argued that the university is not only called upon to respond to the demands of society but by elaborating answers and solutions to the problems it progressively affects the functioning of society.

We are fully aware that each educational experience produces specific results and definitions of teaching-learning practices. The well-established model of the magister teacher, based on a one-to-many transmission of knowledge, is complemented by new configurations of teaching-learning practices. There are teaching practices that cultivate the ambition to combine the technological innovation with the psychological and pedagogical issues. Educational technologies, such as the Interactive Whiteboard, incorporate a new grammar and pragmatic in which the emphasis is placed on the

involvement and the participation of the student, as well as on a “reverse teaching”, compared to the traditional one. The diffusion of online educational platforms, based on algorithmic architectures and data-driven approaches, also draws attention to a personalized way of learning and a datafication of teaching. Digital technologies are therefore stimulating a series of transformations in the socio-material order of the class affecting the spatial and temporal configuration of teaching. At the same time, they are embedded in the complexity of the educational contexts that rework their practical and symbolic value.

In the European framework of strengthening the relations between the labour market and education, we also witness the implementation of teaching practices associated with the idea of knowledge as an economic and social investment. Recently, a large field of critical investigation has highlighted how teaching aimed at improving the employment prospects of students is deeply affecting public values in education. At the same time, different points of view in the educational field claim to postpone the transmission of skills related to the labour market to broader educational objectives of social inclusion and civic participation.

The new proxemics imposed by the current pandemic challenge traditional spatial configuration, from the arrangement of desks to the mobile use of chairs, from the forms of communication in virtual environments to the interaction in the classroom. Therefore, this is to register the need to re-elaborate the ecology of the educational practices, starting from the socio-material space of learning.

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Transformation of University, between Residues and Derivations

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ABSTRACT: *Pareto's dichotomy of residues and derivations can help understand whether the adherence to facts – as outlined in Transformation of Democracy (1921) – may be useful in the analysis of the current transformation of universities, so as to cope with the countless drawbacks that came to light soon after the introduction of the 1999 double degree system, that has deeply changed academic life. Normative discourses seem to fuel some argumentative derivations aimed at stifling academic residues (sentiments and individualism) nowadays still determining university policies. This is a sociological approach highlighting the permanent reformist process supporting rationalization and inclusion, in order to replace the erratic (and sometimes illogic) policies implemented by our early university system. To the fore is the gist of rationalization inspiring the reformist process that Italian universities are handling in order to promote merit, efficiency, transparency and proper evaluation. Hence recent functional transformations have reduced the autonomy of universities and increased centralization, for the purpose of tackling some of the drawbacks and flaws affecting the academic sphere over the last two decades.*

KEYWORDS: *University, Reformism, Rationalization, Evaluation, Social system*

Introduction

Italian University reformism of the last two decades has featured a normative hypertrophy that has burdened the way to modernization and rationalization. The flourishing of ministerial decrees has often been inspired by political pressure leading to norms that partially make our universities efficient and inclusive. The analysis of these norms allows to highlight the argumentative flair inspiring ministerial strategies, in line with a well-planned metaphoric discourse. This is true in reference to the tenet of rationalization inspiring the reformist process that Italian universities are handling in order to promote merit, efficiency, transparency and proper evaluation. The recent functional transformations have reduced the autonomy of universities and increased centralization, so as to contrast some of the drawbacks affecting the academic sphere the last two decades.

This process of transformation is fueled by a normative flood that has not yet stimulated a different cultural mindset. In this account, the legacy of some important sociologists who have analyzed the academic environment in the past – also through metaphoric insights – can help understand the argumentative techniques inspiring our academic reformism. In conjunction with McLuhan's definition of the university as a 'marketplace', Jürgen Habermas's focus on the University 'in democracy' and Jacques Derrida's vision of a university 'without condition', it may also be necessary to focus on Vilfredo Pareto's dichotomy of 'residues and derivations'.

One century later, his sociological effort can still provide some epistemological insights into the reformist shifts bolstered by the self-evaluation, periodic evaluation and accreditation (AVA) system. Such bureaucratic incumbencies as a whole seem to be inspired by a meta-language founded on an over-explanatory normative flair (Lombardinilo 2019, 2018).

1. Experimental facts or the imaginary: notes on academic criticism

Over the last century, some eminent sociologists have analyzed the complexity of the academic environment with the aim to highlight the best practices and drawbacks of higher education. In the second half of the twentieth century, Talcott Parsons, Marshall McLuhan, Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Bourdieu, Zygmunt Bauman tried to probe – from different epistemological perspectives – tried to probe the contradictions afflicting the behavior of the *homines academici*, whose didactic mission has been indissolubly interwoven with scientific research. In other words, while echoing Nietzsche's pamphlet 'on the future of our schools', the theoretical reflection on the future of our universities focuses on the most common criticalities besetting academic institutions in the era of digital complexity. In the Sixties, Habermas concocted a 'university in democracy' (1967), somehow inspiring Grabaud and Ballotti's (1970) vision of the 'embattled university'.

In 1918 it is worth remembering that in 1918 Thorstein Veblen published his biting pamphlet, *The Higher learning in America* that at the time was acknowledged as one the profoundest analyses ever made of the American system. Veblen's criticism of the «follies and fallacies» of higher learning was welcomed by most critics, and some felt that he had paved the way to an improved higher education. In the meantime, Max Weber was engaged with the text of his well-known conference, *Science as a Vocation* (1919), focusing on charismatic teaching: «his starting point is to acknowledge that a significant aspect of what it means to engage in scientific work (or to embark on a scientific career) is to work within a set of university institutions that are subject to the processes of rationalization and bureaucratization characteristic of European cultural life at this time» (Owen, Strong, 2004, xxi-xxii). Their sociological analysis

can still provide insightful reflections on university reformism. Nowadays, rationalization and bureaucratization seem to inspire the assessment standards of higher education in line with the purpose of reducing autonomy and strengthening centralization. The dichotomy of qualitative and quantitative evaluation also concerns two different ways to exalt the scientific vocation in accordance with the conservative tendency to preserve the corporatist inclination of full professors.

In this account, Pareto underlined that scientists should adhere to facts without roaming in the «boundless space of imagination» (Pareto, 1921, 52). This is what he highlighted in *The Transformation of Democracy* (1921) also hinting at Vico's theory of historical courses and recourses. Pareto further investigated the principle of transformation not only in reference to the political and economic situation, but also to the cultural scenario after the end of World War I. The alternation between residues and derivations showed new social dynamics, also in the field of knowledge and higher education. Residues correspond to «sentiments», whereas derivations are «products of thought» (Pareto, 1984, 26) that allow us to analyze the origins of social facts: «interpretation of facts is determined by sentiments, desires, prejudices, and interests which often unknowingly motivate action» (Pareto, 1984, 38).

The dialectics between rational and irrational factors comply with the fluctuation of residues and derivations, as Pareto attentively mulls over in *The Treatise of General Sociology*:

Oftentimes a person following the method of the logico-experimental sciences will begin with a derivation and proceed to subject it to experimental test. In such a case the derivation is just an instrument of research and may have its place in logico-experimental science – though never as an instrument of proof or persuasion (Pareto, 1935, 900).

Facts may be either experimental or imaginary, in line with the separation of sciences and humanities. Pareto had cleverly understood not only the political consequences of war, but also its economic impact on higher education, with particular regard to the plutocratic privileges denounced by Veblen (in America) and Weber (in Europe) (Highley, Pakulski, 2012).

Thanks to Pareto, the critical discourse on university acquires a deeper sociological relevance, since his academic standpoint is substantially a critique of scholars who do not focus on facts. In the first chapter *The Transformation of Democracy* entitled *Generalizations*, Pareto underlines that the academic endeavor should be pursued in conjunction with a necessary focus on specific subjects. Thus, he criticizes the sociological tendency to link science to abstraction and imagination: «It was appropriate for Newton to limit himself to consideration of the gravitational universal, while it is appropriate for modern engineers to want to progress further, and it will be appropriate for people of the future to move beyond modern advances. One should also take careful notice

of the fact that it is important to be able to restrict one's own research» (Pareto 1984, 33). Conversely, Pareto saw that academic engagement showed a detachment from reality, thus resulting in a mere display of intellectual prowess. Hence the need to legitimate, in a conversational way, the circulation of publications not closely related to empiric research and inspired by those sundry imaginaries still present nowadays in the academic sphere. As Bowden and Marton (1998, 9) remark, «in research, one is frequently moving in much wider circles in much narrower fields».

The power of imagination may attract and influence the researcher's work since he frequently has to justify the theoretical dimension of his work logically. This is why derivations are so important in the analysis of social complexity as well, inasmuch as they give a logical legitimacy to a countless number of non-logical residues. To some extent, Pareto seems to link the transformation of democracy to the metamorphosis of university, in a time in which the democratization and globalization of university research were far from being achieved (Slowey, Schuetze, 2014). The juxtaposition between experimental and imaginary facts hints at the dialectics of residues and derivations, insofar as the latter characterize every attempt to confer a logical explanation on non-logical facts. Pareto's academic criticism can still shed light on our cognitive complexity, thanks to an epistemological approach embedded in the devious ambiguities of academic reformism.

2. Academic self-limitations: experience and imagination

A century after Pareto and Weber, adherence to facts and scientific vocation can still be considered as tenets inspiring the academic act, and this holds true in a phase characterized by the digital transformation of learning. Pareto's dichotomy between logical and non-logical actions investigated in the *Treatise of General Sociology* provides an insight into the influence of residues and derivations in higher education, where the oscillation between tradition and innovation can be seen as a permanent functional principle. In the era of evaluative hypertrophy, compulsory accreditation of courses and venues, taxonomic anxiety, and the spread of e-learning, universities have to prove their efficiency, in conjunction with transparency and inclusiveness, in line with social and scientific accountability (Peters, Roberts, 2021). Pareto's metaphor of the transformation of democracy can be the benchmark for observing transformative processes related to the innovation of functional agencies. This is also true for educational agencies coping with the complexity of circular and connected knowledge. Liberal arts are no exception, as Weber demonstrates while retrieving the legacy of poets, writers and thinkers who gave imagination a significant role in the study of social facts, as well as Augustine and Tolstoi's Christian perspective on life (Weber, 2004, 39-42).

How is it possible to conciliate facts and imagination? According to Weber, professors should avoid a demagogic stance and comply with the principle of self-limitation. Furthermore, scientists investigate the most hidden facts without any fear of spoiling consolidated conviction: «To make an initial point: the first task of a competent teacher is to teach his students to acknowledge *inconvenient* facts. By these I mean facts that are *inconvenient* for their own political views. Such extremely inconvenient facts exist for every political position, including my own» (Weber, 2004, 22). Weber stigmatizes the auto-referential dimension and the political distortions of academies, in line with an anti-rhetoric aiming at demystifying those conversational derivations – as Pareto would put it – conferring a hint of logic to practice and behaviour that draw apart from the principle of science as a vocation. Insofar as residues evoke «sentiments» and derivations are «products of thought», it is possible to understand the artificial dimension of some conversational practices that fuel the illusion of renewal. Hence follows the concept of scientific subjects – including sociology – capable of accurately segmenting reality, «The task is more exhausting, more modest, more prosaic, but yet much more useful than allowing our imagination to wander in infinite space beyond the realm of experience» (Pareto, 1984, 34).

3. The critic discourse on university as a sociological effort

Pareto's analysis dwells on the perfect balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces, both in restricted social contexts and complex functional systems (Rabot, 1984). After all, a hierarchical organization of roles does not guarantee agreement among actors, as Veblen pointed out in 1918, at the time of Weber's conference and Pareto's articles. Veblen criticized concentration of power across apical roles of faculties, he also shed light on some specific flaws in the university, whose professional vocation could cause diverse intellectual drifts.

Some of the aforementioned insights inspired reflections on democratization of higher education in the second half of the twentieth century. Fifty years after Veblen's *The Higher Learning in America*, Habermas identified communication, information and transparency as three cornerstones of the new *University in a democracy* triggered by the student unrest in the Sixties. In line with Weber's criticism, Habermas delivered a speech in Hanover on 9 June 1967, which drew on an anti-corporative reformist program in stark contrast to his academic background. Habermas called for independence for researchers, autonomy for young scholars and development of a constant debate and improvement of strategies concerning communication. Such reforms were highlighted by Habermas at a time when the balance of academic power was about to shift and, in the meantime, deceptive conservative derivations – echoing Pareto once again – were fading away, as they were about to be replaced with other political and ideological argumentations.

Practice and theory interlace in a profoundly changed educational context, especially if we consider the mutation of geopolitical scenarios in the aftermath of World War II. While underlining that «there is something new with the German Federal Republic's Universities», Habermas (1968, 99-100) depicted an ambitious – and to some extent – utopian reformist program for the academic institution (not only German) called upon to pay more attention to students' needs: «Briefly, we deal every time with the political function of students, the re-organization of teaching and democratization of universities at large».

Meanwhile, wars in Korea and Vietnam monopolized public opinion. Moreover, Benno Ohnesorg's assassination might have destabilized the students' community of the German Federal Republic. Retrospectively, it is important to emphasize the influence that World War I and the conflict in the Balkans had on the Paretian analysis of the transformation of democracy. According to Habermas, the mission of universities complied with social, cultural and scientific paradigms and the progressive convergence of educational needs and functional innovations. Hence follows the imaginary of a higher education capable of transmitting «extra-functional skills», handing down «cultural traditions» and developing students' «political conscience» (Habermas, 1968, 110-114).

These are the three cornerstones of a university innovation also pivoted on the reform of course degrees and the joint commission of students and professors, with the aim to lay the foundations of a fully cooperative and «faithful to its roots» university. The aforementioned tenets entail a reset of academic classes in the ever-changing society of knowledge, as both Weber and Veblen foresaw from different epistemological perspectives. The criticism of privileges and academic self-reference has recently become necessary to debunk the argumentative rhetoric rebutted by Morin (2000) and Derrida (2002) when the Nineties were coming to an end. The emphasis on students' political consciousness is one of the most insightful traits of Habermas' criticism: «Along with the long-term structural shift of society, we know that the academic class has disappeared, as it was characterized by a common mentality. Does this mean that our universities no longer need to implement political education?» (Habermas, 1968, 113-114).

4. Symbolism and the rhetoric of scientificity

The previous query can also be referred to the Italian University, whose political endeavor has developed in line with a hyper-evaluative perspective offsetting meritocracy and transparency and influencing the planning of universities in compliance with a real 'ideology of evaluation' (Borrelli, 2015). Permanent reformism and the reduction of autonomy generated a substantial transformation of the academic actions supported by professors, who have to cope with a load of administrative

tasks that have increased tenfold since the introduction of the AVA system:

The transformations sweeping over the world of education and academia in particular in recent decades are part of the international mainstream deriving from supranational actors such as the European Commission and ENQA – the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. These actors pushed toward the isomorphization of university systems, evaluation and accreditation in view of the creation of a European educational area (Colarusso, Giancola, 2020, 19).

Hence, the re-consideration of the transformative power of universities, that the current pandemic has unavoidably modified:

Along this linear time, the academic subject and her practices are segmented in series of attributes, within an ordered sequence that seems to guarantee the rational planning of careers, research, third mission activities, as well as the design of teaching programmes, according to common standardized parameters and in relation to given and known strategic horizons» (Grimaldi *et al.*, 2020, 448).

The aforementioned changes concern not only the functional territory of universities, but also its symbolic sphere, without considering the rhetorical connotations that are peculiar to the journalistic discourse:

For its part, teaching has been influenced by the changes in the cultural backgrounds of the students and their increasingly utilitarian outlook. It follows that academicians have been forced to face requests for new forms of learning of non-traditional forms of knowledge coming from the outside world (Moscati, 2021, 411).

Bourdieu reflected on the «rhetoric of scientificity» in the first half of the twentieth century, when he stigmatized the corporativism and self-reference of the *homo academicus*. Scientific skills find their place in the public dimension of knowledge:

Thus the work of construction of the object determines a finite set of *pertinent properties*, established hypothetically as *effective variables*, whose variations are associated with the variations of the phenomenon observed, and it thereby defines the population of *constructed individuals*, themselves characterized by the possession of these properties to varying degrees (Bourdieu, 1988, 9).

The symbolic efficiency that Bourdieu deals with intertwines with the shift of social paradigm which the digitalized university has to comply with, even when the academic environment becomes a relational non-*lieu* that has been projected into the internet (Balzola, 2020). The challenges of university democratization concern some specific forms of free access that ought to be digitally efficient, thus implementing the public

representativeness of didactic practices (Pellegrino *et al.*, 2019). Pareto's analysis of the transformation of democracy acquires a prophetic meaning from an epistemological perspective, also in reference to the adherence to facts and the processes of sharing that might characterize research activities in social contexts.

Habermas' metaphor of the university in democracy can be exploited as an interpretation of the academic public discourse that evolves in accordance with its symbolic perception. To the fore is not only the reliability of the *homo academicus*, but also the social acknowledgment of his educational action, resulting from TV debates involving virologists, politicians, journalists, pundits and professors, thus confirming that «the debate on the Italian university has recently taken off, by getting out of the narrow boundaries of specialists and setting aside the most traditional confrontations» (Capano *et al.*, 2017, 7). The so-called planned obsolescence of university can be tackled by avoiding personalisms. Weber had already focused on academic self-limitation and criticized the personal cult that Bauman too dealt with: «the relentless, but slow and circumspect search for truth or justice is ill fitted for being conducted under the public gaze, unlikely to attract, let alone to hold, public attention and most certainly not calculated for instant applause» (Bauman, 2001, 133).

Bauman longed for a science deprived of the devious glimmers of mainstream culture, in a historical phase still far from the communicative evidence of online communities. He suggested avoiding the footlights and «imaginary spaces», as also Pareto also recommended to social scientists at the dawn of totalitarianism and the start of World War II. The later invention of the nuclear bomb shows, according to Sennett, the risks stemming from politics and the manipulation of science: «knowledge is additive and accumulative; it builds up in time as people stand on the giants' shoulders, like those human pillars in the circus» (Sennett, 2008, 79).

5. University and pandemic: the challenges of rationalization

The metaphor of transformation usually inspiring media narrations and political reforms also concerns higher education systems (Gidley, Inayatullah, 2000) and this holds true especially for the European education area. The array of normative acts issued by the Italian Ministry of University and Education comply with some strategic policies pivoted not only on the development of quality and efficiency, but also on the evaluation of teaching and research activities. Nonetheless, the current reformist process of Italian Universities appears to be burdened by a normative hypertrophy that has unavoidably reduced universities' autonomy when complying with ANVUR's (Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research) guidelines: «Increasing engagement with the outside world has led to changes in academic work,

specifically in the sense of interacting more with the various stakeholders interested in participating and exercising some control over aspects of academic life» (Colarusso, Giancola, 2020, 465).

Evaluation Committees and Presidia of Quality of Universities play a relevant role in a system of assessment supported by the need to tackle the traditional self-reference of academic actors. The opposition to self-reference, fragmentation and lack of transparency led to the 'controlled autonomy' of universities, as stated in the 2019-2021 triennial plan and ministerial decree no. 989/2019 (prior to the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak). The new functional scenario engendered by the digitalization of almost all academic activities required prompt governmental support so as to make Universities capable of managing the pandemic emergency. This is why ministerial decree no. 435/2020 enabled our universities to revise their triennial planning, in compliance with social distancing measures. The above decrees concern distance-learning strategies, economic support for students, scholarships and loans (Lombardinio, Canino, 2020).

These measures are set within the strategy for revamping Italian Universities, as stated in the 2019-2021 triennial plan. Such planning has been conveniently readapted, in the light of the new pandemic scenario, so as to improve the «quality of educational environments», availability of services for students and the number of research activities. The main purpose is to cope with the impact of economic cutbacks on the University system. In this account, the Government has financed innovative activities concerning didactic methodologies, University placement and economic support for higher education studies. Furthermore, the Government intends to improve the certification of degree courses, in accordance with scientific evolution and productive and territorial features. Research activities will be supported through hiring, infrastructure improvement and partnerships among universities so as to enhance universities' attractiveness.

Hence follows the chance to interpret the recent governmental measures in line with the new economic and social environment which calls for responsibility, transparency and accountability. These are some of the inspiring principles of the new three-year planning cycle for universities 2021-2023, as stated in the ministerial decree no. 289/2021. This decree is part of a regulatory framework regarding strategic planning activities for Italian universities, in an era characterized by overwhelming uncertainty regarding the economic and social effects of the pandemic. This situation affects the demand for university courses and their economic sustainability, which should be pursued in conjunction with full autonomy and reliable corporate accounting practices. The goals set by the Ministry of University and Research to support the university system in the three-year period 2021-2023 also concern the convergence between performance and budget, while improving the quality and efficiency of both individual structures and institutions as a whole.

It is quite clear that the recent 'unpredictable changes' (Moscati, 2020) have deeply altered the priorities that Universities have to pursue. Such academic shifts also concern the digital transformation of the academic environment, as Bauman pointed out in 2001, when he focused on higher education in the age of complexity:

The world to which the institution adjusts leaves its imprint on the shape of the institutionalized routine, on the monotony of pattern reproduction. But it also shapes the institution's way of coping with crises, reacting to the change in the environment, articulating problems and seeking solutions (Bauman 2001, 136-7).

The metamorphosis of academic institutions is related to the frenzied transformation of the public sphere as well, in line with the rapid evolution of knowledge that the current rationalization process of universities cannot set aside. This is what Losh reminds us: «Despite being busy stage-managing increasingly complex PowerPoint presentations or elaborate clicker quizzes recommended by instructional technologists, professors notice student apathy and preoccupation, and their feelings do get hurt» (2014, 30).

Conclusion

The reforms launched with the Bologna Process were not meant to undermine 'academic freedom'. Instead, by interacting with QA requirements, they brought out forms of procedural alignment concerning the different spheres of teaching and research, hybridizing and modifying them (Pompili, Viteritti, 2020, 420).

The analysis of the aforementioned norms and the survey of the annual reports released by the Evaluation Committees and Presidia of Quality of universities allow us to understand what the academic rationalization aims at and can emphasize the importance of quality and rationalization (derivations) in contrast with some old-fashioned academic habits (residues). Hence follows the focus on the ongoing process of evaluation aimed at detecting some weaknesses regarding didactics, governance, internationalization, the third mission and student's involvement: «Economic, political, social and cultural pressures, and endogenous and exogenous factors have together helped form a profoundly changed framework which, in turn, has both stimulated and, at the same time, been characterized, by different processes» (Mazza, Valentini, 2020, 521). In this regard, universities' annual reports mirror ANVUR's normative and discursive tenets, aimed at replacing the 'non-logic' habits of the past with the more 'logic' policies promoted by means of the AVA system.

The normative discourses seem to fuel some argumentative derivations aimed at stifling academic residues (sentiments and individualisms) still nowadays determining university policies. Pareto's

dichotomy between residues and derivations can help understand whether the adherence to facts – as outlined in *Transformation of Democracy* (1921) – may be useful in the analysis of the current transformation of universities, so as to cope with the countless drawbacks that came to light soon after the introduction of the 1999 double degree system that has deeply changed academic life (Pitzalis, 2001). This is a sociological approach highlighting the permanent reformist process supporting rationalization and inclusion, in order to replace the erratic (and sometimes illogical) policies implemented by our early university system.

To the fore is the juxtaposition between facts and imagination, as Pareto wisely pointed out:

The degree to which one can engage in experimental abstraction is infinite. Every general principle can depend upon one even more general, and so on, without limit. But following this track is not always useful or suitable to our purpose. One should avoid the risk of generalizing beyond the boundaries of present experience and roaming in imaginary space (Pareto, 1984, 33).

Pareto reminds us that every reflection on academic endeavor should be deprived of misleading argumentations and obscure narrations, so as to shed light on the logical factors founding research activities within our risk society as Ulrich Beck (2016) depicted when referring to the postmodern «metamorphosis of the world».

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