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Introduction to the special issue on Changing values and value of universities and research

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Introduction to the special issue on Changing values and value of universities and research

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The special issue is dedicated to improving our knowledge on the changing values of academic work and the value of scientific endeavour, that is, on the role, function and very meaning of universities and research in our societies. Addressing this topic is important because the values indicate the future changes that will occur over time on the institutional structures of universities and on the behaviour of individuals. The changes that affect the value of the knowledge produced also indicate the basis for a different relationship between the State and universities, with the attribution of new missions and roles.

To adequately understand this problem, it is important to keep in mind both the new policies affecting higher education and research, the ongoing global transformations, and the organisational context in which universities operate today.

1. Setting the scene on new policies for universities…

Starting from the 2000s and especially after the overcoming of the COVID19 pandemic, the interest of policy makers has been strongly oriented towards producing transformative changes in the economy and society to promote and, at least in part, obtain solutions to address the sustainable development goals (SDGs). In Europe this new directionality of public action has been mainly emphasised by the European Commission through the broad debate on the Grand Challenges (Morlacchi & Martin, 2009). In the 2010s, the challenge orientation turned to "mission" (Mazzucato, 2018) or transformation-oriented approaches, suggesting a new justification for state action and a new relationship between science and society (Schot & Steinmüller, 2018). In most OECD countries and at the European Union level,

research and higher education policies have started to be redesigned (OECD, 2021), to increase the responsiveness of different fields and sectors to public intervention.

The changes mentioned require a new commitment towards the effectiveness of scientific results (the emergence of the so-called impact agenda) producing added value for society. At the same time, the European Commission has started the process towards Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), understood as a process of aligning research and innovation with the values, needs and expectations of society (Stilgoe et al., 2013). Several benefits of adopting RRI were considered: providing better solutions based on research evidence to address societal challenges, engaging new perspectives and sources of knowledge and talent, identifying solutions that would otherwise go unnoticed, and increasing societal trust in research and innovation. However, recent data from the literature shows that RRI currently suffers from poor implementation in several countries (Christensen et al., 2020).

The latest initiative deriving from the European Commission is the push towards the effective realisation of the Open Science (OS) paradigm (EC, 2021). According to Thay (2024) "open science is a broad term that refers to the movement to make the entire life cycle of research freely available to everyone, from citizens and students to research professionals. This includes sharing research plans, protocols, materials, data and documents through open access platforms." OS should drive a profound change in the way knowledge is produced as it advocates the need to support knowledge co-production processes between scholars and non-scholars, the opening of resources at every stage of the research process, improve collaboration and open exchange of data and information between scholars and non-scholars, thus mitigating competition, transforming research evaluation methods and tools to improve open debate and transparency of the research process (peer review, metrics, etc.). The implementation of the OS will obviously have to impact on the concepts of quality and impact of research activities with important differences between the disciplinary fields; OS is also strongly related to the RRI agenda since to achieve the OS objectives, RRI is the means to achieve it.

2. …and global trends

The commitment to "transformation" is also accompanied by the emergence of some important processes that could accelerate change; among these we can highlight those that could be particularly relevant for higher education institutions.

First, the *digitalization process* and the rapid development of artificial intelligence, big data, the internet of things (IoT) and platform market devel-

opments. This would form the basis for entirely new forms of conducting scientific and technological activities (digital sciences) and, in the case of universities, could also impact academic integrity, transforming practices in both teaching and research (Eggert, 2021).

Secondly, the *growth of globalisation* which makes scientific and technological research increasingly conducted across borders. However, in recent times we are faced with socio-political developments such as the rise of nationalist forces in some European countries which produce a demand for forms of renationalization of some research and technology activities to reduce vulnerabilities and external dependence. The combination of these very different processes produces increasingly complex combinations of globalisation and renationalization trends in scientific and technological activities, which also have an important effect on university collaboration and networking, as well as dependence on third-party funding.

Third, we must address the *emergence of new actors*. The involvement of the so-called stakeholders began many years ago but has recently undergone a strong acceleration. "Stakeholders" is a label under which very different types of non-academic actors exist such as non-governmental organisations, patient organisations or citizens. These groups are no longer seen as end users of specific solutions coming from research activities, but are in many cases becoming co-creators, thus actively participating in the production of research results.

Fourth, *new forms of organising and financing research activities* are also emerging. These are not just funding instruments that mobilise large amounts of money to support research geared towards SDG-related goals. It is also the emergence of organisations taking on new roles in research funding and execution, with more proactive and strategic management approaches to their portfolio engagement (e.g. charities). All these new dynamics have different consequences, as they bring together different types of actors, different disciplines and skills, therefore on the one hand they increase multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary and on the other they overcome conventional epistemic boundaries.

Finally, we must recall that the effects of transformative changes do not generate the same results across countries, regions and sectors. Actors - primarily higher education institutions - have different enabling conditions at a local and organisational level, and different cultures that push for different reactions to external stimuli. Therefore, it is likely to expect the presence of different strategic capabilities on the part of actors involved in change processes aimed at being more proactive in driving social development in many different circumstances. The expected result is an increase in differentiation between and within countries and organisations, which might produce processes of marginalisation and the emergence of strong inequalities.

3. The new organisational context of universities

The general trends illustrated in the previous section also concern universities, where the national reforms implemented during the 1990s and inspired by neoliberal principles have already significantly changed their mission, organisation and identity. It is worth mentioning that the main effect of neoliberalism is the spread of performance management of universities, through policy instruments that redesign research funding systems at national and European level, broaden the application of performance-based funding allocation to universities, implement government teaching and research evaluation systems, and institutionalise the third mission operationalized by various activities aimed at producing an impact on science and society.

Despite the different ways of implementing New Public Management (NPM)-oriented government reforms (Paradeise et al., 2009) and the different effects at the organisational level (Lepori et al., 2023), there are some elements that characterise their implementation in all European countries, namely: i) the stimulation of competition for students, funding of research and excellence (reputation) among universities and the introduction of higher student fees to empower students as consumers and increase quality levels of teaching, ii) the emphasis on financial control and the principle of value for money, iii) the emphasis on performance in research and teaching, iv) the concentration of funds in the best performing universities, with ministries and their agencies attempting to steer the system by setting explicit standards to be achieved; v) changes in the governance of universities with the concentration of managerial functions and roles on rectors, deans and heads of departments.

These reforms have had a profound impact on academic culture by eroding the principle of collegiality that has always been the characterising element of academic organisations in Western European countries (Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2024). Collegiality can also survive in managerially led universities (Marini & Reale, 2016), but mainly at the middle level of university governance, generating a certain hybridity when performance parameters are applied to research activities (Mignot-Gerard et al., 2023).

The problem of preserving public values also emerges in universities affected by performance-based reforms that have sought to instil a results-oriented culture in organisations. Some scholars (Chatelain-Ponroy et al., 2018) have investigated this topic in French universities; the results show a strong negative correlation between commitment to publicness and commitment to performance-based university management; the authors also note that reverse causality may also apply. This result would require further investigation with a comparative approach. However, the evidence that perfor-

mance-based management conflicts with a commitment to publicness suggests the possibility that it can transform the values of universities and the value of the teaching and knowledge they produce, driving increased competition for funding from external sources and contributing to the change of ideas on the value of the knowledge produced from a public good to a commodity (Nedeva & Boden, 2006).

4. Value

After decades of NPM and performance-based reforms have significantly altered the higher education landscape globally, a new agenda is currently taking shape, although this process is not straightforward. The concept of universities generating *public value* is gaining traction again. The theoretical foundations of public value in public administration offer a way to address many of the NPM approach's shortcomings, which became evident since the late 1990s (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

The public value framework signifies a major shift away from narrow performance management concepts, emphasising the ability of public organisations to align with public preferences and expectations. This shift focuses on ensuring social, cultural, and environmental impacts, rather than merely economic profitability or administrative efficiency (Blaug et al., n.d.). In higher education, this is evident in the increasing debate about the research impact agenda, which began to gain prominence in the late '90s and has become dominant in recent decades, particularly following the implementation of the UK's Research Excellence Framework and its international reverberation (Smith et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, the progress of change is not keeping pace with the debate. While there are some promising examples, they are limited to specific areas, indicating a need for more widespread change at both system and institutional levels. Thus, the challenge of translating public value into practical mechanisms for service reform remains largely unresolved.

Moreover, the dynamics of change are non-linear, as new administrative cultures and organisational approaches tend to overlap and merge unpredictably with old ones. The New Public Service approach cannot be expected to entirely replace NPM, just as NPM did not fully supplant the neo-Weberian model. Consequently, the change process is complex and slow, with varied distribution across administrative and operational areas. This results in the coexistence of diverse management and accountability logics within the same organisational or procedural setting, such as research processes being subjected to neo-Weberian, NPM, and New Public Service logics depending on the operational phase or regulatory context.

Drawing from evidence of government reform in the United States, Romzeck (2000) argued that NPM reforms did not yield the anticipated changes, particularly regarding public sector accountability. This is due to significant misalignments between the aspirations and rhetoric of reform designs and the actual administrative cultures, expectations, behaviours, and practices observed on the ground. The polysemic nature and semantic vagueness of key terms like "efficiency," "impacts," "merit", or "accountability" exacerbate these misalignments. The current obsession with "measurement" in the research impact agenda exemplifies how fundamentally different logics, such as measuring and counting versus publicly accounting, are at play within the same arena, where various actors (policy makers, institutional decision makers, academics, research funders, "knowledge brokers," and research users) debate and pursue their respective agendas.

In this context, the widespread administrative pressure introduced by NPM reforms is at risk of being exacerbated by overruling and conflicting regulatory norms and principles. Confusion and overlaps amongst different logics can be fostered by the instrumental misappropriation of terms, expressions and whole set of publicly desirable goals by market-oriented actors. Such is the case, for instance, of ranking agencies which seize the SDG agenda to serve their individual profit-making interests. This way, public discourse is manipulated to generate private profit, and, to this end, deployed to legitimise the pervasiveness of market-oriented logics. In fact, besides all methodological biases and conceptual shortcomings evidenced by literature, rankings nurture a competitive culture as they inextricably relate knowledge production and sharing with positional goods and crystallise the outcomes of historical competitive advantage (Hazelkorn 2016). Similarly, open access publishing is easily dominated by large publishers of widely cited journals which impose high publishing fees and thus foster existing inequalities between researchers and institutions from low- and high-income countries (Chan et al., 2011). Furthermore, Chen and Chan (2021) show that the often-close relationships between the firms that produce rankings and the publishers/data analytics firms supplying bibliometric data for rankings are highly problematic.

5. Values

Since open publishing is originally conceived as a component of open science and thus intended to serve the public good, the example above makes the case for how market logic can impose radical deviations from the initial aims. The General Conference of UNESCO which was held in Paris in November 2021 adopted a set of recommendations concerning open science.

The driving motives of the decision are stated from the very first sentence of its preamble which acknowledges

> the urgency of addressing complex and interconnected environmental, social and economic challenges for the people and the planet, including poverty, health issues, access to education, rising inequalities and disparities of opportunity, increasing science, technology and innovation gaps, natural resource depletion, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, climate change, natural and human-made disasters, spiralling conflicts and related humanitarian crises (UNESCO, 2021: 2).

The first sociologist who systematised the scientific ethos into four sets of institutional imperatives more than eighty years ago was R.K. Merton. According to this author, universalism, communism, disinterestedness, and organised scepticism guided the conduct of scientists (Merton, 1942). These institutional imperatives did not stand the test of empirical evidence and were largely criticised (Mitroff, 1974). Merton himself set to review them (Merton, 1957). Rather than for their heuristic merit, their relevance resides in that they crystallised a set of ideal norms that infused the general discourse. In other words, Merton's institutional imperatives embodied a long time dominant ideological rhetoric about science.

Coming to the present, UNESCO's recommendations on open science are based on a set of core values such as quality and integrity, collective benefit, equity and fairness, diversity and inclusiveness. These values are strikingly different from Merton's and therefore reflect the relevant shift in the generally accepted principles which orient scientific work. Furthermore, whereas Merton's imperatives embodied a set of norms emanating from the scientific community itself, we are today faced with principles shaped by an entity which is somewhat external to the strict circle of scientists and scientific institutions.

These two shifts reflect two main changes in the overall regulation of the scientific enterprise in the last decades, as the research and innovation process never was but has become less and less a linear one, while the science and research field was progressively populated with a great diversity of actors and has gradually lost much of its autonomy (Bourdieu, 2001). A relevant move in that direction took place between the 1980s and '90s, when the expression "knowledge economy" – which had been circulating for about thirty years in the academic circles – was popularised by the OECD (Godin, 2002) and steadily came to orient much of the research and innovation policies around the world. This expression has been a leverage of the "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltaski & Chiappello, 1999) and of "global knowledge capitalism" (Rullani, 2009) and has profoundly marked the European research agenda ever since the so called "Lisbon strategy" was set up in March 2000 to make Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based econ-

omy in the world , capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

This key assumption of the Lisbon agenda visibly bears the dual tension of trying to hold together market oriented objectives of economic viability with more social aims for the collective good. This double tension was reflected, inter alia, in the European research policies, notably in the Framework Programmes (FP) that were adopted since 1983 to support and orient the sector. A clear shift in the evolution of FPs occurred since 2000 with the development of the European Research Area concept. FP6 and FP7, respectively adopted in 2002 and 2006, were designed to implement the will of the EC to extend its reach beyond research to progressively include the whole innovation process. As the Framework Programmes advanced, the tools utilised for their execution became more varied. Initially focused on grants for transnational cooperative research projects, the program expanded to include the creation of public-public and public-private partnerships, the formation of new entities like the European Research Council and the European Institute for Innovation and Technology, specialised instruments for supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, and individual mobility grants (European Parliament, 2017).

With FPs becoming programmes for innovation, the need progressively arose to more clearly connect the EC research and innovation policies with the purse of the public good and to promote the research and innovation approaches more suitable to effectively address it. The first issue – i.e. stronger connections of the research and innovation agenda with the public good – was notably addressed by Horizon 2020 with the introduction of the so-called "grand societal challenges" which encompass critical areas that impact society. While the promotion (and research on) the most suitable approach to effectively addressing grand societal challenges was initially tackled in Horizon 2020 through wide reference to the Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) framework, which was to be replaced by the so called "Three Os strategy" ("Open innovation, Open science, Open to the world": EC, 2015) which informed the present Horizon Europe FP, and thus way more strongly aligning the EC policy with the global open science agenda.

The evolution of European research and innovation policies from the year 2000 to the present day illustrates the challenging balance between fostering competition, striving for excellence, and promoting private interests on one hand, and encouraging cooperation, cohesion, solidarity, and advancing public interests on the other. While this dichotomy simplifies the actual situation, it effectively highlights the competing sets of values that drive the current research enterprise. And provides an overall interpretative framework and perspective to read the papers presented in this special issue of the Italian Journal of Sociology of Education. These can be roughly grouped into

three thematic areas. A first thematic area of this special issue comprises the contributions from Matrella, Anzivino and Cannito, and Rogošić: here the tension between the organisational and institutional arrangements and the quality of academic life is explored. Papers by Benke and Szőke, Piromalli, and Bozzetti, De Luigi and Vergolini delve into the relationship between the shifting academic context and technological changes, with a specific focus on how this relates with teaching and learning. Finally, a third stream of considerations and insights is presented by Lepore and Jenny who discuss the potential of community-university partnerships for societal change.

6. Organisational and decision-making structures

As noted above, the growth of a neo-liberal approach and associated discourses of NPM during the 1980s and 1990s produced a fundamental change in the way universities and other higher education institutions define themselves and operate in the institutional space.

This change resulted in a series of higher education reforms stemming from both the growth in the number of students and institutions and the increasing importance of higher education and research for economic prosperity. Since the 1980s, reforms aimed at increasing the productivity, efficiency and relevance of academic activities have been initiated and progressively implemented, and the common denominator for most of these reforms has been the starting point from NPM or neoliberal ideas (Paradeise et al., 2009).

The culture of academic work, which traditionally hinged on research and open intellectual contracting, has been replaced by an emphasis on performativity, as evidenced by the emergence of an increasing focus on strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic reviews.

What has emerged from a substantial body of studies is that organisational and decision-making structures within universities have been predominantly oriented and justified by two ideal approaches: the one that views the university as a 'republic of scholars' and the one that views the university as a 'corporate enterprise' (Olsen 2007).

As many scholars have noted, the last decades have clearly been characterised by an increasingly defined shift towards a model of the university as a 'corporate enterprise' (Clark 1998). The ideal of the corporate enterprise is in many ways an integral part of the NPM movement. In some contexts, particularly in English-speaking countries, NPM has a closer affinity with neoliberalism and focuses on the introduction of market mechanisms in the public sector and/or the privatisation of public services. In other contexts, as in many continental European countries, reforms can be better described as attempts to strengthen the public sector by making institutions more effi-

cient. These two main versions of the NPM movement roughly correspond to the distinction made by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) between Anglo-Saxon 'marketizers' and continental European 'modernisers'.

Whether it is the introduction of market mechanisms or the 'efficiency-isation' of institutions, the emphasis has in any case been on the 'performativity' of universities and, consequently, of academic staff in a drift towards the performance society, characterised by competitiveness and the flattening of contradictions (Han, 2010).

Within this context, the precariousness of academic life (already starting from the difficulties in entering) tends to produce conditions of isolation and competition that can contribute to increase the stress level of academic staff as found by several researches conducted in recent years (Mudrak et al. 2018; Pujol-Cols and Lazzaro-Salazar 2018). In this issue of the Journal, Matrella used Resource Conservation Theory (COR) to examine the relationship between the interferences experienced in various domains of life and the work-related discomfort suffered by Italian academic staff, considering the strategies through which academic staff in their daily lives try to maintain and acquire resources such as energy and time (Mochi & Madjar, 2018).

Using a combination of multivariate analysis techniques, the author identifies five groups of academic workers (satisfied and stakhanovite workers; stressed out workers; unsatisfied overtime workers; marginal workers; and satisfied and well-organised workers) characterised by the different daily life strategies adopted that may influence the perception of work discomfort.

If, as Matrella notes, it may be "evident that the most structured job categories are also those that are less affected by work discomfort", not all senior lecturers and researchers experience everyday life in the same way, because there are people "who find themselves in a state of stalemate, perpetually engaged in a cycle of search for professional gratification, which leads to a progressive increase in the importance attributed to work activities".

Professional gratification that, among other aspects, is also achieved through the recognition of one's work by the academic community, a recognition that in a performative-business context is structured, even in Italian universities, around the centrality assigned to merit and excellence (Rostan & Vaira 2011).

Anzivino and Cannito's essay drive attention firstly to the construction of the concepts of merit and excellence and how these are interpreted and acted upon by Italian academic personnel and, secondly, what this implies in terms of the (re)production of inequalities at an individual and organisational level. Merit and excellence, in the academic context, are carved out of characteristics that include overwork, continuous and consistent scientific productivity, significant international mobility and, above all, the ability to attract funding (Thornton, 2014).

Through semi-structured interviews with early-career researchers, advanced-career associate professors, members of competition committees, heads of departments and their deputies, the authors show how "the meritocratic ideal has important implications because it creates the illusion that only individual merit matters", concealing the different *life chances* that underlie academic success, be they related to gender or socio-cultural or economic capital. Another result of Anzivino and Cannito's research lies in the fact that the processes of standardisation of procedures, whether these relate to access or career advancement, do not seem to have significantly reduced - at least according to some of those interviewed - the evaluators' margins of discretion, which may therefore defer to decisions guided by other organisational criteria.

The pursuit of academic success, defined by the logic and new priorities of the science and higher education system (Poutanen, 2022) and conveyed by the concepts of merit and excellence, may however contribute to the professional alienation of academic staff, as suggested by numerous studies (Gachago et al., 2023).

Rogošić frames her paper within Seeman's (1959; 1975) theorisation, according to which social conditions create one or more dimensions of alienation and related behaviour. Within such a framework, Rogošić examines the situation of academic staff in Croatia. Through group interviews conducted in five focus groups, the author shows how "among all the respondents, one or more dimensions of professional alienation can be observed". What emerges from the interviews is the reduction of academic work to mere instrumental tasks, causing a loss of meaning of one's work as well as one's being. The consumption of time related to the production of administrative documents erodes the time to devote to research work or lecture preparation as well as the overproduction of research papers, in a capitalist-driven incremental logic, tends on the one hand to produce frustration ("advancement regulations that force them to publish many research papers, which are often of questionable quality") on the other hand can develop forms of self-alienation because *standing still* is seen as a regression or failure within the social order (Odell, 2022).

7. New technologies for new types of learners and creators?

As we know the 'university' is a community of teachers and scholars (*universitas magistrorum et scholarium*), a school of universal learning, which embraces diverse branches of knowledge and all possible means to make new investigations and thus to advance knowledge. These two characteristics, the community of scholars and the breadth of subjects and intellectual tools, have remained the central elements of the various forms taken

by the university from the Middle Ages (e.g. Paris and Bologna), through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, to today's research universities.

The contemporary shift towards a neo-liberalist approach to knowledge has driven the demand for new types of learners and creators. Moreover, globalisation requires reflective, interdependent and globally identified citizens. New technologies are changing how we learn, collaborate and express ourselves (Patrick 2013).

In addition to the changes that technology may induce in future learning, teaching and research, it is likely to have an impact on the design of physical and virtual university environments (Selwyn et al., 2016), as well as on relationships with intellectual property rights (Marshall et.al., 2024).

Benke and Szőke apply the VUCA framework (related to the challenges of operating within environments marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) to this changing context of higher education. Through an analysis of the most recent literature, the authors show how the studies taken into consideration point to critical elements regarding the transformative potential of AI in higher education: "although AI promises substantial progress in education, it is not without its challenges and ethical concerns". The field data - collected from participants via an online questionnaire - aimed to understand the transformative impact of generative artificial intelligence on academia, with a focus on students' experiences. The main findings emphasise the need for a balanced approach: "These insights emphasise the need for refined AI guidelines and solid ethical standards".

Piromalli focuses on the intersection of digitalisation and marketisation in higher education by examining the market-making processes within the case of virtual universities (VUs) in Italy attempting to "unveil the intricate interplay between economic forces, educational technology, and the dynamic forces of globalisation". The author highlights the ongoing stabilisation of a global edtech network within the higher education system in Italy; a network within which the boundaries between public and private, local and global, policymakers and entrepreneurs, are becoming increasingly blurred. A process that is not configured as a break with or replacement of the previous system, but rather in coordination with state governance (VUs are in fact supported by the state through the allocation of public funds).

Bozzetti, De Luigi and Vergolini's essay takes into consideration the demand for more flexible teaching and learning methods coming from the growing number of non-traditional students in Italian universities. This demand "has been partly met by an increased supply of online higher education, which has more than doubled in Italy in the last decade, compared with an increase of around 10% in the number of online courses offered by traditional universities". Field research findings (obtained through a survey distributed to a sample of students enrolled at the University of Bologna)

show that non-traditional students express "a clear preference for the *fully online* mode of learning, while traditional students prefer the *face-to-face* mode" while the mixed teaching mode is the least preferred by both categories. Rather than trying to bring non-traditional students closer to traditional students, it seems important to identify study modes that meet their needs for flexibility while allowing them effective participation in tertiary education and at the same time avoiding reproducing inequalities in access to educational opportunities.

8. Community University Research Partnerships: an equitable instrument for change?

The relevant changes recalled above are characterised by the growing relevance assigned to knowledge as a decisive driving factor of innovation, development, and economic and social growth. Knowledge resources take on an unprecedented value, and the growing role of intellectual capital and its diffusion are at the centre of competition, even more than economic capital is (Slaughter & Leslie, 1999).

The individuals' ability to access information and/or produce new knowledge becomes a constitutive element for the system functioning. Furthermore, individuals are valued not only as bearers of formal, explicit and transmissible knowledge, but also of their own knowledge, background and experiences.

On the other hand, a progressive awareness of the need for a different way of doing and producing knowledge is valued. Greater attention is given to the contents and methods of its sharing, transmission and communication, in relation to the continuous changes due to its use.

This context calls for a redefinition of the role of universities. Alongside the two traditional university missions (teaching and training and research), a third is being strengthened which promotes a university committed to civil society.

This so called 'third mission' concerns the greatest variety of disciplines and is carried out not only through various top-down approaches but also bottom-up methodological frameworks, such as Participatory Research, Community-Based Research, Community Based Participatory Action Research, Collaborative Research, Action Research, Participatory Action Research, etc (Bortoletto, 2006; Vargiu, 2012).

Within this framework, Lepore and Jenny discuss how to recognize, promote and manage the different Knowledge Cultures which can emerge within Community University Research Partnerships (CURPs) (Nelson et al., 2015; Reed & Rudmann, 2023).

Their essay builds upon results emerging from a multi-year and multinational research project conducted under the guidance of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. According to evidence emerging from this vast research programme, authors evidence how the role of members in the partnership and their knowledge can be influenced and hierarchized by inequalities based on existing institutional or socio-cultural norms and assumptions (Hall et al., 2011). On this basis, they come to outline a theoretical framework which leads to a peculiar understanding of the role of knowledge cultures which is conceptualised as "the set of formal and informal roles, structures, norms and practices, shared meanings, and cultural forms (e.g., language, symbols, rituals), which influence how knowledge is understood, valued, assembled, shared, and acted upon in a specific setting".

Their theory shifts the emphasis from knowledge to knowledges and conceives a vision in which both the academic and community partners of a CURP "represent each a site of practice where individuals learn, replicate, and express the respective structures and processes used to organise knowledge and express themselves through shared resources, paths and practices".

Their work therefore contributes to developing a definition of knowledge culture appropriate to CURP environments, with the aim of better identifying power differentials and leverage points for addressing them.

To do so, Lepore and Jenny take into consideration three interconnected and concentric components that operate on different levels of analysis and that take into account both structural and procedural dimensions. Within this general framework, both "knowledge activities" and "forms of knowledge" are negotiated, valued and supported through different forms of power (Tsouvalis et al., 2000).

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