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The fruit of a long-term collective endeavour

This document is a synthesis of work done within the Institute for the Analysis of Change in Contemporary and Historical Societies (IACCHOS) since 2012, involving modes of production, dissemination and valorisation of research, and quite particularly, in the social sciences field.

7 work stages have been carried out since 2015:

1. In September 2015, the nomination, within the Institute’s Bureau, of a vice-president in charge of these questions, Prof. Jean-Michel Chaumont, replaced in May 2018 by Prof. Thierry Eggerickx;

2. the organization of regular meetings, within the IACCHOS Institute, on the challenges and issues encountered by researchers regarding the production, dissemination and valorization of their research;

3. the December 2016 finalization of a working paper on the international rankings of universities in the social sciences field. The result of a survey mission carried out under the auspices of the SSH (Human Sciences Sector) of UCLouvain, this paper sought to: obtain better familiarity with various general classifications of universities; identify and discuss the arguments and counter-arguments surrounding the use of these classifications; challenge UCLouvain on its policy in this area. It appears in appendix to this document;

4. a work seminar, organized on February 21st, 2017, brought together the directors/presidents of the IACCHOS Institute’s ten Research Centers and Alain Supiot, Professor at the Collège de France, author of La gouvernance par les nombres/Governance by numbers. The seminar intended to bring together perspectives on furnishing conditions for research that is more open to diversity in both its objects and evaluation methods;

5. an intersectorial meeting, held with the presidents of other sectors of UCLouvain (SSS and SST), organized on September 12th, 2017, aimed at public exchanges on the effects of international rankings in the production and valorization of university research, all sectors included;

6. presentation of the conclusions of these various works at the Board Meeting of Institute Presidents (COPI) of UCLouvain, on January 15th, 2019, through a series of powerpoints, also appended to this document;

7. finally, the presentation, by Prof. Pascale Vielle, at the IACCHOS CD? of June 26th, 2018, of the new challenges related to Open Science (Open Access, Open Source, Open Data). Peer Review, Open Educational Resources, etc.). Peer Review, Open Educational Resources, etc).

This presentation has allowed us to accentuate the difference between intellectual property and heritage property, and to underline the stakes involved today in scientific data’s accessibility to the greatest number

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1 In the text that follows, all terms are to be understood in their epicene sense
2 In 2012, the IACCHOS Institute devoted its first colloquium to the topic “Publishing in the social sciences”, which led to a book published under that title in 2013 by Academia-Bruylant. Practically all of the topics treated in this work were already dealt with at that time. Retrospectively, two major phases have marked the collective reflection: from 2012 to 2015, those questions were addressed in the form of transverse issues for the Institute, giving rise to regular colloquia; since 2015, more in-depth work has been undertaken within the Institute, with the various Centers composing it.
This is the context the writing of a consolidated proposal took place in. Initiated by the new vice-president of the Institute in charge of these questions, Prof Thierry Eggerickx, it at once intends to propose a common text and take the multiple interpretations accompanying it into account. A first draft was distributed to all the research Centers, which in turn made their views known. This new version of the document synthesizes those reactions, incorporating them into a long-term perspective.

PROBLEMATIZING SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE... AND ITS CRITIQUE

This working paper is the fruit of critical work undertaken by a scientific community of over 200 researchers, over several years. It in no way intends to propose a doctrine on a difficult subject. Nor is it moreover entirely consensual: its existence continues to raise reservations or criticisms, within the IACCHOS Institute as elsewhere, due to the presence of different “professional cultures” in all university milieux. Yet it intends to make known the malaise felt by a growing number of researchers as to how the knowledge they contribute to today is obtained, disseminated and developed. It also intends to open paths and show concrete ways allowing them to provide a better account of the diversity at work and how it ought to be valorized. In that sense, this working paper proposes guidelines for reflection and action. Standing back, one might say it is based on a double problematization:

- problematizing scientific excellence: over the course of debates, it has seemed counterproductive to question the very object of scientific research, namely the desire to contribute to very high-quality research, valid on the methodological and epistemological level. Even if it comes in various sorts, this object is constitutive of research activity, above all in university institutions which intend to contribute to the democratic debate through the dissemination of information aimed at the greatest number. A precondition all the more important as such a calling into question may broadly echo populist rhetorics regularly disparaging the bases of scientific objectivity, in the name of a reductionistic anti-rationalism. Nonetheless, it has become apparent that the ceaseless invocation of scientific excellence has been ambiguity laden, especially when the criteria founding such an aim were obscured. All too often, “excellence” has been confused with “performance”, privileging the volume of production over the internal quality of research, or the coherence of a singular work or the slow maturation long-term reflection requires. If the ambition to produce knowledge of very high-quality is constitutive of scientific research, the problematization of the modes of production and the valorization of knowledge appears more necessary than ever;

- problematizing the critique of scientific excellence: in counterpoint, many contemporary works underline the ways in which every domain of human activity is in acceleration today, with the risks resulting from it as regards the sustainability of ecosystems or forms of life. Logically, the will to control the rate of that evolution is making itself increasingly felt among populations attached to promoting an appropriate sustainability. “Slow food”, “slow fashion”, “slow life”... Scientific activity has not escaped such an evolution and for many actors in the university world, the “slow science” movement represents a source of inspiration likely to contribute to a scientific culture more attuned to the urgency of the transition. But such a “deceleration” is less simple to implement than it might at first appear: easily promoted by professors or researchers benefiting from a stable position, it is regarded with circumspection by a certain number of doctorands and post-doctorands, who see the intensification of their production as an “indispensable means” for entering the university; conceived as a general directive, it has run up against the fact that the funders in charge of evaluating research projects in turn claim to be acting in favour of quality in research; finally, the expression “slow science” might lead us to believe that the world of research is homogeneous and that one need only slow down what is supposed to be an identical rhythm. The reality is more complex. All of this varies depending on the discipline, the university institution, the mode of governance and their internal power struggles, etc. If, in a period of generalized acceleration, the risks of scientific knowledge functioning in isolation become more patent every day, it is just as essential to retain the clear headedness needed – lest the critique end up being limited to a simple posture. The expression “slow science” is a source of inspiration, not a directive, and still less a banner.
Problematizing scientific excellence… and its critique: this is in some sort the result of these long years of exchange and collective work. Perhaps the reader will be surprised that this work was not synthesized sooner. To which we might respond: involving a subject like this, it would have been at the very least contradictory to want to rush things! Far removed from the rhetoric of urgency, for us, a lengthy timeframe is not the enemy of public reason.

**NEW CHALLENGES, NEW INITIATIVES: OPEN SCIENCE AND THE SAN FRANCISCO DECLARATION**

A growth in awareness of the changes which have affected the field of university research for several years is added to these concerns: Open Science opens promising paths but raises new questions. Studying the economic model for the distribution and valorization of research - in particular the role exercised by the major publishers -, in the long-term it will be bound to have structural effects on the entire production line of university research, without yet being able to clearly identify the impacts. In parallel, important initiatives have been undertaken in the last few years, aimed at anticipating the possible impacts of Open Science, as well as alerting us to the risks of research confusing (short term) performance and excellence (in the long run).

Concerning Open Access practices, we will point out:

- **2003: The Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities.** 300 signatories.
  In Belgium, it was signed by 14 rectors, presidents of federations of Dutch-speaking technical universities and the (Francophone and Dutch-speaking) ministers in charge of scientific policy at the time;

- **October 22nd, 2012: The Brussels Declaration on Open Access,** initiated by Ministers Magnette, Lieten and Nollet. This declaration occasioned the constitution of 2 working groups (respectively on Open Data and Open Access). More information on: [https://openaccess.be/open-access-in-belgium](https://openaccess.be/open-access-in-belgium)

Concerning the appeal for new evaluation practices, we will insist on the existence of the Declaration On Research Assessment (DORA) - also called The San Francisco Declaration - initiated in 2012 by the American Society for Cell Biology. The declaration’s preamble is as follows:

> “The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) recognizes the need to improve the ways in which the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated. The declaration was developed in 2012 during the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Cell Biology in San Francisco. It is a worldwide initiative, covering all scholarly disciplines and all key stakeholders including funders, publishers, professional societies, institutions, and researchers. We encourage all individuals and organizations who are interested in developing and promoting best practice in the assessment of scholarly research to sign DORA”.

Among passages from the declaration, we note in particular:

> “The outputs from scientific research are many and varied, including: research articles reporting new knowledge, data, reagents, and software; intellectual property; and highly trained young scientists. […] It is thus imperative that scientific output is measured accurately and evaluated wisely”.
The heart of this declaration is based on the will to support still more quality in research, but also - and for this very reason - on the need to separate the evaluation of reviews from the evaluation of persons and projects, as the following passage specifies:

“A number of themes run through these recommendations:

- the need to eliminate the use of journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, in funding, appointment, and promotion considerations;
- the need to assess research on its own merits rather than on the basis of the journal in which the research is published; and
- the need to capitalize on the opportunities provided by online publication (such as relaxing unnecessary limits on the number of words, figures, and references in articles, and exploring new indicators of significance and impact).

We recognize that many funding agencies, institutions, publishers, and researchers are already encouraging improved practices in research assessment. Such steps are beginning to increase the momentum toward more sophisticated and meaningful approaches to research evaluation that can now be built upon and adopted by all of the key constituencies involved”.

The full declaration is consultable on [https://sfdora.org/read](https://sfdora.org/read)

The remarks that follow are akin to the spirit of this declaration. They indicate a determination on several levels: to clarify the context and effects of the current method of functioning by proposing a diagnosis coming from within the university community; to show the ways in which these questions concern persons as readily as organizations; to propose concrete courses of action. Within the context of a university having at heart fulfilling its missions of service to the society, this working paper places the accent on the concrete issues of research quality, the well-being of personnel and governance. At the end of the document, two synthesis diagrams summarize the whole.

**A GUIDING PRINCIPLE: PLURALISM AND GLOBAL APPROACH**

Before reaching that point, let us provide a rough sketch of the results of our collective reflection. A consensus was reached on two elements:

1. **Pluralism.** If there is a dimension that characterizes research in the social sciences, it is first the extraordinary diversity of its objects of study, themselves approached in regions, historical periods and distinct cultures. To this may be added a plurality of methods, approaches or even, in certain cases, epistemologies. From the census of populations to the ethnography of religious practices, from the anthropology of forms of life to the sociology of institutions, from the sociology of education to the didactics of sciences, from neopositivism to post-structuralism or post-colonialism, - at least in the social sciences, - scientific activity relies on a range of operational modes which go to make up its wealth and originality.
However that dimension is only lightly taken into account in current research evaluation methods. They remain dominated by a general reference, often implicit, sometimes explicit: the idea that, to hold attention, research must fit into a positivist or neo-positivist epistemology, and then be published in the English language in a review employing “high impact factor”, which generally imposes a standardized structuring. This perspective should not be rejected as such: it constitutes one mode of valorization among others. For that matter, not every quantitative study published in English necessarily fits into a positivist or neo-positivist epistemology. The problem is above all linked to the existence of a dominant frame of reference which, by aggregating these three criteria, leaves little room for a plurality of epistemologies on the one hand, and/or a plurality of languages and/or publishing media on the other.

Concerning plurality among epistemologies, a useful reference is one provided by Habermas\(^3\), who distinguishes control sciences (aimed at improving the functioning of an organization or a society), sciences of mutual understanding (allowing us to discover the meaning of human activities, whatever they are) and critical sciences (oriented towards individual or collective emancipation, within more democratic societies). What counts is that the contribution of sciences to society be measured in terms of their contribution in these three senses - and not just one of them.

For its part, the plurality of languages and/or of supports needs further specifying. Book chapters, monographs, popularizing articles, texts with a pedagogical or transformative aim, as well as publications in languages other than English: such supports are often considered as secondary whereas, in their very diversity, they reveal an incomparable creativity and collective intelligence. Moreover, there exist types of scientific production which can never be reduced to the standard evoked for the moment: ethnographic investigations or historical monographs are good examples, but not the only ones.

Finally, let us underline one of research’s nevralgic aspects: the relationship between knowledge and society is, at best, seen as a background question or, at worst, removed from scientific production as such. The ways in which scientific information is removed from the social tissue make - or do not - make sense for the actors concerned, are liable to modify a social group’s rules … These are all concerns allowing a community to think itself on its own and develop capacities for action, but which are generally relegated to the sidelines of scientific activity. Proof of this is the status publications called “popularizations” occupy in the hierarchy of texts recognized as having scientific validity. The concept of “popularization” should moreover be reviewed, for at least two reasons:

- it provides too weak an account of the ways in which the “ordinary” knowledge of social actors and the knowledge “systematized” by social sciences are interdependent - “recursive” as Giddens\(^4\) would say;

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it conveys a very pejorative vision of the relationship between scientific activity and social actors. Constructing and disseminating research results activities in the social sciences is not just “popularizing them” – making them known to the greatest number -, but also participating in the construction of the society and, thereby, improving its ability to reflect on itself and act upon itself.

Such a perspective by no means means that the research should place the researchers in situations of intellectual or financial dependence vis-à-vis certain sponsors, particularly businesses. But it does imply giving ways of disseminating knowledge in society their rightful place, which is the very sense of sciences whose object deals with societal changes. However current scientific policy does not take these issues into account and does not have the means at its disposal to allow it to concretely translate them into a more open evaluation policy.

For us, plurality is at once a practice and a requirement. It presupposes prolonging the plurality of the objects through an authentic plurality in the modes dissemination and valorization of research.

2. A global approach. The fact remains that one of the principal results of these years of exchange is linked to observing that critical reflection cannot limit itself to the field of results of the research, including when it is a question of improving the quality or of broadening the evaluation methods. In parallel, what has emerged forcefully has less to do with research than with the researchers, less to do with the objects than with the subjects of scientific activity. To be clear, many of the difficulties brought up by researchers refer to how a scientific community functions, as a collective entity in charge of managing persons, often impassioned by their profession, and the resources —structurally limited— of public or semi-public institutions.

Working conditions and employment statuses come up repeatedly as constant concerns, in a recurring worry about “well-being” at work. To which we may add other concerns: gender relationships which remain unequal, insufficiently fluid circuits of information, transversal services which must continue to professionalize, etc. Further still, it is the ensemble of work relationships underlying scientific activity which continues to be the object of criticisms, suggestions and interpellations: thesis direction, integrating young researchers, evaluation practices and intra-university promotion, etc. If well-being at work appears to be a key dimension of social sciences research, it is in the - rather broad - sense of a relationship between the quality of the results of scientific activity and the quality of the conditions that activity is carried out in.

5 This is the perspective that governed the creation of the thematic review of the IACCHOS Institute, Sociétés en changement. Cf https://uclouvain.be/fr/instituts_recherche/iachos/societes-en-changement-notes.html
This demand is not restricted to the university world but in our view takes on a particular importance: in a social universe where “passion for research” constitutes one of the fundamental motivations for engagement in work, this will to connect the objects and subjects of research conditions the future of our community. It renders reflection on evaluation indissociable from a reflection on the organization; hence the importance of a mode of governance based on confidence.

For us, the quality of scientific research would not be able to be attained against the community producing it. The two are indissociably bound together, whether that involve improvement in well-being at work for the entire personnel or, more specifically, involve improvements to be brought about in social relations, the organization of work or the managing of research entities.

CONCRETE ISSUES: THE QUALITY OF LONG-TERM RESEARCH, THE WELL-BEING OF ALL PERSONNEL AND WORK ORGANIZATION

Deepening the diagnosis within the scientific community

Yet these elements require our further elaborating the diagnosis, as much from the context research in the social sciences goes on in today as from the effects felt by those experiencing it daily. In fact, our scientific environment is more and more marked by competition between universities and researchers to obtain research funds, as well as promotions and employment - at undetermined or determined duration. This same competition is made even keener by a triple crisis of financing: the definancing of Belgian universities, especially francophone, in roughly the past fifteen years; the structural under-financing of research in late capitalist societies; finally – and what is no less important – the multiplication of short-term financings, generally non-renewable.

As a whole, without underestimating its complexity, such a situation generates a productivist and standardized vision of research which does not (or only slightly) corresponds to that of the various research centers of an institute like IACCHOS. That vision is opposed to quality, longer-term research work, to the freedom and creativity of researchers. It may also jeopardize the other two important missions of the University: teaching and service to the society.

But such a diagnosis is quite often merely the underside of what remains at the heart of the professional engagement of actors: a profound and long-term involvement, a passion for scientific work and the idea that this work is essential to what our democratic societies become. But this is also what deserves to be underlined: the contrast between the horizon of a scientificity in service to all and current methods of exercising the profession is making itself increasingly felt each day. If the difficulties inherent in this profession were for a long time counterbalanced by a feeling of stability, making it possible to do long-term work, that is no longer the case. The world of university
research is challenged today in its global functioning as well as in the objectives it sets for itself… or no longer sets for itself. Nothing is irreversible: as we will see below, paths exist allowing us to meet these challenges. Yet a better understanding of what we are collectively confronted with is essential.

On the level of effects, there is thus an ensemble of risks or difficulties which have been mentioned. Among them, we can cite:

- **Concerning the researchers**
  - an increase in research work done in rapid response conditions - and in a context of permanent solicitation -, whereas the temporality of research should rather alternate moments of acceleration and latency;
  - a risk of an over-specialization of researchers becoming an obstacle to understanding major tendencies traversing our societies, which suppose stepping back for perspective and thinking in a wider context. This risk goes hand in hand with an orientation of research towards “carrier” themes or topics, notably as regards sources and methods of financing;
  - the rarity of exchanges with other disciplines (disciplinary isolation) and of knowledge transfer towards the society (the researcher’s lack of contact with the outside world);
  - the abusive use of the results of doctoral theses by promoters and/or difficult relations between thesis directors and doctorands concerning ways of valorizing results produced in the doctoral phase;
  - tension between, on the one hand, a process of differentiation of careers (valorized according to the weight placed on research/teaching/service to society) and, on the other, a tendency towards a uniformization of profiles and life courses.

- **Concerning the research entities**
  - a lack or absence of involvement of researchers in the organization and operation of research entities. The missions of service to the institution or society, sometimes burdensome, are often lived as simple constraints;
  - competition on several levels: between researchers within a research entity, notably for obtaining financing or the valorization of work, which may negatively impact group cohesion; between research entities, for analogous reasons, which can harm the construction of interdisciplinary projects or the construction of guidelines common to a profession;
  - such situations impact all of the research entities’ personnel – and particularly administrative staff who, in a context wherein means stagnate or decrease, experience an unceasingly increasing pressure.

- **Concerning research dissemination channels**
preference for “high impact factor” reviews. This impedes the development of innovative or less “renowned” reviews, as well as Open Access, the latter often facilitating the development of research outside the university system;

- preference for anglophone reviews to the detriment of reviews published in the same language the research was produced in, as well as bilingual reviews, which more readily allow disseminating research results to a non-university public;

- risk of limiting the channels of dissemination: most often privileging reviews with reading committees to the detriment of the book, the book chapter, or a monograph’s research report. For these same reasons, the relationship to writing is at stake: work on language seems to have been sidelined behind a strictly analytical presentation of research, developing the results obtained more than the reflection involved in the research itself;

- devalorization of the writings of scientific popularization intended for societal actors, apt to include various formats, particularly audio-visual production;

- finally, many underline the link between such an evolution and the risks of fraudulent practices: results necessarily confirming initial hypotheses, factitious co-signatures or the absence of legitimate co-signatures, various plagiarisms, publication biased towards sensational results, manipulation of quotations, the exploitation of “small” reviews, and misappropriations. Even if those risks have a good chance of being detected by reviewers, we cannot exclude a link between an ever more intense demand for scientific production and circumventing the deontological rules of the profession.\(^6\)

At the risk of belabouring the point, it seems to us fundamental to recall that these elements in no way means settling for research of poor quality. It is exactly the opposite: at stake is making the quest for ever increasing quality a collective demand and a horizon of development.

**Combining development priorities**

- Aiming at long-term quality

Very often, the present situation only lets us see a limited part of the wealth and potentialities of scientific research. Its contribution to the life of the University is important, but takes more the form of publication of results than of an interdisciplinary co-construction or public debate, in particular with actors directly concerned with the creating knowledge. Its contribution to the life of the City is generally limited to imparting “expert points of view”.

In the long run, the quality of scientific research cannot be satisfied with such a situation, particularly in the social sciences field: we measure the quality of a scientific production not only by its ability to describe phenomena, but also to modify how a research field understands problems and contributes to reformulating the questions

and, finally, redefining itself. In this sense, the quality of research can never be limited to a univocal approach to learning: acting on several fronts (various research protocols, various types of publication, and various relationships between researchers and society, etc), it draws its force from its capacity to make this plurality a genuine lever for science and society. A vast gulf remains today between the horizon taking shape if these tendencies are accentuated and the forms of recognition coming from front line international research partners who recognize and encourage a “multi-faceted” mode of functioning, valorizing the quality of relations, the depth of the research questions addressed, and the worth of engagement.

☐ Fostering the well-being of all personnel

One of the principal results of our investigation is that well-being concerns not only researchers, but the whole chain of professions and persons who contribute to the production of knowledge. Such a perspective supposes not opposing the well-being of some to the well-being of others and, above all, thinking this question on the scale of a scientific community as a whole. Even if the question of means cannot be avoided (cf. infra), such a concern presupposes working on several levels simultaneously:

- improving the work environment (buildings, computer resources, support for the empirical research operations: programme usage, data bases, etc);
- stabilization of research teams, or - if possible – the recruitment of highly specialized personnel (post-doctorands, research logisticians);
- development of relations between the “professions”: the research professions themselves, administrative professions (CAI, CLC), support professions (logisticians, coordinators or research managers);
- researchers sharing information and experiments: it is vital to foster knowledge sharing and enhanced mutual learning (exchanges of methodologies or project engineering, lessons to be drawn from funded and unfunded projects, etc).

In this context, the quality of working relationships has a double dimension: it is a condition of well-being; in universes where the creation of value is essentially immaterial, it is a source of collective competence.

Let us add a last point. How is one to resist forms of acceleration of work cadences that are opposed to scientific production and a quest for excellence in the long-term? Maturation takes time; that’s commonly acknowledged. It is often composed of failures, probing, partial successes. Moreover, the gender dimension is still largely underestimated given research valorization methods today: although women may be much more present in academic and scientific activities than in the past, “gender inequalities” continue to favour recruitment and/or promotion methods, notably based on the dominant vision of an investment in work without personal limits7. Yet outside time for

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research, teaching and service to the society, recreating oneself physically and intellectually is vital, as is leading a family life, a social life and a serene citizen’s too. While this issue concerns men as much as women, the latter are not yet in a situation of equality as regards these shared

- Towards improving governance and/or the organization of work

The topic of governance remains in the background in many of the reflections or proposals formulated here. Over the course of this work, three issues have emerged:

- The first is to consider research teams to be front line actors in scientific production concerning, notably, the definition of needs and orientations required for very high-quality research, in the particular fields they specialize in;

- The second is to prevent the organization of work which has been defined to support research from being transformed into a control administration. If the rules for providing funding or management of people must be scrupulously respected, it is important that the organisational engineering favour innovative dynamics: that supposes privileging forms of regulation a posteriori over forms of regulation a priori and promoting management based on confidence;

- The third is that the practices governing research should in the long run try to build scientific communities which are project communities. One of the major challenges for researchers is managing to go beyond their individual field of expertise to integrate themselves into collective dynamics which alone can, over time, constitute veritable “ecosystems of knowledge”. The existence of such ecosystems is a condition for knowledge being criticized, improved and transmitted, but also in ways that persons belong to a project which will, in turn, nourish their quest for excellence.

Proposing concrete actions

- Means

This type of reflection cannot avoid the question of the means placed at the disposal of researchers and research entities. But, in public or semi-public universities, we must recognize that there are structural limits to such an approach. In addition, many independent funders (public and private, on international, European and national scales) offer invaluable, and sometimes vital, funding sources. The limits of that model of research financing are nevertheless known: the intense competition for financing, employment and logistical means create orphan objects or disciplines - even, more widely, recurring deficits in certain key domains. It cannot serve research development as a unique referent. New paths have to be explored engaging the responsibility of all the institutional actors. Among them, we will mention in particular:

- the development of support professions, financed by various channels (logisticians,
managers and research coordinators);

- a reflection to be carried out on the paths of entry into research, seen as too narrow today: envisaging the opening of first assistant posts for assistants having finished their thesis, but who remain eager to undertake postdoctoral research work in continuing their teaching tasks; support for the hiring of postdoctoral researchers in the framework of scientific projects (ARC, PDR, ERC, etc.); open the possibilities of post-docs for women and men for whom mobility is not possible;

- besides geographical mobility, support for intellectual mobility through the possibility of placing in knowledge and skills into circulation and of valorizing what are truly interdisciplinary experiments le développement des métiers-support, financés par différents canaux (logisticiens, gestionnaires ou coordinateurs de recherche) ; for example, in laboratories geographically located at the same place but in markedly different disciplines: a sociologist in an agronomy laboratory, etc

- the creation or development of various arrangements for setting up projects: support funds for writing projects, lessons to be drawn from failures, interactions with various support-professions, etc;

- better work on the margins of current financements: the possibility of “bridge contracts” between two financings, grants for the completion of a thesis or its publication, etc;

- finally, and here again, in various forms, supporting the construction of career projects outside the university

- Organization and well-being

As regards organization and well-being at work, it would vain to imagine that progress will result from a list of short-term measures. Here again, the effects of choices made will be known in the long run. It is nevertheless important to take this question very seriously and, in parallel to assembling projects, reflect on the human dynamics underlying the production of knowledge. In this respect, we notably insist on:

- the need to recognize - in variable forms - the often invisible tasks accomplished by administrative personnel, as well as circumscribing hierarchical relationships, often much more present than might be thought in a scientific community, with various guidelines. That is particularly true of thesis directing, directing research projects, etc;

- move away from a dualism opposing contracted researchers and research personnel, in seeking to integrate the former into research teams offering them the stablest working and employment conditions possible;

- provide researchers exercising management functions all the tools and competencies needed in envisaging the supports adapted as regards training, competency development and career management;

- reflect on an equilibrium between teaching and research on a multiannual basis, favouring alternation between periods of teaching and periods of research.

- Evaluation practices


Finally, there remains the eminently difficult, but also eminently strategic question of scientific research evaluation methods. To put it in a word, the issue is to leave behind the article in English in a “high impact factor” review, as a reference metric, in favouring a plurality of criteria and distribution channels: of course scientific reviews - among which those presenting a “high impact factor”, - but also chapters from works, monographs, popularizing articles, texts with a pedagogical or transformative aim, without forgetting publications in other languages than English.

In the social sciences, we must insist on the importance inherent in publishing in the same language the research was produced in. It is not only the degree of correspondence between the process and the research results which is involved; it is also the function of language in the analysis of human phenomena which is at stake. Publishing in the language of one’s “research terrain”, is first of all to consider that the ways in which the actors - or the files – have verbalized a question forms part of the question itself. It is also to consider that the scientific community is not a community hermetically sealed off from the society it belongs to. Here again, this in no way involves refusing to publish in English, but of making multilingualism a source of valorization of research works. These orientations thus open the way, not to one, but to several metrics. We might add other proposals here, for example:

- Generally speaking, privileging the quality of research work produced over its quantity. In that connection, one might restrict the number of publications that can be mentioned in FNRS/NFSR? candidacies, insisting on a thorough reading of the principal texts proposed by the candidates, as well as supporting evaluation procedures based on listening to the researchers, their projects, etc;
- taking into account the researcher’s civic activities, as well as popularizing publications and talks given outside the scientific sphere. Such a recognition should not be confused with “impact analysis” alone or the question of “social impact” in its own right, which obliges researchers’ having to justify the added value of their research for society, yet without valorizing the ensemble of interactions between researchers and society over the course of that scientific activity. It is more important to provide candidates the possibility of valorizing what, perceived from their specific research field, seems to be an essential dimension of the production of knowledge “in context”, able to establish a link with decision-making cultural change, and power relations, etc. More broadly, this involves supporting diversity in research paths, both inside and outside of academic circles;
- valorizing the work provided by the assistants, who are still too often seen as “second-class researchers”, and whose work in managing and teaching cannot be ignored.

Two other, more general orientations may be added to these considerations, but which contribute to facilitating reflection on research evaluation:

- being able to valorize the processes as much as the results. Generally speaking, research can never separate the results from how they were obtained. However the work of constructing the object of research, the data gathering and coordinating aspects of the same project, is often underestimated – in accentuating end results alone;
agreeing on what cannot be evaluated. Similarly, every research procedure relies on principles or values which are essential to scientific research itself: academic freedom, the researchers’ autonomy, a research ethics, to mention just a few. Not only can these principles not be measured; they should not be the subject of an evaluation as such… They rather reveal a form of categorical imperative, whose - fragile - existence is not given in advance. In scientific communities subjected to multiple pressures, it is up to the actors’ and institutions’ engagement to promote them.

**CONCLUSION - UNIVERSITY RESEARCH AT A MOMENT OF TRANSITION: GUIDELINES FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION**

It would be vain to seek to conclude this reflection on an overly simple formula. Negatively, one might say that the present reflection is driven by a rejection of “scientific productivism”. Positively, that it can play a pivotal role in societies in transition, on the condition of articulating results and processes, excellence and overture, a plurality of objects and a plurality of evaluation methods. Faced with the transition, one of the major stakes in scientific research is not only to produce more contents: it is also a question of “thinking oneself” in the transition, in constantly working on our ways of producing knowledge. It is, more broadly speaking, a question of “reflecting” the societies of yesterday and today, in a game of toing and froing which expresses observations on the existent and on what may happen. This is the sense of a plea for a plural research: to open paths within the scientific community to make our practices responsive to emergent changes. A modest but efficacious conception of university exemplarity.
Permettez-moi d’abord de vous féliciter (et tous les participants des groupes de travail) pour l’impressionnant travail collectif fait dans le cadre de IACCHOS sur les enjeux des transformations de l’activité scientifique et universitaire en sciences sociales et humaines aujourd’hui. J’ai hâte de pouvoir transférer (notamment à mes collègues québécois) lorsqu’il sera terminé le document de travail que vous avez envoyé. Il est stimulant, pose un diagnostic qui me semble complet et nuancé sur la situation actuelle.

Revenu cet été en Belgique, après mon périple canadien, je ne manquerai pas non plus de participer aux futures activités autour du colloque IACCHOS sur la « slow science »

J’aurai alors juste une suggestion (que vous avez peut-être abordé dans vos discussions) concernant la réflexion sur les pistes d’action. Par-delà la multiplication des « métriques » d’évaluation de la recherche, ne faut-il pas aussi réfléchir aux conditions et au mode de fonctionnement des comités et groupes (de pairs) qui évaluent et sélectionnent (les bourses, subventions, articles, candidats aux postes) dans les institutions du monde académique : j’ai l’impression qu’elles doivent traiter de plus en plus de dossiers, dans un temps très limité, avec pour corollaire l’usage justement de « métriques » diverses (ou mesures sur des critères divers), pour « réduire et traiter l’information » sur les candidatures et ensuite les classer. Mes expériences récentes au Canada en la matière me sensibilisent à une forme de réduction des classements à des « compilations de mesures », qui prennent le dessus faute de temps ou par peur de devoir affronter les dissensus socio-cognitifs entre pairs, dans des comités interdisciplinaires. Le « jugement » proprement qualitatif, discursivement argumenté, tend à dès lors s’estomper à la marge des métriques et calculs de rang des candidatures.

Bref, par-delà les métriques à « pluraliser », ne faut-il pas veiller à garantir l’exercice de « jugements » (qualitatifs) dans le fonctionnement de ces comités, leur donner le temps de fonctionner sereinement (« alléger l’urgence ») et valoriser davantage les collègues qui y consacrent du temps.

Au plaisir de vous recroiser à LLN. Bien amicalement,

Christian Maroy. Professeur ordinaire UCLouvain & Université de Montréal
Objet : Re: [COM. IACS] N’oubliez pas ! Plaidoyer pour une recherche plurielle - ANNEXES

Je vois vos efforts pour le plaidoyer : un débat semblable avait déjà eu lieu il y a dix ou quinze ans... apparemment sans trop de résultats... bien que des choses avancent. Il me semble que la notion de « sciences humaines » est trop générique. Toutes les sciences humaines ne sont pas sur le même registre. Une partie de l’économie ou de la psychologie cognitive se retrouvent assez dans la logique des sciences dites « dures ». Le droit, l'histoire et l’anthropologie sont à part. Il me semble que certaines disciplines sont plus confrontées à la question, notamment la sociologie. Sans spécifier les enjeux spécifiques on tient des discours génériques. Et il me semble que, mises à part les revendications concernant les critères (et les lamentations), le défi, entre autre pour la sociologie – qui me semble terriblement en crise –, est de s’interroger sur elle-même, sur sa capacité de production et sur ses produits.

Mais voilà, ceci entre nous.

Felice Dassetto – Professeur ordinaire de l’UCLouvain, membre de l’Académie

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De : Michèle Garant <michele.garant@uclouvain.be>
Envoyé : jeudi 7 novembre 2019 15:58
À : Matthieu de Nanteuil <matthieu.denanteuil@uclouvain.be>
Objet : Re: [COM. IACS] Plaidoyer pour une recherche plurielle - Trois annexes

Suite à notre rencontre d’hier lors de la célébration des nouveaux émerites en PSP, je tiens à vous redire combien je considère les documents reçus cet été (Plaidoyer pour une recherche plurielle, avec ses annexes sur la propriété intellectuelle et l’Open access, sur les rankings, sur les valeurs et axes stratégiques d’une recherche dans notre secteur) comme forts et nécessaires.

Je n’ai pas réagi sur ces « balises sur la réflexion et l’action », fruit d’un travail de longue haleine prenant en compte toute la complexité de la thématique, car j’estimais ne pas pouvoir enrichir la réflexion. J’émets le vœu ardent que cette réflexion épistémologique et sociale puisse se diffuser au maximum auprès de tous les collègues concernés.

Je retiens quelques points auxquels mon parcours m’a rendue particulièrement sensible :

- Le mode de gouvernance accompagnant la production de recherche. Sans avoir réalisé d’étude systématique, mais pour avoir été en posture… anthropologiquement participante dans diverses facultés, il me semble que l’acceptation d’une pluralité de formes de recherche et le développement d’une posture transversale est loin d’être acquise partout, la culture de chaque champ disciplinaire et de chaque école méconnaissant parfois d’autres chemins de production de connaissance que le leur.
- La formation des responsables à la gestion d’équipe, qui n’est pas une compétence innée loin de là. De grandes capacités intellectuelles et des productions scientifiques de haut niveau ne sont pas automatiquement corrélées à l’intelligence sociale et relationnelle nécessaires pour donner confiance, encourager l’explicitation, ouvrir le champ des analyses, maintenir un travail rigoureux sans décourager ni faire perdre la face, et enfin, dans une gestion dynamique des carrières, encourager l’un à produire davantage de travaux de recherche, l’autre à s’engager davantage dans le service à l’équipe et (re)contractualiser régulièrement ces perspectives.
L’attention au transfert de connaissances et à la valorisation du travail de recherche vers la société. Seuls des chercheurs sénior ou inconscients se risquent à ce travail citoyen, les jeunes chercheurs devant avant tout produire, et nombre d’académiques le considérant comme du temps perdu, sans y voir ni sens ni intérêt.

Deux anecdotes enfin :

- Hier, une chercheuse en neurosciences (champ valorisé, évaluable selon les critères d’excellence d’aujourd’hui) me disait combien avoir travaillé avec Philippe Lekeuche (psychologie clinique, hors du champ des radars des valorisations contemporaines me semble-t-il) avait été pour elle un apport des plus précieux pour ce qui concerne le rapport à la construction du sens et à la critique épistémologique dans la formulation de ses questionnements.

- Je me souviens avoir fait appel autrfois à l’apport de jeunes chercheuses (dans le champ de la motivation), afin qu’elles présentent leurs apports à des collègues d’autres facultés. Ce qu’elles avaient fait avec brio. Néanmoins, lors d’un échange en fin de séance, lorsque la question leur était posée de connaître leur position ou leur avis face à une question concrète (elles pouvaient de pas savoir y répondre, mais la question n’était en rien indécente), je les voyais se draper dans leur dignité de chercheuse de fond, pour lesquelles une telle question relevait de la trivialité.

Allez, bonne poursuite de vos magnifiques travaux, et merci de m’avoir donné le plaisir d’y réagir. Avec mon cordial salut Michèle Garant
Professeure ordinaire émérite
UCLouvain Présidente de l’Académie luxembourgeoise

DE LA PLURALITÉ DES OBJETS A LA PLURALITÉ DES MODÈLES D’ÉVALUATION

FROM « SLOW SCIENCE » TO « PLURAL SCIENCE »

- Qualité à long-terme
- Gouvernance fondée sur la confiance
- Bien-être de tous les personnels
- PAT/PST/PAC (relations de travail, conditions d’emploi)
- Indicateurs (non-économiques) d’aide à la décision
- Evaluation par les pairs, rétisation auprès des acteurs
- Court/moyen/long-terme
- Décentralisée/centralisée
- Régulation a priori/régulation a posteriori
- De la pluralité des objets/méthodes/épistémologies...
QUELQUES PROPOSITIONS INDICATIVES

- FROM « SLOW SCIENCE » TO « PLURAL SCIENCE »
  - Sortir de l'article de revue en anglais dans un journal Impact Factor comme critère exclusif / prioritaire de l'évaluation des projets et des personnes (Déclaration de San Francisco)
  - À la pluralité des modes d'évaluation

Promouvoir DES METRIQUES
  - Interdisciplinarité (FNRS)
  - Livres/chap. d'ouvrages
  - Art. de vulgarisation
  - Diversité des langues de publication
  - Ratio financements/publications
  - Journal Impact Factor

EVALUER LES PROCESS, autant que les RÉSULTATS
  - Définition cumulative des productions à la cumulativité des débats
  - Risques d'explosion (« burn-out ») des personnels
  - Interactions avec la société

Se mettre d'accord sur L'INEVALUABLE
  - Liberté académique et éthique de la recherche