

## Politics and knowledge. Beyond the university reforms

Federica Giardini, University "Roma Tre", Italy

### 1. University and Globalisation. Some reflections in political theory

As many aspects of our lives, also the institutional ones are deeply involved in the processes gathered under the general concept of globalisation. Looking at the changes in University requires then to start the analysis on the largest scale.

Globalisation entails an abrupt transformation of "sovereignty", the foundational and final form of our political systems. Globalisation, as the process of progressive interdependence, if not integration, of the different economies of the world, entails the very fundamental elements of our citizenship, especially the role played by the States on a bordered space, the Nation<sup>1</sup>. The end of both the Modern couples State-nation and State-society affects the realm of citizenship, especially the legitimating contract establishing the circuit obligations-rights. Among these we find the progressive social right to education, but also the specific relationship that, since the Nineteenth century, has been connecting State and University<sup>2</sup>.

Today Europe has to be considered a region of the globalized world, that is to say a space looking for an inner "harmonisation" within a larger framework of transformations. This is the point of the conceptual map where we can find the new and peculiar European institutions – no more national and statual ones – such as the European Higher Education Area.

In 1999 the so called "Bologna process"<sup>3</sup> initiated a large reform of the European Universities. On the inner side, the purpose of the Bologna Process was the creation of a European Higher Education Area by making *standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe*. On the outer side, the Bologna Process was meant to strengthen the *competitiveness and attractiveness* of the European higher education and to foster student mobility and employability through the introduction of a homogenous system based on undergraduate and postgraduate studies with easily readable programmes and degrees. The undergraduate/postgraduate degree structure was modified into a three-cycle system, which now includes the concept of qualifications frameworks, with an emphasis on learning

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<sup>1</sup> S. Sassen, *Losing control? Sovereignty in an age of globalization*, Columbia UP 1996; Ead., *Territory, authority, rights. From Medieval to Global assemblages*, Princeton UP 2006. See also the dialogue Butler-Spivak, *Who sings the nation state?* Seagull 2007.

<sup>2</sup> J. Derrida, *L'université sans condition*, Galilée, Paris 2001.

<sup>3</sup> It was named after the place it was proposed, the University of Bologna, with the signing in 1999 of the Bologna declaration by Education Ministers from 29 European countries. European cooperation in higher education started essentially through three treaties: the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities (Paris, 11 December 1953), the European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study (Paris, 15 December 1956) and the European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications (Paris, 14 December 1959). It was opened up to other countries signatory to the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe; further governmental meetings have been held in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen Norway (2005), London (2007), and Leuven (2009). With the London Communiqué, of 2007, the number of participating countries was enlarged to 46. (from the official Bologna Process website).

outcomes. Also, it was meant to ensure the promotion of qualifications, with regard to the job market.

The rationale for the Bologna Framework was to provide a mechanism to relate national frameworks to each other, that is:

International recognition of qualifications – this will be assisted through a framework which provides a common understanding of the outcomes represented by qualifications for the purposes of employment and access to continuing education<sup>4</sup>.

The key elements of this overarching framework can be best understood by reference to internationally acceptable descriptors, the so-called “Dublin descriptors” (see paragraph 1.1.2).

### **1.1 The crisis, a crisis of measure**

It is easy to see that the key used to achieve the “harmonisation” between different educational cultures and histories has been “standardization”, a quantitative criterion.

This is a specific case of the more general crisis of sovereignty and the related conceptions of citizenship. We are all aware, in this very recent period, that political Europe is lacking – we do not have a new institutional form for Europe, substituting the state’s sovereignty – and that, instead, economical institutions are providing for decisions. This is true for Europe – it is the ECB (European Central Bank) deciding about the relationships among the European partners and about the domestic policies, as for the dramatic case of Greece –, but it is also true worldwide: financial institutions as Moody’s or transnational yet financial institutions as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) are the effective agents of general and specific policies.

#### **1.1.1. The OECD standards**

Let’s come to the specific area of education. The European institution giving the “glances” on education in each partner country is the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). The name of this European institution – the council of OECD, vesting the decision-making power, is made up of one representative per member country – is signifying itself, as it points out that cooperation is conceived on an economical ground. Its history is even more clarifying: its roots go back to Europe after World War II, in 1947, when the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) was established *to run the US-financed Marshall Plan* for reconstruction, recognising the *interdependence of the economies* of the individual governments.

OECD is now 50 years old. Here is an excerpt from its self-presentation:

In today’s globalised, interdependent world, multilateral co-operation is more important than ever.  
(...) our mission is to promote policies that will improve *the economic* and social wellbeing of people around the world (...) we work with governments to examine what drives *economic*, social and environmental change. We produce high-quality internationally *comparable data and indicators and develop key statistics* used to understand the economy. We measure *productivity and global flows of*

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

*trade and investment. We analyse and compare data to predict future trends. We track dynamics of growth and development at the international scale, at countries' and at the regional level. We set international standards on all sorts of things, from the safety of chemicals and nuclear power plants to the quality of cucumbers. We compare how school systems are*<sup>5</sup>.

OECD experts vocation is thus to produce comparable data and indicators, to develop key statistics to understand the economy, measure productivity, and set standards on "all sorts of things" and, moreover, these are intended to establish effective processes for ensuring their implementation.

We could stop here. There is enough, and shortly expressed too, to understand the final philosophy by which the European university has been dealt with: according to standards that are fit to measure all sorts of things, from school to cucumbers.

Let's go closer. Which are these standards? The standards are formulated by the OECD itself, the authority expressing from year to year the "value" of each country educational system. In "Education at Glance 2011" OECD gives the state of each country according to the following indicators:

Indicator A4 - To which fields of education are students attracted?

Indicator A7 - How does educational attainment affect participation in the labour market? (an indicator on labour market outcomes of students from vocational and academic programmes).

Indicator A8 - What are the *earnings premiums* from education?

Indicator A9 - What are the *incentives to invest* in education?<sup>6</sup>

*The quantitative relation between input and output is thus fundamental.*

This concerns both students' academic experience and academia itself, as the public funding is distributed – since 2008 – according to the attained level in production (how many graduated students? How many products – articles as well as symposia?).

Public funding is thus going to decrease for the majority of public universities that will have to increase the students' fees. The economical weight insisting on families is corrected by the introduction of a "loan" that the student – once occupied in the labour market – will pay back to the State. Many Italian academics have underscored that the loan mechanism will have a backward effect on the attractiveness of the different fields of education: the student will choose the one giving the more opportunities to find a job and to pay back the loan<sup>7</sup>. Thus another main point is coming out: *studying has become a dependent variable of labour market.*

As I will examine in the next paragraphs, this dependency deeply affects not only the students' choice, but also the professors' conception of what they are teaching, especially in humanities.

### **1.1.2 The Dublin descriptors**

The Dublin descriptors were developed by a group of European higher education specialists, and cover all three cycles. Not only must they accommodate a wide range of disciplines and

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<sup>5</sup> *Better Policies for Better Lives, The OECD at 50 and beyond*, OECD 2011.

<sup>6</sup> OECD, *Education at Glance, 2011*. <http://www.oecd.org>.

<sup>7</sup> F. Sylos Labini, [www.ilfattoquotidiano.it](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it)

profiles but they must also accommodate, as far as possible, the national variations in how qualifications have been developed and specified. Qualification descriptors are usually designed to be read as general statements of the typical achievement of learners who have been awarded a qualification on successful completion of a cycle.

Qualifications that signify completion of the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study (...) such knowledge provides an underpinning for a *field of work* or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle;
  - can apply their knowledge and understanding in *occupational contexts*;
  - have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to *well-defined concrete and abstract problems*;
  - can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and *clients*;
- (...)

Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who:

- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include *reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues*;

Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who:

- can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and *professional contexts, technological, social or cultural*<sup>8</sup>.

The European Higher Education Area works for integration by the means of standardization and the creation of a general framework by which mobility can be achieved. *Mobility is one of the fundamental rights of citizenship*. But, because of the peculiar origins of the idea of Europe, citizen's mobility has been shaped according not to a political conception of it, but to an economical principle: *citizens can move as long as they circulate as goods do*. Moreover, as goods enter in the exchange system through a general equivalent – money – so citizens will enter in the exchange system by being standardized.

It appears quite clearly that *market is the model for European citizenship in education*.

## **2. Human sciences? Practical knowledge/professional skill versus embodied theory**

Knowledge is thus redefined in relation to the keyword "skill": its value is strictly depending on the *achievement of practical abilities* and these practical abilities are *tested according to the demands of the labour market*. Reading again these descriptors and indicators, and finding that they also stress the achievement of a more general education making students able to judge on social and ethical issues, I realized that – as it always happens with general norms – part of the responsibility on the style of the application of these criteria is due to the content of the norms themselves, but part of it is due to the interpretation<sup>9</sup> given by each State.

Going thus back to what has been said at the beginning of this paper, we can see that the *general criteria related to quantity and market*, privileged as the main mean to realize the

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<sup>8</sup> Appendix, *The Dublin descriptors*, in *Introducing the Bologna Qualifications Framework*, <http://www.nqai.ie/documents/bolognasummary.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> R. Cover, *Nomos and narrative*, in M. Minow (ed.) *Narrative, Violence and the Law. The essays of Robert Cover*, University of Michigan Press, 2010 (1993).

integration, are not a necessity, nor due to an objective cause, but are *the result of a political choice. On a large scale, measurement by standards is easier to grasp and to manage.*

The effects of this choice are under our eyes everyday. Politics in education is no more conceived as a political issue endowed to the State, but as a matter of multilevel governance, that is to say, a management issue, optimizing the questions at stake as they emerge from one time to another. As the contingency of contexts is quite disturbing, there has been an effort to foresee the behaviours of the agents, by the means of statistics. Thus a fair distribution of opportunities in education is fostered through standard procedures.

*Students' intelligence is not considered as a living process, but is measured as a quantity one can test in a due moment; time is reduced to the measurable time of production and its value is dependent on productivity; therefore humanities – I haven't stressed yet that the whole reform of the three cycles is conceived on the base of the hard sciences model – are less valuable disciplines as they are scarcely classifiable on the base of their production and outcomes relating to a specific professional profile; and, finally, each single university is valued and sustained on the only base of its capacity of "producing" graduates fit for the labour market.*

The very challenge is thus *another conception of measure* – as long as in a globalisation era the traditional ones, State, national culture, traditional ethics, rights, etc., do not fit anymore – *a new conception of the principles regulating the relationships and the exchanges: among different cultures, among different educational programs, among State and citizens, among the different realms of the living together, school, university, society, labour market, market itself. In these last decades we have been living under the mainstreaming ideology of neoliberal democracy: freedom and rights are realized in the exchanges conceived according to the market dynamics. In education this can be called "the pedagogy of the Capital"*<sup>10</sup>.

### **3. Women and Higher education**

Facing this European and worldwide process – that is, the direction or the political response given to a need for change – we have also to consider the historical period, within the women's social expansion, in which it is taking place.

The long ending of the modern conception of university and academic studies – university as the space where to reproduce the elites – was firstly initiated by the social and students' movements in the very late Sixties. Italian analysts see the result of these struggles in "democratization of university itself and of its functions" and, connected to this, the raise of a less triumphal "mass university"<sup>11</sup>. In those decades (1970-1990) we lived a double sided phenomenon: on the one hand, the "feminization of university" – that is, the massive entrance of women to the higher levels of education both as students and teachers – and on the other hand, the "feminist critique of the academia" – that is the impressive multidisciplinary

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<sup>10</sup> A. De Vita, *La creazione sociale*, Carocci, Roma 2009.

<sup>11</sup> A. Graziosi, *Università per tutti* (University for everybody), Il Mulino, Bologna 2010.

literature, claiming for and enacting an epistemological and institutional change of the contents and of the organization of the academic knowledge. The general principle of this claim was both to reveal the biases of the disciplines and to connect knowledge to the lives and experiences of the subjects involved in teaching, studying and researching processes<sup>12</sup>.

In Europe and in the Anglo-Saxon area the latter process led to the creation of women's/gender studies departments, in Italy things went in a quite different way.

### **3.1 The non-case of women's studies in Italy**

Imposed from the above, accepted quite passively by the academic establishment, welcomed with mixed feelings by the ones who were not persuaded by the idea of an institutionalisation of feminist politics and knowledge<sup>13</sup>, gender studies took a long time to enter in the universities and never saw an accomplished realization. The fact is that in Italy – like in France but for different reasons – there has been a strong attitude against “representative/institutional politics” for women<sup>14</sup>. The leading idea was that women do not have to be represented as such, as a social group or any equivalent, but that they are *the bearers of a “difference” affecting any level of knowledge and of social organization*. Therefore, women are due not to ask for a share in the existing academic order – such as Gender/Women's studies departments -, but rather they have to ask and foster a change at the very core of each academic discipline, method and situation.

The outstanding subject of this conception has been the philosophical community “Diotima” at the University of Verona, who started to revision topics and approaches.

Being a sexuate subject entails “another way of entering into relation with oneself, with the world, with the other(s)”<sup>15</sup>. In teaching, specifically, this has meant to me that sexual difference is an approach rather than a topic: *one does not teach sexual difference, she teaches starting from it and showing it*. This new position – that affects the very sense of the relation to oneself: who am I? I am the one represented? With which other words can I tell the story I am coming from? – affects the relation to others, to students. As it has been stressed, the peculiarity of Italian feminism resides in its dual nature, namely its mobile position between theory and practice, academic research and politics<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> See the foundational essay by J. Scott, *Gender: a useful category for historical analysis*, “American Historical Review”, 91, 5, 1986. The essay, concerned with feminist historiography, can be read as a more general epistemological statement about gender *in academia*.

<sup>13</sup> P. Di Cori, D. Barazzetti, *Gli studi delle donne in Italia* (Women's studies in Italy), Carocci, Roma 2001, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> L. Cigarini, *La politica del desiderio*, (Politics of desire) Pratiche, Parma 1995.

<sup>15</sup> L. Irigaray, *Keywritings*, Continuum, London 2004, p. XII.

<sup>16</sup> V. Pravadelli, *Women and Gender studies, Italian style*, “European Journal of Women's Studies”, 17, 1, 2010, p. 61.

#### 4. Gendered difference in a globalised education

Since their very beginning, Feminist, Women's and Gender studies have fostered a "situated knowledge"<sup>17</sup>. In Italy this was called "thinking experience"<sup>18</sup>. Can we welcome the reform as an answer to this inspiration<sup>19</sup>?

The contemporary situation in academia is double sided, at least.

a. The idea of a sexuate – that is both historical (gendered) and material(embodied)-knowledge has been largely accepted, but the implications of sexuation have been reduced to the practical and functional dimensions of knowledge.

b. The idea that university is no more a closed and elitist male citadel is definitely accepted, but opening to the changes in society addresses society as the equivalent of market ex/changes, according to the neoliberal conception of democracy and politics.

Thus the "pedagogy of the Capital" perverts an event many women welcomed as liberation and fairness: the opportunity of studies keeping together life and knowledge. *The fall of the walls of the Academic citadel hasn't meant an addition of life and citizenship, but an addition of market.*

At the same time we, in the Western countries, can see the radical change that has affected the social(and political) discourse on gender differences in respect of the original feminist inspiration. Italy is especially relevant in order to perceive the contradictory aspects of contemporary times, showing what Braidotti calls a "proliferating discourse on reified difference"<sup>20</sup>.

a) women are once again the topic of public interest and knowledge as far as they are victims. This can be a good thing for public opinion, but scarcely for the academic situation, unless one becomes the expert of the disgraceful situation of the others (see the rising of such a discipline as "victimology").

b) In a strange short circuit the Pope and the IMF are happy to recognize women's difference, but as the ones preserving the social order ("feminine genius" in family, love, care and relationships, women repairing the human mess after wars, women as peace builders).

c) In the specific horizon of the new model of market enterprise, Maurizio Ferrera, Italian professor in economics at the private university "Bocconi" in Milan, has written *Il fattore D*, (The W(women) factor)<sup>21</sup>: women are a resource for the economic – that in the views of the

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<sup>17</sup> See S. Harding, *Whose science? Whose knowledge?*, Cornell UP 1991; D. J. Haraway, *Situated knowledges*, in Ead., *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, Routledge, New York 1991.

<sup>18</sup> It is both the title of the XII IAPh (Internationale Assoziation der Philosophinnen) Symposium in Rome, 2006 and of the book of selected proceedings by A. Buttarelli, F. Giardini, (eds.), *Il pensiero dell'esperienza*, Baldini, Castoldi, Dalai, Milan 2008.

<sup>19</sup> See V. Despret, I. Stengers, *Les faiseuses d'histoire*, La Découverte, Paris 2011. See also Angeliki Alvanoudi, *Teaching Gender in a Neoliberal University*, in D. Gronold, B. Hipfl, L. L. Pedersen (eds.) *Teaching with the Third Wave*, Athena 2009, pp. 37-53. My view differs from Alvanoudi's stressing the power implied by the feminist performance in teaching. As I will propose, a new conception of the university and of academic knowledge has to be confronted with.

<sup>20</sup> R. Braidotti, *Prefazione alla nuova edizione*, in Ead., *Madri mostri e macchine*, new edition, manifestolibri, Roma 2005.

<sup>21</sup> M. Ferrera, *Il fattore D*, Mondadori, Milano 2008.

author is synonymous of social – development of a country. Women are welcome as the perfect subjects in the neoliberal order: more ambitious, less claiming and more enthusiastic, relationally skilled, flexible and multitasking<sup>22</sup>.

#### **4.1. Some options within this frame**

Going back to the worldwide changes in higher education with its relations to social changes, we thus come to some clearer options.

Sexuate subjects in academia can:

- defend the part they gained in the Seventies-Nineties decades. Nevertheless in a period of reified/functionalised difference, women's and gender studies are less attractive; students looking for critical knowledge turn towards the more innovative and promising "queer studies".
  - foster and accompany the "skill oriented knowledge", a betrayal, as we have seen, of the more general principle of a connection between knowledge and life, knowledge and citizenship. Moreover, this leads to the downgrading of "non useful knowledge", that is to say, non productive ones, in respect of the useful ones, the disciplines supporting management issues.
- Or - and this is the point for a new approach and struggle, in order to empower the original feminist inspiration - foster the connection between university and society by the idea that higher education is a democratic value and a principle directly relating not to labour market or market, but to citizenship.

What does this mean in practical terms?

#### **5. *La universidad fértil*, "institutions of the common" and politics of translation**

In order to develop an analysis, *a distinction has to be made between the practical and the generative dimension of knowledge*. If the one responds to the criterion of professionalization, the other responds to the criterion of citizenship. Knowledge is a matter of embodied intelligence, embodied in relations, it is a matter of biopolitics rather than a matter of becoming a citizen-worker, as the Twentieth century was conceiving it.

In other words, this statement can be transformed in some foundational questions: to whom are we teaching? In which order of discourse are we writing and making research? Is it for the labour market, or is it in the wider horizon of becoming citizens? Can the social actors be plainly identified with workers? How do we put in question the relation between knowledge and the social realm?

Italian Feminist Theory – all along with what has been recently defined "Italian Theory"<sup>23</sup> – offers some clues to reconsider the relations between knowledge and its agents, knowledge and participative politics, knowledge and its institutional forms.

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<sup>22</sup> For a critical reading of the interpretation of this situation as a progress for feminism, see Nina Power, *One-dimensional woman*, Zero Books 2009.

<sup>23</sup> See especially, R. Esposito, *Communitas*, Stanford UP, 2009; and A. Negri, M. Hardt, *Commonwealth*, Harvard UP, 2010; A. Negri, *The Italian Difference* ([www.iaphitalia.org](http://www.iaphitalia.org)).

## 5.1 Education and biopolitics

If the whole range of living experience is concerned with democracy, if we have to conceive anew what democracy is, if university is no more a citadel of knowledge, separated from society, then we have to reformulate what education is. Education has to be placed in the larger frame of what I call "cosmopolitics", that is the dis/order of relations among human and non human beings. As we have seen in these last months, claims for democracy – from the *Indignados* to the *Arab spring* and the students movements – are not defending a past conception of social rights, they do ask for a new conception of *what a worthy life is*. Water, green power as well as education are the very first needs for each human being<sup>24</sup>.

University has then to conceive itself in its "fertility"<sup>25</sup>. How is it responding to this new consciousness, this new conception of humans, of their needs and of the new ways of living together<sup>26</sup>?

In order to enact this change in function, sexuate subjects in university have to put in question their relation to what they are teaching and studying: and this questioning concerns the hard as well as the human sciences. As politics is no longer an institutional matter, but a biopolitical one, how are we relating to and conceiving the contents of our disciplines? As I explained above, the answer cannot reside in a change of topics only, but in a change of attitude, of what is showed while teaching and studying. *The capability in resituating oneself and the topics according to the social/political requests is crucial*.

Moreover, the one teaching has to listen to the urgencies of the ones attending university courses. This happened to me when I was asked to cooperate with students in their "self-formation" seminars. The topics are decided by politically aware students, putting forward their own peculiar need of knowledge according to the problems they are confronted with.

## 5.2 Streets squares (and theatres) beyond University

But not only. The one teaching has to care about the connection with extra academic places where knowledge is asked for.

As "enterprise university" is producing market oriented courses, the need for a truly social knowledge finds less and less satisfaction. This can have a depressive effect. I have in mind the double fetishism about "utility" and "objectivity", represented by the new title of a degree in "Sciences of tourism" – "tourism" being the useful knowledge, and "sciences" granting its "objective", serious (in the Foucaultian sense) disciplinary status. What will be the fate of your

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<sup>24</sup> F. Giardini, *Beni comuni, una materia viva* (common goods, a living matter), in Verlan, *Dire fare pensare il presente*, Quodlibet 2011.

<sup>25</sup> A. Piussi, R. Arnaus, *L'università fertile*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Milano 2011 (original Spanish edition, *La universidad fértil*, Octaedro, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> F. Raparelli, *Istituzioni del comune* (institutions of the commons), in Id., *La lunghezza dell'Onda*, Ponte alle Grazie, Firenze 2010.

cheerful, fuzzy Italian holidays in the hands of a “scientist of tourism”? Does a tourist operator need to attend university in order to achieve that skill<sup>27</sup>?

But a different reaction is at hand if one connects to the places where social knowledge is demanded and generated.

The example I can present concerns the most ancient theatre in Rome who was due to close because of public funding cuts. The theatre has been occupied since June of this year. The young people occupying it are mainly artist, not especially aware in politics, they were moved by the consciousness of culture as a “common good”, as a non marketable value. When they started discussing together, the first question that aroused was that their language, the words they used, were colonized by the mainstreaming imaginary: merit, productivity, efficiency, value, and so on. They then decided to start some seminars in which they could make the double work of deconstructing and enrooting the words in their concrete experience.

I was invited to direct this common work. I think it happened for two reasons: because I have learnt from feminism that “useful” knowledge has to do with its *power to express the singular experience* – “starting from oneself”<sup>28</sup> is the Italian version of the practice in the consciousness rising groups – and because the possible differential in knowledge I can have is not played in a leader/professor mode, but according to the practice of “*autorità*” (authority), that is the *relational capacity of augmenting the shared intelligence*<sup>29</sup>. Last but not least, this kind of demands leads right back to the original inspiration of feminism: a peculiar way of keeping together knowledge and politics.

I want to add a more scholarly consideration. University as an institution is not eternal, although very ancient. What happened to knowledge before its establishment? Generation and transmission of it took place in “Schools”, gathering around religious centres, in the medieval times, or in bigger cities<sup>30</sup>. Shouldn’t we *look for and recognise these extra University spaces, where knowledge, the one we value, is demanded nowadays?*

### 5.3 Higher Research Sites

Another effect of the new model of the “enterprise university” is that research is somehow separated from university itself: according to the Dublin parameters it may concern the very last cycle of higher education. Moreover, research is valuable as long as it produces results which are mainly outcomes for the market. This may function for the hard sciences – although many protests were made against the idea that basic scientific research must directly produce goods – but what about the so called human sciences? If we follow these criteria, maybe the

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<sup>27</sup> And, in fact, the educational office of Confindustria (the Entrepreneurs Italian Association) is deciding to invest not in University but in Professional Schools.

<sup>28</sup> Diotima, *La sapienza di partire da sé* (The wisdom of starting from oneself), Liguori, Napoli 1996.

<sup>29</sup> Arendt intends authority as the attitude that does not recur to perusasion nor to violence, in *What is authority?* See also Diotima, *Oltre l’uguaglianza. Le radici femminili dell’autorità* (The feminine roots of authority), Liguori, Napoli 1995.

<sup>30</sup> P. Riché, J. Verger, *Des nains sur les épaules de géants. Maîtres et élèves au Moyen Age* (Teachers and students in the Middle Ages), Tallandier, Paris 2006.

only productive knowledge will come from the social sciences, whose results and reports can be used as tools for the management of statistical populations.

Here too I can draw a counter example from the IAPH-Italia website we founded in 2010<sup>31</sup>, after the Symposium in Rome. Women of different generations are cooperating in order to provide tools for studying, researching but also for information. This work entails a consisting update of what is generated in academic and non academic spaces. There is thus a high flexibility according not to the University curricula, but to the social questions at stake in public debates and researches.

The younger women came to work on the website because of a first experience of study and research for their academic degree. Because of the connections with extra academic spaces of knowledge, they are now agents of researches on contemporary issues, such as work, sexuality, etc. *They are "politically" active, though with a strong intellectual and theoretical preparation*<sup>32</sup>.

Of course, funding for this kind of researches is a main problem. We are working at a cross fundraising – university, local institutions, EC, research foundations - so to maintain the independence of the urgencies we are focusing on. Nevertheless these young women started to take jobs, and this fact points out another question to confront with.

*In a "long life learning society" what happens to the time for learning, when precarity leaves no time for doing else than looking for a job?* During our research on the experience of work we thus connected with the debates and campaigns for Basic Income<sup>33</sup>.

I can tell that, while transmission of sexuate knowledge at the University can be the first step, *the core of this transmission happens in the middle of the everyday social life.*

#### **5.4 Transdisciplinarity and politics of translation by narration**

Finally, we have seen that the interaction among differences, in a globalised world and education, has been promoted through standardization. On this point feminist/gender/women's studies have a lot to teach. All of us have worked on the questions arising from difference(s), and *we never concluded for a quantitative solution*. Rather, we know a lot about what can be called a "politics of translation". Translation is a relational practice involving both different subjects and different languages/codes. The principle is, as Chakrabarty puts it:

starting from what appears to be incommensurable, translation generates (...) precisely that partly opaque relation that we call difference<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> The website originated from the IAPH (Internationale Assoziation der Philosophinnen [www.iaph-philolo.org](http://www.iaph-philolo.org)) Symposium held in Rome in July 2006. For the English presentation, see [www.iaphitalia.org](http://www.iaphitalia.org).

<sup>32</sup> See the issues of "DWF" on work, (*Diversamente occupate; Lavoro se e solo se*) 1 and 2, 2010 and on sexuality (*Questo sesso che non è il sesso*), 1 and 2, 2011. The group authors a blog on the Italian national newspaper, "Il fatto quotidiano", and a blog of their own "diversamenteoccupate". They also cooperate with some main national historical feminist associations, such as UDI (Italian women's union).

<sup>33</sup> Bin-italia.org (Basic Income Network Italia). See also C. Pateman, *Democratizing citizenship. Some advantages of basic income*, "Politics and Society", 32, 1, 2004.

Difference is thus the capability of communicating beyond the idol of immediate and total transparency and commensurability. What does this mean in teaching and research?

It would mean that a student going abroad will not have to find the same topics she finds in her own university, but she will have to *narrate* to her new pals and to a teacher the questions she is working on or studying.

It would mean that *we can work together starting from an experience* rising from an urgency or a theoretical question. As an example: what means having/being/treating a "hormonal body"? *One will have to narrate* the triggering experience: using the pill, using psychic drugs, undergoing a hormonal treatment in a transsexual process...

*Thus narration appears to be the practice by which we can achieve communication and mobility in education and knowledge*<sup>35</sup>, without recurring to quantitative criteria and standardization.

Sexuate subjects – connected in a genealogy to the epistemological and political radical change enacted by feminism – know that *life has measures that the market does not know*. It is an ancient knowledge, endowed to the ones who have some proximity with the (mindful)bodies and their needs. We both have to learn from non Western countries - who were able to contest the GDP (gross domestic product) as a measure of the wealth of a country and to propose the idea of measuring the social wellbeing of a country as the effective wealth – and we have to enact again what feminism once knew so well: *culture and its means are fully implied in the suffering and the pleasure of our bodies, in their re/generation*.

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<sup>34</sup> D. Chakabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Princeton UP, 2007 (new edition).

<sup>35</sup> See I. M. Young, *Communication and the other*, in S. Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference*, Princeton 1996.