**Roundtable: "Science Policies, Research Funding, and the Future of the University"**

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Organizers:

Barbara OSIMANI (Marche Polythecnic University)

The current system of rewards for academic work, which connects funding assignments to metric performances, and these in turns on the capacity to attract funding, reinforces multiple St. Matthew effects and increases gaps across universities and scholars, both geographically (widening the North-South and West-East divides), and institutionally (expanding the distance between high ranked universities and those down in the ladder), as well as disciplinary: favouring applied fields of research over theoretical ones, and the hard sciences over “soft” sciences and humanities.

The epistemic dimensions of such state of affair is to date a relatively underexplored area of research. This roundtable presents current debates around science policies, research funding allocation and the future of the university, from diverse epistemological perspectives, not only in view of improving fairness towards the underprivileged, and the efficiency of the system, but also in order to foster a new role for science and research institutions in society.

**Speakers:**

**Sabina Leonelli (Exeter): Research Excellence**

The research landscape is changing in multiple ways at once, calling into question well-established ways to evaluate research “excellence” - and with them, the institutions in charge of overseeing such evaluations, including universities, funding bodies, education policies and traditional publishing. Digital technologies are radically transforming research design, conduct and communication, and there is a growing recognition that conducting responsible and participatory practices within this digitalised landscape requires relevant venues, infrastructures and metrics. In turn, such resources require substantive, long-term financial commitment and institutional support. At the same time, attempts to boost such resources - such as the open science movement - are coming into direct collision with evaluative and intellectual property regimes grounded on an individualistic understanding of success as well as exclusive access to training and goods; and the evolving tensions between global and local dimensions of research reflect the increasing power struggles between more or less advantaged participants in scientific knowledge creation. This paper discusses some dilemmas and possible ways forward for research institutions interested in boosting cutting-edge research that is responsible and participative, while striving to maintain an international reputation for “excellence”.

**Richard Pettigrew (Bristol): What principles should govern the distribution of research funding?**

Abstract: In this paper, I consider some of the norms that have come to govern the distribution of research funding in the UK and, to an extent, in the rest of Europe. Some of these --- such as the Haldane Principe, which asserts the authority of academics and not policymakers over the choice of topics to be funded --- have a long history. Others --- such as the enthusiasm for a smaller number of very large research projects, instead of a larger number of medium-sized projects, or indeed a mixture of small, medium and large projects --- are of a more recent vintage. I argue that many such norms lead to a certain sort of conservatism within the academy, even when they are intended to foster exactly the opposite. I survey proposals for how to avoid this conservatism.

**Barbara Osimani: Science as a Signaling Game**

As a response to the so called “reproducibility crisis” and, more generally, to a crisis of trust towards the scientific enterprise (Edwards and Roy 2017, Vazire 2017), various initiatives are being promoted in the direction of fostering transparency of scientific procedures and honest evidence disclosure. The Open Science Movement, the AllTrials Campaign, and Sense about Science, to name but a few, are putting efforts into both identifying scientific misconduct and its sources, and proposing possible solutions. These generally involve developing tools to identify methodological flaws as a deterrent to cheating and invoking stricter and stricter norms for open policies (accessible data, codes, and research protocols), and transparency (e.g. pre-registration of trials).

The appeal to introducing, and strengthening already established, monitoring systems stems from the awareness that incentives to bias scientific results affect the process of knowledge acquisition and disclosure both at the level of individual scientists working in a more and more competitive market, and at the level of institutions (academy and industry), having strong conflicts of interests in the production and delivery of scientific knowledge. Hence, contrary to the traditional optimism expressed by some philosophers with respect to the self correcting capacity of science (Kitcher 1993, Solomon 1992, Hull 2001), methodologists do not show an equal dose of confidence in the power of an “invisible hand” (Smaldino and McElreath 2016).

This paper offers an overview of the diagnoses and possible solutions currently advanced in order to improve the reliability of scientific evidence. Especially, it contrasts currently advanced remedies with the contribution of game-theory on the topic, suggesting that such remedies may be useless or even backfire, because of various interacting dimensions at play in evidence collection, interpretation and disclosure in strategic environments.

**Marco Ottaviani (Milan): Grantmaking**

The paper develops a foundational model of the decentralized allocation of subsidies through competitive grantmaking. Casting the problem in a simple supply and demand framework, we characterize the level of applications and acceptance standard that result in equilibrium. The equilibrium success rate (grants over applications) decreases in the budget, consistent with some recent evidence, if and only if the distribution of types has decreasing hazard rate. In all stable equilibria resulting when funds are allocated across fields proportionally to applications---as well as under apportionment rules in a general class characterized in the paper---an increase in noise in the evaluation in a field perversely raises applications in that field and reduces applications in all the other fields. We characterize how the design of allocation rules can be modified to improve welfare.

**Link to Paper**: <http://didattica.unibocconi.eu/mypage/index.php?IdUte=48832&idr=16546&lingua=eng>

**Andrea Saltelli  (Barcelona)**: **Scientific integrity**

What does integrity means? Diving into the different meanings of the terms - uncorrupted, sound and of one piece, offers an occasion to investigate what is science, what is the present condition of the scientific enterprise; are transmitting to our students a science whose quality compares with that received from our masters? The conflicted images of science in the public discourse, the medialization and commodification eroding the codes of science *qua* social system, the different roles of science as both victim and perpetrator in the dynamics of regulatory capture, the role of new disciplines within new configurations of capitalism, offer a rich kaleidoscope to our reflection. How can we transmit this to our students as to make them more alert, reflexive, and still loving science?

**Sources**

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A. Saltelli, D. J. Dankel, M. Di Fiore, N. Holland, and M. Pigeon, “Science, the endless frontier of regulatory capture,” SSRN Electron. J., vol. [https://ssrn.com/abstract=3795058](https://ssrn.com/abstract%3D3795058), 2021.

Discussants:

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Jean-Pierre Bourguignon (ERC)

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