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New patterns of university governance and evaluation

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Limits in thinking about university reforms

- higher education seen mainly as a specific field, which limits reflections on the progress made by studies on public policies, governance and management in general (Ferlie, Musselin, Andresani, 2008);
- widespread use of a descriptive approach, which is still poor in terms of theories and concepts (Huisman, 2009);
- weak elaboration, which leads to exposure to forces and pressures towards uniformity that contrasts with the requirements of differentiation (Engwall, 2008);
- very "thin" evidence used as a basis for reform proposals: the university is an object of "over-debated and under-investigated" policy (Maassen, Olsen, 2007);
- mismatch between macro level initiatives in quality assurance and micro level experienced needs (D'Andrea, 2007; Harvey, Newton, 2007).

The case of Italy

These limitations are even more evident in Italian universities where heated discussions in political circles and the press make very little reference to correct empirical evidence and are not connected to international reflections

Governance & Evaluation

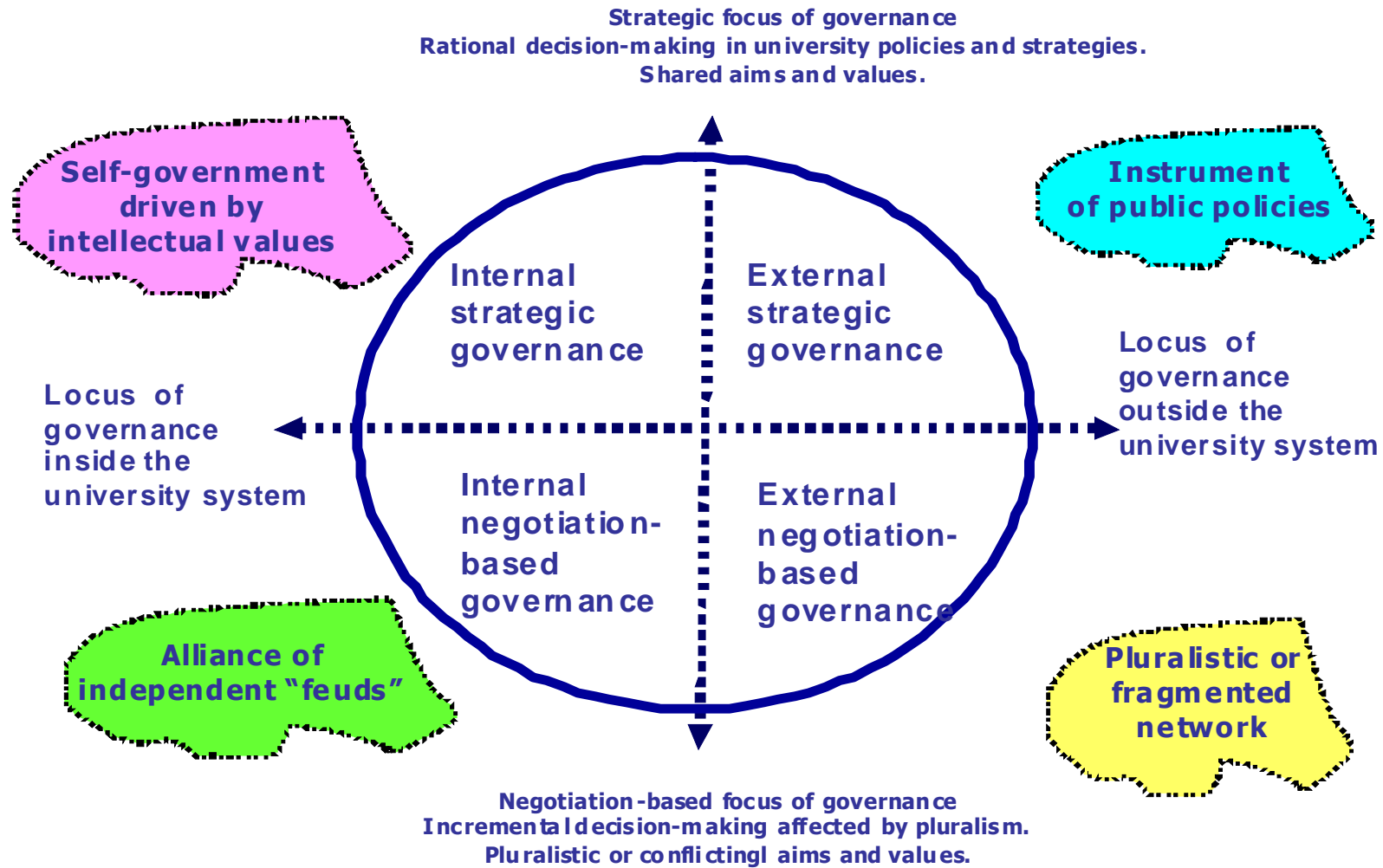
- Two levels:
 - System (national, European ?)
 - University as a single organisation
- A very critical relationship
- A turning point in reform

Outline

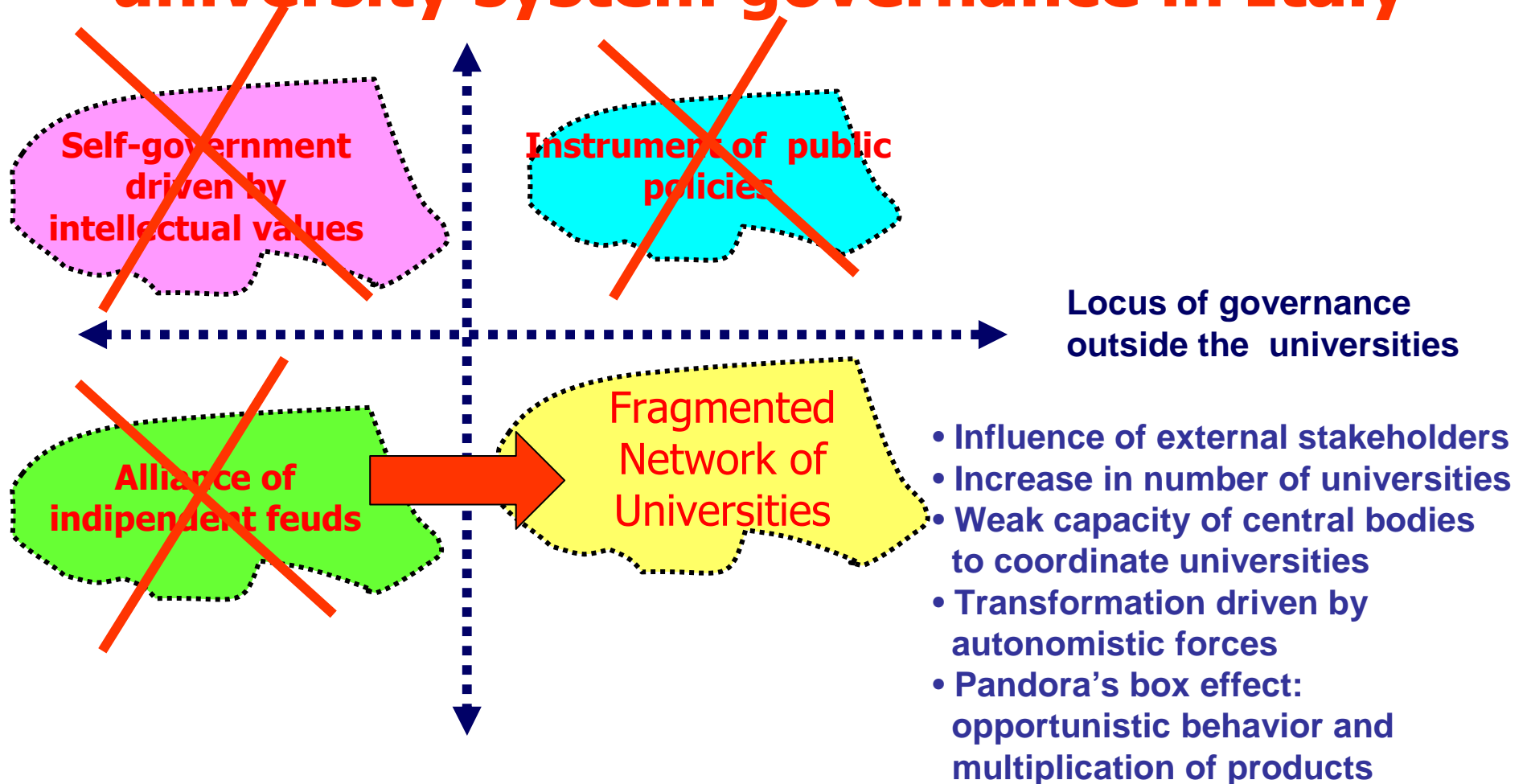
We propose a framework of the significance of evaluation and its role in national university system governance, taking into account:

1. The background: the emerging pattern of system governance of the Italian university
2. The negative impact of governance problems on evaluation
3. The choice between competing roles of evaluation (in the context of system governance)
4. The concept of quality and the systemic nature of evaluation
5. The rationale for a dual system:
 - a. Quality assurance as a guarantee of basic conditions
 - b. Enhancing and empowering professors and students
6. The balancing efforts of improvement and accountability at the university level

1. Background : four patterns of system governance in higher education



Background: the emerging pattern of university system governance in Italy



Negotiation based focus of governance - Incremental decision making affected by pluralistic or conflicting aims and values

Background: evaluation in Italian universities

The Italian university system has been undergoing a change process for over ten years and has used evaluation as one of its main drivers, set in motion by:

- Central government bodies (still operative):
 - CNSVU: production of an enormous quantity of statistical data on the system and on individual universities
 - CIVR: triennial evaluation of research 2001-2003
 - CRUI : promoted voluntary self evaluation in degree courses with widespread experimentation of evaluation methodologies
- The universities themselves:

since 1994 internal evaluation units have worked in each university making use of a wide range of evaluation methodologies and writing annual reports.

Waiting for Anvur

- 2007: a law decided the merger of the CNVSU and CIVR and the setting up of the ANVUR
- 2008: the new government modified the set-up of Anvur
- 2009: the new rules are on the way of final approval, but the Agency is not yet beginning its activity

Ossification of a fragmented system?

- Universities must now manage relevant cuts in their budgets with the risk that future rules about evaluation will increase the pressure for compliance and conformity

2. Governance problems have negative impact on evaluation

A critical examination of existing evaluation experiences in Italy: (MINELLI E, REBORA G., TURRI M. (2008). *How can evaluation_fail? The case of Italian universities*. QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION. vol. 14, pp. 157-173)

- closed answer questionnaire to collect the points of view of key figures in evaluation
- 12 in-depth interviews to professionals holding a position of responsibility in evaluation
- Respondents (% of the entire universe) : 31%
 - 26% rectors: RET
 - 44% administrative directors AD
 - 29% presidents of evaluation units PEU
 - 30% members of evaluation units MEU

FACTORS CAUSING PROBLEMS FOR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

(mean rating for each interviewed category)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------|---------------------------------|--|--|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| | Technical aspects of evaluation | Personal characteristics of evaluators | Organisation and policies of staff in evaluation units | University governance | Public policies and system factors | Inappropriate relationships and conflicts of interests |
| PEU | 3.19 | 3.76 | 3.62 | 4.24 | 2.81 | 2.81 |
| MEU | 3.48 | 2.94 | 3.32 | 3.89 | 3.06 | 3.00 |
| RET | 3.85 | 3.30 | 3.60 | 3.55 | 3.70 | 4.10 |
| AD | 3.44 | 3.34 | 3.31 | 4.16 | 3.38 | 3.94 |
| MEAN | 3.49 | 3.34 | 3.46 | 3.96 | 3.24 | 3.46 |

- The difference between the mean rate given to 'university governance' and that given to all the other factors is statistically significant when considering separately the presidents of evaluation units (t-test=3.56, P=0.0012), members (t-test=5.14, P≤0.0001) and directors (t-test=2.59, P=0.0133), while for rectors this difference is not statistically significant (t-test= -0.41, P=0.6845).

The three most critical factors for the efficiency of evaluation and quality assurance practices in Italian universities

| Respondents | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| PRESIDENT OF EVALUATION UNIT | MEMBER OF EVALUATION UNIT | RECTORS | ADMINISTRATIVE-GENERAL DIRECTORS |
| GOVERNANCE Insufficient internal operational support for evaluation units 3.67 | GOVERNANCE Indifference of university government bodies towards evaluation 3.86 | INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS Evaluators and evaluated subjects belonging to the same environment and ensuing over-familiarity 4.40 | GOVERNANCE Indifference of university government bodies towards evaluation 3.97 |
| TECHNICAL ASPECTS Insufficient and not very methodical definition of evaluation procedures and practices 3.48 | GOVERNANCE Insufficient communication and interaction between the different subjects involved in the evaluation activities 3.37 | INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS Conflict of interests and lack of independence between universities being evaluated and evaluators 4.20 | TECHNICAL ASPECTS Insufficient and not very methodical definition of evaluation procedures and practices 3.91 |
| GOVERNANCE Indifference of university government bodies towards evaluation 3.38 | TECHNICAL ASPECTS Insufficient and not very methodical definition of evaluation procedures and practices 3.37 | INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS Involvement of evaluators in interests systems and alliances dominated by evaluated institutions 4.15 | INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS Evaluators and evaluated subjects belonging to the same environment and ensuing over-familiarity 3.84 |

University governance (1)

- The present structure of university governance is considered the main reason for the indifference towards evaluation output.
- The critical issue of *governance* recurs in all the open interviews. The weak link between *governance* and evaluation is the first hurdle for the development of evaluation and the cause of its failure.
- *“The dynamics of effectiveness is all played inside the university and so it depends on the fact that university government is in agreement with the evaluation unit. I’ve witnessed situations where the evaluation unit was not on the same wavelength as the rector and the stand it took was ignored”*, (Interviewee # 8, president of evaluation unit).

University governance (2)

The interviews show that a weak type of governance like the one in Italian universities is disinterested in evaluation because it involves making decisions that no one has the strength to make. Evaluation “causes embarrassment” (Interviewee #1, president of evaluation unit) because it provides justification for university government actions that cannot be taken. Several interviews underlined the case of rectors who saw evaluation as a stimulus and tool for governance but then had difficulty in finding the necessary consensus for re-election.

Inappropriate relations and conflict of interests

- The respondents consider this question to be moderately critical with the exception of the rectors who see it as the most problematic factor.
- However, analysis of the texts of the interviews highlights various references to inappropriate relationships: *“In the CRUI, when we discussed the link between funding and evaluation, ultimately the question was which university would have the main advantage from funding”* (Interviewee #3, representative of CRUI); *“When national evaluators are part of the university system, this creates a conflict of interests: just as people have become members of a university evaluation unit because they represent disciplinary areas...”* (Interviewee #7, representative of CRUI)
- The fact that some evaluators are subject to conflicts of interests impoverishes the evaluation exercise and gives rise to doubts and disparaging comments that in certain cases end up by questioning the evaluation output

BUT see this comparative survey

Minelli-Rebora Turri, *Why do controls fail? Results of an Italian survey*,
 “Critical Perspectives on Accounting”, 2009

| T-test for the difference between the rate given to “governance systems in organisations being controlled” (#4) and the others items taken individually | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|---|------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|--|------------------|
| | #1 | | #2 | | #3 | | #5 | | #6 | |
| | Technical aspects of controls | | Auditors’ personal characteristics | | Organisation and policies of auditing staff | | Public policies and system factors | | Inappropriate relations and conflicts of interests | |
| | T | P-value | T | P-value | T | P-value | T | P-value | T | P-value |
| UNIVERSITIES | 3.64 | 0.0004 | 7.29 | <.0001 | 5.23 | <.0001 | 5.87 | <.0001 | 4.92 | <.0001 |
| MINISTRIES | 0.90 | 0.3765 | 1.98 | 0.0588 | 0.11 | 0.9143 | 2.34 | 0.0278 | 1.55 | 0.1339 |
| LOCAL AUTHORITIES | 6.69 | <.0001 | 5.22 | <.0001 | 6.75 | <.0001 | 8.95 | <.0001 | 5.92 | <.0001 |
| PUBLIC UTILITIES | 2.77 | 0.0068 | 1.34 | 0.1820 | 1.29 | 0.2003 | 0.79 | 0.4308 | 1.41 | 0.1627 |
| LISTED COMPANIES | 5.54 | <.0001 | 3.31 | 0.0013 | 5.35 | <.0001 | 3.18 | 0.0019 | 1.73 | 0.0857 |
| BANKS | 1.84 | 0.0732 | 0.33 | 0.7432 | 1.57 | 0.1252 | 2.82 | 0.0073 | -0.40 | 0.6909 |
| NON-PROFIT | 1.48 | 0.1464 | -0.09 | 0.9295 | 1.47 | 0.1511 | 1.23 | 0.2276 | -0.18 | 0.8613 |
| OVERALL | 9.61 | <.0001 | 8.15 | <.0001 | 9.91 | <.0001 | 10.96 | <.0001 | 7.38 | <.0001 |

- The analysis with the T-test shows that the difference between the mean rates given to “governance systems in organisations being controlled” (#4) and those given to all the other factors is statistically significant for the sample as a whole
- The same difference is statistically significant for the universities, local authorities and listed companies taken individually but not for the other sectors. In the public utilities sector, governance is considered more critical than the other factors but the difference is not statistically significant whereas in the ministries priority is given to “technical aspects of controls” (#1) but does not have any statistical significance.
- In banks and non-profit organisations the mean value given to governance is lower than “inappropriate relations and conflicts of interests” (#6). The difference between the combined factors “governance systems in organisations being controlled” (#4) and “Inappropriate relations and conflicts of interests” (#6) and the other four factors put together is statistically significant in the banking sector ($T=2.10$ $P= 0.0377$) but not in non-profit organisations ($T=1.44$ $P=0.1518$).

and...

Results of the tests of statistical significance (t-test): each of the 3 items (# 7, #22 and #23) is tested in comparison with the other 24 items in section B of the survey

| | Conflicts of interests and lack of independence between controlled institutions and controllers (#7) | Indifference of boards of directors or other governing bodies to control activities (#22) | Insufficient communication and interaction between the different subjects involved in controls (#23) |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | T P-value | | |
| UNIVERSITIES | 1.68 0.0942 | 6.85 <.0001 | 4.88 <.0001 |
| MINISTRIES | 0.65 0.5243 | 2.69 0.0125 | 2.42 0.0224 |
| LOCAL AUTHORITIES | 1.64 0.1011 | 11.32 <.0001 | 5.79 <.0001 |
| PUBLIC UTILITIES | 2.12 0.0364 | 3.06 0.0028 | 5.08 <.0001 |
| LISTED COMPANIES | 2.83 0.0055 | 6.27 <.0001 | 0.69 0.4894 |
| BANKS | 4.50 <.0001 | 1.69 0.0982 | 0.51 0.6121 |
| NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS | 0.96 0.3409 | 2.05 0.0476 | 2.14 0.0384 |
| OVERALL | 4.89 <.0001 | 14.86 <.0001 | 8.81 <.0001 |

3. The choice between competing roles of evaluation

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

- At higher level it is a general theory or doctrine that the public sector can be improved by the importation of business concepts, techniques and values (Pollit, 2009)
- In this context evaluation is a tool of performance management

EVALUATION THEORY AND PRACTICE

- This is a moment of critical and dialectical examination of the results in a sphere of activities, in that it analyses validity, matter and value of what has been realised in a retrospective key.
- This is a resource for future decision-making, and thus for the evolution of institutions (Scriven, 1986, Vedung, 1997; Paddock, 1998, Stame, 1998).

Comparing NPM (Performance management) and evaluation

| | Performance management | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|
| Time orientation | The near future is more important than the past | It prepares the future, towards which it is oriented by analysing past and present time |
| Method | Incentives set in motion in order to motivate players and decision-makers | It pursues knowledge by means of detachment and critical reflection |
| Main tools | Performance indicators | Action theories, which link resources, behaviour and results |
| Intended effects on organisation | Improving measurable results | Supporting evolution and transformation skills |
| Professional roles | Consultants supporting management | Evaluators as independent professionals |

NPM

(Pollit, 2009)

A bundle of specific concepts and practices, including:

- **Greater emphasis on performance: setting goals and measuring outputs**
- **Preference for lean, flat, small, specialized organisational forms**
- **Widespread substitution of contracts for hierarchical relations as the principal coordinating device**
- **Injection of market-type mechanisms such as public sector league tables and performance-related pay**
- **Emphasis on treating service users as customers and on generic quality improvement techniques such as TQM**

Evaluation

- Good evaluation can improve the decision-making process by offering deep understanding of situations and developing a comprehensive view founded on accurate analyses based on the application of specific methods.
- Oriented to the future, evaluation accounts for the resources it absorbs and the bureaucratic burden it generates if it manages to activate the real levers of change, amplifying the effects of drives from the external environment on organisational structures and offering stimuli to internal players and change agents. Evaluation prepares the future by analysing the past and the present. It contributes to knowledge by means of detachment and critical reflection.
- Paradoxically, the tool that makes it possible to respond to the evolution of the environment in a timely way and thus adjust to future conditions is the accurate and autocritical analysis of past performances.

Prevailing trends

(Amaral, 2006)

- In most higher education systems quality assurance and accountability measures have been put in place to ensure that academic provision meets the clients' needs and expectations.
- These developments have resulted in loss of trust in institutions and professionals
- The use of performance indicators and benchmarks are becoming a common practice in European policy implementation, which is congruent with the implementation of accreditation mechanisms, rankings of institutions and the emergence of a stratified EHEA

The concluding remark goes to accreditation and trust. Today there is a tendency to change from quality assessment mechanisms to accreditation, at European level and at the level of its member states, which exposes a tendency towards lack of trust in institutions

4. The concept of quality and the systemic nature of evaluation

We will consider:

- **A transformative notion of quality (L. Harvey)**
- **A dual concept of quality (Pirsig)**
- **Evaluation as a system with several components**

Lee Harvey: what is quality

- For me quality is about transformation. I will focus on student learning rather than research but the same principles apply. A quality learning experience for me is one that transforms the student's knowledge and way of thinking. It involves enhancing the student's attributes (knowledge, skills and abilities) but, more importantly, empowers the student as a critical, reflective learner. This requires focusing on student learning rather more than the performance of the teaching. Good teachers enable transformative learning.
- That is quality for me and so all these 'definitions' of quality, such as 'fitness for purpose', 'excellence', 'value for money' are just partial operationalisations (and not very good ones) of the fundamental notion of transformation.
- Quality assurance is not quality. It is a mechanism that addresses some aspects of quality, depending on its purpose. Again, for me, quality assurance is only really valuable when it helps improve quality: then it links to the transformative notion

Our proposal is based on a dual concept of quality (Pirsig, 1981)

- **Static quality**

- is achieved by compliance with a pre-established scheme that guarantees continuity in learning together with respect for rules
- is a stabilising force and ensures the duration of teaching systems over time
- also consists of the repetition of contents put to the test of time and experience
- can be measured and monitored

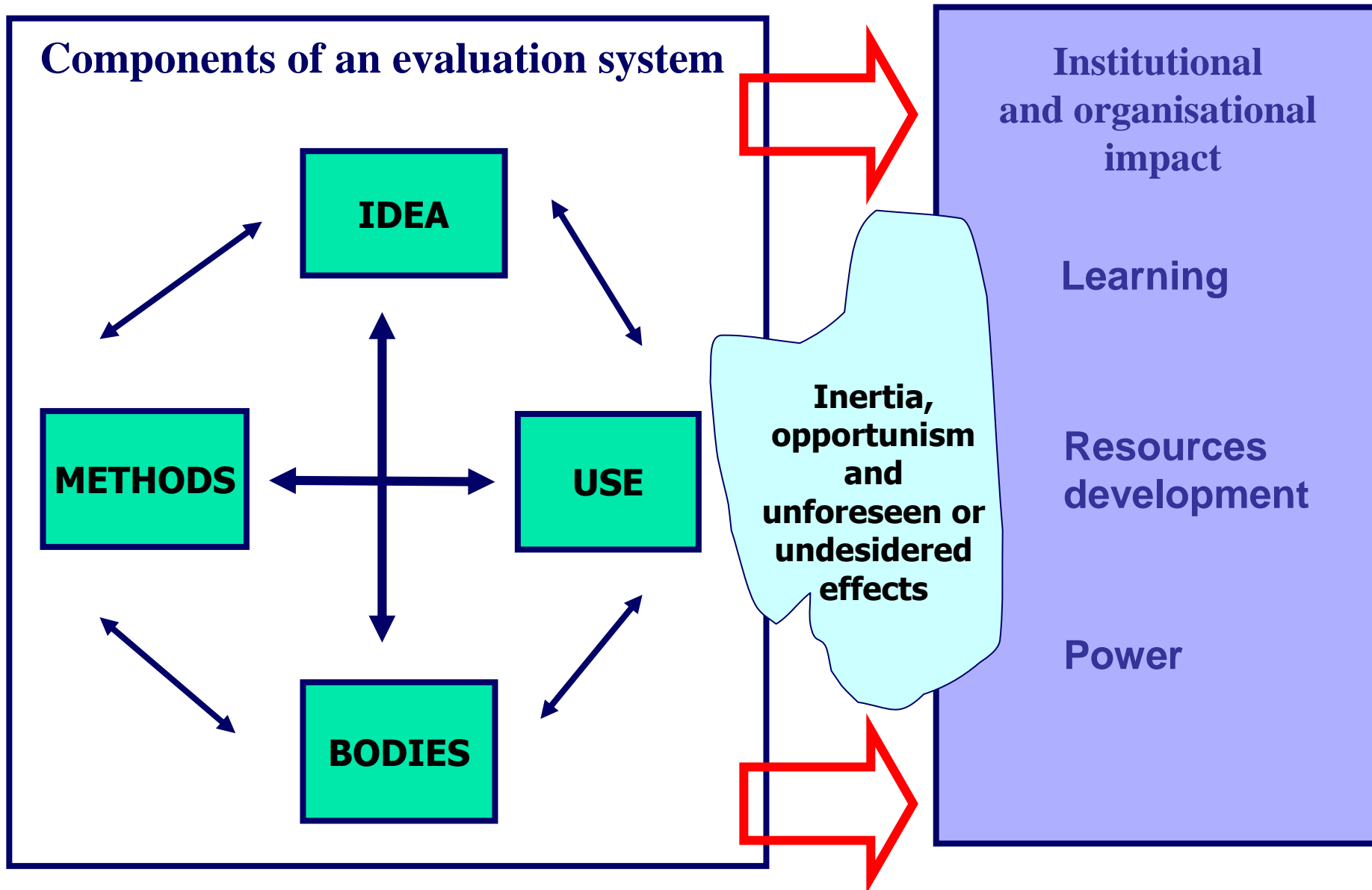
- **Dynamic quality**

- is interactive and evolving
- begins with a combination of relationships and has to be continuously rejuvenated
- is influenced by factors of context and environment that are often incomprehensible and meaningless if observed from the outside
- can be assessed according to methods and logics that are inevitably subjective

Ricordo di Claudio Demattè (1942-2004)

(Piantoni G., Economia & Management, n. 6 2007)

“Seeing him in the classroom was a show. During the courses for managers, he never worded the topic to discuss but he questioned them all asking: “What is your main concern?” And he built his speech on the basis of the answers he received. I saw him talking over the same business case fifteen times. I used to take notes, and they were always different from the previous ones. Naively, one day I asked him: “But what is the ideal solution?” And he replied laughing: “The next one!” He was always in search of a creative relationship with the class. “If you go in the classroom and give a lecture and leave as you have entered, you have mistaken your lesson and betrayed your pupils”. And added: “Also in entreprise this is true. When you take part in a meeting, if you go out with the same idea you got in, for you the meeting has been worthless, as it has not taken place”.



5. The rationale for a dual system

Static Quality

Dynamic quality

**QA as a guarantee of
basic conditions**

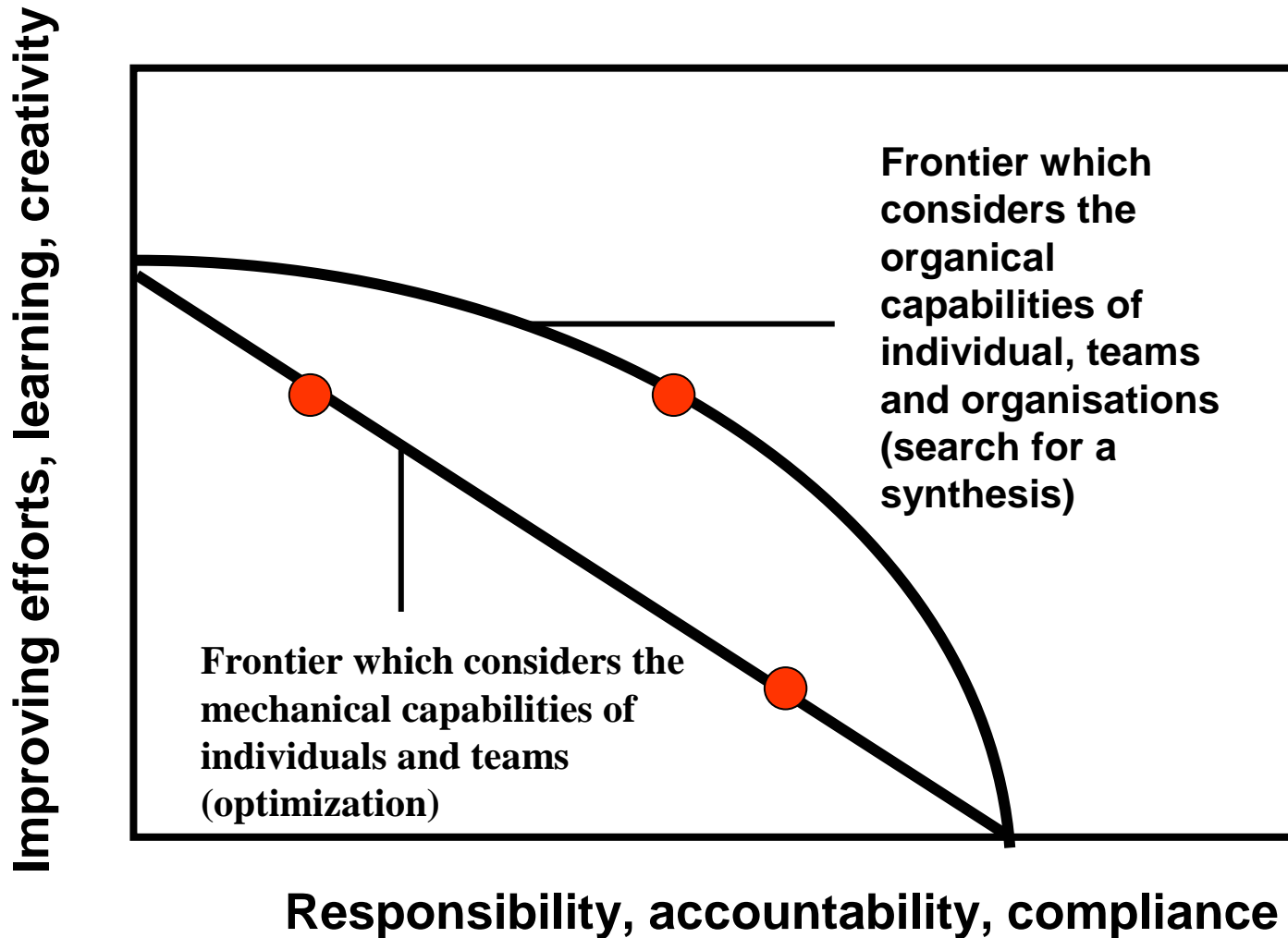
**Enhancing and
empowering professors
and students**

How to use evaluation at the national system level

National bodies can support a pluralistic system of universities in several ways:

- by establishing a threshold in order to prevent the diffusion of weak higher education initiatives
- by abolishing rules that impose specific organisational patterns and limit strategies of differentiation
- by providing rules that university leaders (rectors, deans and the various coordinators of teaching activities) can use in order to validate and strengthen their strategic choices and their government structure
- by allocating resources in order to stimulate and reward the entrepreneurial drive of both state and private universities .

6. Balancing improving efforts and accountability at the University level



(Elaborated from Barzelay, 1996; Nonaka-Toyama, 2002)

How to promote quality in the Italian university system

IN A STATIC SENSE

- By safeguarding a threshold of acceptability of performances (but not parameters to maximize):
 - teaching: presences and regularity of supply, programmes, information
 - research: minimum threshold of scientific productivity on the basis of standard criteria
- Improving transparency and diffusion of information

IN A DYNAMIC SENSE

- Fostering the proactive role of universities which self-govern the procedures of evaluation
- Avoiding the possibility that static thresholds set at too high a level induce forms of compliance
- Orienting national evaluation systems to the future, taking into account development aspects
- Looking for correspondence with different disciplinary fields
- Fostering partnership between academics and professional managers
- Enabling people to give more....

A threshold, a base of static quality ...

The university management should assure the observance of some basic rules and standards, by means of suitable quality assurance systems, such as:

- a good package of services, structures and professional resources;
- the continuing presence of regular professors according to programmes and timetable published
- the development of a clear teaching programme, fitting the specific educational environment
- the presentation of a *syllabus* at the beginning of the course
- the timely hand-out of teaching material during courses
- the responsiveness of results, publications, patents, experiments to criteria of validity in research according to classifications generally accepted in the discipline.

Beyond Quality Assurance

- Once basic conditions are granted, true quality requires an active, creative interaction among the different subjects, professors, students, technicians, professionals etc.
- Beyond this threshold we enter the critical area, where university management meet the true problems of evaluation and where measurements, controls and hierarchies are not able to bring forth any improvement
- **Therefore: promoting room for autonomy beyond the threshold**
 - teaching: promoting *transformational learning*
 - research: taking into consideration the intellectual influence of a research programme on the authors themselves, the involved subjects and the final recipients? How important are the creative capability of each player and the propensity to manage and deal with change?

Previous research outputs of our group

- MINELLI E., REBORA G., TURRI M. (2009), *Why do controls fail? Results of an Italian survey*, “CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ACCOUNTING”, 2009 forthcoming
- REBORA G., TURRI M. (2009), *Governance in higher education: an analysis of the Italian experience*. In: Huisman J. (Ed.), *International Perspectives on the Governance of Higher Education*. (pp. 13-32). New York and London: Routledge, 2009.
- MINELLI E, REBORA G., TURRI M. (2008). *How can evaluation fail? The case of Italian universities*. QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION. vol. 14, pp. 157-173.
- MINELLI E, REBORA G., TURRI M. (2008). *The risk of failure of controls and levers of change: an examination of two Italian public sectors*. JOURNAL OF ACCOUNTING & ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE. vol. 4, pp. 5-26.
- MINELLI E, REBORA G., TURRI M. (2008). The structure and significance of the Italian research assessment exercise (VTR). In: MAZZA C., QUATTRONE P., RICCABONI A. (Eds), *European Universities in Transition*. (pp. 221-236). CHELTENHAM: ELGAR.
- MINELLI E, REBORA G., TURRI M. (2008). *The fifteen year evaluation experience in Italian universities with its crisis factors and a desire for Europe*. In: BESO A. ET AL. *Implementing and using quality assurance: strategy and practice. A selection of papers from the 2nd European Quality Assurance Forum*. (pp. 68-73). BRUSSELS: European Universities Association.
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- REBORA G., MINELLI E, TURRI M, HUISMAN J. (2006). *The impact of research and teaching evaluation in universities: comparing an Italian and a Dutch case*. QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION, vol. 12, pp. 109-124.