

Innovating Universities.

Everything needs to change, so everything can stay the same?

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The dominance of the neoliberal paradigm in recent years has significantly changed the way universities are run. They have progressively adopted the principles of New Public Management (NPM), which are based on centralizing leadership, increasing competition and greater participation in decision-making by entities that are external to the academic world. Thus, university governance has undergone a process of transformation that has shifted it in the direction of managerial logics, both in terms of how to handle the decision-making processes, and in response to the need to find external funding to guarantee teaching as well as research activities. These transformations, though in a slightly different way in different countries, have had noticeable effects on courses of study and academic autonomy, as well as on the theoretical and methodological approaches used in scientific research. In fact, almost all funding for research is now apportioned based on the assessment of projects, often with an eye to finding good fundraising opportunities, rather than to investing in fields of research that do not necessarily have a short-term impact and/or clear applications.

In conjunction with this, the progressive liberalization of the academic world has translated into a general deterioration of working conditions for people working at all levels in universities, with an inevitable effect on the quality of what has turned into a real training and research marketplace. Among the most significant mutations that have marked the academic world is the exasperated growth of competitiveness, accompanied by the ever increasing and prolonged uncertainty of embarking on a scientific career, which is becoming more fragmented and focused on the short term. These processes only intensify the application of evaluation criteria that are based on efficiency, pushing

researchers, especially those not in stable positions (or tenure tracks), to always produce more, applying ever higher international standards, and ever more fastly. Moreover, this happens in a professional context in which the pressure to increase productivity erodes the time and space boundaries that delimit the working times. Furthermore, these are phenomena characterised – we could say on a global scale – by notable differences, in terms of gender and age, not to mention social class.

In this session we solicit ethnographic and qualitative contributions, including comparative ones, that examine the changes taking place in the academic world, either with respect to social, economic, legal or political contexts, or to organizational changes and to the current state of scientific careers both in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and in SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities). We accept contributions both in Italian and in English.

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