

# For a community of the European educational research

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## Resumen

El proceso de europeización del sistema de educación superior está siendo implementado en la mayor parte de los países europeos con el objetivo de movilizar a los profesores e investigadores en la creación de nuevas formas de inversión científica. Es un proceso que trata de un Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior, estrictamente coordinado con los sistemas nacionales y capaz de conectar la universidad con la investigación, el desarrollo de competencias y la producción. El artículo se centra en el campo de la educación y en la capacidad de acción y coordinación de la investigación educativa en el nivel internacional. Se ofrecen algunas clarificaciones sobre las necesidades estratégicas a través de las que las comunidades científicas pueden influenciar activamente en la creación de una comunidad europea de la investigación pedagógica.

## Abstract

The europeanization process of higher education system being implemented in the European Community countries continues to mobilize scholars and researchers creating new forms of scientific investment. It is a process that tries to create an out-and-out European Space for Higher Education, strictly coordinated with the national ones, able to link university, research, skill and production. The paper focuses on science of education field and problems regarding the capacity of action and coordination of the educational research at an international level. Some clarifications are delivered about strategical needs through which the various scientific communities may actively influence the creation of an European community for the pedagogical research.

**Keyword:** higher education, qualifications frameworks, university system, Bologna process, educational research, european culture

As in medieval age the University is today the intersection of the exchange between many European university cultures, exchange of scientific knowledges but also of a soft of transmission of the same ones. Europe is introduced as a whole of positive factors that explain the regular increase and the progressive qualification in the panorama of the universities present in Europe. Such community in its entirety can boast of some situations of excellence, even if we know that it is not sufficient to develop the activities and to consolidate structures, but it is on the contrary necessary to guarantee

above all a correct information on the process of unification of the European university system and to introduce the entity of the efforts made in this sense.

Today we are called to think the university formative system in a new European key, also because the main elements of the contemporary professional qualification cross the national borders inducing the university instruction different systems to specify more and more their orientations, their dimensions, their targets and the direction to take. It is well known the European Community (Commissione Unione Europea, 2003) has stressed the different countries to reflect on the changes related to knowledge, decentralization, resources, social inclusion and the problems related to the data and the comparability of the university systems. There are however several ways through which all this has been, and can still be, faced. The European university system, which reform of the study courses represents the more important aspect of the innovation process undertaken during last years, contemplates a group of elements connected among them (creation of structures on two levels - and a third level -, generalized introduction of the European system of credits, ECTS, guarantee of quality and accreditation, reform of curriculum based on disciplines), according to terms of mutual relationship and dependency, in an unitary whole, from which emerge the fundamental principles or parts on which it is founded, but above all on two unavoidable and equally important paradigms: didactics and research. It expresses, under the triple profile of the universities autonomy, of the instruction innovation and the convergence of the various higher education systems of the European Union countries towards the European Space for Higher Education and research, the need to reach a more satisfactory dimension of the same system in terms of effectiveness. That means above all to fight the excessive duration of studies, the high rate of abandonment (that sees students to leave their studies prematurely without being able to acquire any title), the insufficient flexibility (in allowing students to change road in the middle of the undertaken course). A strong incentive to the renewal process has been given during the last years by the Process of Bologna, that has as objective just the creation of an European space of the coherent advanced instruction, compatible and competitive that is in a position to increase the employment, the mobility of the European citizens and promote the European advanced instruction in the world and which program, result of the arranged initiative of Universities and Governments, sees the works completion within 2010.

### **Bologna Process and the descriptors of Dublin**

The Process of Bologna (2005), that is a political engagement and not a reforming treaty of the advanced instruction systems structures, has scheduled a series of specific targets:

- create a picture of common references with regard to intelligible and comparable titles (they are descriptors in terms of study charge, level, educational targets, competences and profiles - Bergen, 2005);

- define a system based on two cycles (and a third in addition);
- generalize the bachelor and post-bachelor levels (in order to allow the outlet of the working market), to recognize the titles and the periods of study promoting the European dimension of the advanced instruction;
- a system of credits which are compatible (European credit system - model ECTS);
- cooperate for the assessment of quality on European scale;
- eliminate the obstacles to mobility (promotion and acknowledgment of mobility of students, researchers and administrative staff).

Inside this process, that has seen the involvement of many countries engaged in the realization of an European Qualification Framework (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005), the States member of the European Community have elaborated a “qualifications framework”, that is a schema of titles European comparable and compatible within which framing national schemes (Bulletin of Berlin, 2003). In particular, after the Conference of the Ministers, which did take place in Praga year 2001, has become clear that structures of three cycles introduced by the Process of Bologna needed to be ulteriorly specified in terms of results.

The problem of the quality standards for diplomas has carried the net “Joint Quality initiatives” (constituted by quality guarantee national agencies and by the Education Departments representatives) to elaborate generic descriptors of qualifications for bachelor, master and doctorate diplomas, that are valid all over Europe. But we must better explain the concept of descriptors, that interests us closely. Generally this last one constitutes an analytic description of levels, modalities and criteria of acceptability of a certain knowledge or ability that students must achieve by the end of a certain formative course (Domenici, 1981). And the description, clear and analytic, represents the criterion through which confronting performances; comparison that lets emerge the data on which judgment can be expressed. The descriptors can concern single and specific abilities or, if grouped, can synthetically express the learning data related to a certain area. Therefore the descriptors elaborated by the task force of “Joint Quality Initiatives”, which refer to competences independent from the dominion and the EHEA (Contribution of the European Commission, 2005) three cycles, beyond constituting the structure of titles, make reference to learning results common to a particular “qualification area” or study title and they are called “qualification descriptors”, which particularity consists in their facility of employment in a wide range of disciplines and profiles. However, they aim above all to achieve the ambitious objective enunciated in the Conference of Lisbona (2000), that is the one of making “the economy based on the more competitive and dynamic knowledge of the world, able to realize an enduring economic increase with new and better workplaces and a greater social cohesion” (Council of Lisbona, March 2000). In this sense, the Dublin descriptors alled by the Seminary

head office that has completed their elaboration in 2004) want to indicate, for every title, the competences that who acquires it must possess in terms of:

- knowledge and understanding;
- applying knowledge and understanding;
- making judgements;
- communication;
- learning skills.

The descriptors qualify every one of these five types of competences, separately, for the short cycle, for the first cycle, for the second cycle and for the third cycle. At a first reading, descriptors can appear highly vague definitions; in truth, if we consider them as a frame in which will have to be placed the picture constituted by the single formative course, with its specific disciplinary contents, gives us account of the great potentialities of this scheme as an instrument for making “readable and comparable” the same courses. Their globality makes them applicable to all European Countries without reducing in any way the innovative nature and the single autonomy of courses and cycles of study. It is an important result that disciplines in a crucial way the competences that must be caught up for obtaining a bachelor or a master diploma. The descriptors of Dublin (2004) can constitute an important instrument of reference for the universities for better articulating their university courses, better regulate professions, institutionalizing the continuous formation and refer to precise standards. For these reasons many times the initiatives of the Bologna Promoters have suggested to the universities to follow in deep such descriptors, in a way that later they could be integrated in the accreditation system. But we want to consider those descriptors that belong to the third cycle, those elements that allow us to better understand the passage from being a student to becoming a researcher, passage in which is necessary that the new researcher demonstrates to possess “the systematic understanding of a study field and the possession of practical abilities and methods of research associated to that field” beyond that “the ability to conceive, to plan, to realize and to adapt a process of research of important dimensions, with the due scientific integrity”. And this is more true one if we think to the role that institutions, students and researchers play in the promotion of the European Space of instruction and the European Space of research.

### **The educational research ground: the indicators’ problem**

The relationship between research and didactics builds up exactly on this ground. The main question is then the following one: which influence has the university instruction on the quality and the product of the research? What effect produces instruction on the research productivity and university and social productivity more in gene-

ral? What effect produces research on didactics? What are then the effects of the research evaluation on the university research and didactics? Finally, what are the effects of the search evaluation on pedagogical research? But above all which contribution can give the pedagogical research in order to give an answer to these questions. If we think that is the quality of the individuals and of their profession (the one of researcher) to determine the productivity of their job (Rumberger, 1988) and the quality of the research product, as well as the quality of didactics and of the research on didactics, then we can only refer to that theory of the human capital where appear central:

- the abilities, the competences and the capabilities that researchers carry in the research;
- the abilities, the competences and the capabilities that the researcher profession demands as a fundamental requirement;
- the abilities, the competences and the capabilities that effectively the researchers use in order to carry out their own research activity.

And also if it is true that instruction has numerous important benefits on research, contributing to improve its productivity, then research results can be considers signals of instruction results? And in which sense? Beyond these benefits, instruction and research produce other social benefits that have important economic consequences.

### **The quality of research-instruction relationship**

The debate on the relationship between results obtained in the research field and results obtained in the instruction and in the research training is more complex than it may seem, and the difficulty consists just in estimating the instruction benefits, even if it does not mean to deny the value of being able to control and measure results. This means that it depends above all on the choice of appropriate signals able to trust a valid system of signals that aid to descriptors and to explain, even only partially, this phenomenon. However, such a choice is always in relationship with political, social and economic assessments. To this purpose, some years ago, Gilbert De Landsheere (1988) wrote that in education this measure informs on the health and quality of a system functioning. If we report what has been said to the university system we must ask which are the best signals for describing the quality of didactics and university research and those that better help us to estimate the processes and the products. The primary role of the university is the one to develop the competences and knowledges of the future citizens and workers, and therefore to form new professions considering above all the social and professional demands of enterprises, institutions etc. but it is also the one to train to research, to form new researchers with more and more relevant profiles. Which relationship exists then between these intents? Better instruction quality means better store in research training. Therefore a “strong” system of signals should have to be able to let us define the

relationships and to understand if the measured signals determine their influence in order to produce the condition of the university formative system and therefore its evolution. If the creation of a system of signals of the university system is a very ambitious exploit, it cannot avoid to consider the tight relationship that exists between quality of didactics and quality of research. But the main problem is certainly the one to be able to understand how the best integration of the educational courses and the sharing of standards, as wished by the process of Bologna, can contribute to realize effective processes of quality assurance. It means to define the problem of the signals and descriptors pragmatic in the field of research leading it back to its methodological project, that is that one of the activation of the procedures. Let's think, for example, to the importance of a signal like the one of total effectiveness, that it is given by the proportion of students who achieve the bachelor compared to the total number of students registered by the first year of course (this permits to appreciate the ability that a course has to carry to maturity a possible number of its students).

We call, therefore, signal the instrument that helps us understand where we are, where we are going and how far away we find ourselves from the previewed objective. It refers to a parameter or to a category of parameters having a tight relation with a certain phenomenon or kind of phenomena, in a position to supply information on the event characteristics in its globality, although of it represents only a part of it. The main function of a signal is therefore the synthetic representation of the investigated problems in order to keep the informative content of the analysis. These are emerging aspects of the information that synthetize the systems characteristics or point out what is happening inside a system and, generally, in good conditions, they are the reflexion of the formative and research politics put in action. Subsequently, the choice and the use of a particular signal are closely connected to the intent that we want to pursue and to the ability of supplying the best achievable description of the analyzed system, in addition to the social actors who operate and to the pragmatic purposes for which they activate the knowledge process. The signals must therefore be brought back to a project conception in which their construction is integrated in the paradigms and the theoretical models of research. And this is what the pedagogical research must consider if it wants to supply relevant evaluation instruments in order to produce usable knowledges to underline potential qualities of relation between its action and the university renewal.

### **Looking into the quality criteria**

If we bring back these reflections to the evaluating process put in action by the CIVR (Italian Center for the Evaluation of Research) in the determination of the criteria (quality, importance, originality, innovation, internationalization) according to which the products of the scientific research are evaluated, we must first of all interrogate ourselves about the content of these criteria, considering the fact that the evalua-

tion process of the product must follow some important and sufficiently clear passages like the definition of the object of control and of the dimensions on which carrying out the analysis, the collection of the necessary information to evaluation, the elaboration of the information, the construction of the signals and the drawing up of the report.

If the pedagogical research really wants to be respected in the evaluation of the processes and of the products that it expresses, it needs significant signals and descriptors, valid, easy to find, credible, that help it follow these passages, to facilitate the communication between its various fields of study, to increase the transparency and the comparative information, but that above all lead it to a real improvement and progress of the “pedagogical researches” plurality. Therefore, starting from this plurality, we must reduce the number of measurements and parameters that normally are requested in order to supply an “exact” picture of research and pedagogical researches and to simplify the communication process through which the results of these actions are supplied to users and divulged. All this becomes determining just for the urgency and the complexity of the changes that concern the whole university system, that sees, in the afterthought of its politics and its action within the European Education Space and the one of European Research, considered the two new pillars of a society based on knowledge, opening a new scene within which pedagogical research must move.

### **For an European identity of the educational research**

Europe appears as an immense cultural area on which has been impressed the visible brand of a human collectivity that has in common various kind of beliefs and behaviors, a total lifestyle that includes the social ideology, technology, institutions and material assets (Jordan, 1984, p. 22), but still not able to express a completely clear scientific identity. Ancient and future at the same time (Le Goff, 1994, p. 5), it still finds itself at a level of project. Le Goff wondered if it would have been able to answer to the challenges of the modern world. From this reflection emerges as it hasn't still been specified an European common identity even if its existence is today a certainty. Present cultures and civilizations in Europe are permeated by a dialogical character which does not reach its maximum realization. And this consideration is worth above all for pedagogical research, the only one in a position of founding a new European educational conscience, that is the new “conscience of everything is uncertain”. Problems, uncertainties, risks, educational possibilities of present and future appear to be shared by “all parts, provinces, countries, nations of Europe, this ties them up in a common destiny” (Morin, 1988, p. 126), making of the new European scientific conscience a “community of destiny” (Bauer, 1907) governed by that continuous tension towards change and innovation. A conscience that, mentioning Edgar Morin, “allows us not to die” (Morin, 1988, p. 129), not only zoologically, politically, culturally, intellectually, but above all - I would add - just scientifically. And in order to avoid this to happen it is opportune that the education scho-

lars exceed the concept of “own scientific frontier” of the past and cast instead towards a transnational dimension of research, also because it is with such an increase that is possible to gain a more articulated pedagogical speech and of sure effectiveness that will be able answer always better to important issues as the following: which are the criteria of a “good” research in the dominion of education and formation? How to make the educational research more scientific and more useful to the society? Which roads and which methodologies to privilege in order to make it? Such issues appear delicate but they constitute the heart of the discussions conducted by scholars of the different countries, who are engaged in the realization of more and more effective researches in order to improve the total level of research in education. This last one is, in fact, from many parts, accused to be little adequate and hardly scientific. And if one of the main problems is the existing and indissociable relationship between researchers, political deciders and teachers, however many critics have been turned to it, all enough similar from a country to the other and concerning above all the fact that often researchers who work on the same object of study ignore each other and do not consider the achieved results, the researches seem too much professions of political faith, the scientific practices are confused and little explicit, regarding the presented issues as well as the used research protocols, the employed methods appear to be little founded and rigorous, the studies are little diffused, they are little known and also often little productive.

Behind these general considerations there is double lack of the educational research, the social usefulness and the scientific rigor (Whitty, 2006, pp. 159-176), which carry to assert that the absence of cumulativeness and systematic comparison of such a research in certain fields has prevented to identify those that we could define the “good practices”. The process of explicitness (Davies, 1999, pp. 108-121), that is constantly recalled as the main element of weakness, would consist in fact in knowing how to use, compare and systematize in education the results of research and scientific literature, in order to carry out some “goal-analysis” of the acquired knowledge on certain problems. This obviously demands the researchers to be able to place issues concerning the educational range, that’s to say those issues to which we can answer in a scientific way, to be able to collect data in a systematic way (from the classic sources to the most recent data banks), to compare data and experiences in a critical way, referring to scientific and professional standards, to determine the pertinence of researches to the social demand in education and so on.

## **Europe: a community for the educational research**

What has been said interests two important components. The first concerns the general objective of educational research, with which the greatest part of scholars seem to agree, that’s to say the whole research tries to help to understand and to improve the activities of its own field; the second concerns the training of researchers who



are concerned in education at an international level. Concerning the first issue Develay asserts that the educational research cannot be satisfied with explaining and understanding the educational facts, but at the same time must grow up in researchers the effectiveness in action (Develay, 2004, p. 79). Concerning then the second issue, we must remember that the international dimension of educational research must obviously be supported by an adequate researchers training on the level of scientific and technological competences in the specific field, and by the complementary ones, and also by an international formation and an effective exchange of the research practices. The first element (quality of what is produced) and the second element (professional quality) in are closely related: to promote and to support the process of researcher professionalization by helping him to consider himself an European professional is not separated from the quality process of his performance, finalized to the quality of the end product that is in close relationship with the peculiar character of the educational phenomena. Carl Kaestle in 1993 (Kaestle, 1993, pp. 22-31) wrote, on this matter, in the review *Educational Researcher* a famous article titled "The Awful Reputation of Educational Research", that despite the improvements in terms of theories and methods, to the educational research of today is conferred less respect than in the past, above all in terms of tangible support (it is sufficient in fact to think about the financing sums reserved to this field). The scholar pressed for the passing of such an acknowledgment not only through the consolidation of the tie theory-praxis, reconceptualizing the relation, but also inviting researchers to converse in order to improve the "reputation" of the educational research. I think that in order to increase the impact of the European educational research, it would be opportune a context that is able to think about the high quality of the innovation consolidating the European initiatives, usually not adequately supported. It would be useful, in this sense, to institute international nets in order to carry out the exchanges of practices and compatible and comparable materials that can carry new life and quality to the present research programs and supply alternative ways for the solution of problems in the field of the education and the formation. Through the guarantee of the international engagements and the exchange of strategies between subjects, like also the necessity supporting infrastructures of the research at an European level, we can give back to the educational research the place that deserves. Central in this speech becomes conceiving the educational reforms as a process of constant improvement that demands long term investments, and to lead parallel researches at an international level, that would contribute to improve schooling and education putting in continuous relation theory and experimentation, to valorize the role of researchers and education experts in the process of experimentation and arrangement of the educational system and of the one of research which are in continuous change, to make possible and to support the transfer of the innovative process from the scientific community to the formative system, and to the politicians in order to let the system itself develop.

Unfortunately, in the past the educational research did not place sufficient attention to culture as the main mechanism for institutionalizing the innovation process, which

needs the continuous renovation of relationships between researchers, experts and politicians. The fact that educational research does not commonly have great credibility is something sure. In fact, it does not often happen that when, for example, school administrators, have educational problems and address to it in order to try solving them and this happens because is effective the idea of a lack of credible models able to be used in the educational practices. Part of this explication lies in the traditional way of leading the educational research that never effectively align research and praxis. The educational research has the social duty of generating knowledge that could also be useful for practical uses (Cooley, Gage, Scriven, 1997, pp. 18-21). Is useful, in this sense, the parallelism that Michael Scriven (in *Idem*, p. 20) makes with medical research finding that if this last one had only contributed to explain diseases and instead had not identified neither developed useful treatments, we would certainly say that it has missed its main task. To these difficulties joins the one that sees the consent absence on the research targets in the formation range at the center of the epistemological debate, letting appear this field of studies even more weak if compared to what it actually is, in which it seems impossible to take “strong” decisions in order to make some things and not others (Kaestle, 1993, p. 29). We don’t want to transfer in the educational research the methods used in the field, for example, of natural sciences but to lead the pedagogical research base on scientific results. It is clear that educational decisions are not only based on theoretical knowledges, judgment and experience, which are the main components of the traditional research, but also on scientific “proofs”, and for proofs we mean knowledges that have been taken from methodical studies. And if it is true that pedagogical research, as it seems obvious, characterizes itself for the complexity of the individual, social and cultural factors that are involved, it is equally true that we cannot renounce to resolve the educational problems. Robert Slavin (2002, pp. 15-21), during the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, has asserted that the scientific revolution has deeply transformed medicine, agriculture, transports, technologies and other fields during the XX century but it seems to have completely left intact the field of education. Beyond this paradoxical and provocative affirmation, that asks the pedagogical search to be more rigorous, it is necessary first of all to clear, if we want to talk about European perspective of research, which are the elements that render the “educational dominion” a scientific dominion. In fact, I think that the problem of the European educational research is not only the one of choosing appropriate methods or methodologies, but mainly the one of being poor in the debate on used theories and methods. This concerns the ability of the research community to express its own difficulties, insufficiencies and absences (Feuer, Towne, Shavelson, 2002, pp. 4-14) in the field of the instrumentation. Therefore, it is essential for investigators to let grow such a community being personally responsible of the quality of its products and the methodological rigor that it expresses. It does not mean to privilege or not quantitative or qualitative methods, but it means to prevent the perpetration of researchers complete ignorance, at an international level, of methodological issues or methods that involve the use more or less sophisticated of measures, variables, reasoned and statistical samples (Gorard, 2001) as well as of sources and ways of historio-

graphical innovation and so on. I think that in order to realize pertinent strategies of research in the field of education, it is important to avoid building methodological and epistemological barriers that prevent to the scientific community to talk and to increase the understanding of the educational phenomena. At the same time, if it is reasonable that pedagogical research orientates itself towards shapes of cultural “half-breed” or of interference with other disciplines it is a good thing if it maintains its specificities. It is not negligible the fact that still persists the common conception that education researchers do not know how to diffuse the results of their researches (Kaestle, 1993, p. 28). That would prevent education to “be” listened and to “affirm to be” really European. It has been noticed that European researchers look very rarely over oltre their own country, or carry outside from national borders their own research confronting it with the one carried elsewhere in Europe, there is a diversity of tradition inside the specific cultures that does not facilitate the creation of a context for the development of an effective critical debate about methodological problems and mutual learning, not in each country has been activated, in a substantial way, a fast reform of the educational systems, which still appear ideologically guided and show insufficient consideration for the researches carried out and the need to evaluate their consequences, in Italy, but we could perhaps also assert in Europe, educational research has been poorly appreciated and, in some cases, little upgraded and developed.

A greater international coordination could contribute to improve it, to increase its consideration and use and finally to cultivate it. If we will reach a better integration of the European politics of research, the states, the Union and the other actors of the European research (such as the great organisms of cooperation as the ESA) will have to assure a real synergy between the various political actions in order to design a new scientific area, founded on those ideals of democracy and social justice that transcend the nation-state and supply a structure able to reorganize the economic system. The educational systems today, for example, share the common dimension of educating people to democratic participation and social justice, but this need does not imply a rigid standardization of results and an omitted answer to the differences in the formative aims that are useful for preserving the diversity of each culture. Although there are conflictual visions on the European project of a new space for the educational research and inside it can be recognized particular “tensions”, like those identified by Dobrich (1997) in “New Challenges for Educational Research in Europe” that conceives such space as an area of identity crisis, I am convinced that in the future conflicts will be solved, obviously if we will be able to place ourselves in a perspective of development in terms of studies of processes, products, conciliation, afterthought and integration between the various approaches and methods of work. To manage the scientific and cultural conflicts recognizing the “identity of the educational search” and not producing methodological antagonisms with the other disciplines, or sour controversies between interpretative paradigms etc. remains *conditio sine qua non* for preventing that the critical debate between researchers who

operate in the range of formation could be destroyed and that the social and cultural responsibilities of the educational practices would be evaded.

### **A data bank on the pedagogical research in Europe**

The European Commission has instituted a fund for the European research with the related scheduled programs; the most recent have gone to feed what has been defined the “European added value”, that’s to say the action of those researchers who work together in international and interdisciplinary groups in order to focus the problems of “politics of knowledge”. In more general terms, it has taken the challenge to create an “European space of the research”, converged in some documents that have been useful for giving shape to the Sixth Scheduled Program for Research and Technological Development, related to years 2002-2006, and the following one (Seventh Scheduled Program for research), during period 2007-2013. The challenge in the field of training consists in delineating an European educational politics, recalling the actions and problems that the different countries face overcoming the mere juxtaposition of national programs. In spite of the importance attributed from many sides to this problem, there isn’t however in official documents any specification of the peculiar characteristics of the European educational research, but it is still not known what has really happened inside those projects that had objectives of European cooperation. We do not know how the demand for “an European dimension of the educational search” has been really interpreted by researchers and neither how such interpretation has found translation in praxes. Moreover, are lacking sufficient indications on the actual meaning of international and interdisciplinary educational research and on how the various solicitations carried out by the European Commission have been then concretely accepted by various groups of research.

For creating an European space of the educational search it is therefore necessary to have documentation of the experiences carried out by researchers in their working field, which could give life to the first fund of the European educational patrimony that would concur to estimate and to take advantage of the accumulated experience from the various scientific communities until this moment. Such fund would constitute a precious source of concrete suggestions potentially determinant for the future. It means, obviously, to consider the opportunity of creating a database of all the European educational projects in which researchers are involved, that can be used not only as a statistic description of the research in the UE range but also in order to supply useful information on the national and thematic composition of the European groups of research and in order to increase, considering what already proposed and activated, the exchange of research practice and the occasions of transnational comparison. That this would allow to make also more adequate evaluations about the problems of the international educational research, interpreting a need that today appears to be urgent, the one of systematization of the international pedagogical

research patrimony. An informative flow of this kind concerning the processes and results of research in education would feed therefore the channels of comparison between research practices pertaining to truth and various contexts facilitating the understanding the kind of the use that in ours and in other cultures is made of such practices. It is in fact indispensable for researchers to have admission to the information on programs, work plans and various efforts lead from other European scholars in the opening towards other countries, in fact this gives them the possibility to open new editions of already started or concluded projects and to clear problems that originate at local level, regional or national.

Thus the structured information may offer a hint for a debate on the characteristics of a basic knowledge of education and make clearer the vision of a common European project that could concretely stimulate the creation of one Europe of educational research, an educational research in Europe and a research on the European education. It would concur, moreover, to fix strategic targets more and more clear in terms of action dominions, priorities, duration and necessary budgets, above reinforcing the efforts of collaboration between the institutions, international training associations etc. able to promote the cooperation in the accumulation, exchange and interpretation of comparative data of high-quality.

### **Educational research and innovation processes**

What has been said agrees also with what has been asserted by the conclusion of the European Council of Lisbon, that took place in March 2000, during which has been exposed the need of an European coordination in terms of educational targets, coordination that would have been implemented by a program activity called Open Method of Coordination (OMC), applied as an instrument for the development of a coherent and comprehensive educational strategy through articles 149 and 150 of the international Convention. The method indicated here, involving different tools like “benchmarks”, signals, “good practices” exchanges and “peer review”, has opened the research to the development of “virtuous” praxes assuring better convergences towards the common aims. But at the moment, in the field of pedagogical research, the committed budget appears to be, in this sense, generally still little satisfactory, even if with this statement I do not want to omit the often brilliant single results, of those scholars who, even in need of means and credibility, do not arrive to have the critical mass necessary in order to collect the fruits of their innovations. But still at present time, the European pedagogy seems to have a “narrow European conception” of its research praxes, even if during last years the interest scholars for the European nets has visibly increased. It is necessary that European efforts, turned to let participate to researchers to international projects or training programs, will be addressed more and more towards what has been said by the European Commission that has recommended to reinforce the impact of the Union actions: creating poles

of European excellence for the cooperation between laboratories and institutions, launching some European technological initiatives, stimulating the research creativity which is fundamental for competition between the équipes at European level, improving the European attraction for the best researchers, developing structures of research of European interest and reinforcing the coordination of national research programs. But in addition to these indications, I am convinced that inside the progressive development of an European educational research live also the issues related to the indispensable character of a collective identity for European integration, which absence could slow down the scientific participation. And if it is true, as it is true, that research concurs to reinforce “the feeling of belonging” to the Union for a wider implication of researchers in cultural life and in the construction process of the European scientific space, then pedagogical research, which task is the one of interrogating Europe about its idea of education and training, engaging itself in the “complex issue of European identity”, it imposes itself as determining factor of social integration able to correct divergences and consolidate community connections. Due to its dynamic qualities, educational research places itself as necessary bastion to the affirmation of any collective identity, that moreover implies the possibility to benefit of all the opportunities of access to knowledge and to competence contributing to modify the truth and to build up a society of progress able to express and preserve inside a full consciousness of the European dimension. If its task is the one to help producing a higher degree of civilization in society, the aim of the university system is the one of making as large as possible the number of those who possess the ability to act effectively and professionally in various communities. The European university system and the professionals who operate inside it, only if they will help to produce many species of abilities necessary to contemporary life they will win the challenge of future and will be in a position to plan the European space of advanced instruction about which we are so much discussing today.

But to do it it needs to enlarge the competences of the researchers. It cannot be overseen the tight link between the aim of making Europe the most competitive society of knowledge in the world and the continuous training of researchers, the makers of this knowledge. In this sense the investment in human capital and the reforms of the University system appear decisive to meet the Lisbon targets. But research and learning within the university are two faces of the same coin. And if it is true that the quality of the university instruction mainly depends on people working within it, the first investment for quality must concern educational processes, recruiting, adjournment of the professionals in education, who will carry out at various levels a central role to give people those competences and qualifications meeting the needs of the job market (Commissione Unione Europea, 2003, p. 8).

Nowadays instead the lack of teachers constrains the European countries, at different levels, to employ teachers often not much qualified and this could affect the human capital's increase first and foremost of the students, but also that of teachers and researchers.

## The new role of university within the European Community

University can be considered the key sector for the development and supply of human capital for research and innovation fields and for the creation of highly productive jobs. At international level, some more advanced universities today compete with each other to create research and knowledge centers to attract resources from a global context (such as human and financial capitals).

The transformation of university in the last few years made possible the achievement of the consciousness regarding the strategical function it can have in treating and implementing processes of support and promotion of research and innovation that are still characterized by a national, or even local, presence (this level of presence makes knowledge exchanges among the various actors easier). This means that an educational research strategy at an European level allows reaching a critical mass of adequate characteristics of competitiveness compared with the research systems of other continents, considering that an European dimension seems to be the best in terms of interaction among local, national and international actors.

A widespread characteristic of the educational systems, at all levels, in European countries, criticised by the Union is the paths' self-referentiality, having recoils in the link between paths and job market and on the value of human capital.

It is necessary to go over this self-referentiality as suggested by the European Council in Barcelona (2002), if we are going to reply to the question: what do we mean with identity of the European education research? The question is a difficult one, but broadly speaking, when we talk about the identity of a community we refer to the capacity of a group to recognize itself within specific rules, communities, institutions, and to the effort to make this characteristics visible through the original contribution to the solution of all problems of this world. It is through this way that research can aspire to become culture of a globalized research, no longer just the combination of individual utilities but the result of a collective project.

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