

Plurilingualism, multilingualism... in the contexts of assessment

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ABSTRACT

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At present, one of the hot topics on the European research scene is ‘assessment’. Namely, to put it very briefly, it could be said that ‘assessment’ is undergoing a major revision, or reevaluation, in an attempt at recognizing that the full scope of an academic portfolio should be taken into consideration and not just papers published in high-level journals.

It is exactly ten years now since the famous DORA (San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment) saw the light of day at the Annual Meeting of The American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB). Other landmarks during the past ten years after DORA have been the Leiden Manifesto and the Hong Kong Principles. These landmarks, in my view, present an accumulation of the energy necessary for change within this very wide concept of ‘assessment’. It should be noted that the changes do not only pertain to SSH but to all domains of research. This is important because it indicates a major push towards ‘reevaluating evaluation’.

Needless to say, the changes that we can hope will be articulated and widely accepted especially pertain to many of the disciplines in the Humanities. It is well known that it has been the voice of SSH that has, even during the past decade (and even long before

that), stressed many of the points that are now under discussion. One of the issues with the long history has been to point out the diversity in the Humanities. This point often went hand in hand with publishing in ‘national languages’.

It is impossible in a short presentation to even enumerate all the contributions to this new vision and articulation of ‘assessment’. Since 2019, in a more recent perspective, the need for ‘reassessing assessment’ can be found in, for example, the LERU document *A Pathway towards Multidimensional Academic Careers - A LERU Framework for the Assessment of Researchers*, the EC Scoping Report *Towards a reform of the research assessment system: scoping report*, the *Position Statement and Recommendations on Research Assessment Processes* from Science Europe, the document *Room for everyone’s talent: towards a new balance in the recognition and rewards of academics* by the Netherlands public knowledge institutions and funders, etc. etc. etc.... Much of what we find in these documents is incorporated in the currently still ‘strictly confidential’ EC document on research assessment, articulated at present by a core group under the auspices of the EC.

The idea behind these activities is to propose a way forward that would incorporate a European agreement to be signed by individual research funding organizations, research performing organizations as well as national/regional authorities and agencies. Whether the same will be achieved only time will tell, but the objective is: “A reformed system should also be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the diversity of countries, disciplines, research cultures, research maturity levels, the specific missions of institutions, and career paths.” (*Towards a reform of the research assessment system Scoping Report*, European Commission, November 2021).

When one takes a bird’s eye view of the documents at hand, a question that arises is: What about language or What about languages? Languages are mentioned in some of these documents, but when one takes into consideration that the main aim is to acknowledge a broad range of research activities (such as peer review and mentoring), then the above question becomes even more pertinent. Or simply put, where do ‘national languages’ come into this picture?

This presentation does not address the many-layered facets of multi- and plurilingualism, but aims at the need to bring their importance into the dialogue on ‘assessment’.

For some time, it could be said that plurilingualism was equivalent to multilingualism. However, today we can make, at least in a brief overview, the distinction between the two in the sense of plurilingualism being more focused on the individual speaker of multiple languages. This competence implies the knowledge not only of multiple languages, but also the understanding of different cultures – and all of this allows for better communicative skills.

Thus, in my view, what needs to be stressed in the many-faceted discussions on ‘assessment’ is the importance of the ‘more-than-one’ language principle. Researchers in the Humanities by default use more than one language. This is manifest not only in concrete scholarly outputs, but also in other activities, such as peer review, mentoring, etc.

In my opinion, the contribution of this meeting, held during the French Presidency, should aim at stressing the importance of pluri- and multilingualism in various contexts of ‘reevaluating evaluation’. What’s more, the notions of pluri- and multilingualism should be explicitly incorporated into the documents of the future, especially the document at present being developed under the auspices of the European Commission. The stress on ‘languages’ does not only pertain to various published outputs, characteristic of the Humanities, but is also an integral part of all the other activities that members of the academic community perform on a regular basis in their scholarly/academic careers.