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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NEOLIBERALIZATION BY EVALUATION
Explaining the Making of Neoliberal Evaluative State

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ABSTRACT: Starting from the late seventies neoliberalism has emerged as the new global hegemonic paradigm. Several studies demonstrated that different factors facilitated the global spread of neoliberalism, but little attention has been paid to the role played by evaluation both in legitimizing the neoliberalization of the state and in explaining the resilience of neoliberalism. The article argues that evaluation is a strategy of action which is able to emphasize the adaptive capacity of neoliberalism to different socio-political contexts and the neoliberal purpose to depoliticize public action. The contribution aims to illustrate how evaluation works on a twofold level. On the one hand, evaluation is a tool of global governance that acts normatively to homogenize states' action consistently with some neoliberal values, such as competitiveness and economic efficiency. On the other hand, to conform to such values, variegated forms of evaluation are implemented by each state in order to introduce market rationality in non-economic domains, such as education and health system. Referring to some empirical cases, these two overlapping processes are termed as the "evaluated state" and "evaluative state". As a result, neoliberalization by evaluation is a process involving the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state-endorsed norms.

KEYWORDS: Evaluation, Governance, Neoliberalism, Neoliberalization, State

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1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the last economic and financial crisis, several authors announced the demise of neoliberalism (Stiglitz 2008). As Birch and Mykhnenko (2010, 255) pointed out: "Neoliberalism has self-destructed. The thirty-year long global march of free market ideology has come to an abrupt end". More cautiously, David Harvey asked whether it was "really" the end of neoliberalism (Harvey 2009), concluding that "the current bailout [of banking system] is the same old story". More convincingly, other authors have described "the strange non-death of neoliberalism" (Crouch 2011) and "how neoliberalism survived the financial meltdown" (Mirowski 2013), thus suggesting that the crisis can be interpreted as an adaptation of the neoliberal paradigm. The diversity of opinions can be ascribed to the lack of a clear definition of neoliberalism, which has become an academic catchphrase (Boas & Gans-Morse 2009), applied to a wide range of phenomena and used in myriad ways in scholarship across social sciences. But such a diversity also derives from different views of neoliberalism. In fact, following Ward and England (2007), we can outline at least four understandings of neoliberalism, with scholars that typically amalgamate two or more of them: 1) neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project; 2) neoliberalism as governmentality; 3) neoliberalism as policy and program; 4) neoliberalism as state form.

These understandings, as described below (see section no. 2), also propose alternative solutions to the resilience of neoliberal ideas, ranging from the historical dynamics which have produced the still hegemonic power of capitalist elites (Duménil and Levy 2011) to the special capacity of neoliberalism to adapt to different social and economic contexts (Peck and Tickell 2002), as well as to become the political "rationality of contemporary capitalism" (Dardot and Laval 2014, 7). Few studies emphasized that any critical analysis of neoliberalism must also draw on "an interpretation and genealogy of neoliberal ways of thinking, measuring, evaluating, criticizing, judging and knowing" (Davies 2014, 23).

In fact, neoliberal ways of evaluating are strategic for understanding both the rise and resilience of neoliberalism, and the character of neoliberal authority, that is on what basis the neoliberal state demands the right to be obeyed. Evaluation plays a strategic role in stabilizing, legitimizing and reproducing neoliberalism, as well as in neoliberalizing states. By putting evaluation at the joining point of different understandings of neoliberalism, the present contribution focuses on the key role played by evaluation in these processes.

Whatever the understanding, evaluation can be considered as one of the main strategies of neoliberalization, because of its ability to emphasize two characteristics of ne-

oliberalism: 1) its adaptive capacity to different socio-political contexts and 2) its purpose to depoliticize public action (Moini 2015). Evaluation is one of the main tools through which the restructuring of the State is performed and legitimized. Meanwhile, it is also a device to implement and support neoliberal policies and programs both nationally and internationally. The contribution aims to emphasize how evaluation works on a twofold level. On the one hand, it is a tool of global governance that acts normatively to homogenize states' action consistently with some neoliberal values, such as competitiveness and economic efficiency. On the other hand, in order to conform to such values, the states constantly monitor and assess public action and policies, as well as the conduct of individuals and organization, for the purpose of introducing market rationality in non-economic domains, such as education, health system, justice and public services. We describe these two overlapping processes – namely the "evaluated state" and "evaluative state"– in sections no. 4. In the next section, the paper briefly describes the paradigm shift from the welfare state to the neoliberal state occurred from the seventies onwards and introduces four different understandings of neoliberalism. Then section no. 3 focuses on the special role of evaluation for neoliberalism's ascendancy and resilience. The article ends with some concluding remarks.

2. Understandings of neoliberalism, understanding neoliberalism

Since the seventies neoliberal ideas have established themselves as the main answer to the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state and lasting stagflation. It was a fiscal (O'Connor 1973), governability (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki 1975) and legitimation (Habermas 1976) crisis that paved the way to an all-encompassing critique of the state as the source of every kind of waste and as a brake on prosperity. The transformation of state action and the change in its modalities of intervention was the major success of the neoliberal turn in the seventies. After the first experiment in Chile under Pinochet, neoliberal policies were implemented in leading Western countries by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, which established neoliberalism as the new dominant paradigm shaping all policies both nationally and internationally.

Several studies showed how the global spread of neoliberalism has been facilitated by different causes. Firstly, the transition from the Keynesian national welfare state to the Schumpeterian competition state (Jessop 2002) was associated with the globalization of economy and finance and the development of new information technologies, both of them constituting an effect of neoliberal policies, as well as a catalyst for their spread. Secondly, it was favoured by the neoliberal turn in the politics of many West-

ern governments, that transformed the meaning of the remit of major international institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, to the extent that they acted as the main vectors for the global diffusion of neoliberal ideas. Thirdly, the crisis of left-wing parties and the collapse of the Soviet Bloc favoured the acceptance of neoliberalism also by the modern Left and post-communist countries. To the extent that since the nineties neoliberalism has entered into mainstream politics almost without regard for old partisan divides and national boundaries.

Different understandings of neoliberalism have been proposed to explain its rise and resilience. Following Ward and England (2007), we can identify:

1) *Neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project*. Based on neo-Marxist studies, this understanding sees neoliberalism as part of the class struggle for dominance over the ideas (and minds) of the social formation (Harvey 2005). Strongly influenced by Gramsci, hegemony is understood not just about imposition, but also about "willing consent" by those being subordinated. As Hall (1988, 52) pointed out, the aim of the struggle is "to gain ascendancy over the entire social formation, to achieve positions of leadership in a number of different sites of social life at once, to achieve the commanding position on a broad strategic front". Neoliberalism is the ideology associated with the successful restoration of class power by world economic elites occurred from the seventies onwards. Ideology is not the engine of neoliberal revolution, which realized through the material compromise between capitalists and the upper fractions of managerial classes. Nevertheless when a neoliberal ideology emerged, it was a crucial tool for the establishment of neoliberalism (Duménil and Levy 2011). Such an ideology is understood to rest on five values – the individual, freedom of choice, market security, *laissez faire*, and minimal government (Larner 2000) – which have become "the commonsense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world" (Harvey 2005, 23).
2) *Neoliberalism as governmentality*. Based on post-structuralist studies, this understanding implies power "as a complex, yet very specific form centering on knowledge production through the ensemble of rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques concerning the mentality of rule that allow for the de-centering of government through the active role of auto-regulated or auto-correcting selves who facilitate 'governance at a distance'" (Springer 2012, 137). Neoliberalism is "the new way of the world" (Dardot and Laval 2014), a political rationality based on a set of discourses, practices and apparatuses that constitute a new modality of government of human beings, in accordance with an entrepreneurial model and the universal principle of competition. It is a constructivist project involving a normative rather than ontological claim about the pervasiveness of economic rationality.

3) *Neoliberalism as policy and program*. This understanding refers to the transfer of ownership from the public to the private sector, through policies and programs advanced under the banners of deregulation, privatization, liberalization, depoliticization and monetarism. These policies involve a conceptual reworking of the meaning that categories such as "state", "market", "public" and "private" hold. The premise of this understanding is the idea that the market is the most efficient institution for the production and allocation of resources.
4) *Neoliberalism as state form.* This understanding refers to "the quantitative and qualitative restructuring of nation-states, involving redrawing the boundary between civil society, market, and state" (Ward and England 2007, 12). Neoliberalism is considered as a process of transformation (neoliberalization) that states purposefully engage in to remain economically competitive. As Peck pointed out, ''the embrace of neoliberalism lead states to denigrate their own capacities and potentialities, to restructure and to cut themselves, to engineer their own 'reform and downsizing'" (2001, 446).

In general terms, the rise of neoliberalism has led to the recognition of the following principles: 1) the acknowledgment of competitive market as the most efficient and morally superior institution for the production and allocation of resources; 2) the repudiation of any form of State intervention in reducing market inequalities; 3) the exaltation of freedom at the expense of equality; 4) the demotion of social rights and 5) the reduction of individual freedoms to economic freedom.

Although, theoretically, neoliberalism can be considered as a paradigm based on general principles, "actually existing neoliberalism" (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 349) shows that those principles are adapted in a creative manner to different historical, economic, political and institutional backgrounds. Hence, the notion of "variegated neoliberalization" has been introduced to emphasize "the *constitutively* incomplete, experimental and ultimately polymorphic character of neoliberalization processes" (Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010, 217).

Conceiving neoliberalism as a process (neoliberalization) rather than an end-state reveals some analytical advantages. In particular, it allows to reconcile perspectives focusing on the homogenizing capacity of neoliberalism as global regulatory regime (Crotty 2003) with those emphasizing the multifaceted actual manifestations of neoliberal values (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009). The variegation of concrete forms and the sharing of general values are not inconsistent, but strengthen each other (Moini 2015). Therefore, the analysis of different processes of neoliberalization is helpful for understanding "the ways in which ideologies of neoliberalism are themselves produced and reproduced through institutional forms and political action" (Peck and Tickell 2002,

383). In general sense, neoliberalization is both an "out there" and "in here" phenomenon, that denotes a politically guided intensification of market rule and commodification. As far as the state is concerned, its transformation is driven both by a neoliberal metalogic of convergence and by an active state-driven construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms. In other words, the state is both the victim and the master of its neoliberalization, with the global hegemonic classes that have purposefully operated for its transformation in order to strengthen their power.

3. Evaluation as a tool of neoliberal governance

We use evaluation as an umbrella term for a wide range of techniques – such as audits, rankings, ratings, indicators and indexes – that systematically assess the performance of individuals, organizations and states. By the arrangement of a special culture (including auditing, monitoring, and measuring) and instruments, aimed at creating a comparative system that makes possible both the measurement of overall phenomena and the calculation of the gaps between individuals, states and organizations, evaluation allows to describe, judge, measure, and compare various actors based on a common metric (Foucault 1999). By drawing up rankings (of democracy, debt, corruption, transparency, economic freedom, and so on) between countries, evaluative instruments are able to signal virtuous and non-virtuous actors, thus legitimizing certain policies at the expense of others. Those instruments "are not only informational devices that grease the wheels of commerce, but profoundly disciplining ones as well" (Fourcade and Healy 2007, 304).

It is no coincidence that the ages of neoliberal triumph have coincided with the proliferation of instruments aiming at measuring, monitoring, and evaluating state's behavior with respect to issues such as debt, corruption, democracy, transparency, media freedom, creditworthiness, and business environment. There are theoretical and practical reasons that explain this phenomenon.

Firstly, the neoliberal dogmatism of rationalizing every aspect of human life made evaluation based on calculation, quantification and standardization a major strategy to manage uncertainty. Neoliberalism understands individuals, organizations and states as rational actors which need impartial, updated and comparable data to make rational choices. Since "knowledge claims based on quantitative measures are commonly treated as though they had a distinct and superior status compared to claims based on other forms of information" (Munck 2009, 10), evaluation is acknowledged as the privileged method of knowledge of neoliberalism. The latter takes to the extreme one of

the crucial features of the development of capitalism, that is "decision making based on numbers, rather than duty, magic, or custom, [as] a radically new orientation toward business" (Stevens and Espeland 2005, 375). An orientation involving the depersonalization of business relations and a more objective stance toward business choices.

Secondly, such depersonalization concerns also the political sphere, as neoliberalism has favoured a shift from politicized forms of economic management, that were dominant during the period 1945-76 and were characterized by discretion-based decision-making by government, to depoliticized forms, which are being dominant since the eighties and characterized by rules-based decision-making. In this context, neoliberalism can be interpreted as an attempt to replace political judgement with economic evaluation (Davies 2014). But depoliticization does not mean the "end of politics", as it is a highly political governing strategy taking three different forms: 1) the reassignment of government tasks to 'non-political' bodies, such as the European Central Bank; 2) the adoption of measures ostensibly to increase the accountability, transparency and external validation of policy; 3) the acceptance of external binding 'rules' which limit government room for manoeuvre (Burnham 1999; Moini 2015). As Supiot pointed out, one of the main depoliticization strategy is to remove the political character of decision-making by transforming "*le gouvernement par les lois*" into "*la gouvernance par les nombres*" (2015, 462). In order to understand the resilience of neoliberalism, the political power of numbers, their performative character, as well as the control of their production and use, are crucial political and research issues (De Leonardis and Neresini 2015). In this context, evaluation is among the privileged depoliticization strategies, as it produces numbers that make evaluated subjects comparable and quantifiable.

Thirdly, evaluation is fostered by the commodification of every human action and product that neoliberalism demands. As Mosco pointed out, "commodification demands the use of measurement procedures to produce commodities and monitoring techniques to keep track of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption" (2009, 141). If data are organized, accessible, and capable of being provided in manipulable and discrete units, they become a valuable good (Schiller, 1989).

Fourthly, evaluation has been favoured by the development and rapid diffusion of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Since neoliberalism seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market, "this requires technologies of information creation and capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyse, and use massive databases to guide decisions in the global marketplace. Hence neoliberalism's intense interest in and pursuit of information technologies" (Harvey 2005, 3). Thanks to the digital revolution it is often cheap and easy to formulate and disseminate benchmarks. ICTs have made quantitative data more accessible and recordable. Further-

more, the evaluative instruments based on the quantitative measurements done by ICTs records, are more objectifiable. Hence, ICTs can be regarded as "the privileged technology of neoliberalism" (Harvey 2005, 68).

Finally, the growth of international neoliberalism gave an impetus for the spread of ratings and rankings, because of new factors emanated from neoliberal interests, visions and understandings of the developed world vis-à-vis the developing world (Arndt and Oman 2006). One of these factors is that the large increase in international investment in developing countries has prompted investors to seek more information to help them reduce risk to their investments. Furthermore, starting from the nineties in many Western countries there has been a move towards more transparent and accountable public policies, which has prompted governments to justify expenditures such as foreign aid according to measurable and supposedly objective benchmarks and standards (Löwenheim 2008).

4. Evaluation and the making of neoliberal state

Neoliberalism is a self-contradicting theory of the state (Harvey 2005). On the one hand, by downsizing government and dismantling welfare state, it appears to aim for a less interventionist state. On the other hand, the state is seen to play an indispensable role in the creation, governance, and conduct of markets, including at the international scale. In order to understand this apparent contradiction, various authors prefer to use the term "neoliberalization", for emphasizing the spatial and temporal dynamics of neoliberalism, described as two partly overlapping processes. The first are the "roll-back" processes, which "tend to be predominant with the initial onset of neoliberalization, when restructuring projects are typically focused on dismantling alien institutions […] and *disciplining potentially unruly (collective) subjects*" (Peck 2010, 22, my italics). These processes have been prosecuted in the name of privatization, deregulation, discreditation and dismantlement of welfare state and social-collectivist institutions. Greatly influenced by Hayek (1944; 1973), this phase of *creative destruction* was characterized by the understanding of the market as a spontaneous and self-regulating institution tending to equilibrium, and the state planning as inefficient and threatening individual freedom. The second are the "roll-out" processes, which are typically associated with an "explosion of 'market conforming' regulatory incursions" (Peck 2010, 23), as well as with forms of reregulation through adaptation. These processes focus on the "purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations" (Peck and Tickell 2002, 384). Deep neoliberaliza-

tion rests on proactive statecraft and institution-building in service of neoliberal goals, as the state is in charge to provide the legal, regulatory, fiscal and institutional framework for the implementation of market principles, as well as for the *positive creation* of new markets. This implies the extension of market rationality to public sector too (Buchanan 2000).

Despite the fact that "evaluation practices are firmly embedded in and inextricably tied to particular social and institutional structures and practices" (House e Howe 2000, 3), the relationship between neoliberalization and evaluation has been nearly overlooked especially as far as the transformation of the state is concerned. To the extent that only recent studies have emphasized the global power of rankings and indicators and the political aspects of grading states (Cooley and Snyder 2015; Davis et al. 2012). In particular, those studies underscored evaluation's ability to act as a tool of global governance, which is able to neoliberalize states through the normative and disciplinary power of rankings and indicators. This process combines with variegated forms of evaluation, which differ both by spatial dimension and policy sector. Since evaluation techniques "adapt to the particular rhetorical, normative and pragmatic purposes of the actors who use them" (Davies 2014, 35), through evaluation different states – as systems of neoliberal governance – implement national and policy variants of neoliberalism with the aim to conform themselves to the global principle of competition (Giancola 2015).

Roll-back neoliberalization compels each state to become an entrepreneurial state in competition against others for running after capital. Governments' efforts have to move from full employment and inclusive welfare systems to economic efficiency and international competitiveness. The old system of bureaucratic judgement, which was dominant over the so-called "golden age" of welfare state, is now substituted by the more regular evaluation of individual competence that carries out at every instant (Dardot and Laval 2014).[1] As Davies pointed out: "Neoliberalism is typically less concerned with expanding markets per se, than in expanding the reach of *market-based principles and techniques of evaluation.* […] Institutions […] [such as] trade unions, families, artists, democratic procedures, law, traditions and professions all make claims to

[1] The bureaucratic judgement was based on the creation of classification systems constructed on the statutory qualities assigned to individuals in the course of his/her educational and professional career. The evaluation of individuals was based on the statistical probability of a link between the situation of each individual in the classification and his/her personal effectiveness. This system allowed a high predictability of individual situations, as to professional advancement, social security allowance, etc. Neoliberal tenet considers such a predictability as a way of making individual indolent, less active, and not inclined to put himself into play.

authority and justification, by appealing to tacit and/or incalculable notions of what counts as justice or the common good. They […] refuse measurement. They typically abstain from offering factual, quantitative justifications for their existence and activities. Neoliberal critique cannot simply abolish all of these institutions, or replace all of them with markets, but the targeted use of economics can seek to replace normative, critical evaluation with economic, technical evaluation" (2014, 32). Since the eighties a strong focus has emerged on the measurement of political and economic aspects of countries. As hegemonic ideology, neoliberalism has made some values more relevant than others and some evaluation tools preferable to others, by stressing the need to assess, measure and monitor specific topics, such as creditworthiness, public indebtedness, economic freedom, corruption, and transparency, through specific *neoliberal* instruments. Hence, evaluation practices have constituted an overall system of examinations that establishes and/or reaffirms structures of hierarchy and authority in the international system (Löwenheim 2008). Some examples may clarify this point which is crucial for the rise of the "evaluated state".

In fact the roll-back processes of dismantlement of welfare state and liberalization of domestic markets had to be evaluated through instruments capable of measuring states' ability to conform to market rationality. Many indexes of global governance,[2] such as the index "Economic Freedom of the World" by the Canadian Fraser Institute, the "Index of Economic Freedom" by the Heritage Foundation and the "Global Competitiveness Index" by the World Economic Forum, were created to measure those states performances. These indexes have been used by national governments – such as the US – and international institutions – such as the World Bank – to implement their foreign and development policies to developing countries. For instance, in 2004 the US Congress created the Millennium Challenge Corporation, as an independent US foreign aid agency with the aim to fight against global poverty, by delivering foreign assistance to countries. The selection of eligible countries is based on various indicators[3] from different sources. The most of these indicators focus on state's capacity to liberalize domestic markets ("trade policy" indicator by the Heritage Foundation), and foster competitiveness and entrepreneurship ("access to credit" indicator and "business start-up" indicator by the International Finance Corporation). This external evaluation tends to remove the political character of countries selection and through a 'depoliticization by numbers' it surreptitiously rewards neoliberalizing states (that is states implementing

[2] An updated list of these instruments is the Global Benchmarking Database by the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, University of Warwick. Available at: www.warwick.ac.uk/globalbenchmarking/database.

[3] For a list of indicators, see http://www.mcc.gov/pages/selection/indicators

neoliberal reforms) and punishes welfare states. As several studies demonstrated (Davis et al. 2012; Giannone 2015; Merry et al. 2015), the selection of indicators is not just a methodological procedure, because the values and standards of the measuring instrument would still be set through an essentially political process, and the responses to the result of measurement are, at their core, a matter of political judgement. Indicators can be seen as "political spaces" (Urueña 2015) because "political judgements are implicit in the choice of what to measure, how to measure it, how often to measure it and how to present and interpret the results" (Alonso and Starr 1987, 3). Furthermore, in the neoliberal State, indicators have a "feedback effect on quantified subjects […] that takes the form of benchmarking, evaluation, ranking and centrality of performance" (Desrosières 2011, 380 and 382).

Another example of external evaluation is the measurement of countries' level of good governance by the World Bank. In order to realize its structural adjustment programs, the World Bank measures good governance through an instrument, based on indicators provided by various sources (including the Heritage Foundation and Freedom House), which tends to focus on the assessment of government's ability to foster private business and trade liberalization, to reform public sector and protect property rights (Giannone 2010b). The term "good governance" seems to remove the political character of these structural reforms, that are negotiated with the country concerned, thus creating a variegation of neoliberal (re)forms, as part of "a revised neoliberal model stressing market-friendly state intervention" (Peet 2003, 129).

The power of evaluation also lies in its ability to legitimize a new understanding of democracy, consistent with the neoliberal view of exalting economic freedom, neglecting socio-economic equality and considering negatively the state's role in the economy. As has been previously demonstrated (Giannone 2010a), the construction and successive transformations of the *Freedom in the World* index by the American organization Freedom House – the most important instrument for measuring democracy around the world – have been affected by the rise of neoliberalism. Specifically, some indicator – such as "freedom from gross socioeconomic inequality" – referring to a more equalitarian conception of democracy, has been deleted. Other indicators emphasize property rights and economic freedom, and equate government "unduly influence" on business activity to the one by organized crime, thus revealing a negative bias towards state/public role in the economy, which is typical of neoliberalism. This instrument is widely used by governments, national agencies (USAID), international institutions and organizations (the World Bank and the United Nations), thus contributing to the diffusion and legitimation of its neoliberal understanding of democracy.

These kinds of evaluation favor the development of "evaluated state" processes. Specifically, they produce what Fourcade and Healy (2013) have termed as "within-market classifications",[4] that is classifications with categories and thresholds that restrict access to certain resources. Compared to boundary classifications, within-market classifications are seemingly more democratic, since they do not exclude definitely evaluated states from the possibility to get access to those resources. Within-market classifications exercise a moral and disciplinary power, as in exchange for inclusion they require a commitment to improvement. These classifications "steer behavior toward some desirable goal, and encourage […] [the states] to stay on top of their commitments. There are incentives for compliance, material or symbolic rewards for success, and sanctions for failure. Rewards and punishments are often themselves acts of reclassification. Punitive reclassification, for instance, may entail higher premiums, loss of privileges, poorer service, or higher interest rates" (Fourcade and Healy 2013, 564).

These processes of "evaluated state" help to create a new conception of the state as "evaluative state".[5] In fact the global diffusion of evaluation tools embodies "a profoundly new sociopolitical view in which the behavior of actors is regulated internally through self-monitoring, rather than externally through coercion" (Fourcade and Healy 2007, 304). Precisely because of its declared commitment to technicality, objectivity, rigour and impartiality, evaluation is a seemingly less restrictive and confrontational way to propagate neoliberal values. This makes it a privileged substitute for political choice in order to introduce market rationality and the neoliberal principles of competition and entrepreneurship in non-economic domains, such as education, public services, and health system.

Roll-out neoliberalization demands each state to have an active role in neoliberalizing society and individual conduct. The end goals of neoliberalization, such as "freedom, choice, consumer sovereignty, competition and individual initiative, as well as those of compliance and obedience, must be constructions of the state acting now in its positive role through the development of the techniques of *auditing*, *accounting* and *management*" (Olssen and Peters 2005, 315). Unlike other organizations, the state is a "consent-based principle of public order", with the power to define and modify the

[4] There are two main kinds of classification: boundary classification, which distinguishes those who are "in" from those who are "out" (for instance members and non-members of the Eurozone), and the very widespread within-market classification, which, "rather than dividing people into two mutually exclusive groups, […] position[s] them in a categorical framework or on a continuous scale, the latter usually having key cut-points or thresholds" (Fourcade and Healy 2013, 564).

[5] The expression "evaluative State" was first introduced by Neave (1988 and 2012) and used to describe the transformation of the state's role in higher education. But this process can be considered as just one piece of a more general and all-encompassing transformation of the State.

rules of the game, to require compliance and confer trust. In its neoliberal configuration, the state demands the right to be obeyed mainly on the basis of particular economic claims and rationalities (Davies 2014). In this context, neoliberalism might be defined as "the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state-endorsed norms" (Davies 2013, 37). Since "systems of measurement are the mechanisms of neoliberal roll-out […] [and] metrics are needed to enable differentiation, to facilitate rankings and to demarcate winners from losers" (Beer 2016), the evaluative state has the power of legitimizing "the production and canonization of [those] social classifications" (Bourdieu 2013, 23, my translation).

The bureaucratic centralized control – as a typical feature of welfare state – is now substituted by a myriad of evaluation agencies, both nationally and internationally, as well as both public and private. These agencies manage to be simultaneously "modest and omniscient, limited yet apparently limitless in their application to problems as diverse as the appropriateness of a medical procedure and the viability of a university department" (Rose 2000, 54). As recent studies demonstrated (Gambardella and Lumino 2015; Giancola 2015; Moini 2015), neoliberalization by evaluation is realized in ways that are variegated both by spatial dynamics and policy fields.

Partly justified by economic efficiency requirements from the reform of European and national systems of governance, performance indicators aiming at measuring the level of competition, ability to attract funding, entrepreneurship, economic efficiency, have been extensively introduced for the evaluation of different non-economic domains, such as higher education and health system. This evaluative knowledge is deemed able to reduce the irrationality of decision-making in these policy fields (Gambardella and Lumino 2015). For instance, as far as universities are concerned, new performance indicators tend to reward departments and professors' ability to create relationships with the industrial world, attract external research funding, and improve research income rather than the quality of scholarship (Olssen and Peters 2005). As Neave pointed out (2012, 278), "such evaluation affects whether [they] bargain for resources from a position of strength or from a situation of publicly certified intellectual and moral debility".

Consistent with variegated neoliberalization, two carriers of change act simultaneously on education policies: 1) the first is related to international institutional pressures and the comparison of performance from international organizations such as the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development); 2) the second is related to the territorialization of educational facilities and the processes of decentralization and school autonomy (Giancola 2015).

With the PISA (Programme for International Students Assessment) study, the OECD spreads its neoliberal economic approach, conceiving education as a means to improve the competitiveness of a national economy (OECD 2006). As Knodel, Martens and Niemann demonstrated, "PISA is not neutral. It evaluates education against predefined economic and utilitarian criteria and leaves out other aspects of education that are also traditionally seen as an integral part of that process" (2015, 211). With PISA, OECD unleashes massive reform pressure on countries education systems, pushing a turn in the leading ideas from social to economic principles. Although it does not offer direct recommendations, PISA provides a within-market classification of evaluated states and hints on best practices. While the 'losers' are driven to improve, "the 'winners' in the league table (for instance, Finland and Canada), which have comparable cultural and social structures, are presented as blueprints or role models for a successful schooling system" (2015, 216). PISA and the OECD primarily create an "air of competition" about educational matters. Hence, beyond the variegation in form, each evaluative state ends up reinforcing a system of market-oriented reforms through the second carrier of change, that is decentralization and school autonomy. In fact the latter are accompanied by the reassignment of the task of evaluation, with the multiplication of the levels of oversight, as well as the proliferation of "instruments of a new surveillance, performance indicators, quality indices, setting of 'standards' through 'benchmarking'" (Neave 2012, 266). This "enduring tension" (2012, 275) between autonomy and control, decentralization and multilevel oversight, is characteristic of the evaluative State, which acts as "a broad operating frame in which the functions of definition, implementation, interpretation and verification are split up and assigned to different agencies and different levels of decision-making" (277).

The obvious goal of evaluation is to create an accountable, manageable and governable educational system. But at the same time evaluation works as an "ideologically driven system for disciplining and controlling doctors, teachers, university lecturers and so on, and not as an instrument of genuine accountability" (Power 2000, 114).

It realizes what Foucault (1999, 101) pointed out about the means of correct training: "The distribution according to ranks or grade has a double role: it marks the gaps, hierarchizes qualities, skills and aptitudes; but it also punishes and rewards. […] By the play of this quantification, this circulation of awards and debits, thanks to the continuous calculation of plus and minus points, the disciplinary apparatuses hierarchized the 'good' and the 'bad' subjects in relation to one another. […] Discipline rewards simply by the play of awards, thus making it possible to attain higher ranks and places; it punishes by reversing this process. Rank in itself serves as a reward or punishment".

5. Conclusions

The circumstances of neoliberal triumph involve political aspects (such as the conquest of power by the neoliberal forces), economic aspects (the expansion of globalized financial capitalism), as well as social aspects (the individualization of social relations to the detriment of collective and social rights, and the extreme polarization between rich and poor), cultural aspects (the rise of consumer society), and subjective aspects (the emergence of a new subject).

Despite the economic crisis, neoliberalism has remained almost unchallenged. In order to explain the resilience of neoliberal ideas, Schmidt and Thatcher have suggested five potential explanations: "first, the generality, flexibility, and mutability of neoliberal ideas themselves; second, the gap between neo-liberal rhetoric and a reality in which they are not implemented; third, their advantages in policy debates and political discourse compared with alternatives; fourth, the power of interested actors who strategically adopt and promote neo-liberal ideas; and, fifth, the force of the institutions in which neo-liberal ideas are embedded" (2013, 1-2). Other authors have emphasized neoliberalism' adaptive capacity, by focusing on the dynamic relationships between roll-back and roll-out processes of neoliberalization (Peck 2010). The variegation of national and policy forms reinforces neoliberal hegemony, as neoliberalization allows the coexistence of general principles with specific forms adapted to different contexts (Moini 2015). This article has shown the role of evaluation in these processes. As has been said, evaluation has a close connection with neoliberalization and is able both to legitimize neoliberal values and to reproduce them in variegated forms. As Broome and Quirk (2015: 821) pointed out, much of the power of evaluation "is bound up in the mechanics and effects of ranking and quantification, which in turn generate a form of 'constructed objectivity' that acts back upon the reality it aims to describe". This is the "feedback effect" of indicators on quantified subjects extensively described by Desrosières. Evaluation has the special capacity to cloak normative agendas in languages of neutral and technocratic assessment. By means of the rhetorical appeal to the alleged neutral language of expert assessment and numerical comparison, evaluation objectifies and naturalizes contested political concepts, such as democracy, corruption, transparency, and freedom and reduces legitimate opposition to evaluators' authority. On the one hand, evaluation is an instrument of class power, as the dominant economic and political classes impose specific evaluation tools and topics (Giannone 2014). On the other hand, it is an instrument of classification power (Fourcade and Healy 2013), that is able to orient self-monitoring subjects to adjust their behavior to the hegemonic values. The power of evaluation "is exercised through its invisibility;

at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects to a principle of compulsory visibility" (Foucault 1999, 103), based on the motivation of transparency and accountability. What is involved is the public estimation of worth and thus of the explicit value - or its lack - of one institution or individual compared to others. It is a technique of *naming and shaming*, which is typical for discourage some kinds of activity.

Since the transformation of the state is among the main objectives of neoliberalism, evaluation has played a central role in this process. Taking advantage of the aforementioned characteristics of evaluation, the making of the neoliberal state has been achieved through two overlapping processes, namely the "evaluated state" and the "evaluative state".

A transnational carrier of change, based on various global indexes aimed at assessing states' performance with respect to the main neoliberal values, has pushed the evaluated states into a global context of competition. The more each state is positively evaluated in its compliance with neoliberal norms, the more it is deemed as credible and accountable internationally. A positive evaluation could favor foreign investment, international aid, money loans, good diplomatic and trade relations, the granting of financial assistance, the purchase of government bonds in the financial markets, and so on. For these reasons, not only the states cannot avoid to be evaluated, but actually they pay to be evaluated. This is the case of the sovereign credit rating, where the states pay their raters, because the absence of the "seal of approval" of rating may be interpreted negatively by financial markets (Lehmann 2004).

The evaluated state needs also to be able to self-evaluate. As it is subject to the norm of competition, it is obliged to regard itself as an enterprise both in its internal functioning and in its relationship to other states (Dardot and Laval 2014). Hence, the neoliberal state is an aggressively utilitarian state, in the sense that it seeks to make all political, legal and public action subject to quantitative empirical evaluation (Davies 2014). The states become "inveterate classifiers. They count, rank, measure, tag, and score on various metrics of varying degrees of sophistication, automation, and opacity. The data collected in these procedures becomes grist for analytical machines devoted to further refining the classification system itself, and the engine for allocating individuals [organizations and states] to some tier or group on the basis of that classification" (Fourcade and Healy 2013, 562). The state does not necessarily (or at least, not always) cede power to markets, but comes to justify its decisions, policies and rules in terms that are commensurable with the logic of markets (Davies 2014). The neoliberal state indirectly conducts individuals to conduct themselves like entrepreneurs. This mode of governmentality specific to neoliberalism includes "techniques of governing that exceed express state action and orchestrate the subject's conduct toward him or herself"

(Brown 2005, 43). A second carrier of change, based on variegated forms of evaluation, is pushed by the "evaluative State", that, through a myriad of evaluative agencies, constantly monitors and measures public sector's performance, as well as individual and organization behavior.

As Power (2000) pointed out, the rise of the neoliberal evaluative state has been driven not only by the financial constraint imposed by the New Public Management, but also by the political demands on behalf of citizens – as taxpayers, patients, pupils – for greater accountability and transparency of service providing organizations, as well as by the rise of quality assurance practices and related transformations in regulatory style. Therefore political motives for increased auditing, evaluation and monitoring activity, include making public organizations and individuals accountable and transparent. Thus, such seemingly democratic reasons made financial audits evolving into elaborated practices of quantification in organizations and individuals performance. The depoliticization of public action supported by neoliberalism led to the gradual replacement of political choice and expert knowledge with the know-hows of enumeration, calculation, monitoring, and evaluation: a process described as the transition from the rule of law to the governance by numbers (Supiot 2015). Through evaluation the state is both the subject and the protagonist of its neoliberalization. Indeed, we can even say that evaluation is "the state's own way of existence in its neoliberal configuration" (Pinto 2013, my translation).

The rise of the evaluative state could not have been achieved without the recognition of a "philosophy of evaluation" (Martuccelli 2010), that made the instruments of auditing, monitoring, and inspection more central to the operational base of government. Among the consequences of the spread of that philosophy, it is the often uncritical acceptance of the results of evaluation: this is partly due to the fact that "part of the very function of establishing evaluative standards is to change the culture of the phenomenon that is being evaluated" (Stremlau 2011, 192). Also the resilience of neoliberalism is a phenomenon to be evaluated: "Resilience is a process, not a fixed state – it occurs and must be assessed over time" (Schmidt and Thatcher 2013: 403). But to imagine a deadlock in neoliberalization implies recognizing that the assessment of this highly political process, marked by struggles to determine agendas, set goals, and select policies, should be preceded by the rise of alternative understandings able to impose new evaluative instruments and a new philosophy of evaluation, based on alternative values and different criteria.

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