

# **Snowball Effect: The Consequences of the Introduction of the University Reform for the Undergraduate Anthropology Courses at The University of Rome “La Sapienza.”**

**Angelo Romano**

My paper focuses on the changes produced by the introduction of the university reform in the Anthropology Department at The University of Rome “La Sapienza.”

By closely observing the practices of teachers and students, by listening to and analyzing the narratives they produce, which make sense of the university experience and render it objective, I attempt to grasp how the university reform has been negotiated with local traditions and habits, how the idea of anthropology (its boundaries, its theoretical perspectives, its methodological baggage) has changed in accordance with its changes in direction, both academic and non-academic.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first, I attempt to bring to light the reaction of the teachers' in response to the introduction of the university reform, and the debate that its implementation has produced among anthropologists; in the second, I attempt to show what dynamics the establishment of first and second level degree programs has caused among the students; in the third, I analyse the perception of anthropology on the part of subjects who work in companies, social cooperatives and government agencies, and have had anthropologists among their employees.

In the background stands a crucial question: how is the university changing? What kind of space is it becoming?

## **An academic discipline**

‘There are, perhaps, other scientific professions which are even more academic - paleography, the study of lichens - but not many.’ (Geertz, ed. it., 1990: 140)

It is not possible to grasp the changes occurring in Italian anthropology, without studying how academic communities are changing.

Anthropology has established and developed itself as discipline in the university environment, following the trajectories of the careers of teachers, who have obtained professorships and have opened new fields of research. In a nation in which academies of science do not exist, the university has been the predominant location for the transmission of knowledge and for research. As Alberto Cirese, professor emeritus of cultural anthropology at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" has recently stated, during a "special" lecture: "In the university one did research and study, not teaching. The role of the university professor was to provide original contributions to the progress of the discipline, not to teach. The university was a place of research, and the university professor was a scholar.

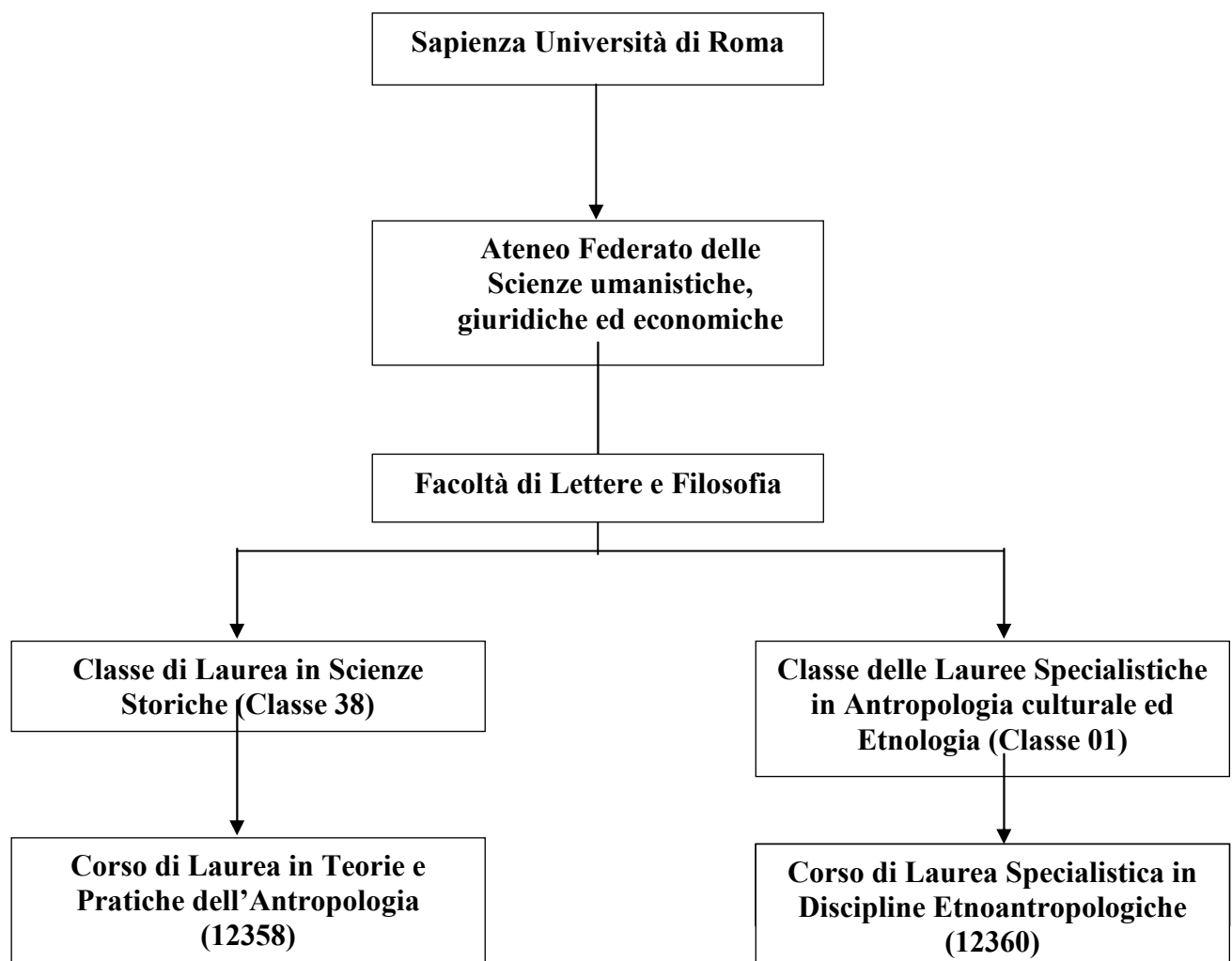
And it is thus that anthropologists have been viewed inside the university. Synthesizing the nature of anthropological knowledge, Becher has defined it as "Holistic; reiterative; concerned with

particulars, qualities, complication; results in understanding/interpretation" (2001: 36) Among the social sciences and humanities, anthropology is located with the "soft-pure" disciplines (ibid:36). Given anthropology's strong link to the academic dimension, it is easy to imagine how the university reform has dramatically affected the scientific anthropological community. The reform has had a snowball effect, causing a series of chain reactions in the organization of relationships between teachers (who have had to plan a new organization: the degree programs); in the redefinition of the relationships between teachers and students<sup>1</sup>; in the creation of new dialogues with other disciplines; in the rethinking of their own study (between pure research and applied research); and in the conception of a new professional identity as an anthropologist, in the light of the opening to the world of work and the applied dimension of the discipline.

The implementation of the new directives has forced teachers for the first time to create an organic educational project, finalizing the choice of material and the space given to every subject matter, toward a preventive individuation of the cultural and professional objectives of the course. Every degree program is thus a project. But with how much autonomy?

Leafing through the guide for students of anthropology, on the fifth page we find the following table:

**Schema della struttura organizzativa:**



<sup>1</sup> In 2007, in Rome alone, there were around 600 students enrolled in the first level degree and more than 200 enrolled in the second.

As the table shows, every degree program has a five-digit ministerial code, which makes it identifiable inside the Faculty and refers to a larger family of degrees (the classes of degrees), together with other related degree programs. The degree classes are ministerial, while the degree programs instead are under a Faculty: in the case of anthropology, the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. The University of Rome "La Sapienza," on the other hand, is divided into different "federated universities". The Faculty of Letters and Philosophy is under the "Ateneo Federato" of human, legal and economic sciences.

This page, which the students avoid to consult, and which consequently remains obscure to them, is indicative of the complexity of the Italian university system.

As Rizzi and Silvestri (1999) have laid out, the Italian university system is a group of teachers organized in Faculty with a ministry at their head. If we wish, therefore, to conceptualize the composition of the Italian university, we should think about a group of teachers, organized in Faculty, who make decisions inside the academic community, following the procedural norms of the Ministry (HIGH LEVEL), norms with which the local administrations (LOW LEVEL) must evaluate their compliance.

This system structurally promotes habitual practices which place the state and the ministry as the sole reference points of teachers who ask for help and intervention rather than thinking of an organic development of the reality of the university to which they belong.

This system is characterized by central governmental control and ample academic autonomy, in which the Ministry ratifies what the Faculty has decided. The Faculty is the structural node of the Italian university system, the "arena of conflict and negotiation, where the prize in play is disciplinary hegemony." (Vaira, 2008: 31).

In this context, the universities are configured as federations of disciplines characterized by asymmetric powers. Every Faculty is distinguished by the key disciplines through which it develops; by the number of teachers of every discipline, result of the evolution of the Faculty; by the number of full professors of every discipline, who guarantee, in correspondence with their numerosness, political weight and influence in decision making processes.

The Reform (decree 509/99) aimed to bypass this system founded on Faculty, giving more autonomous power to the *atenei* and to the degree programs. The idea was to pass from a vertical and bureaucratic system to a horizontal one, one founded on the construction of productive connections between *atenei* and territories ("learning regions" was a common phrase), and on the construction of interdisciplinary paths from below, among the degree programs.

Instead, the tortuous political path and the succession of different governments mitigated the innovative effects of the reform, restoring much power to the Faculty. The departments have been deprived of power, the degree programs, without research funds to manage, have had to create their institutional and scientific space inside the Faculty to which they belong.

In addition, the absence of a real debate inside the academic community and the parallel development of European initiatives (the Declaration of the Sorbonne, the Declaration and the Process of Bologna, the Declaration of Lisbon), have not allowed real preparation and involvement of academics in the process of reform. As Neave (2005) has said, *political time* prevailed over *academic time*.

The reform was thus perceived as external, as an unneeded invasion from above. As Moscati and Vaira write in the introduction to their text *L'università in cambiamento*: "Above all there has been a lack of clarity about the aims of the reforms in the context of a world (the academy) which was traditionally unconcerned with the systemic (but also institutional) dimensions of the reality to which it belonged." (2008: 13).

A series of misunderstandings resulted from this lack of clarity, through which the reform has been understood as a directive to modify the academics' own way of teaching and the content to provide to their students, raising cries of the violation of the autonomy in teaching and research. According to the authors, a direct consequence of this has been a separation between the formal realization of the reform, (construction of the programs, attribution of credits) - delegated to those teachers who followed closely the progress of the reform - and the actual result (the new containers ended up containing old contents), which remained the domain of each individual teacher.

While the reform asked the teachers, who were creating a degree program, to think of themselves as a system, through which every measure was presented as a project of the spaces and developments of the discipline, many of them continued to repeat old behaviors and habits, in a manner that did not go beyond the borders of their intellectual and professorial habitat.

These misunderstandings caused an almost ideological opposition between supporters and opponents of the reform.

In the face of this change, the university took on a social dimension, involving teachers, students, journalists, intellectuals, unions, politicians, and entrepreneurs in a debate which took place in newspapers and specialized periodicals, as well as during many conferences. All of these participants, proceeding from their own position and their perceptions of the university, put forth their own solutions, presenting them as objective, attaching themselves to nostalgic portrayals of times past, on the one hand, or calling up images of economy and efficiency on the other.

Both the retreat to a past which is alive only in the memory of those who lived it and who try to resist the changes taking place, and the evocation of a model of businesslike efficiency, are based on a distancing from that which is happening in a particular context in a certain point in history.

In both cases, the university disappears, either into a past remembered as a golden age or into a decontextualized model.

Other questions should be asked instead: Has the reform caused a crisis in the system? What is the nature of the crisis, and how can we emerge from it? What strategies for adapting and regaining equilibrium has the system employed?

It is proposed, in other words, to closely observe how the social actors involved have implemented the reform, how they have interpreted and perceived the changes, and how, in light of the perception of what was happening, they have interpreted the academic life.

In evaluating the implementation of the reform by teachers and the choices of the students, the numerous studies conducted by many institutes of research have spoken of an *irrational* system. My hypothesis is that the introduction of the reform did not accomplish a complete passage from a university of the elite to one of the masses, but has instead created a hybrid system, suspended between tradition and the market, between "petrification" of knowledge in skills to use externally and reproduction of itself in knowledge usable only inside the academic community.

## The Introduction of the University Reform for the Undergraduate Anthropology Courses at The University of Rome “La Sapienza.”

‘The university has changed radically in recent years. Before we were few, anthropology was a discipline among the humane sciences inside the Faculty of Letters. There was very little teaching and to become an anthropologist you had to attend graduate school after graduating. And the teachers could be counted on your hands.

Today, the university is opening itself to the world of work, the degrees have been professionalized. And anthropology, which before was tough like literature or art history, today has to enter into dialogue with sociology, economics, law. Our role as teachers has changed profoundly. We need to be managers, teachers, tutors and researchers as well. We have to do all this at the same time’.  
(M. Pavanello, president of the degree program in Ethno-Anthropological Disciplines).

‘Today we must respect the parameters imposed by the commissions of qualitative evaluation of the degree programs: the more students graduate in three years, the more funds we are entitled to. And to succeed we have to continually monitor ourselves’.  
(Prof. A. Lupo, ex-President of the degree program in Theory and Practice of Anthropology).

In the words of the presidents of the two degree programs in anthropology, the university reform is not only a watershed moment. For them, the reform appeared to be a true Copernican revolution, which radically changed structures, times, ways of inhabiting university spaces and criteria for the acquisition of knowledge, and it has transformed what was a specialized major (for graduates with degrees in Philosophy, Letters, or Sociology), into a basic discipline.

In their remarks, there is a clear distinction between a past, focused on the *inside*, and a present projected towards the *outside*.

The former refers to a closed and self-referential world (the university space), founded on the system of the professorships and on the relationship between master and pupil; the latter looks outside the narrow world of the discipline, and pays attention to relationships with other disciplines, to relationships with the world of work, to compliance with the control of the ministry and the *ateneo*. Before, it was the discipline that had to conquer always larger academic spaces (at times at the price of vicious internal conflicts), while today, it is the profession of anthropologist that must find a place in the world of work.

In light of the changes introduced, what transformations has the introduction of the Reform caused in the way teaching is conceived, the way two degree programs are organized, the way the perspectives of the demo-ethno-anthropological disciplines have changes? How has the way of interpreting the roles of teacher and student changed? How has the way in which students involved interrogate university space changed?

In 2002 the degree program in Theory and Practice of Anthropology is created (henceforth TPA). It constituted the first level of university education. The next year the specialist degree (second level) in Ethno-anthropological disciplines (DEA) was to be instituted as well, the last step before the doctorate.

As Professor Renata Ago (Professor of Modern History, first president of the degree program in TPA ) recounts:

AGO I remember that the first year there was great enthusiasm on the part of all the teachers. We felt that we were part of a communal project and at the beginning of a great adventure. There was the idea that we could create something of importance. There was a desire to collaborate and to conceive of education oriented towards the students, presenting the fields of study of anthropology in their variety.

Anthropology was finally acquiring visibility and consolidating itself in a degree program.

ANGELO How did the degree program come to have its current form?

AGO I remember that *they* (the anthropologists) were unsure if they should place the degree program under the class of the degrees in Cultural Goods, or if *they* should dialogue with *us* historians. In the end, they recognized in the four of us historians a background similar to anthropology, and it was decided to create a degree program in which history and anthropology would be in dialogue.

ANGELO And how did the form of the programs of study come to be?

AGO In the beginning we were disoriented. It was alien territory. There were these ministerial grids, credits, so many parameters to respect in order to satisfy the criteria for classification by the ministry as a degree program.

Degree classes, ministerial tables, credits: these are the organizing categories imposed by the ministry from above, in accordance with a bureaucratic/administrative logic.

In the view of the legislator, these homologizing taxonomies should have permitted a simple organization and a greater control of the degree programs, thus avoiding the proliferation and excessive fragmentation of such programs.

And thus the anthropologists were unable to freely choose which disciplines to enter into dialogue with. The construction of the degree programs had to be inserted in a schema created by the ministry (the degree classes), and then be evaluated by the Faculty to which they belonged.

The schizophrenic logic of the reform (which on the one hand promotes interdisciplinary and on the other limits it with the rigid structures of the ministerial schema), is made clear in the ministerial table, in the creation of which the anthropologists did not participate.

TABELLA MINISTERIALE CORSO DI LAUREA IN TEORIE E PRATICHE DELL'ANTROPOLOGIA (CLASSE DELLE LAUREA IN STORIA N. 38)

ATTIVITÀ FORMATIVE				
Attività formative:	Ambiti Disciplinari	SETTORI SCIENTIFICO-DISCIPLINARI	CFU	Tot. CFU
<b>di Base</b>				<b>36</b>
	<b>Metodologia e fonti della ricerca storica</b>	M-STO/01 - Storia medievale M-STO/02 - Storia moderna M-STO/04 - Storia contemporanea	12	
	<b>Geografia</b>	M-GGR/01 – Geografia	4	
	<b>Antropologia, diritto, economia, sociologia</b>	IUS/09 - Istituzioni di diritto pubblico M-DEA/01 - Discipline demoetnoantropologiche SECS-P/01 - Economia politica	20	
<b>Caratterizzanti</b>				<b>72</b>
	<b>Discipline politiche, economiche e sociali</b>	M-DEA/01 - Discipline demoetnoantropologiche SECS-P/12 - Storia economica SPS/03 - Storia delle istituzioni politiche SPS/07 - Sociologia generale	52	

	<b>Discipline filosofiche, pedagogiche e psicologiche</b>	M-FIL/05 - Filosofia e teoria dei linguaggi M-FIL/06 - Storia della filosofia M-PED/01 - Pedagogia generale e sociale	4	
	<b>Storia moderna e contemporanea</b>	M-STO/02 - Storia moderna M-STO/04 - Storia contemporanea	8	
	<b>Discipline storico-religiose</b>	L-OR/17 - Filosofie, religioni e storia dell'India e dell'Asia centrale M-STO/06 - Storia delle religioni M-STO/07 - Storia del cristianesimo e delle chiese	4	
	<b>Storia e civiltà dell'Africa, dell'America, dell'Asia</b>	L-OR/10 - Storia dei Paesi islamici L-OR/23 - Storia dell'Asia orientale e sud-orientale SPS/05 - Storia e istituzioni delle Americhe SPS/13 - Storia e istituzioni dell'Africa SPS/14 - Storia e istituzioni dell'Asia	4	
<b>Affini o integrative</b>				<b>20</b>
	<b>Discipline letterarie</b>	L-FIL-LET/10 - Letteratura italiana L-FIL-LET/11 - Letteratura italiana contemporanea L-FIL-LET/12 - Linguistica italiana	12	
	<b>Discipline storico-artistiche</b>	GEO/01 - Paleontologia e paleoecologia L-ART/02 - Storia dell'arte moderna L-ART/03 - Storia dell'arte contemporanea	8	
<b>Ambito aggregato per crediti di sede</b>				<b>16</b>
	<b>Discipline linguistico-letterarie (crediti di sede)</b>	BIO/08 - Antropologia Fisica L-ART/05 - Discipline dello spettacolo L-ART/07 - Musicologia e storia della musica L-ART/08 - Etnomusicologia L-FIL-LET/14 - Critica letteraria e letterature comparate L-LIN/01 - Glottologia e linguistica M-GGR/02 - Geografia economico-politica M-FIL/02 - Logica e filosofia della scienza M-FIL/04 - Estetica M-PSI/01 - Psicologia generale	16	
	<b>TIPOLOGIE</b>		<b>CFU</b>	<b>TOT. CFU</b>
<b>Attività formative:</b>				<b>36</b>
<b>TOTALE</b>				<b>180</b>

As can be seen from the table, it is divided into four categories: *discipline di base*, *discipline caratterizzanti*, *discipline affini* and *crediti di sede*. Every category is in turn divided into subcategories. Inside each subcategory are inserted the disciplines (chosen from a group determined by the ministry), among which the students must choose to create their course of studies, with the according number of credits.

The category of "*base*" contains disciplines common to the degree program which belong to class 38 in all of Italy. In the case of Rome, there are three degree programs which belong to this family: history, anthropology and history of religion.

The "*caratterizzanti*" category characterizes the degree program with respect to other programs belonging to the same class: the margin of choice consists of the greater number of credits reserved to anthropology as opposed to history or history of religion.

The "*affini*" category marks another dimension of the degree program with respect to other programs in the same degree class but belonging to another Faculty: we are in Letters, and thus it is assumed that a student enrolled in this Faculty must take exams in Italian literature, linguistics, or art history.

The "*crediti di sede*" mark out the specifics of the degree program with respect to other anthropology programs inside the same *ateneo*. The disciplines in this category reflect the traditional of Roman and Italian anthropological studies: it contains credits in physical anthropology<sup>2</sup>, ethnomusicology, linguistics and psychology.

In a system this rigid, the sphere of action for the creation of a course of study which would take into account the tradition of anthropological studies and its applied fields was reduced. In the students' view, the essential goal of the project was lost amid the fragmentation of the many exams to be taken, exams at times perceived as disconnected from anthropological study.

The scientific pursuit of knowledge has been squeezed between academic/bureaucratic and economic/efficiency levels.

The crucial point was the relationship between an academic program oriented towards the transmission of skills that would be immediately usable in the world of work and recognizable to the graduates themselves, versus a program oriented towards the transmission of a profoundly sophisticated and reflective body of knowledge (like anthropological knowledge).

As Alessandro Simonicca, a teacher of cultural anthropology at the University of Rome, writes:

On the institutional level, this amounts to understanding to what extent it is more rigorous to reconstruct communities of teachers and learners in the universities, in the medieval manner, or on the other hand to focus education on creating a common base from which graduates can then continue in varied directions.<sup>3</sup>

Underlying the words of the Roman teacher is the more specific question of what role the university should have: if it should continue in the scholastic tradition which holds the graduates close to itself in the teacher-student relationship, or if it should open itself to the outside world and offer its students theoretical and methodological baggage that can be used in the world of work.

The move to a skills-based pedagogy means, for anthropology, the successful joining of the spheres of *knowledge*, *know-how* and *knowing how to be*. For a discipline whose mastery derives from a long apprenticeship, this means bridging the gap between what an anthropologist must know how to do, and what he must know how to be.

In his book *Careers in Anthropology*, Omohundro (1997) distinguishes, in two tables, the skills which an anthropologist must master (for example, know how to draw maps, to conduct interviews to obtain information on the attitudes, behaviour and knowledge of subjects or social groups, to cooperate in groups of ethnographic or archaeological research, etc.), from social-relational skills (for example, social agility - the ability to rapidly learn the rules of the game in unusual situations, in order to be more readily accepted -, observation, planning, accuracy in interpreting behaviour, etc.) that the anthropologist can acquire during his long apprenticeship.

It is a question, especially in the second table, of "qualitative skills" which refer to a theoretical structure aimed at the gaining of implicit, hidden, or not apparent knowledge, an objective which qualitative social (or sociological) research has attempted to pursue for a long time.

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<sup>2</sup> For a brief overview of the teaching of anthropology in Italy, see Viazzo, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Simonicca, A (2006), Quindici anni dopo, [www.antropologie.it](http://www.antropologie.it)



Making reference to Omohundro's tables, Simonicca (2006) suggests that we not confuse the skills which a *graduate* will have mastered at the end of university studies with the social-relational abilities which an *anthropologist* acquires only after a long process of study and research. In other words, a graduate in anthropology will be able to call himself an anthropologist only when he is able to employ the complex theoretical and methodological baggage of his discipline, and he is able to *make a good fieldwork*.

From this point of view, the apprenticeship is an essential moment for acquiring these abilities.

'When I arrived in Rome, I was asked to define the field of university trainings and I began to imagine a map of the urban environment in which the intercultural or multicultural dimension would be evident. One must roll up one's sleeves, I was told, because, in contrast with the strong interest for the "traditional" provincial and regional zones, the Capital did not seem like such a pleasure to the anthropologists. Translated in other terms, it meant studying modernity. And what object was more nearby than the city? (...) To map the anthropological spaces of the Capital... an interesting project, but with what criteria?' (Alessandro Simonicca)

The planning of practical training experiences, with agencies, museums, associations, NGOs, hospitals and ex-asylums, challenged Italian anthropology to confront an *anthropology of home* (rather than an *anthropology at home*) and an environment (as will be seen later) which associated with anthropology images of the *exotic*, the *primitive*, and the *bizarre*.

Instead, in the creation of courses of study, teachers have preferred to teach the history of national and international anthropological studies, reproducing in their units the subjects and areas of interest to them<sup>4</sup>, rather than conceiving a "skills-based pedagogy" which would involve more time for practical research activity and for the use of reflective methods, as in the case of Joyce, discussed by Simon Coleman and Bob Simpson in the volume edited by Dorle Dracklè and Iain Edgars (Coleman and Simpson, 2004).

Through the years students have been advised to put off their first fieldwork until the second-level degree, orienting the students from the beginning to view their course of study as a five-year apprenticeship.

### **"Similarity is an institution": the degree program in Ethno-anthropological Disciplines as a learning community?**

In her book *How Institutions Think*, the anthropologist Mary Douglas writes that only institutions can define identity. Although she holds the capacity for individual choice to be fundamental, Douglas reaffirms that shared categories determine the limits of individual choice and that categories can become shared precisely because they are institutionalised, that is connected to social relations which have been formalized and inscribed in the larger order of the *social universe*, of *nature* and of the *cosmos*.

Institutions produce functional and symbolic classifications, taxonomies, spaces of identity within which it is possible to view oneself.

In this sense, the first level (TPA) and second level (DEA) degrees - considered by the Reform as two separate moments with different aims<sup>5</sup>, interpreted by teachers as an uninterrupted five-year process of anthropological apprenticeship - have permitted students to feel earlier on that they belong to a community of study, that they are participants in a common endeavour, to critically engage with theoretical and research-related developments in their field, and also (encouraged by their apprenticeship experience) to ask questions about future employment.

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<sup>4</sup> From American Studies, to African Studies, to the Ethnology of the Mediterranean.

<sup>5</sup> The former directed towards professionalisation, the second understood as a first step on the way to an academic career.

In his study on the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge by students of physics and management, Jan Nespór (1990) argues that a university curriculum characterized by *density* and *rigidity* causes the students to spend more time together and to shape a shared image of the discipline and of their career. Curricular pressure therefore produces the conditions through which students assimilate the socio-academic relationships of the discipline. The more schooling there is, the more academic dispositions are absorbed.

Programs in physics work to organize the academic world of the students in such a way that the knowledge of physics and career success are understood as tightly linked to the academy and to the resolution of academic problems. Students of physics, continues Nespór, perceive themselves as physicists as a result of their experiences of academically-oriented peer groups. "What physics curricula have done," he writes, "is to create structural pressure for the development of friendships or "strong links" (...) oriented towards the accomplishment of academic goals." (ibid:221)

The management program, on the other hand, characterized by lower density, is less academically oriented. Unlike physics, the degree program pushes the students to interact with the non-academic side of the program and to think about their professional future in extra-academic networks.

Nespór's analysis raises again the choice faced by the anthropologists involved in the creation of first and second level degree programs. The choice between a more academic orientation and one more open to the territory concealed a split between two ways of conceiving the discipline, the use of its knowledge, the aims of research.

However, in my opinion, Nespór pays little attention to individual paths and ways of interpreting courses of study, and to disciplinary dynamics. In this respect, I consider the concept of situated learning articulated<sup>6</sup> by Lave and Wenger (1991) to be more helpful.

The first-level degree represents the moment of self-orientation inside the university space. The first apprenticeship consists of familiarizing oneself with the credit system, with the course table, with the teachers of the degree program. The structure of the schedule of lessons, the preparatory quality of the courses of the first and second years (in the latter of which there is more freedom of choice), and the restrictions of the ministerial tables function to create a *horizontal* form of attendance. Students attend classes together, exchange notes, compare themselves with their peers on the first nodes of the discipline they meet. With regard to the teachers there is a reverential awe which manifests itself in silence which becomes evident when students participate to specialized seminars.

The second-level degree represents a break from the three-year degree. The reciprocal attention of teachers and students changes, and students begin to form part of a *learning community* (Lave, J. e Wenger, E., 1991). In such a community, knowledge, linked to learning, is located in a relational space between teachers and learners, in which "the discepts, acquiring skills and situated knowledge, and learning the rules of the game, become part of a community of practice (ibid: 29), in which learning is participated and negotiated.

The training, no longer pre-professional like those in the three year degree, is an opportunity for preparation for research, and is directed towards the thesis; the students choose as tutor the teachers with whom they graduated or those whose field or research is near to their interests; with the thesis readers a relationship of identification-assimilation begins to establish itself. The professor is seen as a juncture which can open a network of relationships (professional and scientific, directed both

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<sup>6</sup> More than a mere "learn on the spot" or "learn by doing," learning for Lave and Wenger is inseparable from social practice. The idea of "situated learning" is a bridge between a point of view in which cognitive processes are more important (practice is the replicating application of what has been learned) and another in which learning is firmly incorporated in practice (one learns by doing). In this respect, learning goes beyond apprenticeship; rather than "stealing with the eyes," it is a process of reflection, the acquisition of the consciousness of what one is doing.

towards the applied world and the scientific community). The mode of university attendance changes: from the students - who begin to see themselves as "researchers," participants in the dynamics of an *environment* like that of Italian anthropology, united on a common path - is requested active participation, the study of texts in foreign languages, the writing of papers, involvement in the first research activities.

From the three year degree, where their relationship with anthropology is *intimate*, linked to texts for exams and to familiarization with the themes of the discipline, students pass to specialized work, where the relationship becomes social, linked to the sense given to their own experience (*local*) which then resonates with the perception of scientific issues and disciplinary epistemological issues (*global*).

Intimate (belonging to a community of learning), local (one's own role in the world, explanation of events and immediate responses), global (theoretical knowledge to be articulated) are the three levels that have emerged from interviews with the students. These give sense to their own experience and to their perception of their future. Changing positions and perspectives is part of the trajectories of learning of those involved in the process of developing identities and forms of belonging to the anthropological community.

This process of acquiring a sense of belonging has awakened among the students a reflection on the extra-academic professional spaces of the discipline, and on what aspects anthropological knowledge should base itself.

In 2003 a group of students in the DEA degree program attempted to create an association to work in the applied spheres identified by means of the apprenticeship experiences. The debate which arose among those students led in November of the following year to the organization of a conference<sup>7</sup>, which was to involve all the interlocutors in the changing university: students, faculty, association representatives, NGOs and institutions.

As two student organizers of the conference write in its Acts:

‘During the three days of *Ascoltare le voci* we tried to "bring out" the experiences and professional aspirations which emerged during our time as students, with the intent to make clear the effective presence and the potential applicability of anthropological skills in the world of work, that is with the double aim of, first, throwing doubt on the pessimistic and widely-held opinion that there is no place for anthropology in our society, and, second, to demand a more informed perspective on the part of the institutions (...) we tried, in other words, to renew the need of greater interaction with the world outside the university and to draw attention to the presence of a gap and a sometimes difficult communication between university education and a society undergoing a transformation.’ (Demichelis e Meloni, 2006: 291 - 292).

As a result of this conference were born "Alter", a magazine of students of the department; the site "Antropologie" (whose experience was then translated into the constitution of the "Anthropolis" association, formed by young graduates and doctoral graduates in anthropology, which has done research on urban anthropology for the city of Rome), which had as its thematic focus the public uses of anthropology; and the informal group "Esquilino Plurale," which has done research in the Esquiline district, the multicultural quarter of Rome.

### **Which Anthropology? The Viewpoint of the "Employers"**

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<sup>7</sup> Voluntarily held at one of the places where some of the students had done their apprenticeships: the former insane asylum of Santa Maria della Pietà.

In 2005 some students of the course of applied anthropology, taught by the anthropologist Patrizio Warren, conducted a research on anthropology and work, interviewing anthropologists, employees of NGOs, and non-university institutions, and the so-called "employers".

This research, whose results were never published, testifies to the gap existing between university education and the world of work, between the knowledge offered by the former and the skills requested by the latter, between the objectives of one and the language of the other.

In reading the interviews with the employers, it appears that the problem is not only that of a difficult placement in the world of work, but also a question of professional identity, because of the difficult definition of the boundaries of the realm and the methodology of anthropology.

As Losi (OIM) says, in his interview, "anthropology should be able to better define what it is in terms of the world of the non-anthropologist, and its own usefulness in many sectors."

Nourished on the myth of the exotic and of pure research, almost all of the interviewees emphasized how anthropologists are difficult to manage in the limits of short-term projects. The theoretical aspect should, instead, give way "to something concrete, something more direct for the groups for which they are working," to "research, as long as it always has a practical and concrete aspect for the population with which the research is conducted"<sup>8</sup>.

In such an environment, where anthropologists receive jobs as *facilitators* (interview with Caprara, Asp), *trainers, evaluators, researchers, mediators, cultural-planners* (interview with Mariotti, Museo Nazionali Arti e Tradizioni Popolari) e *capacity-builders* (interview with Losi, OIM) and where the dimension of "know-how" in the field becomes central, the degree in anthropology is of little relevance. The degree – probably because of the education unbalanced in the direction of the theoretical aspects of the discipline and long-term ethnographic research - is not considered a professional credential.

In the words of Mariotti and Goletti

‘There is no recognition for figures with the professional profile of anthropologists.[...] The Ministry has never recognized us [...]. In the current labour market, there is no market exclusively for anthropologists; there is a labour market in which anthropologists have much to offer.’<sup>9</sup>.

‘Anthropology is not part of the demanded professional qualifications; it is something extra which helps the carrying-out of the usual activities.’<sup>10</sup>.

As Shore has written, (1996: 2), anthropologists employed in this sectors renounce the label of anthropologist.

The words of the employers recall a celebrated passage, already quoted by Pietro Clemente (1991) in the Acts of *Professione Antropologo*, and born from the imagination of Charles L. Dodgson: the encounter between Alice, the Gryphon, and the Mock-Turtle. Alice is a girl forced by the unpredictable reality in which she travels to continually change dimension, context and state of consciousness; the other two are fantastic figures, which she would never have thought to have encountered, and much less would have imagined to be able to carry on a dialogue with. As

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Gentile, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mariotti, Museo nazionale arti e tradizioni popolari

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Goletti, Movimondo

Demichelis and Meloni write, 'Alice reflects the condition of "us anthropologists," heterogeneous even in their epistemological state, changeable, placed in a difficult situation of transformation, but a situation which by impelling them to travel makes possible "mythical" and unexpected encounters and thus a more advanced consciousness' (Demichelis e Meloni, 2006: 295).

The encounter between the three characters represents as well the difficult dialogue between academics, applied anthropologists and the world of work, not only about the definition of the figure of the anthropologist, but also the construction of a common language.

At the end of May in Matera was held, the first conference of the ANUAC, the newly-formed association of Italian teachers of cultural and social anthropology, with the evocative title: "Anthropological Knowledge, Media and Civil Society in Contemporary Italy"

The conference, during which alternated talks by well-established professors and young and precarious researchers, focused on certain specific themes: the difficulty of anthropology's achieving recognition in a period in which there is a great need of workers in social fields; the difficulty of recruitment; the epistemological crisis of a body of knowledge in search of identity; the issue of the relationships with other disciplines; the difficulty of rendering accessible a very sophisticated body of knowledge.

In a moment in which anthropology has become a force which causes other disciplines to mingle and mingles in turn itself, its knowledge should be safeguarded and promoted. The question is one of terminology (control the vocabulary), epistemology (reconstruct the threads of that rug which constitutes the anthropological paradigm) and politics (that is, the perception and the social spaces that the discipline will manage to conquer).

We seem to be witnessing, now in Italy, the crisis which French sociology confronted in the 1960s, when in order to gain recognition, it distanced itself from academic research to being empirical applied sociology. In a climate of severe crisis the conversion to the numerical and to the statistical was perceived as a stabilizing link to the scientific.

As Pierre Bourdieu observed in *Mitosociologia*, from that moment, the sociologists changed their mode of self-representation: 'When sociology, which had been until then an almost exclusively academic discipline, becomes an applied sociology, responding to the demands of a bureaucracy, public or private, it tends not only to lose its own liberty, its own freedom in research choices, and to study the problems which its clients pose it; owing its issues and its financial funds to a bureaucracy and considering the administrative apparatus as a privileged object, sociology is more apt than ever to become bureaucratic sociology or sociological administration [...] To gain recognition for a discipline whose legitimacy is still contested and to evade the accusation of futility, of uselessness traditional in authorities, certain sociologists tend to identify themselves prospectively with the expectations of a public which is at the same time their privileged object, eventually reducing the sociology of bureaucracy to a specular image of the image of bureaucracy that the bureaucrats create for themselves.' (Bourdieu, 1971: 74 – 76).

The analogies between the experiences of French sociology in those years and the experiences of contemporary Italian anthropology (while keeping in mind the distinct spatial and temporal contexts), are evident.

We must ask ourselves whether to make ourselves desirable for the market will mean sacrificing the understanding of the individual in the name of generalization (more or less rigorous, more or less formulable in mathematical language), to mark our a different paradigm<sup>11</sup>, which substitutes for the

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<sup>11</sup> "We could compare," writes Carlo Ginzburg in his essay *Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario*, 'the threads which make up this research to the threads of a rug. The rug is the paradigm which we have variously called, according to the context, venatory, divinatory, evidentiary or semiotic.' (Ginzburg, 1986: 184)

lynx's eye<sup>12</sup> and the clinical eye - which identifies the symptoms, discovers the tracks, reads the signs and permits us to decipher through these windows the shadowy regions of an opaque reality - the number and the measurements of mathematics.

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<sup>12</sup> "Vision, symbolized by the lynx with the proud gaze which decorated the seal of the Academy of Federico Cesi, became the privileged organ of those disciplines to which was precluded the suprasensory eye of mathematics." (Ibid: 179)

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