“From the Evaluated State to the Evaluative State: the role of measurement in the neoliberal restructuring of European states”

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Draft version

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Abstract

The rise of neoliberalism came along with the proliferation of instruments aiming at measuring, monitoring, and evaluating State’s behavior with respect to debt, corruption, democracy. Neoliberal emphasis on calculation and standardization as strategies to manage uncertainty made evaluation a formidable source of knowledge and power for setting policy frameworks and imposing a system of values. The paper reconstructs three different perspectives on neoliberalism and analyses which role they assign to evaluation in the restructuring of the State. By highlighting three functions of evaluation, the work argues that the neoliberal restructuring of the State realized through a twofold process over different stages of European integration. The creative destruction of ‘roll-back neoliberalism’ turned the State into ‘evaluated State’, with measurement acting as a disciplining tool for potentially unruly states. The construction and consolidation of ‘roll-out neoliberalism’ have turned the State into ‘evaluative State’, an institutional regulatory regime aiming at disciplining its citizens, based on the technocratic embedding of routines of neoliberal governance.

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to focus on the role played by evaluation in legitimizing the neoliberal restructuring of the State. The paper is made up of two main parts. In the first one, some historical and political notes are provided about the paradigm shift occurred over the ‘70s from the welfarist model to the neoliberal one. Then, the paper highlights the main features of neoliberalism by introducing three different perspectives on it: the neoliberal, neo-Gramscian, and neo-Foucaultian perspectives. One of the aims of the paper is to show that these perspectives, although based on different approaches, are not mutually exclusive and can be seen as completing each other in explaining neoliberal success. Hence, for each perspective the role played by evaluation in legitimizing neoliberalism is introduced.

In the second part, the paper focuses on the neoliberal transformation of the State. It maintains that such transformation realized through a twofold process. In the first place, the State has become “evaluated State”, that is a State subject to be measured, evaluated and monitored against neoliberal principles and values. In the second place, the paper shows how neoliberalized State is also an “evaluative State”, since it becomes an evaluative institution aiming at conforming organizations’ and individuals behavior to neoliberal norms, in order to achieve economic efficiency and profitability. Lastly, some concluding remarks about such complex transformation are provided.

From Welfare to Neoliberal State

Considering that the so-called ‘golden age’ (1945-75) was marked by a shared welfare state consensus and the welfarist model was described as the most successful ideology and movement of the
twentieth century (Berman, 2006), a brief summary of the main normative and empirical features of this model is necessary, in order to emphasize the key features of the neoliberal restructuring of the State. The first feature of the welfarist model is the positive and active role of the State in economy (1). Welfare democracy regards State’s intervention in regulating market as both positive and desirable, because market produces inequalities which, in turn, could undermine democracy. In the welfare paradigm, equality is a positive value (2) and democratic States must pursue substantive equality of people. The array of rights includes (3) both civil and political rights (individual rights), and socio-economic rights (collective rights), because the welfare model of democracy is based on two fundamental values – freedom and equality – which must coexist in democratic societies (4). Liberty doesn’t come down to market freedom, but it is a set of individual freedoms (5), including freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the right to organize.

The ascendancy of neoliberal paradigm challenged all these principles by: 1) the recognition of competitive market as the most efficient and morally superior institution for the production and allocation of resources; 2) the repudiation of any State’s intervention in reducing market inequalities; 3) the glorification of freedom to the detriment of equality; 4) the demotion of social rights and 5) the reduction of individual freedoms to economic freedom. Such an all-encompassing paradigm shift involved a structural transformation of the State as the key institution of the welfarist model. This transformation underwent two partly overlapping phases, the first one heading to the downsizing of government and dismantling of welfare state, and the second one to the construction of a true neoliberal State, that is a State with a purposeful role in promoting and diffusing neoliberal policies and norms and creating enterprising and competitive organizations and individuals. As we’ll see, evaluation is key to explain why “while neo-liberalism may mean less government, it does not follow that there is less governance” (Larner, 2000: 12).
The crisis of the welfare model was not just fiscal or economic: it was also a legitimation crisis (Habermas, 1976), since this model of democratic capitalism was discredited both in its normative foundation and practical operation by different perspectives. On the one hand, theorists of legitimation crisis, such as Habermas (1976) and Offe (1984), emphasized the inherent contradictions of democratic capitalism based on welfare State; on the other hand, overload theorists, such as Crozier, Huntington (1975) and Brittan (1975), underlined the dysfunctions of democracy caused by the delegitimation of authority and overloading of government. Both these theories claimed that State power had been eroded in the face of growing demands emerged over the sixties. These were regarded as the result of an “excess of democracy” in the case of overload theorists, or as the inevitable result of the contradictions within which the State was enmeshed, in the case of legitimation crisis theorists. Nonetheless, while the solutions proposed by the latter remained by and large the province of a few political analysts and academic circles, overload theories were influential in party political circles and much discussed in general ways in the media (Held, 2006). Their proposals of downsizing government, reducing the excess of democracy, and reconstituting authority based on expertise rather than democracy, were key points of neoliberal perspective too. In this sense, the role of overload theories in paving the way to neoliberalism has to be emphasized. Yet, neoliberal discourse distinguishes itself by some special elements.

In the first place, downsizing government coincides with less interventionist State only during the early phase of “creative destruction” of neoliberalism, which was dominant during the 1980s and based on privatization, deregulation, discreditation and dismantlement of welfare State and social-collectivist institutions. Greatly influenced by Hayek (1944; 1973), this “roll-back neoliberalism” (Peck and Tickell, 2002) considered market as spontaneous and self-regulating institution tending to equilibrium, and State planning as inefficient and threatening individual freedom. Over the ‘90s this phase was replaced by the ascendancy of “roll-out neoliberalism”, an emergent phase of active state-
building and regulatory reform. The latter focused on the “purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations” (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 384). In the first place, mature neoliberalism realizes that market should regulate public sector too (Buchanan, 2000), because competition improves productivity, accountability, control and quality. In the second place, it also realizes that institutions matter and the State has a key role in providing the legal, regulatory, fiscal and institutional framework for the implementation of market principles, as well as for the positive creation of new markets. Peck and Tickell (2002: 384) described this recent pattern of institutional and regulatory restructuring as “a radical, emergent combination of neoliberalized economic management and authoritarian state forms”; others described this phase as “disciplinary neoliberalism” (Gill, 2001), as a time characterized by the de-democratization of politics and de-politicization of economy (Streeck, 2014), as well as the growing role of unelected bodies and non-majoritarian institutions in steering states’ policies (Giannone, forthcoming).

Besides this, another special element of neoliberalism that should be documented is the role of evaluation in State’s transformation. Here evaluation is understood in a broad sense as the arrangement of a special culture (including auditing, monitoring, measuring) and instruments aimed at creating – through a combination of quantitative measures, indices, indicators, ratings and rankings – a comparative system that makes possible the measurement of overall phenomena, as well as the calculation of the gaps between individuals, states and organizations, which may be described, judged, measured, compared with others based on a common metric (Foucault, 1999).

Evaluation can be a powerful technology of governance which is able to hide possible authoritarianism with the masks of accountability, transparency, meritocracy, rationality, efficiency, and liberty. Hence, it is not an accident that “the proliferation of agencies that monitor the behavior of individuals, corporations, or nations with respect to debt, transparency, or honesty” (Fourcade and
Healy 2007: 304) occurred over the ‘80s. Such a proliferation was favoured by the diffusion of new information and communication technologies, which made data more accessible, storable and transferable. But it was mainly due to the expanding role of calculation and standardization as strategies to manage uncertainty (Espeland and Stevens, 1998). These strategies, which are central features of Western rationalism and crucial for the development of capitalism, underwent a speed-up based on the neoliberal longing to rationalize every aspect of human conduct in terms of economic efficiency and profitability.

As Brown (2005: 40) pointed out, “neoliberalism does not simply assume that all aspects of social, cultural, and political life can be reduced to a calculus; rather, it develops institutional practices and rewards for enacting this vision. That is, through discourse and policy promulgating its criteria, neoliberalism produces rational actors and imposes a market rationale for decision making in all spheres”. It is a constructivist project involving a normative rather than ontological claim about the pervasiveness of economic rationality. Hence, evaluation’s ability to signal virtuous and non-virtuous actors (in terms of sovereign debt, economic competitiveness, democracy, corruption…), as well as to draw up rankings between countries, organizations and individuals, takes on several functions, such as cognitive, normative, ideological and disciplinary. These functions can be best explained by introducing three different perspectives on neoliberalism.

**Three visions of neoliberalism and evaluation**

The ascendency of neoliberalism and the diffusion of its main principles and values drew the attention of many scholars from different disciplines. A first conceptualization describes neoliberalism
as a policy framework associated with the globalization of economy. Specifically, it is a set of policies to face the crisis of democracy, caused by an overload of government activities (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, 1975), as well as the fiscal and legitimation crisis of welfare state (O’Connor, 1973; Habermas, 1976). Such an approach can be associated with the work of neoliberals themselves, such as Hayek and Friedman, which stated that policies based on deregulation, privatization, monetarism, and liberalization would be the rightest answer to jump-start the economy, as well as to design a new role for the State. This is what Bob Jessop (2002), from a different perspective, defined the paradigm shift from the “Keynesian Welfare National State” to the “Schumpeterian Competition State”.

In order to favour the unfettered operation of markets, neoliberal policies move governments’ efforts from full employment and inclusive welfare system to economic efficiency and international competitiveness. The focus is not on class power and ideology (as for the neo-Gramscian perspective), but on the actual policies (which are to be) implemented for realizing a new regime of democratic capitalism, consistent with the financial liberalization and globalization of economy, and based on the downsizing of the State and privatization of public services. As some critics of neoliberalism stressed, this new international competition regime compels every State to run after capital by leveraging fiscal and regulatory systems (Gallino, 2013). Hence, each State has to show itself continuously as reliable and credible to (that is reliable to get credit from) financial markets, as well as to public and private international evaluators, such as the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, and credit rating agencies. Indeed, “market people” (Streeck, 2014) is the State’s new constituency with the power to evaluate daily the State’s capacity to repay its own debt.

The achievement of some key features of neoliberal tenet, such as the sanctification of competition as a universal guiding principle, as well as the economic efficiency and profitability, has led to the introduction of market principles in the operation of State too (as the New Public
Management and Public Choice Theory assert). Moreover, the special neoliberal longing for rationalizing every aspect of State’s and individual conduct has been coupled with the neoliberal belief that everything can be quantified, measured and evaluated in terms of economic cost-benefit analysis. Hence, the function of evaluation is first and foremost cognitive, since it provides knowledge to better understand social reality. “As a vehicle for assembling and sorting information, [evaluation] shapes what we attend to, simplifies cognition, and makes a complicated world seem more amenable to our control” (Stevens and Espeland, 2005: 375). The growing need for gathering information in order to assess states’, organizations and individuals behavior with reference to their level of debt, corruption, economic freedom, good governance, transparency, makes evaluation a powerful tool to provide each economic actor (be it a state, an individual or an organization) with the information required to calculate whether, when and where to invest. Meanwhile, evaluation is also an instrument for assessing the efficacy and efficiency of State policies and its conformity to market logic. Such a cognitive function of evaluation is coupled with other functions, as alternative perspectives on neoliberalism emphasized.

From a neo-Marxist perspective, neoliberalism can be seen as part of a struggle for dominance over the ideas (and minds) of the social formation (Harvey, 2005). Strongly influenced by Gramsci’s conception of hegemony, Hall (1988: 52) specifies that this is a “struggle 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”. According to this perspective, neoliberalism is the ideology associated with the restoration and reconstruction of the class power of economic elites occurred from the ’70 onwards. Such an ideology is understood to rest on five values: the individual; freedom of choice; market security; laissez faire, and minimal government (Larner, 2000). In order these values become hegemonic, that is they become “the commonsense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey, 2005: 23), evaluation and measurement have
played a key role. Indeed, as Gramsci pointed out almost a century ago, any struggle for “the realisation of a hegemonic apparatus, in so far as it creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge: it is a fact of knowledge, a philosophical fact” (Gramsci, 1971: 365, my italics). Measuring instruments (that is the instruments through which evaluation is performed) can be considered as the methods of knowledge that any counter-hegemonic ideology has to create and diffuse for legitimizing its main values and principles. In this view, evaluation is an alleged technical and scientific process through which the values of the dominant class become the values of the entire society by consent (and not by the use of force). Yet they originally came into being as values that served the purpose of a special social group, evaluation makes them appear as completely natural and commonsensical, as the natural values against which the behaviour of each State, social group or individual has to be assessed.

A third conceptualization of neoliberalism describes it as a political rationality. Based on the Foucaultian conception of governmentality, neoliberalism as a political rationality tends to shape and organize both government action and individual conduct. Specifically, it is “a set of discourses, practices and apparatuses that determine a new mode of government of human beings in accordance with the universal principle of competition” (Dardot and Laval, 2014: 7). According to this perspective, economics is just “a method to change the soul”, as Margaret Thatcher clearly put it. Indeed, far from being a coherent hegemonic ideology, neoliberalism is “the new reason of the world” (Dardot and Laval, 2014), as it involves the transformation of economy, as well as politics, society, and individual psychology. To these ends, it is coupled with “the emergence of institutions and practices (technologies of governance) that facilitate and encourage individual and group conformity to market norms” (Mitchell 2006: 389). Evaluation and measurement belong to such practices. Far from being just a cognitive tool, or the means to legitimate the hegemonic power of the dominant class, they constitute a set of practices, techniques, and discourses which encourage states, organizations and individuals to
conform to neoliberal norms. The Foucaultian approach maintains that much of the regulation in neoliberal markets must come from within, from self-monitoring subjects, while evaluating institutions and evaluation are meant to be performative and able to orient the responsible and efficient functioning of calculating selves.

As Fourcade and Healy (2013) pointed out, the point at issue here is not class power but classification power. Indeed, one of the main outcomes of measurement and evaluation is the creation of rankings, which classify states, people, and organizations based on a common neoliberal-driven metric. “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” (Foucault, 1999: 101). Evaluation is a disciplinary power, since “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” (Foucault, 1999: 101).

Although based on different approaches, these three perspectives emphasize evaluation’s ability to legitimize the neoliberal restructuring of the State, be it in terms of economic efficiency, hegemonic ideology, or governmentality. The ensuing section outlines the main lines of this process.

**Neoliberalism, Evaluation and State Restructuring**

The neoliberal transformation of the State is a two-step process. In the first place, for safeguarding global competition and improving economic performance, roll-back neoliberalism
requires each State to become an “evaluated State”, that is a State being evaluated, assessed and ranked against neoliberal principles and values. In the second place, roll-out neoliberalism requires each State to play an active role in neoliberalizing society and individual conduct, thus becoming an “evaluative State”. As stated, whatever the perspective on neoliberalism is, evaluation is a key process both for the implementation of specific policies, and for the realization of a hegemonic ideology, and for the conformation of individual conduct to specific norms.

Over the first phase of roll-back neoliberalism and dismantling of welfare state, each State has to be evaluated in its ability to conform to international competitiveness, to run after capital, be economically efficient and market-friendly. It is a metamorphic and contradictory phase for the State, because, on the one hand, it is still a welfare state, thus providing social services and protecting social rights and, on the other hand, it is compelled to become neoliberal, that is to cut social spending and privatize the provision of social services. Over this phase evaluation provides neoliberalism with a powerful tool for assessing State’s performance against new criteria. As demonstrated (Giannone, 2010 and 2014), this is the case of concepts such as democracy and freedom of information, with neoliberalism affecting the definition and measurement of these concepts, thus influencing the construction of evaluation instruments and, in turn, of rankings between states. As a consequence, besides maintaining to measure and compare liberal democracies and liberal information systems, these rankings tend to reward neoliberal democracies and neoliberal information systems. But this is also the case of the index of economic freedom and the index of competitiveness whose aim is to evaluate State’s conformity to neoliberal norms. Starting from the ‘80s a myriad of surveillance organizations has been entitled to monitor “an intensely moral project carried out in the name of rationalizing and expanding economic exchange and democratizing society” (Fourcade and Healy, 1988 and 2012) and used to describe the transformation of the State’s role in higher education. We consider this process as just one piece of a more general and all-encompassing transformation of the State.
Such a proliferation is also due to State reluctance to its neoliberalization, as demonstrated by its early contradictory responses to this process. Indeed, over the ‘80s, no State was able to dismantle its welfare system all at once (even Reagan and Thatcher could not do it), as well as no State was able to remain a “tax State”, that is a welfare State which finances its social services through a high level of taxation. Due to the decrease of State’s revenues linked to the neoliberal tenet of lowering fiscal pressure for the wealthiest income brackets, State’s response to such an enigma has been the resort to public debt in order to finance its main services (Streeck, 2014). This way the “tax State” became a “debtor State”. Consistently with the principles of mature neoliberalism, the “debtor State” can be just a provisional regime, because it emphasizes State’s inability to fully conform itself to neoliberalization. Indeed, high level of public debt may be sanctioned by bad evaluation by credit rating agencies and high interest rates by financial markets: hence, State’s difficulty to pursue this double-edged strategy for a long time. In this case, international evaluation has been able to create a within-market classification, with categories and thresholds that restrict access to certain goods and services. Hence, the level of State’s access to credit by financial market is also based on its rating by credit agencies as compared to other countries. A special feature of these within-market classifications is their seemingly democratic power, since they don’t exclude definitely – as for the boundary classification – the evaluated states from the possibility to get credit. The other side of the coin of this inclusiveness is a kind of moral and disciplinary power, since such classifications represent a pressure for improvement: “they steer behavior toward some desirable goal, and encourage people [and States]

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2 This is due to the fact that the State is not an apparatus but a “field where agents and institutions struggle. […] Those who dominate in a specific field can make it work to their own advantage, but they have always to face the resistance, contestations, demands, protests of dominated groups” (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 43, my translation).

3 There are two main kinds of classification: the 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).

4 Such classifications act also on the organizational and individual level, for instance by regulating both universities’ (or departments) access to national funds, based on the result of the Evaluation of Research Quality, and academics’ access to research funds, based on the evaluation of their ability to draw funds and improve the profitability of their research. These classifications are being even more promoted by the evaluative State.
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).

Because of this combination of economic, fiscal, political and moral factors, the debtor State has to turn into an austerity or consolidation State, defined by cuts in social spending, balanced budgets and a gradual decline in public indebtedness. As to the European states, such a process was institutionalized by European integration, with Maastricht criteria imposing on candidate states to Eurozone to reduce public debt and deficit, while recent intergovernmental treaties – such as the Fiscal Compact – tightened these conditions. It is not a coincidence that European integration was described as a “Hayekization process” (Streeck 2014), since it has constituted an international regime for the development of roll-out neoliberalism.5

Political choice and expert knowledge have been replaced by the “know-hows of enumeration, calculation, monitoring, evaluation” as the new and stronger authoritative claim of supranational institutions (such as the European Commission and the European Central Bank) and international private intermediaries (such as credit rating agencies). Therefore, while “the very powers that the technologies of welfare accorded to experts enabled them to establish enclosures within which their authority could not be challenged, effectively insulating experts from external political attempts to govern them and their decisions and actions”, with the neoliberalization of the State, “the powers once accorded to positive knowledges of human conduct are to be transferred to the calculative regimes of accounting and financial management. And the enclosures of expertise are to be penetrated through a

5 A detailed explanation of this process is in Streeck (2014). As to the role of the EU in dismantling welfare state, Storey (2004) documents, in particular, the multiple attacks on the state provision of goods and services through the EU’s activist competition policy and through the limits it places on state aid to publicly controlled ‘businesses’ such as banks and airports. Both Brenner (1999) and Swyngedouw (1997) likewise, have demonstrated the key role played by the EU in restructuring space in a matter beneficial for capital.
range of new techniques for exercising critical scrutiny over authority - budget disciplines, accountancy and audit being three of the most salient” (Rose, 1996: 54). These techniques certainly rely upon a stronger claim to truth and objectivity than the experts’ enclosed knowledge does. As Andre Orléan pointed out: “The power of the market is the power of public evaluation [ ...]. Financial power is a power of influence which controls debtors by subjecting them to a certified judgment, which generates a great deal of publicity within the financial community” (as cited in Lazzarato, 2012: 138). That is why neoliberal market institutions are “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).

From the Evaluated State to the Evaluative State

With neoliberalism, state’s bureaucratic centralized control – as a typical feature of welfare state – is substituted by a myriad of evaluation agencies, which are both national and international, as well as both public and private. In the first place, evaluation is even more put into the hands of supranational institutions or international private intermediaries also because of its ability to ensure that their policies are nonpartisan and their judges are unbiased. This is the case of fiscal monitoring by the Commission, the continual surveillance of member states both before and after admission into the Union, the process of geo-economic monitoring through which post-communist states were disciplined to accept as both natural and necessary their wholesale transformation into market-based neoliberal societies (Mitchell, 2006). Yet, roll-out neoliberalism requires each State to have a proactive role. In order to become a
consolidated State, external evaluation and surveillance are not always adequate, because of the possible protests and resistance by organizations and individuals to conform to foreign-imposed neoliberal measures. A further step is necessary to make them self-conforming to those norms. Hence, the mature neoliberalism’s insight that institutions matter has pushed the neoliberalized State at the core of the process. Indeed, in order to conform individuals’ and organizations conduct to neoliberal norms, the State may take the key advantage of being a “consent-based principle of public order” whose main function is “the production and canonization of social classifications” (Bourdieu, 2013: 23, my translation). The task of the “evaluative State” is to introduce the culture of evaluation as a performative apparatus for assessing its main traditional policy areas (as health, education, and public administration) against their level of efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, profitability and so on.

At first glance, these new evaluative standards change the scope of public sector, as well as its aims and reference values, consistently with the neoliberal tenet. Moreover, they also change the conduct of public sector workers and organizations, which are even more evaluated (that is rewarded or sanctioned) against those new evaluative standards. In substance, as Stremlau (2011: 192) pointed out, “part of the very function of establishing evaluative standards is to change the culture of the phenomenon that is being evaluated”. Through evaluation there is a legitimation of the neoliberal transformation of the State, as well as an objectification of its new values and guiding principles.

As to the causes of this structural transformation towards the evaluative State, Power (2000) highlighted that it was driven not only by the financial constraint imposed by 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. For instance, university departments and academics are evaluated through targets and performance criteria based on quality evaluation measured in terms of quantity rather than scholarly content. New performance indicators tend to reward relations with industry, external research funding, quantity of research income rather than quality of scholarship, and so on (Olssen and Peters, 2005).

Besides the cognitive function, quantification and numbers “can be a tool of state control, a basis of political mobilization, a form of accountability, a commodity that is bought and sold, or various combinations of these” (Espeland, forthcoming). 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).

Furthermore, for understanding the rise of the evaluative State it is also important to recognize the growth and circulation of an idea of evaluation, which is not simply about the consequences of roll-back neoliberalism and downsizing government. The intensification of the “culture of evaluation” made the instruments of auditing, monitoring, and inspection more central to the operational base of government. In the place of the historic mode of State control, based on centralized and hierarchized administrative verification (Neave, 2012), the rise of the evaluative State was accompanied by a fundamental reassignment of the task of evaluation itself, as well as the proliferation of “instruments of a new surveillance, performance indicators, quality indices, setting of ‘standards’ through ‘benchmarking’” (Neave, 2012: 266). Through deregulation and autonomy, the two magic words of neoliberalism which are able to emphasize individual freedom and responsibility, the State doesn’t opt out its functions. In fact, the apparent contradiction between a more limited role assigned to national administration and the multiplication of the levels of oversight is just an “enduring tension” (Neave,
of the evaluative State. The latter is perhaps best described 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” (Neave, 2012: 277) rather being concentrated within the central administration. This means that “for neoliberal perspectives, the end goals of 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). It is these evaluative techniques, as Barry et al. (1996: 14) states, that “enable the marketplace for services to be established as ‘autonomous’ from central control. Neoliberalism, in these terms, involves less a retreat from governmental ‘intervention’ than a re-inscription of the techniques and forms of expertise required for the exercise of government”. As noted, neoliberalism may mean less government, but it doesn’t mean less governance. The State is in charge to define and modify the rules of the game, to require compliance and to confer trust. Its ability to perform these tasks realizes through the myriad of national evaluation agencies which have the power to define what is to be evaluated and how it is to be evaluated. 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). Every agency is “both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert, since by its very principle it leaves no zone of shade and constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising; and absolutely ‘discreet’, for it functions permanently and largely in silence” (Foucault, 1999: 99). Hence, while the disciplinary 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” (103), based on the motivation of transparency and accountability. For instance, far from the early financial audits, the new elaborated scores given to universities are turned into rankings that are widely reported in the
popular press. 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 another. It is a technique of *naming and shaming*, which is typical for discourage some kinds of activity. Furthermore, as Neave stated (2012: 278), in the end “such evaluation affects whether individual universities bargain for resources from a position of strength or from a situation of publicly certified intellectual and moral debility”.

**Conclusions**

The circumstances of neoliberal triumph involve political aspects (such as the conquest of power by 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 the rich and poor), cultural aspects (the individualization and the rise of consumer society), and subjective aspects (the emergence of a new subject). At different levels, neoliberalism acts as a process (neoliberalization) aiming at imposing competition as the main principle of conduct and market logic as the fairest and most efficient resource allocator. The aim of this paper was to describe the role of evaluation in legitimizing such an all-encompassing transformation of the State. Yet, it is clear that the paper should be considered just as an experiment in putting together some pieces of an ultimately incomplete and intricate puzzle. In the first place, the work focused on the early phase of neoliberalism’s diffusion. Neoliberalism has been described as a never-ending restructuring process, based on a radical and continuous change in State’s scope,
objectives, norms, values, and constituency, with evaluation playing a central role as a neoliberal technique for governing States, organizations and individuals behavior.⁶

As stated, evaluation can be considered as a cognitive tool for legitimizing the efficacy of certain policies at the expense of others, as the conceptualization of neoliberalism as a set of policies suggests. Accordingly, the neoliberal restructuring of the State should rely on the (evaluation of the) efficacy and efficiency of neoliberal policies and their capacity to make the State more able to face international competition and the globalization of economy. This cognitive function of evaluation is just a piece of the puzzle and is not adequate to explain the powerful role of evaluation in the endurance of neoliberalism. For instance, this cognitive function is inadequate when the last economic crisis is taken into consideration. In fact, although the crisis highlighted the failure of neoliberal policies (as evaluated in terms of economic growth, market efficiency and so on), we are still facing “the strange non-death of neoliberalism” (Crouch, 2011). Such an apparent paradox cannot be explained when only the cognitive function of evaluation is taken into account. Therefore the ideological and disciplinary functions of evaluation have to be considered.

When you regard evaluation as a tool for legitimizing the hegemony of the dominant class, as stated by the neo-Gramscian conceptualization of neoliberalism, then the alleged scientific and politically neutral nature of evaluation comes to light. Hence the ineffectiveness of neoliberal policies is hardly put into question because the evaluation of the crisis (in terms of responsibilities, policy efficacy, as well as responses to it) is still made through neoliberal methods of knowledge which are able to transform the aims and values of the dominant class into the aims and values of the whole social formation. As a consequence, the dominant class has been able to move the responsibility of the crisis from extreme deregulation and growing private indebtedness to State’s inability to reduce sovereign

⁶ As noted before in the description of State transformation, this technique came to take hold through debt, and today it is employed in every economic and social sphere (Lazzarato, 2012).
debt and make market-driven reforms, thus shifting to states the blame and cost of the crisis (Gallino, 2013).

In order to repay its debt, as well as to keep as a consolidated State, each State has to use evaluation as a disciplinary power. Without imposition, the evaluative State has been able to make organizations’ and individuals conduct conformed to neoliberal norms by consent and self-regulation. Through evaluation, an illusory democratization and objectification of power occurred, thanks to the technicality and alleged scientific nature of indicators and measurement.

Besides these different perspectives on neoliberalism consider evaluation as a key process in the legitimation and success of this paradigm, they lack to underline its structural role in States’, organizations and individuals transformation. The phrase “evaluative State”, originally used to describe the new role of the State in higher education, can now be used to define the all-encompassing neoliberal restructuring of the State, to the extent that evaluation can be considered as “the State’s own way of existence in its neoliberal configuration” (Pinto, 2013, my translation)

References


