

# Ricerca come professione e come arte

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## Sommario

Il paper si posiziona all'interno del dibattito inerente la natura applicativa delle scienze umane e sociali, con specifico riferimento alla Psicologia del lavoro e delle organizzazioni. Sono sollecitate nuove traiettorie per una ricerca rilevante, significativa e appropriata. Fare ricerca relativa a oggetti e domande riguardanti l'emergere di nuovi scenari organizzativi richiede una professionalità capace di rileggere e riorientare le coordinate epistemologiche, metodologiche e operative connesse a tale produzione di conoscenza, secondo una epistemologia della pratica, concretizzata in una metodologia emica di ricerca relazionale e trasformativa. Di qui il rapporto tra dimensione professionale e arte, che il contributo esplora nelle declinazioni della ricerca in ambito WOP.

## Parole chiave

Professionalità, Arte, Ricerca applicata, Complessità, Epistemologia del particolare.

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# Research as a profession and as an art

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## Abstract

This paper is positioned within the debate concerning the applicative nature of human and social sciences, with specific reference to Work and Organisational Psychology. New trajectories for relevant, meaningful and appropriate research are called for. Carrying out research related to objects and questions concerning the emergence of new organisational scenarios requires a professionalism capable of rereading and redirecting the epistemological, methodological and operational coordinates connected to this production of knowledge, in line with an epistemology of practice, realised in a relational and transformative emic research methodology. Hence the relationship between the professional dimension and art, which the contribution explores in its declinations in the context of WOP research.

## Keywords

Professionalism, Art, Applied research, Complexity, Epistemology of the particular.

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## Positioning oneself creatively in the emerging scenario

This contribution is part of a debate concerning the applicative nature of Work and Organisational Psychology, configured as a peculiar disciplinary knowledge and specific human and social science (Scaratti & Ivaldi, 2021). The question concerns both the different ways of conceiving research as a production of relevant and expendable knowledge, and the need to bridge the gap between academic and practical knowledge (Bartunek, 2011; Gibbons et al., 1994).

On the one hand, the need for a research and knowledge production approach connected to organisational realities is highlighted (Mode 2 by Gibbons et al., 1994), reducing the distance between managerial theory and managerial practice, feeding the prospect of new research sensitivities in the field of disciplines related to Human Resource Management (we could say to WOP in general). In this regard, Lawler (2007), in an acclaimed article in a prestigious journal (*The Academy of Management Journal*), underlines how the research developed by academic faculties exceeds methodological rigour based on complex statistical analyses, whose relevance in terms of influence and support to managerial practices appears minimal or unlikely. The numerous articles with high impact factor and rigour, the author argues, have a poor impact on practices, supporting academic career paths that depend more on the number of articles published in high-end journals, than on consistent research capable of influencing practice.

Hence the need for new perspectives, ones that are more creative and centred on complex problems close to contexts, developing reasoned and articulated approaches that require proximity to the field and complex methods of research-action and evaluation. Lawler (2007) hopes for the courage to open new trajectories for a production of knowledge that is relevant to contexts, meaningful for people and appropriate in the method that generates it.

The evolution and progressive change of historical-cultural conjunctures and work scenarios, however, constitute, in the current context, the material and immaterial conditions for a re-configuration of research in the WOP area. The new organisational and working contexts in rapid and profound evolution require facing complex situations, with high variability and poor governability. The same effects of the pandemic have accelerated the changes and transformations already underway in contemporary organisations, soliciting new challenges and tensions (while new perspectives for work, management and value production processes are opened, at the same time concerns and critical attention to concrete risks of manipulation and distorted use in terms of power generated by the digital transition are introduced) and leading to the emergence of new professions and skills. At stake is a profound change in organisational and professional cultures, which require social intelligence, adaptive/divergent thinking, intercultural openness, a mindset capable of dealing with data, interpretations and quick decisions.

On the other hand, carrying out research on objects and questions regarding such scenarios requires, from a WOP perspective, a professional dimension capable of rereading and redirecting the epistemological, methodological and operational coordinates connected to this production of knowledge, overcoming a modernist vision of rationality as a unitary and privileged system of knowledge (Toulmin, 1990). At stake is a leaning towards an epistemology of practice (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011), realised in an emic methodology (Berry, 1969, 1999), and from a relational and transformative research perspective (Scaratti & Ivaldi, 2021).

Professionalism is needed:

- for research exposed to constant shifts and realignments, to be constantly negotiated and undertaken with the various interlocutors involved, following a logic of knowing from within (Shotter, 2008, 2010);
- for research located within a flow of experience that cannot be entirely controlled from the start, although necessarily prefigurative in order to negotiate essential operational agreements;
- for research concerning the use of experiential knowledge capable of reflection and critical thinking, discernment and expert judgment, which makes use of the various sources of evidence available, avoiding assigning rankings of greater/lesser validity to one or the other, modulating them in reference to local needs, to be discerned and evaluated, also valuing tacit judgments, local knowledge, and contextual skills that can generate situated interpretations.

Against this backdrop, there are two cognitive questions that this contribution intends to address:

- the first concerns the new configuration of the professional dimension and the implications inherent in research as a professional practice;
- the second relates to the relationship between the professional dimension and art and the consequent declinations in the research in the WOP field, considered in its connotation of applied social science.

The paper develops as follows: firstly the concept of professionalism is explored, centred on located and locally distributed knowledge, with specific reference to its emerging configuration generated by the evolution and transformation of current organisational scenarios; the professional dimensions at stake are then highlighted in the context of research inspired by an epistemology of the particular (Tsoukas, 2009) and oriented to a processual approach, relating to the social processes of constructing meaning to what happens in work and organisational contexts; finally, the relationship between professionalism and art is described and discussed, with some indications for future research within WOP.

## Rethinking professionalism

The concept of professionalism can be considered within the need to reread and deepen the skills required by emerging scenarios, understanding the profound paradigm changes involved and highlighting the importance of transformation logics and professional and organisational learning. In more general terms, professionalism has been revisited from the perspective of neo-professionalism (see Bosio, 2004a, 2004b; Bosio & Kaneklin, 2001; Prandstraller, 1994; Romano & Quaglino, 2001) and the need to face complex situations, variability and poor governability (Ballarino & Regini, 2005; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Butera, Donati, & Cesaria, 1997; Floridi, 2017; Prandstraller, 2003; Schwab, 2017).

In fact, we can identify four constitutive dimensions that transversally characterise emerging organisational scenarios: governance of the unexpected; the different architecture of work processes; orientation to new values; and the high organisational reliability required for appropriate process governance.

The first dimension refers to the need to deal with situations in which the breakthrough of the unforeseen, the urgency and the unexpected constitutes a daily and not an exceptional experience. Sometimes this irruption manifests itself in a dramatic and catastrophic form (accidents in nuclear power plants, earthquakes, fires, terrorist acts, etc.), indicating the need to increase the resilience threshold in facing such situations. Like the property of some materials linked to the ability not to break even if exposed to considerable external pressures and stresses, resilience has largely become a metaphor for the ability to face and endure work stresses due to particular situations. More frequently, such situations occur in the daily routine of processes, where errors, problems and deviations from what is expected due to multiple and unpredictable circumstances, are proposed as the unexpected to be faced and managed. In addition to resilience, in this case, an ability to predict and anticipate events is needed, connected to a careful reading of what is happening, including weak and apparently irrelevant but abductively significant signals. These clues (reports, observations, evidence and indications as to what is happening) are widely evidenced by those who are «on the ball», by the line operators who are confronted with the daily progress of production and organisational operations.

The second dimension concerns the need for hybrid and adhocratic organisational architectures, capable of articulating the need for differentiation and integration of each organisational structure. Current scenarios require attention to widespread learning processes, characterised by a high circulation of available knowledge and the non-hierarchisation of decisions: the dispersion of these means the possibility of increasing the level of participation of each organisational player in the overall good functioning of the organisation.

The third dimension, related to new emerging values, rewards the ability to learn from mistakes, which are used as a source of reading and critical exercise

towards ordinary work processes. This ability to report and use errors feeds a settlement co-responsibility, whereby everyone proactively offers their contribution to achieving the agreed objectives. Another value is the representation of one's work as physiologically characterised by high levels of disorder and emergency, connected to the structural uncertainty that characterises environments traversed by rapid transformation, evolution and change.

The fourth dimension refers to concepts studied in-depth by literature in the disciplinary scientific sector of Work and Organisational Psychology and which constitute theoretical frameworks which are now consolidated and in use. Think of Weick's (1995) sensemaking, relating to the possibility/need to activate spaces for reflection functional to the recognition and processing of opacities, obscurities and chiaroscuro effects connected to the processes of concrete doing in action, opening up opportunities for a vision in which work performances can be recognised intersubjectively and take on a shape that makes them reproducible between constants and variances, repetitions and improvisations. Or to the loose coupling construct which refers to the need to represent and articulate suitably flexible organisational processes (neither too tight/structured to avoid stiffening and consequent inadequate reading of needs; nor too frayed and loose to avoid dispersions and inefficiencies), so as to relate to the reference context with the right adaptation and adjustment required by the constant change and evolution of demand. Or, again, to enactment as the ability to focus on aspects and to configure defined objects within the flow of experience in which one is immersed, addressing problems and taking action towards possible and sustainable solutions to them. Finally, to the concept of mindfulness related to the complex ability of activating the different individual and collective resources available, capable of valorising established knowledge and developing an articulated awareness of the scenarios in which one is involved, a representation of the complexity of the problems to be faced and a congruent and pertinent activation of existing actions and skills.

The comparison with these dimensions mobilises movements from execution to entrepreneurship, from passivity to the assumption of responsibility, from indifference to dedication, from avoiding problems to investing in them, calling into question related working and professional cultures.

Living and going through organisational scenarios characterised by the dimensions evoked undoubtedly solicits the interpretation of one's own professional identity and the training and learning trajectories necessary to consolidate the skills profile suitable for its appropriate exercise. Hence the plausible reference to aspects of inventiveness, creation, reconfiguration and identity evolution that the connection between profession and art seems to evoke, as we will see in the next paragraph.

At stake is the cultivation of a professional view, which is both listening and interpretation exercised on reality and a professional vision that one learns to share

within different practices and aggregations (Goodwin, 2003), in an intertwining of the subjective, relational, scientific-cultural and institutional dimensions that characterise professional action. An action located within organisational contexts represented in turn as socially constructed artefacts and as processes of cultural construction. Organised action, which activates contexts that allow for situated interpretations of what happens, within an institutional framework of meanings and structures of meaning (Weick, 1995) that constitute a sort of available «silent organisation» (Romano, 2006).

Professionalism must therefore be interpreted and understood in the tuning process between subject and context through negotiations and joint constructions of culturally shared meanings. In this regard, it is interesting to note how many contributions in this direction (Fregnan et al. 2020; Hecklaua et al., 2016; Ivaldi et al., 2021), highlight how, in the knowledge society, the high degree of specialisation and operational contexts in continuous evolution place particular emphasis on transversal skills, which are not only technical-operational, but also and above all social and relational.

Green (2009) supports the concept of professional practice in this regard, meaning practice as a distinctive aspect of social life (and not as a construct opposed to theory) and profession as a dimension exceeding the possession of specialised knowledge. Inspired by a post-modernist orientation, the author proposes an operational formulation of professional practice in four directions:

- to practice a profession, acquiring habits with tacit distributed knowledge within a professional activity;
- to be professional, interpreting one’s own identity according to widespread and shared values and cultures;
- to manifest ethical quality, developing responsibility towards one’s own object of work and in one’s relationship with others;
- to acquire professional behaviour, in line with formal, explicit and collectively recognised references.

A synthetic figure of this declination of professionalism is the construct of *phronesis* as being distinct from the *episteme* and bearer of practical knowledge (or wisdom or judgment), in other words, knowledge capable of guiding and informing the actions of subjects on the basis of valid and pertinent resolutions. The possibility that practitioners use evidence to produce informed judgments (assumed to be at the basis of the evidence approach) also depends on *phronesis*, which joins the *episteme* as a legitimate and relevant form of knowledge, capable of directing practical actions in the context of the multiple human contexts in which the subjects are involved. At stake are two ways and expressions of knowledge that can and should be recognised and legitimised in a logic of authentic orientation towards decision-making guided by reasonableness and sustainability.

The episteme expresses and offers knowledge that bears an analytical rationality, capable of generating universal principles. The phronesis manifests and conveys orientations and reference coordinates to move in a flexible and adaptive way in situations characterised by surprise, exposure to the uncertainty and the unexpected, and mutability of contexts, and is based on experience and professional judgment/wisdom that settles in practical knowledge, functional to facing the challenges related to the particularity and contingency of contexts.

Kemmis (2009) identifies in turn five interconnected and integrated interpretations for an understanding of professional practice: the individual behaviour of the professional; the patterns socially shared by professionals involved in the same activity; the intentions, meanings and values conveyed by the actions implemented by professionals; the language, speech and symbols that characterise a community of professionals; and the historical changes and transformations that professional practice goes through and develops in its dynamic evolution. A portrait of professional practice emerges as characterised by socially constituted actions related to «saying», «doing» and «relating», meaning how different professional practices are characterised by plural linguistic-discursive forms, by specific systems of activities and by relational dynamics that configure and actualise them.

Schatzki (2002) also proposes his vision of professional practice, identifying as constitutive elements: operational understanding connected to the ability to understand and perform certain actions; the rules underlying the execution and implementation of the practice itself; the teleoaffective structure, which conveys the level of emotional investment and the intentions and priorities assigned to it; and a general understanding that connotes common ways of understanding, representing and communicating common ways of doing certain things. Professional practice is thus configured as an intertwining that connects and declines subjective and objective, individual and social, intentional and tacitly acquired, and stabilised and dynamic aspects and dimensions.

## Research implications

The epistemological assumptions underlying the aforementioned reconfiguration of the concept of professionalism are well recalled in the position of Tsoukas (2009) and Sandberg and Tsoukas (2011), which calls for the adoption of a logic of practice capable of going beyond traditionally understood scientific rationality and restoring an appropriate relationship with the contexts and systems of activity (Engeström, 1999), in which the subjects and research objects of WOP are incorporated. The recognition of the socially constructed nature of reality, through constant transactions and negotiations that mediate the mate-



rial and immaterial dimensions at stake, introduces a contextualised research perspective, capable of grasping the indexical dimensions through which people configure their experience and practices inherent to it as recognisable, legitimate and socially communicable and reproducible.

Dunne (2005) speaks in this regard of a kind of research that translates into thickly descriptive studies, capable of embracing and generating multiple narrative modes and accounts, in line with a hermeneutic capacity and understanding of the complexity and of the empirical and cognitive elements present in contextualised and particular situations.

In this regard, we can recall Mintzberg (2009), extending the indication he suggests for the approach to the managerial function also to the dimensions of professionalism in research, underlining the need to refer to three anchors to configure and interpret management (for us, professionalism):

- science, by evoking the power of the word, connected to logical and thinking skills, analysis of reality, planning and programming, and of consolidated knowledge;
- art, with its connection to seeing and imagining, to creatively conceiving, to multiple sensory expressiveness;
- the craft trade, connected to concrete doing, to action and practice, to venturing and learning.

Words, images and artefacts correspond to a vision of professionalism, expressed from a perspective of Work and Organisational Psychology and declined as sensitive to four reference drivers (Scaratti, 2017):

- that of situated knowledge, connected to meanings and levels of awareness attributed by subjects to the events and work and contextual processes in which they are involved and to the consequent epistemological assumption of assigning the value of relevant empirical data to the implicit elements of knowledge, incorporated in operational situations and mostly taken for granted;
- that of the relationship (*re-ligare* and *re-ferre*) in its value both of interaction and transaction connected to the development of bonds to be regulated over time (more or less loose vs tight, from time to time to be tightened and/or loosened), both of joint construction of meaning starting from common belonging (through constant negotiations and dynamics of cooperation/conflict);
- that of meaning as a shared symbolic order within common space-time coordinates, which define the concrete socio-organisational contexts in which people find themselves carrying out their activities. It is a question of the possible and not obvious access to public and collective dimensions, as opposed to private and individual ones, which everyone nourishes in relating to the solicitations of meaning that life conveys and provokes every day;

- that of practice, inherent in our being absorbed within operational activities (related to individual and cooperative actions in certain contexts for the achievement of objectives and purposes), an expression of our transformative agency.

Carrying out research on professionalism means developing an exercise in style, according to a dynamic trajectory that prefigures processes of constant learning and transformation, by relating knowledge and practice, individual and social dimensions, attention to means and orientation towards ends, and acquired experience and its reflective elaboration. At stake is the possibility of legitimising different rationalities (scientific, technical and practical) (Hamilton, 2005) and the consequent necessary art of improvisation (Polkinghorne, 1997), which characterises having to face events and situations defined by fluidity and uncertainty. Hence a propensity towards an interpretation of the professionalism of research in a hermeneutic key, capable of discerning and interpreting situations and realities to be faced on the basis of descriptively dense approaches and knowledge close to the experience of the subjects (Green, 2009).

### **The intertwining of profession and art: towards a paradigm of complexity**

The reference to improvisation can only evoke references to expressive registers typical of theatre (as in the comedy of art) and music (as in the jazz sections), symbols of a professional dimension capable of intertwining with creative manifestations.

The connection between knowledge, practice and professionalism becomes a condition for overcoming a current pervasive trend towards bureaucratic professionalism, even in research, typical of a neo-liberal orientation, based on reductive logic about the ways of considering knowledge and knowledge that matters (Scaratti, 2016).

The link that connects the world of professions and that of art can be historically placed in the associations of artisans, merchants or workers in general, who, exercising an identical economic activity, joined together for the protection of their interests. These associations, existing with various names from antiquity to the French revolution, had particular political importance in the Middle Ages, and specifically in Florence in the communal age, where they were divided into major arts (seven: judges and notaries, merchants of Calimala, bankers and money changers, doctors and apothecaries, wool manufacturers and merchants, silk weavers and merchants, and furriers), and minor arts (initially five, then gradually becoming fourteen: amongst which butchers, shoe makers, blacksmiths, carpenters, etc.).

The analysis of the semantic network of the terms involved helps to strengthen this historical connection: the term profession derives from the Latin *profitēri* («to declare, to profess») and refers to the open and public manifestation of something, professional performance, activity, work, occupation or profession, connected to high preparation and consistency. Doing something with professionalism therefore means expressing ability, skill, capability and competence, and professionalism is demonstrated in whoever shows or reveals particular preparation, seriousness and efficiency (such as a hairdresser or a plumber or a teacher who is skilled, good, capable, expert, smart and well-prepared), as a professional who knows how to do things in a workmanlike manner.

The connection between profession and art is linguistically founded and not accidental, as it can be traced back to the ability to act and produce, based on a particular set of rules and cognitive and technical experiences, and therefore also the set of rules and procedures for carrying out a human activity with a view to certain results. This brings us back to a cultural heritage in which we are deeply permeated and to the memory of the mechanical and liberal arts, divided in the Middle Ages into arts of the trivium (grammar, dialectics and rhetoric) and arts of the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music). Art and profession are intertwined as both refer to the set of rules necessary to conduct a series of operations, as well as to the means to do something or achieve a specific purpose with skill, dexterity and shrewdness, combining where needed cunning, artifice and shrewd handling.

If exercising a profession is knowing how to do things in a workmanlike manner, the focus on the profession is functional to highlighting the delicate relationship that is established between people and their work contexts, between the socio-economic system in which we live and the relationships that we entertain with the organisations in which our professional project is expressed and realised. Hence the possibility of configuring, in the current realities responsible for developing research and knowledge production, a professional identity capable of building action-oriented situated knowledge and tackling unprecedented problems with an attitude of critical thinking. The profession of the researcher is at the same time the result of design trajectories, of a path to acquire the skills necessary to experience the current organisational scenarios with critical capacity and adaptive balance, and of consolidation and transformation of identity in the constant confrontation with the solicitations that operational contexts convey.

Practicing this profession thus becomes a configuration of specific actions and operations directed at an object and endowed with its own structure, which is defined through historical, social and cultural processes (Scaratti, 2007). Consequently, being a research professional means acquiring experience as it is characterised by different levels of awareness, memory, orientation to the future, the relationship with space, time, emotions, feelings, affections, sensoriality and

corporeality, deriving from material and immaterial contexts which constitute the symbolic and operative fabric within which our concrete work is placed. Participating as a professional in this symbolic order nourishes the interpretations of professional families who shape their cultures and, on the basis of them, read the meanings contained in the signs (semiotics) and produce signs that convey meanings (semiosis). The semiotic register allows a person to immerse themselves in the *cum plexum* of plots, stories, flows of events, speeches, narratives and conversations that shape the experiences of the subjects and the meanings attributed to them, jointly constructing interpretations and participating in the weaving of renewed stories and trajectories. The semiotic register involves the creation of an adequate setting in order to make representations and knowledge visible and accessible, through the mediation of physical and material (tangible) or immaterial (ideal and symbolic or intangible) objects (Scaratti, 2017).

Professionalism in research is expressed in turn as a habit and a way of tackling unprecedented problems with an exploratory attitude, having clear in one's mind and heart that what one knows is not enough and the ability to build action-oriented situated knowledge is needed, earning the right position between curiosity and respect for the object with which one has to deal professionally. This is an attitude that is not taken for granted and is connected to the ability to sustain unpredictability (complex situations, with high variability and poor governability); to the exercise of action-oriented thinking and to the joint and situated research of knowledge; to the mental disposition capable of reflecting on one's own assumptions and of entering into dialogue with one's own and others' experiences. The challenge is the acquisition of a new paradigm, open to the complexity of the multiple relationships that connect the various dimensions of reality, generating questions with creativity and courage that fuel curiosity and a passion for knowledge. In this regard, I return to the two expressive registers referred to at the beginning of the paragraph: the theatrical and musical ones.

A first theatrical metaphor can, in fact, help to emblematically chisel the union between the professional and artistic dimension, as the research professional is part of a scenography (environment, situation, context and space-time configuration) and creator of a screenplay (text, history, dialogues and dynamics), modulating from time to time scenes, actors, purposes, actions, tools, critical events and resolutions, in the representations that they are called to interpret.

It is a question of addressing, for motivation and a sense of responsibility, solicitations and situations, trying to offer oneself and others anchors and references to move forward, even if provisional, declining aspects of trust, understanding, respect, humility and innovation. The professional who does things in a workmanlike manner faces «hypocritical» dimensions, in the Greek sense of the actor's interpretation of a mask and several masks (*dramatis personae*), in other words, of views and perspectives capable of nurturing visions and senses

(meanings and directions). Also, however, in the sense of acceptance of the imperfection that is connected to reality, and therefore as an adaptation of one's own research path that welcomes and confronts the complexity of the relationships to which the study of any object refers.

In the current scenarios of turbulence and tragic exposure to personal and collective uncertainty and vulnerability, the research professional is confronted with two masks to wear, in order to use their knowledge-producing action in a sensible and sustainable way.

The kairotic mask: it means using the power of discernment, discretion and interpretation at our disposal, which allows us to contribute, at least in part, to the configuration of sensible, relevant and expendable knowledge. Searching in time, for time, in the time available means measuring oneself with accelerations and delays, inertias and speeds, evolutions and involutions. In Greek mythology, Kairos intervenes at the right and appropriate moment, even if always exposed to uncertainty and potential error, but also to the creative opportunity connected to the appropriate choice that the responsibility of research (taking a stand and being responsive) expresses.

The mask of Abrahamic tension: the one that accompanies people and groups through multiple adversities and contradictions towards the promised land, which refers to the assumption of both vagueness and synthesis, uncertainty and vision, of the movement that directs even if one is not certain of being able to see the goal (as happens to the biblical figure of Abraham). It is not seen, but its vital trajectory that animates and supports research processes towards a better outcome of one's work can be understood. We, like Abram, are nomadic researchers in tension and waiting for an epiphany capable of shedding light on the mystery of complexity that surrounds us and that we are. The evoked tension recalls the humility and courage of every piece of research, especially if it is addressed to collective dimensions where individual, relational, organisational and institutional aspects are intertwined, the understanding of which often requires divergent thinking (from the Latin *divertĕre*, «to turn elsewhere», composed of *di(s)-* and *vertĕre* «to turn»), capable of opening up to multiple possibilities of interpretation.

The reference to this plurality is connected to the second metaphor, this time musical, suggested in order to grasp the orientation towards an epistemological perspective of a new research paradigm open to complexity: it is polyphony, masterfully interpreted by Johann Sebastian Bach with his fugues. At stake is the attention to multiple voices, their intertwining and overlapping, their orchestration in a global structure that takes shape, towards the unexpected effects that inevitably occur as well. As if to say that to do research according to the paradigm of complexity, a polyphonic attitude and sensitivity are needed, as Bachtin suggested in his reading of Dostoevsky, positioning himself in this case on the expressive register of literature and literary criticism. Texts, themes and rhythms

that are proposed and that return, in the enriched and recomposed polyphonic composition (and in research), the result of many languages that intersect and of the entertainments generated (it is interesting to note how the Latin root is at the basis of diverging as well as of having fun, amusing oneself), capable of producing joy and passion for what you are looking for.

Summarising the considerations developed, with reference to the cognitive question relating to the new configuration of the professional dimension and the implications inherent in research as a professional practice, we can recall expressions such as «practicing a profession», «being a professional», «ethics of practice and practice of ethics» and «professional vs amateur aspect of the practice». They are loaded with meanings that go beyond the prevailing mainstream, relative to the possession of specialised knowledge and open to a demythicised vision of knowledge and multiple rationalities. A vision that expresses both the necessary humility in the face of the inevitable imperfections and relativity of one's own assumptions, and the non-renunciation of a constant tension towards a sought truth, even if not fully possessed, as theatrical and musical metaphors have appropriately underlined.

Regarding the second, relating to the relationship between the professional dimension and art and the consequent declinations in the field of research in the WOP domain, considered in its connotation of applied social science, the reference to polyphony suggests multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, collaborative and orchestral coordinated approaches to research, which solicit innovative interpretations and configurations both of professional practice as researchers, and of new research policies and architectures at various levels.

It seems appropriate to quote, as a gloss and final figure of this contribution, as well as an appropriate and icastic representation of research as a profession and as an art, the quotation of what Wright Mills argued in 1959 about the sociological imagination (but we could say human and social sciences) in professional research practice:

Be a good craftsman: avoid any rigid set of procedures. Above all, seek to develop and to use the sociological imagination. Avoid the fetishism of method and technique. Urge the rehabilitation of the unpretentious intellectual craftsman, and try to become such a craftsman yourself. Let every man be his own methodologist; let every man be his own theorist; let theory and method again become part of the practice of a craft.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sii un bravo artigiano intellettuale ed evita di renderti schiavo di un codice procedurale rigido. Cerca soprattutto di sviluppare e usare l'immaginazione (sociologica). Resisti al feticismo del metodo e della tecnica. Reclama la riabilitazione dell'artigiano intellettuale, semplice e senza arie, e sii tu stesso. Lascia che ciascuno si dia il suo proprio metodo e la sua propria teoria. Lascia che teoria e metodo tornino a partecipare all'esercizio di un'arte [translation edited by the author].

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