

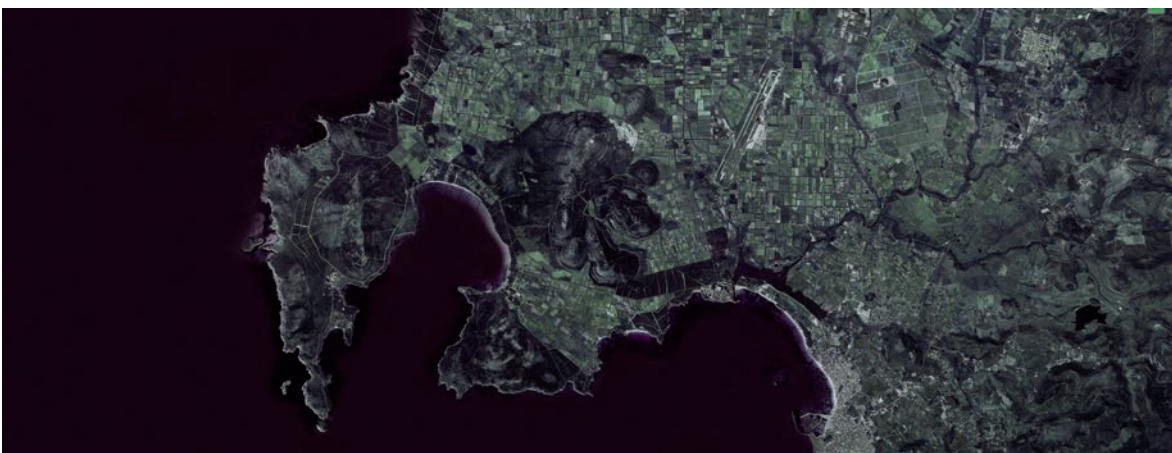
ADI Cagliari - ADI Sassari
Associazione dottorandi e dottori di ricerca italiani

RICERCA IN VETRINA 2015

PhD in Sardinia: Higher Education, Scientific Research and Social Capital

Edited by Laura Lai, Miriam Mastinu, Valeria Saiu, Matilde Silvia Schirru

Introductions by Fabrizio Angius, Marco Calaresu, Carla Contini,
Giuseppe Desogus, Laura Lai, Miriam Mastinu, Emanuele Mura,
Federico Onnis Cugia, Simone Poddighe, Rossella Putzolu,
Valeria Saiu, Matilde Silvia Schirru, Alberto Valenti



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Conference Proceedings

Ricerca in Vetrina 2015

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Alghero - Sardinia (Italy)

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Table of Contents

For a Regional Research Policy Per una politica regionale della ricerca <i>by Valeria Saiu, Matilde Silvia Schirru</i>	p.	15
Vetrina 1. Energy Efficiency and Sustainability <i>by Giuseppe Desogus, Emanuele Mura</i>	»	31
Performance Analysis of Thermal Energy Storage (TES) Systems based on Sensible and Latent Heat for Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) Applications <i>by Simone Arena, Efsio Casti, Mario Cascetta, Fabio Serra, Giorgio Cau</i>	»	34
Energy Landscapes. Renewable energy and evolving landscape <i>by Silvia Farris</i>	»	43
Thermal Comfort Analysis of Buildings in Mediterranean Climate <i>by Stefania Di Benedetto</i>	»	49
Energy retrofitting of historic buildings: criticality and intervention strategies <i>by Miriam Stara</i>	»	56
A methodology for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of dwelling energy retrofits <i>by Lorenza Di Pilla</i>	»	64
Vetrina 2. Applied Technologies <i>by Simone Poddighe, Matilde Silvia Schirru</i>	»	73

Municipalities Sardinians on Facebook: ID cards of Public Administration in the cyber space <i>by Angela Piredda</i>	p. 75
The health technologies: management profiles as a result of an empirical investigation in an economic corporate perspective <i>by Eleonora Melis</i>	» 82
A Planning Support System for supporting Local Land-Use Planning. Strategic Environmental Assessment <i>by Andrea Matta</i>	» 89
Probabilistic approach in Rocking Analysis of Masonry Elements: influence of the restitution coefficient on the response <i>by Linda Giresini, Jose Matos</i>	» 99
Social Media Geographic Information (SMGI) in tourism planning <i>by Roberta Floris</i>	» 106
Social Media Geographic Information (SMGI): analytical opportunities for spatial planning and governance <i>by Pierangelo Massa</i>	» 114
Geodesign and metaplaning: advanced planning support systems development <i>by Elisabetta Anna Di Cesare</i>	» 123
Marine sponges (Porifera) as promising bio sources in pharmaceuticals <i>by Rita Langasco, Barbara Cadeddu, Giovanna Rassu, Renata Manconi, Elisabetta Gavini</i>	» 130
Vetrina 3. Science, Culture, and Economy of Food <i>by Fabrizio Angius, Matilde Silvia Schirru</i>	» 137
What's inside our plate: culture or economy? Outcomes of a socio-economic modernization process on food and eating habits <i>by Emanuela Porru</i>	» 139
Detroit urban gardens: from crisis to renaissance? <i>by Laura Dessantis, Sara Spanu</i>	» 146
Embeddedness and organic certification influence on alternative food networks: a case study in the community of Madrid, Spain <i>by Salvatore Pinna</i>	» 153

New diagnostic approach to Celiac Disease. Cell-mediated response to the antigen-specific stimulation <i>by Maria Luigia Biggio, Grazia Galleri, Francesca Losa, Rosalia Fadda, Alessandra Mela, Giannina Secchi, Roberto Manetti</i>	p. 162
Estimation of body reserves in lactating ewes and goats <i>by Mondina Francesca Lunesu, Leonardo Sidney Knupp, Alberto Stanislao Atzori, Giacomo Floris, Mauro Decandia, Antonello Cannas</i>	» 169
Application of multivariate principal component analysis on milk composition variables and milk coagulation properties in Sarda dairy ewes <i>by Jessica Serdino, Fabio Correddu, Maria Grazia Manca, Nicolò Pietro Paolo Macciotta</i>	» 176
Vetrina 4. Environment and Landscape <i>by Miriam Mastinu, Valeria Saiu</i>	» 183
Phytoremediation of heavy metal contaminated soils for biofuel production <i>by Marta Canu, Giovanna Cappai, Alessandra Carucci</i>	» 185
New forms for transforming water landscapes <i>by Giovanni Maria Biddau</i>	» 194
Designing Waterscapes. The Territory of the City of Olbia <i>by Laura Lutzoni, Michele Valentino</i>	» 203
Bio-refineries as a regional development strategy: a regional input- output analysis <i>by Giovanni Mandras, Devrim Murat Yazan</i>	» 211
Between Metropolitan Archipelagos and Patchwork Metropolis. The dimension of the urban project in the neoliberal period <i>by Carlo Pisano</i>	» 219
Eco-Roads. Roads as generators of complex spaces <i>by Alfonso Annunziata</i>	» 227
Contamination: When research influences the profession. “Mobilità Lenta. Oristano e area vasta”. The project <i>by Enrica Campus</i>	» 235

Reduction of carbon dioxide point sources emissions through accelerated carbonation of alkaline residues <i>by Alessio Nieddu, Giovanna Cappai, Martina Piredda</i>	p. 241
A correlation study among some environmental factors and human health in Sardinia (Italy) <i>by Alessandro Sanna</i>	» 249
What about grapevine phenological stages under climate change scenarios? A modellistic approach <i>by Viviana Guido, Valentina Mereu, Donatella Spano</i>	» 259
Design for the territory amidst crisis and new signs: the “avant-garde mountain” <i>by Leonardo Lutzoni</i>	» 269
Vetrina 5. History and Identity of Places <i>by Laura Lai</i>	» 277
Urban design and environmental process. The Porto Conte Regional Park <i>by Michele Valentino, Laura Lutzoni</i>	» 279
Landscape and archaeology in Sardinia. Between juridical inertia and land management <i>by Roberto Busonera</i>	» 288
For a new geography of Sardinia. Planning processes and territorial transformations <i>by Giuseppe Onni</i>	» 297
Total art and Total theatre at the Bauhaus. Oskar Schlemmer’s abstract choreographies <i>by Lino Cabras</i>	» 304
How the settlement in Sardinia has changed. The stock housing in fifty years of building activity <i>by Cristian Cannaos</i>	» 312
Industrial archive-keeping: recovery of disused mining facilities in the south-west of Sardinia <i>by Annalisa Carta</i>	» 321

Modern Architecture in Sardinia. The case of Arborea. Analysis of construction techniques and recovery interventions <i>by Claudia Mura</i>	p. 327
Minimalia. Building practices of resistance in the abandoned territories <i>by Sara Impera</i>	» 336
Mediterranean traditional culture, architecture paradigms and contemporary declinations. Light as a tool for compositional analysis <i>by Silvia Carrucciu</i>	» 343
The Structural Vulnerability of The Architectonic Heritage in “Low-Risk” Sites. The Example of the Sardinian Churches <i>by Maria Dessì</i>	» 353
Turris Libisonis Colonia Iulia. Urban Archeology and digital tools for knowledge and protection <i>by Enrico Petruzzi</i>	» 362
Magnetometry on deserted villages of Meilogu and Anglona: methodologies and case-studies <i>by Maria Cherchi</i>	» 371
Landscapes of Power and Sacred Landscapes in the medieval Meilogu (VI-XIV a.D.): history and archaeology <i>by Gianluigi Marras</i>	» 379
When the dance becomes macabre <i>by Maria Serena Cadoni</i>	» 388
Vetrina 6. Democracy and Social Equality <i>by Alberto Valenti, Valeria Saiu, Federico Onnis Cugia, Marco Calaresu</i>	» 393
Governing urban transformations. Urban commons: processes and dynamics of practise of the right to the city <i>by Roberta Guido</i>	» 399
Walkability, right to the city and urban design <i>by Giovanna Fancello</i>	» 406

Shared Services Delivery in Italy and Europe. A comparative research about the state of the art of intermunicipal cooperation around Italy and Europe <i>by Andrea Laddomada</i>	p. 415
Empowering stakeholders: participatory processes' role in landscape planning in Sardinia <i>by Antioco Ledda</i>	» 423
New approaches to the design of spaces of information in relation to public urban spaces <i>by Davide Pisu, Matteo Trincas</i>	» 430
Forms of shared habitation in Barcelona <i>by Silvia Bodei</i>	» 439
Natural risk and cohesion policy <i>by Maria Coronato</i>	» 445
Social Capital, Mobility and Crime. Socio-territorial indicators for an Information System <i>by Daniele Pulino, Sara Spanu</i>	» 453
Field notes on public engagement of research and community empowerment <i>by Valentina Ghibellini</i>	» 462
From school dropouts to educational success. Policies and actions against early school leaving in the Italian school <i>by Gabriella Colucci</i>	» 469
Poster Session <i>by Carla Contini, Rossella Putzolu</i>	» 477
Measuring and modelling the urban carbon budget <i>by Veronica Bellucco, Serena Marras, Donatella Spano</i>	» 480
Eco-responsible plan and design. Processes, strategies and tools towards environmental assessment in Architecture <i>by Alessia Meloni</i>	» 481
Toward a Observatory for sustainable revitalization of building heritage of historic centers <i>by Stefano Pili</i>	» 484

Increased levels of Cystatins A and B in saliva of edentulous subjects <i>by Barbara Liori, Barbara Manconi, Tiziana Cabras, Maria Teresa Sanna, Massimo Castagnola, Irene Messana, Alessandra Olianas</i>	p. 487
Study and development of a biosensor for mycotoxins determination and new sustainable components <i>by Patrizia Monti, Giammario Calia, Paola Carta, Davide Fabbri, Maria Antonietta Dettori, Quirico Migheli, Pier Andrea Serra, Giovanna Delogu</i>	» 489
Biomimetic Metalloporphyrin as emulator of cytochrome P450 in the degradation of the antimycotic drug bifonazole <i>by Gianmarco Cocco, Enrico Sanjust, Mário M.Q. Simões, M. Rosário M. Domingues, Paolo Zucca</i>	» 490
Characterization of pharmacologically active oxidovanadium(IV) complexes. Biotransformation in the blood <i>by Valeria Ugone, Daniele Sanna, Eugenio Garribba</i>	» 492
Effect of flaxseed in the diet on the Δ^9 -desaturase activity in dairy Sarda ewes <i>by Fabio Correddu, Maria Grazia Manca, Jessica Serdino, Antonello Ledda, Anna Nudda</i>	» 494
Histological analysis of compact bone tissue, a comparison between wild boar and domestic pig <i>by Stefano Giua</i>	» 496
Quality assessment to improve supply chain management in the agri-food sector: key performance indicators (KPIs) <i>by Daniela Paddeu</i>	» 497
Farming sponges in the North Western Sardinian Sea <i>by Barbara Cadeddu</i>	» 499
A model for participatory design and planning: the case of the Feasibility Study for a Landscape Ecomuseum <i>by Federica Isola</i>	» 501
Archaeological Landscapes in the Gulf of Oristano: methodology and preliminary results <i>by Barbara Panico</i>	» 504

Reconstructing history through the study of the architectural structures. Rural churches in the area of the ‘Rio Mannu’ hydrographic basin <i>by Alessandra Urgu</i>	p. 506
The architecture of the electrical industry in Sardinia, from 1911 to 1961 <i>by Sara Marcheselli</i>	» 507
The medical sources in Sardinian mining archives: the case of Montevecchio’s mine <i>by Eleonora Todde</i>	» 509
Archaeology and Numismatics for reconstructing the peculiarities of Byzantine Sardinia: a developing research <i>by Marco Muresu</i>	» 511
The ornamental the Valencian community during the era Bell and comparisons with the jewelry bell-Sardinian <i>by Claudia Pau</i>	» 512
The Hospital Brothers of St. Anthony and Sardinia <i>by Mariangela Rapetti</i>	» 513
Primitivism and Contemporary in the work of Zervos <i>by Maria Paola Sabella</i>	» 515
Tools and methods aimed at the knowledge in the restoration project <i>by Silvia Marchinu</i>	» 517
Effects of development projects: the point of view of final beneficiaries in the Ghaja project case-study <i>by Laura Chessa, Mariantonietta Cocco, Matteo Funaro, Marcello Lubino, Laura Altea, Michele Gutierrez, Pier Paolo Roggero, Giuseppe Enne</i>	» 519
Reconsidering the local dimensions: meanings of participation <i>by Matteo Funaro, Romina Deriu, Laura Chessa, Pier Paolo Roggero, Giuseppe Enne, Luciano Gutierrez, Antonio Fadda</i>	» 521
Relationship between East and West in Chinese cinema <i>by Roberto Lai</i>	» 523
Jazz as Open System Music <i>by Gabriele Meloni</i>	» 525

Biographical notes of panel chairs

p. 527

Conference Photos

» 531

For a Regional Research Policy

Per una politica regionale della ricerca

by Valeria Saiu, Matilde Silvia Schirru*

The Association of Italian PhD Candidates and PhD Researchers (ADI, Associazione Dottorandi e Dottori di Ricerca Italiani), founded in 1998 and with 20 local branches in different Italian universities, is formed by PhD Candidates and PhD Researchers who voluntarily devote their time to represent and defend the rights of PhD students and young researchers. Part of this dedication is aimed at promoting the reflection on the world of higher education and scientific research, drawing attention on their pivotal role in the economical and cultural development of the Country. To pursue this aim the ADI association, as an actual voice of the young workers of knowledge, promotes multiple cultural activities and events, generating new debate spaces functional to create an active community of researchers.

The Association is committed not only to the enhancement of the living and working conditions of the PhD candidates, but also toward the future perspectives of integration into the job market of PhD Researchers, both inside and outside academia. Within this framework, *Ricerca in Vetrina* is intended to be an ethical and cultural project, one of the major scientific communication and information events entirely dedicated to the work of young Italian researchers, one of a kind in the Sardinian context. *Ricerca in Vetrina* represents a moment for sharing and debating that the young generation needs, as the large participation to the conference testifies: the 2015 edition – realised thanks to the combined efforts of the ADI Sassari's office, founded in 2012 and organizer of the first edition, and ADI's Cagliari branch, born in 2014 from the collaboration between the researchers of the two Sardinian universities, started precisely with the experience of *Ricerca in Vetrina 2013*– has involved more than 140 researchers from 24 Departments of 5 Italian and foreign universities¹.

* V. Saiu, Coordinator of ADI Cagliari, DICAAR – Department of Civil-Environmental Engineering, and Architecture, University of Cagliari, v.saiu@unica.it; M.S. Schirru, Coordinator of ADI Sassari, DipNeT – Department of Science for Nature and Environmental Resources, University of Sassari, msschirru@uniss.it

¹ Through the young researchers were represented: the University of Cagliari – Department of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering (DICAAR), the

The conference, therefore, confirms its winning setting, aspiring to become a real “biennial of young researchers” in Sardinia, of which the Proceedings represent the memory and the main spreading tool.

The 87 studies presented during this edition of the event were divided into six “windows” which have explored from multiple points of view some of the major issues important to the development and growth of the territory: sciences and applied technologies; culture and economy of nutrition; environment and landscape; history and identity of places; democracy and social equality. The interdisciplinary approach characterising the six sessions promoted an exchange of knowledge, expertise and networking between different scientific-disciplinary fields and between young researchers. The opening of the conference also to the world outside academia has moreover promoted the communication of the scientific research carried out by graduate students and post-doc researchers to the institutional and entrepreneurial worlds, as well as to the civil society, contributing to realize the so called University’s “third mission”².

This is a commitment to which the ADI has given voice by organizing seminars, meetings and activities that, in line with the spirit of *Ricerca in Vetrina*, are strongly characterized by a positive interpretation of the social and cultural role of research and higher education. The University «needs not only to be permanently in contact with science, to remain alive, but it also needs to be in contact with public life, the historical reality, with the present [...]. The University must be open to the full actuality, it rather must be in the midst of it, immersed in

Department of Mechanical, Chemical and Materials Engineering, (DIMCM), the Department of History, Cultural Heritage and Territory (DIPSTO), the Interdepartmental Centre for Engineering and Environmental Sciences (CINSA), the Department of Economical and Business Sciences, the Department of Pedagogy, Psychology, Philosophy, the Department of Life and Environment Sciences, Biomedical Sector –; the University of Sassari – the Department of Architecture, Design and Urban Planning (DADU), the Department of Biomedical Sciences, the Department of Chemistry and Pharmacy, the Department of History, Human Sciences and Education, the Department of Agriculture (DISSUF), the Department of Political Sciences, Communication Sciences and Information Engineering (POLCOMING), the Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, the Department of Veterinary Medicine, the Department of Nature and Territory Sciences (DipNeT), the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (DUMAS), the Department of Economic and Business Sciences –; the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”; the University of Rome “La Sapienza” and the Universidad de Granada.

² Along with teaching and scientific research, the university pursues a “third mission”, that is to operate in transferring the results of research to society, contributing to the spread of knowledge and technology. This concept – born in 1963 thanks to Clark Kerr, president of the University of California, who during a lecture at Harvard coined the term “Multiversity” to urge American universities in taking the responsibility for “saving society,” dealing with reality in all its forms (Kerr, 1963) – has established itself institutionally in Europe in 2000 with the Commission Communication’s *Innovation Policy in a Knowledge-Based Economy*. In Italy, «the set of activities by which universities come into direct interaction with society» (ANVUR, 2013) is subject to periodic reviews, based on indicators and parameters set by the Ministry of Education.

it» (Ortega Y Gasset, 1991 [original ed. 1930], p. 80), becoming an active force in the process of building the spaces and practices of new democracy.

***Ricerca in Vetrina*: a project of communication and diffusion of science**

The key words “higher education,” “scientific research” and “social capital” represent not only the soul and the mission proper to the academic institution – and more generally of the scientific and cultural promotion and of the transfer of technology – but they also constitute the very paradigm into which the Graduate Candidates and the Graduate Researchers aim to find recognised their own everyday job identity and their own rights. This necessity seems even stronger in relation to the disparity that characterises the diverse contractual positions, which precede the possibility to access the tenure, positions highly inadequate to guarantee the fundamental rights of the workers.

Facing the growing individualism and separation between the diverse levels of figures involved in the University, particularly between the already structured researchers and the various “pre-role” workers, a separation that generates this condition, to network, work for the community, share communal goals, represent the only ways to generate a real project of change and to achieve concrete objectives. The collaboration between Cagliari and Sassari ADI’s branches has reinforced the relations between researchers of the two Sardinian universities, with the aim of starting a cultural project of regional spectrum. As a matter of fact, *Ricerca in Vetrina* thanks also to the publication and diffusion of the Acts, emerges as a process of scientific animation, cultural contamination, as a platform of participation and debate for multiple researchers’ communities.

The effort of the event has been to reduce the distances between the two university centers, to reinforce – when not newly creating – the relations among different research groups, thus moving from communal places to a relational space, the only possible territory for the critical mass and the research groups united to avoid fragmentation and contribute to build an organic system. This is particularly true within a small context, for the geographical extension and the small number of citizens, like the Sardinian one, where the “geographical distances” such as the ones that separate the two universities must not become an excuse for penalizing the creation of collaboration networks, needed for the growth of our Region.

The experience of living the conference in two physically close but different venues – the Technology park of Porto Conte Ricerche and Casa Gioiosa, hub of the Azienda speciale Parco Regionale di Porto Conte – made it possible to demonstrate how the cultural differences between centers of “production” of knowledge can enrich the territory when they cross-compensate each other.

Furthermore, the choice of the conference’s spaces is strongly coherent with the cultural meaning of the *Ricerca in Vetrina* project. Porto Conte Ricerche represents one of the main regional centers for basic scientific research and transfer of technology, placed at the heart of the Porto Conte regional park’s territory, it

constitutes in all respects an important symbol of socio-environmental resilience. These places, used in the past for detention and agricultural activities, nowadays see the marriage between educational and production purposes with environmental and cultural values (nature's preservation, ecological restoration, training/education), in the belief that economic development and the socio-cultural identity of the places constitute an inseparable pair.

The Research PhD in Italy

Following the title of a recent study by Viesti (2015), it is possible to say that [the Italian] *University is declining*. The data collected by the *Education at Glance 2015* report about the educational systems of 38 countries, places Italy at the 31st position, with a public funding dedicated to education that equals to 7.4% of the general public expenditure, against the average 11.6% of the OECD's countries. Even at university level the investments are scarce: the 0.9% of the Gross domestic product (GDP) of the Country, the second lowest percentage following only Luxembourg's one, at the same level of countries like Brazil and Indonesia.

In regards of doctoral education, the highest level of university education, Italy stands at the 26th position among the 28 European countries for the number of doctoral candidates per 1,000 people (ADI's processing on Eurostat data). This number is destined to further shrink in the next years; the MIUR note 436/2014 about "doctorate guidelines" alone has revealed a real collapse (-25%) on the number of doctorate positions publicly announced yearly at national level (ADI, 2015).

The constant reduction of financial resources (around 1.5 billion euros during the period 2008-present) alongside partial blocks of the turnover of the universities' teaching personnel, have provoked an unprecedented explosion of the precariat.

The cancellation of the permanent term researcher figure, as a matter of fact, has come along with the proliferation of different precarious researcher positions and to the consequent fragmentation of the contractual positions of employment used by the University. The impossibility for a lot of universities to announce adequate RTD positions (RTD stands for *Ricercatore a Tempo Determinato*, i.e. "fixed-term researcher," TN), both for the "A" and in particular for "B" types, has caused an increase of the number of the so called *assegnisti di ricerca* (i.e. post-doctoral researchers who are granted a monthly wage [*assegno*] for a fixed period of time, TN), raised from less than 11,000 to more than 16,000 between 2006 and 2013, a share that on average represents more than the 30% of Italian professors (Viesti, 2015b)³.

³ Deepening the analysis of the relationship between precarious personnel and permanent term personnel, in 2013 there were more than 28,000 graduate candidates, 15,300 research fellows, 8,000 collaborators to research programs, 3,300 temporary term researchers and 53,500 instructors among ordinary professors, associate professors, university researchers. This means that, in 2013, 50.9% of the employees engaged in

Moreover, the *assegno di ricerca* (“research check”) has opened up the issue of the dignity of research as a job: it is one of the few contractual forms in Italy that does not establish measures of social protection, currently excluded also from the DIS-COLL. This is a position with characteristics judged as inadequate also from the European Commission, which has questioned the admissibility of the *assegno di ricerca* as personnel cost for the projects funded by Horizon 2020, the main program dedicated to research and innovation of the EU.

This “social capital” into which the individual researchers and the State have made huge investments⁴ is not adequately used, neither inside nor outside the academic world, with the result that the greatest majority of the more qualified human resources of our Country is forced to occupy job positions that are not giving value to the expertise acquired during the educational training period, or that is forced, to fully exploit its potentials, to migrate abroad.

This critical issue seems to be an important repercussion of the devaluation of the Post-Doctoral researcher in Italy, a condition for the greatest part determined by the ambiguity of the Italian legislation. Whereas the Law 28/1980 and the D.P.R. 382/1980 define the doctorate as the “ultimate and highest level of education”, in fact, the consideration of the PhD title as a mere “cultural title,” affirmed by regulations like the D.M. 11 November 2011, creates a series of obstacles on the way of its full valorisation as a requirement to access the procedures of selection even outside the universities, particularly in the research institutions, the public administrations, the school and the enterprises (ADI, 2015).

The Italian scenario appears to be in stark contradiction with the vision of development outlined by the European Union that establishes the importance of the PhD in the training (and hiring) path of a university researcher and for researchers in general (Recommendation regarding the European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, 2005), and considers research at doctoral level as crucial to drive innovation and economic growth. As noted by the OECD, in fact, «PhDs play a crucial role in driving innovation and economic growth [...] The companies are attracted by the countries that make this level of training and research an opportunity easily accessible» (OECD, 2013).

If it is possible to start seeing the first encouraging signals on incentives for innovation of businesses, promoted through the strengthening of relations and

academic research activities were not granted a structured position, a percentage that stops at 33.8% if excluding the graduate candidates. Processing by ADI on ANVUR data (ADI, 2014).

⁴ The state invests at least 50,000 euros for each PhD funded with grant, considering the gross annual recipient for doctoral students of 13,600 euros to which it is necessary to add up the social security contributions. If the student is registered with the so called INPS’s *gestione separata* (“separate accounting”) (the tax rate is 27.72%, of which 18.48% covered by the university, Ed.), in fact, the cost rises to over 16 thousand euros per year, with a total for the three years of 48 thousand euros. To this figure you can add a surcharge of 50% for up to 18 months abroad, which makes up to 60 thousand euros overall spending, to which must be added the possible refunds, generally provided by the department, for more trips and conferences. Data processed by Tomaso Greco, PhD in Legal Sciences, researcher at the University of Insubria.