The emergence of a self-evaluation culture and its development into the Italian academy
The history of the quality evaluation system dates back at least in 1980 when a President of the Republic’s decree stated that all university teachers should be evaluated (DPR 11/07/1980).

It is amazing that it clearly states (artt. 19, 33) that full professors as well as associate professors and researchers should be checked every third year, but most universities applied this decree only to researchers.

Though this decree could have pushed Italian university toward a new path, it partially failed.
In 1999 several European countries (29, then 49) agreed to set common rules for the higher education process, that since then it is known as Bologna process.

The Bologna Process seeks to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe.

It established the European Higher Education Area to facilitate student and staff mobility, to make higher education more inclusive and accessible, and to make higher education in Europe more attractive and competitive worldwide.

As part of the European Higher Education Area, all participating countries agreed to:

- introduce a three-cycle higher education system consisting of bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies
- ensure the mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad completed at other universities
- implement a system of quality assurance, to strengthen the quality and relevance of learning and teaching
The background: quality assurance within the European framework – the ENQA

European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

- 2000 - established to promote European cooperation in the field of quality assurance in higher education.
- 2004 – turned to the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

AIMS

- to contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of European higher education
- to act as a major driving force for the development of quality assurance across all the Bologna Process signatory countries
In the Berlin communique of 19 September 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited ENQA ‘through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB’, to develop ‘an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance’ and to ‘explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Bologna Follow-Up Group to Ministers in 2005’.

The background: quality assurance within the European framework – Berlin 2003
In 2005 the ministries of education of 45 countries met in Bergen to discuss the ongoing Bologna process not only from the perspective of academics and not only concerning teaching activities.

Beyond Europe itself and beyond good ideas without a follow up, this meeting was a milestone for the whole process of the self-evaluation.
• the interests of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education;

• the central importance of institutional autonomy, tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibilities;

• the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose and to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its objectives.
The EHEA after Bergen pushed to a closer relationship among the partners to promote a first release of the European Standard Guidelines for higher education institutions.

1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance: **Institutions** should have a **policy** and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the **development of a culture** which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a **strategy** for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a **formal status** and be publicly available. They should also include a role for **students** and other **stakeholders**.
2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards: Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

3 Assessment of students: Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

4 Quality assurance of teaching staff: Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

The EHEA after Bergen pushed to a closer relationship among the partners to promote a first release of the European Standard Guidelines for higher education institutions.
Besides these guidelines, the ENQA developed also recommendations for external evaluation.

5 Learning resources and student support: Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

6 Information systems: Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

7 Public information: Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.
In 2015 the Yerevan conference was a further turning point to change the pace to the whole Bologna process. The Bologna Follow Up Group set a dense agenda to improve a new culture of evaluation processes among the partners.

The Yerevan conference’s outcomes are important for the further development of the evaluation process.

The European Standard Guidelines is intended to give help more than prescriptions.

The whole process is, thus, bottom-up rather than top-down driven.
Bologna Follow-Up Group

BFUC Board

AG1 - EHEA international cooperation
AG2 - Support for the Belarus roadmap
AG3 - Dealing with non-implementation
AG4 - Diploma Supplement revision

WG1 - Monitoring
WG2 - Implementation
   Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments
WG3 - New Goals
   Policy development for new EHEA goals

In cooperation with national stakeholders

BFUG Secretariat

Legend
- Advisory group
- Working group

The background: quality assurance within the European framework – Bologna FUG
The whole process had a first outcome in Italy in 2010 with the establishment of the National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and the Research (ANVUR), though the law was promulgated in 2006 (L. 2006/286 – Artt. 2, c. 138, 139, 140, 141).

It has the goal to give an external evaluation of the quality of research. Thus, it is only a portion of the whole evaluation process. The path is correct but it took more time to reach a full development of a relationship between self-evaluation and external evaluation.

The emergence of a quality assurance system in Italy
The follow up of the whole process came with the DM n.1154 dated 14-10-2021. It clearly states at art.1 that all the universities have to be granted the right to keep on with teaching activities after a periodical evaluation process which includes a self-evaluation.

For the first time the whole set of principles coming from the Bologna process (and Bergen and Yerevan) were officially acknowledged as crucial features of the Italian higher education system.
The emergence of a new culture: the awareness of self-evaluation

Summarising the long lasting path

Top-down approach

- Bologna
- Bergen
- Yerevan

European Guidelines

self-evaluation

external evaluation
Self-evaluation is the skill to evaluate how much did we fit with the goals we set.

Everything’s fine

Nothing seems to work

What do I mean for self-evaluation?
Self-evaluation is crucial to develop a culture of good practices when planning teaching courses as well as research projects and public engagement activities (these are the 3 milestones for Italian academics).

- It cannot be promoted by the establishment.
- It must come out of a new awareness of the role of teachers within a new academy.

It helps to plan sustainable paths and reasonable outcomes.

Do I really need a self-evaluation?
The structure of Italian self-evaluation

2013 AVA system self-evaluation, evaluation, validation

to improve the quality of teaching research dissemination (recently)

Thanks to internal and external crystal-clear procedures

Validation of each single course: there are or persist the quality requirements
The structure of Italian self-evaluation

- Rector, senate, board of directors
  - Evaluation team
    - Students' opinion
    - Teachers-students commission
  - Quality assurance team
    - Departments' QA
      - QA delegate
        - Yearly monitoring
        - Periodical monitoring
  - Courses' QA teams
    - director
A perfect law can return bad outcomes if there is no social engagement

Once the process of self- and external evaluation has been set, the goal is to **teach the teachers**

Academics are usually reluctant to be evaluated and are not educated to evaluate themselves

This crucial step of the procedure cannot be dictated by the ministry

The real challenge is to promote a new culture of self-evaluation

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*The education of academics to a good self-evaluation*
The pros of self-evaluation

Because self-evaluation is a bottom-up process, it promotes:

- A brand new approach to teaching and planning courses
- A better awareness of the sustainability and reliability of the learning projects
- It promotes a closer relationship between teachers and students to develop better paths
- It pushes to monitor each step of the learning process and to find out what did not work
Self-evaluation is potentially a dangerous process because:

- Teachers usually feel it as one among many formal duties.
- Thus, they do not pay much attention to the whole set of procedures and requests.
- Students are not (and often do not like to be) involved in the making of new paths to a better teaching.
- Therefore, the forms are often filled without a real discussion and a clear strategy.
The courses and the teachers are evaluated according to a set of thresholds to reach.

To many this looks like turning the academy into a company that needs to provide incomes.

All the parameters have been set by the ministry and they do not fit with all the kinds of courses.

It often returns the bad feeling that education is a set of percentages and numbers.

The main critic to the evaluation system is the huge set of parameters.

Toward a transformation into a company?
It is hard to self-evaluate and to project when a parameter refers to a situation we know is already not up to date.

An alert on a parameter can mean that there is something to reflect on and discuss about.

But there are parameters that do not depend from the will and the work of teachers and students.

A wise approach suggests to evaluate each parameter not as a mere number or percentage.

Parameters are often not updated or they come from different sources.
We must be aware that the culture of self-evaluation transformed the role of the teacher as well as that of the student.

- They are now closer to project and manage the course.
- They collaborate to monitor the parameters and follow the list.

Project
Plan
Do
Check
Act

Are we still teachers after the quality evaluation system?
There is a major risk within the process of self-evaluation

To give numbers and percentages a role beyond that of alarm bell

To monitor how do we

- Teach
- Make research
- Disseminate the research

Is nowadays necessary but not enough and it does not substitute the daily relationship between teachers and students in class