

## IMPACT, QUALITY AND PERTINENCE

In the field of science the measurement of productivity and of the quality of the produced results, as well as the global assessment of the activity of scientists, have become controversial matters. There are no ultimate truths but approximations that leave room for errors.

Impact, whether considered in its initial conception as an indicator of the number of times that a paper receives citations by other authors in a given period after its publication, or in any of its later variants, reflects the interest that a given work is able to induce among colleagues and is related, generally although not always, to its quality. It has a lot to do with the pace of scientific progress, the accessibility to dissemination media and the pressure that the environment exerts on researchers and on institutions.

There are scientific papers that achieve a very high impact, being cited very frequently, more than because of its particular quality, for including methodologies extensively utilized or presenting exhaustive reviews of subjects of general interest. Also, for having achieved wrong results or conclusions in fields with high numbers of practitioners. Science, like any human activity, is subjected to variations, changes of emphasis or fashions, and follows a path that on occasions is motivated by opportunities and factors that are foreign to it.

Scientific publications are also evaluated according to their impact, without consideration given to, among other aspects, values closely related to the scientific culture, such as is the usage, valorization and preservation of the language. Neither is the pedagogical content of the editorial labor in environments of lesser development considered, nor the difficulty of access to mainstream journals by researchers of peripheral countries.

The scientific institutions and the governmental organization for the promotion of science lack appropriate and sufficient indicators to evaluate their own activities and those of their members. Therefore, they make use of parameters established in other places, mostly in highly developed

countries. These parameters are usable and of great help for the determination of goals, but can not be applied without being previously adapted. Furthermore, the pertinence of a given line of research for the development of a nation, or the social pertinence of a particular study are often dependent upon reasons inherent to the local environment where they are carried out. Also, the interest for the scientific communities of other regions can very well be reduced or null.

Although the emphasis that each country gives to research and to the level of priority of different areas is a matter for discussion, nobody contends the need to develop the scientific capabilities of the people. It makes no sense to think that intellectual and social progress of their people is something that is reserved for the benefit of developed societies. The wellbeing of the people, their health conditions, their education and the freedom of will must be the guide for any policy, including those referred to the sector of science and technology.

The intention to channel all that pertains to scientific research, imposing guidelines and controlling resources so as to force its compliance, is a characteristic of totalitarian regimes. This is nothing else than the counterpart of the national policies, where the course of action is given by the sole way of thinking of those who hold power. Under such circumstances, invariably, a very marked emigration of established scientists takes place. The number of quality papers that are published, particularly of those that have access to indexed journals, undergoes a decrease that in most cases acquires a dramatic dimension. The institutional autonomy, mostly that of higher education and research institutions, is trampled over.

It is for these reasons that it is the responsibility of all men and women of science to fight for the preservation of their human and political rights, as well as those of all of society.

MIGUEL LAUFER  
Editor