

Editorial

The intrinsic curiosity of human beings dooms them to learn, that is, to produce understanding on and act in the world. A questioning attitude is always the starting-point to scientific production or any other kind of knowledge production. In the case of scientific activity, questioning is systematic and follows an explicit method that consists in confronting theory and empirical information and building answers which are always viewed as provisional and based on acknowledgement that human knowledge is fallible. Our search for true knowledge is permanent, but real and definite truth is out of reach since, as the Greek philosopher Xenofanes said, “everything is noting but an intricate network of suppositions”.

In scientific journals, researchers usually publish the outcomes of their research work, which contributes to their dissemination and makes them available for debate within the scientific community. That’s what *Sísifo* does in this fourth number. Its thematic dossier provides the theoretical questioning that grounds a large-scale project conducted in the context of a European network (Know&Pol) and includes a range of specific research projects still at a stage of study-object construction. The decisive importance of the theoretical pole as a methodological component, in the broad sense, is precisely due to the fact that problem formulation is placed at the highest point of tension between what we already know and recognition of what we do not yet know.

Hence the interest and relevance of the material published in this number of *Sísifo*, which is primarily due to its potential to illustrate the centrality of

theory and research issues and, therefore, the epistemological priority of *questions* rather than answers.

As Bachelard so well stressed, without a question no scientific knowledge is possible. Capacity to pose problems and simultaneously build provisional hypotheses of answers is the distinctive brand of scientific spirit. This articulation corresponds to the construction of a theoretical area and research question in a process where nothing is “given” and everything is “built”. In this perspective, theory and research problems are indissociable, since theoretical elaboration is always inscribed in an attempt to solve an enigma.

Considering that scientific activity takes problem construction as its major dimension, no wonder that *social relevance* of research emerges as an important feature particularly in the field of social sciences. The study object at stake here in this number of *Sísifo* journal is the relationship between scientific knowledge and policymaking, operationalized through analysis of health and educational public policies. The way it is dealt with contributes to highlight the issue of relevance in the following dimensions:

- How does research relate with “social demand”, still preserving its autonomy, and in what way are its outcomes re-invested or appropriated into policy and practice?

- As regards “problem production”, how can we overcome the immediatism of problem formulation in the social field, transforming social problems into scientific problems?

· How can scientific questioning allow for an exercise of reflectivity that implies not only redefining spontaneous processes of problem equation, but rather “deconstructing” false problems, poorly posed, or “producing” new problems through paying attention to all those who do not accede to formulation?

Finally, a third feature deserving to be highlighted is the way the research programme presented in this thematic dossier is articulated and closely linked to a doctoral programme. Though particularly focusing on specific dimensions, the texts written by doc-

toral students represent a set of research projects inscribed in a broad thematic area, which deals with big societal problems. In such a close and fruitful articulation between research and post-graduate education, namely at doctoral level, would lie the potential to preserve a process of scientific development inserted in the critical tradition of being seized and guided by “big” problems and difficult to solve.

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