

# THE GENTILE REFORM (1923) AND ACADEMIC STRATEGIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MACERATA BETWEEN NATIONAL SCIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY

*La Reforma Gentile de 1923 y las estrategias académicas de la Universidad de Macerata entre la ciencia nacional y el desarrollo de la economía local*

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to examine the peculiar and significant innovations introduced by the University of Macerata in the aftermath of the Gentile reform on the educational syllabus and, in particular, in relation to the rise of a specific line of applied research having as its object the improvement of the agricultural economy and the formation of specialists in this field. In this regard, on the basis of the need to «promote any form of involvement and financial contribution» of the local authorities, resulting from its being among the universities of B type, i.e. those only partially supported by the State, the University Macerata was engaged in a work of rethinking of its role in the local and regional level.

In 1925, for example, the University inaugurated a School of Accounting and Foreign Languages, which would have to become a real center of higher education for the new financial and accounting professions related to the development and modernization of the agricultural and manufacturing enterprises, as well as of the trade and credit activities in the region. The initiative promoted by the University Macerata two years later, in 1927, was even more articulate and ambitious with the establishment of the Graduate School in Agricultural Law and Agricultural Economics and Statistics. In the intentions of the leadership of the university, these two institutions had

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to go beyond the expansion and diversification of the educational syllabus, to represent the fundamental elements of a more comprehensive project. According to this, the University of Macerata was intended to be a real source of «high-level professionals», and, at the same time, the laboratory for the formation of a new local ruling class, capable of leading not only the cultural, but also the «industrial, agricultural and commercial» growth of the entire region.

**Keywords:** University. Education System. Italy. 20th Century.

**Resumen:** *Este artículo pretende examinar las innovaciones específicas y significativas introducidas por la Universidad de Macerata como consecuencia de la Reforma Gentile de los planes de estudio y, en particular, en relación con el desarrollo de una línea de investigación aplicada que tenía como objeto la mejora de la agricultura y la formación de especialistas en este campo. En este sentido, partiendo de la necesidad de «promover cualquier forma de participación y contribución financiera» de las autoridades locales a consecuencia de su clasificación como universidad de tipo B que sólo recibía apoyo parcial del Estado, la Universidad de Macerata se esforzó en replantearse su papel en el ámbito local y regional.*

*En 1925, por ejemplo, la Universidad inauguró una Escuela de Contabilidad y Lenguas Extranjeras, que debería convertirse en un verdadero centro de educación superior para las nuevas profesiones financieras y contables relacionadas con el desarrollo y la modernización de las empresas agrícolas y de fabricación, así como con las actividades comerciales y de crédito en la región. Más elocuente y ambicioso fue aún la iniciativa promovida por la Universidad de Macerata dos años más tarde, en 1927, de establecer una Escuela de Graduados en Derecho Agrario y Economía Agrícola y Estadística. Las intenciones de la dirección de la universidad eran que estas dos instituciones trascendieran la expansión y diversificación del currículo educativo para constituir los elementos fundamentales de un proyecto más amplio. Desde este planteamiento, la Universidad de Macerata estaba destinada a ser una verdadera fuente de «profesionales de alto nivel», y, al mismo tiempo, el laboratorio para la formación de una nueva clase dirigente local, capaz de liderar no sólo el desarrollo cultural, sino también el «industrial, agrícola y comercial» de la región entera.*

**Palabras claves:** *Universidad. Sistema Educativo. Italia. Siglo XX.*

## INTRODUCTION<sup>§§</sup>

The university reform enacted by Giovanni Gentile with the R.D. 30 September 1923 n. 2102, while confirming the polycentric structure of the

<sup>§§</sup> Archives and abbreviations: CAS=Central State Archive (Rome); SAMc=State Archive of Macerata (Macerata); AUMc=Archive of the University of Macerata (Macerata); ANNUARIO=«Yearbook of the Royal University of Macerata»; OJ=«Official Journal of the Kingdom of Italy»; MPE =Ministry of Public Education; R.D.=Royal Decree; e. =Envelope; f.=File.

national university system, introduced a sort of hierarchy among Italian universities, dividing them on the basis of three different types: state universities of A type, entirely dependent on the national budget; those of B type, also of the State, but only in part financially supported by it, and that needed the support of appropriate financial agreements between the government and local authorities; and, finally, those of C type, i.e. the so-called «free universities», which didn't involve the state financial support, and that, in accordance with the art. 112 of R.D. 30 September 1923, could be suppressed if «the teaching given in them didn't respect the institutions and principles that govern the state social order».<sup>1</sup>

The choice made by the Minister Gentile to recover, emphasizing it, the distinction between the universities of first and second class<sup>2</sup> already introduced by Carlo Matteucci in the aftermath of the Unification, represented a real turn around respect to the abolitionist line supported in the past by the neo-idealist group and it appeared undoubtedly far from the hypothesis formulated a few years before by Benedetto Croce, according to which the Ministry of Education would have to create the conditions for the final closure of minor or incomplete universities or for their transformation into more modest educational institutions, more functional for the productive and economic growth of the respective territories.<sup>3</sup>

The Gentile perspective was based, as we know, on a rigidly elitist vision of higher education and university, accompanied with a marked and

<sup>1</sup> See art. 112 of R.D. September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1923, n. 2102, «Ordinamento dell'istruzione superiore», *O. J.*, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1923, n. 239; see it also reproduced in *Lex. Legislazione italiana. Raccolta cronologica con richiami alle leggi attinenti e ricchi Indici semestrali ed annuali. Anno IX-1923* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1924), 1449-1484 (we used for the quotations). On the university reform by Giovanni Gentile see: Michel Ostenc, *La scuola italiana durante il fascismo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1981); Giuseppe Ricuperati, «Per una storia dell'Università italiana da Gentile a Bottai: appunti e discussioni», in *L'Università tra Otto e Novecento: i modelli europei e il caso italiano*, ed. Ilaria Porciani (Naples: Jovene, 1994), 313-377; Maria Cristina Giuntella, *Autonomia e nazionalizzazione dell'Università. Il fascismo e l'inquadramento degli atenei*, (Rome: Studium, 1992); Floriana Colao, *La libertà di insegnamento e l'autonomia nell'università liberale. Norme e progetti per l'istruzione superiore in Italia, 1848-1923* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1995); Mauro Moretti, «Scuola e università nei documenti parlamentari gentiliani», in *Giovanni Gentile, filosofo italiano*, ed. Senato della Repubblica (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004), 77-108; Elisa Signori, «Università e fascismo», in *Storia delle Università in Italia*, eds. Gian Paolo Brizzi, Piero Del Negro y Andrea Romano (Messina: Sicania, 2007), 3 vols., I, 381-423.

<sup>2</sup> See Simonetta Polenghi, *La politica universitaria italiana nell'età della Destra storica 1848-1876* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1993), 240-263.

<sup>3</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Discorsi parlamentari*, ed. Michele Maggi (Bologna: il Mulino, 2002), 119-121. See Colao, *La libertà di insegnamento*, 461.

substantial contempt for the small provincial universities, judged by the philosopher of Castelvetro, as well as by Benedetto Croce and by the entire neo-idealist group, a real burden for the Italian university system and one of the main reasons for the poor progress made by the «national science». So, it was essentially built on the awareness of the insurmountable difficulties and oppositions that, from the very beginning of the post-unification experience, had frustrated all the attempts to rationalize higher education through the elimination of the incomplete or so-called minor universities.

The Minister of Education, convinced that such difficulties were far from being definitively overcome, and that, therefore, it was necessary to take alternative routes in order to effectively reduce the negative consequences of the traditional polycentric structure of the national university system, recovered the criterion of the «hierarchical differentiation» among Italian universities so dear to the nineteenth-century liberal ruling class and introduced a sort of «double track» into the university system. It was formally based on the traditional criterion of the state participation in the financial support of the universities, but was also interested in the university prerogatives and functions.

In other words, if on the one hand the Gentile reform gave to all universities and high schools the task to «promote the progress of science and to provide the scientific knowledge necessary for the exercise of the offices and professions»,<sup>4</sup> on the other hand it created the conditions for the minor universities —those that the R.D. 30 September 1923 identified of B type— to develop their own «specialization» in relation to the specific needs of the reference areas and to the cultural activities of the local *elites*, in order to favor the «interest» and the necessary «financial contribution» of local authorities and private companies for their «maintenance and functioning»<sup>5</sup>.

A «double track», the one suggested by Giovanni Gentile, that, without questioning, from a formal point of view, the substantial legal and institutional uniformity that characterized Casati's system of higher and university education, was aimed at the substantial redefinition and

<sup>4</sup> *Capo I. Del fine dell'istruzione superiore e degli Istituti nei quali s'impartisce. Art. 1*, in R. D. September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1923, n. 2102 —*Ordinamento dell'istruzione superiore*—, 1449.

<sup>5</sup> *Capo VIII. Dell'amministrazione delle università e degli istituti superiori. Art. 79*, 1466.

qualification—through the differentiation of the functions and objectives of the universities of different sizes and geographic location—of the traditional polycentric structure of the national university system—.

We can clearly understand that this was the strategy pursued by the Minister of Education also reading *Chiarimenti sui concetti della riforma* written by Gentile some months before the enactment of the measure, on 29 March 1923:

My intention is to radically revise university structures, which today are modeled on the uniformity of teachings and of degree systems for the various study courses. We need a greater specialization, to promote the progress of the culture.<sup>6</sup>

### THE APPLICATION OF THE DISPOSITIONS OF THE GENTILE REFORM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MACERATA

The reorganization of higher education and Italian university system realized within the framework of the Gentile Reform, with the R.D. 30 September 1923 n. 2102 undoubtedly contributed to the strengthening of the ties between the University of Macerata, local institutions and socio-economic and productive activities of the territory of Macerata and of the Marche, further emphasizing the tendency—already outlined from the end of the nineteenth century and, above all, during the years of the First World War and in the immediate post-war period—<sup>7</sup> towards an increasing specialization of the research and of the teaching of Law and Economics, in line with the specific agricultural attitude and the needs of the labor market in the region.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Gentile, *Chiarimenti sui concetti della riforma* (March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1923), in Giovanni Gentile, *La riforma della scuola in Italia*, III revised and expanded edition, edited by Hervé Antonio Cavallera (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1989), 36. See also, in this same collection, Giovanni Gentile, *I problemi della scuola e la riforma universitaria* (August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1923), 141; and Giovanni Gentile, *Apologia* (February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1925), 260.

<sup>7</sup> See, in this regard: Niccolò Lo Savio, «Parole del Rettore Niccolò Lo Savio inaugurandosi l'anno scolastico 1885-86», *ANNUARIO*, 10 (1886): 3-9; Donato Donati, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1917-1918. Relazione del Rettore Prof. Donato Donati letta nella cerimonia inaugurale del 18 novembre 1917», *ANNUARIO*, 41 (1918): 7-18; Pio Barsanti, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1920-1921. Relazione del Rettore Prof. Pio Barsanti letta nella cerimonia inaugurale del 14 novembre 1920», *ANNUARIO*, 44 (1921): 7-14.

<sup>8</sup> See Luigiaurelio Pomante, *Per una storia delle università minori nell'Italia contemporanea. Il caso dello Studium Generale Maceratense tra Otto e Novecento* (Macerata: EUM, 2013), 257-340.

During the inauguration of the academic year 1923-1924, the Dean Riccardo Bachi gave, in this regard, a first account of the significant developments connected to the reform measures drawn up by the Minister of Education Giovanni Gentile, compared to the drastic intentions shown at the beginning

It seemed —said the Dean of the University of Macerata— that the transformation of the structure could cause the suppression of many of our universities, especially those located in small towns or with a more restricted course of study than the typical with four faculties. Among the universities that seemed destined to an immediate end there was also the one who plays for six centuries in this noble city a function certainly not modest nor unfruitful. The reform, finally, followed different directives than those before thought or supposed, and adapted to the tenacious spirit of an intense and varied regional life, which is still one of the most important characters of our country. All the so-called minor Universities were maintained, as well as our University, and after the complex events of the past, now a new phase of life can be opened, that must be, which will be, undoubtedly of rise.<sup>9</sup>

The prevalence, in the measures issued by the national government, of an attitude adapted to «the tenacious spirit of an intense and varied regional life, which is still one of the most important characters of our country», while, on the one hand, fortunately prevented the suppression of the University of Macerata, on the other imposed, according to Riccardo Bachi, a real strengthening of its role and functions, in close collaboration with local institutions and productive activities, in favor of the citizens' cultural growth and the strengthening of local and regional economy.

Moreover, if the University of Macerata wanted to really raise its level, it was necessary to go beyond the simple bureaucratic adjustments and take advantage of all the benefits granted by the Gentile reform, especially where, as in the case of the art. 79 of R.D. 30 September 1923, the leaders of the universities were urged to «encourage all forms of involvement and financial contributions from local authorities and private citizens in favor of the University they are responsible for», and to «coordinate initiatives in

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<sup>9</sup> Riccardo Bachi, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1923-1924. Relazione del Rettore Prof. Riccardo Bachi letta nella cerimonia inaugurale dell'11 novembre 1923», *ANNUARIO*, 47 (1924): 12-13.

the most useful and effective way for the support and the functioning of the Universities.<sup>10</sup>

It was necessary not only to recover the relationship with the local authorities of Macerata, always very close and supportive towards the University, but to propose a more ambitious challenge, giving the University of Macerata a regional dimension and claiming for it a role and a scientific and cultural function of high profile. In this regard, the Dean of the University of Macerata illustrated to the participants at the opening ceremony a real program of activities to be implemented in the following years:

It is, first of all, my firm belief —he wrote— that we should [...] devote every energy, every effort to ensure a better life for our secular school of law and economics. And this is a belief fully shared by the other teachers of the University and widely accepted also in other environments [...]. The establishment of an Institute or a Seminar of Law similar to those existing in many Italian and foreign universities could be useful for the constitution in our University of an environment of scientific research. [...] The Institute, which should also include the University Library, will deal with both legal and socio-economic disciplines. It could have a regional function particularly useful also for the future studies on local problems, because it would permit, without effort, to collect in a systematic way all the material, not only books, but also documents, relevant for the economic life of the Marche and Abruzzo. [...] This institute of legal and social economic studies and this Archive for Marche and Abruzzo economic history would permit the University to act also outside the limits of its classrooms and its ordinary disciples. [...] Our University could effectively exercise an action for the local spread of the culture. It should be a public teaching, through a series of public readings, systematically arranged according to well-defined programs, and relating from time to time to the economy of our two regions, on current problems. [...] From a practical point of view, this public action could be addressed also to particular groups of listeners, outside the circle of ordinary students, with the aim of integrating the professional culture for certain functions.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See art. 79 of R.D. September, 30<sup>th</sup>, 1923, n. 2102 – *Ordinamento dell'istruzione superiore*.

<sup>11</sup> Bachi, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1923-1924», *ANNUARIO*, 47 (1924): 24-29.

The challenges that the University was required to face were very difficult and complex. The University of Macerata needed cogently to re-think its role and its forms of presence and interaction with the territories of reference and the local governments, according to the rector Bachi, not only by virtue of the new perspectives of reorganization of the national university system introduced by the Gentile reform, but also —and especially— as a result of the profound changes provoked by the war and the post-war serious economic crisis in the living conditions and social and civil customs of the populations.

Fundamentally, in front of these «epochal» changes, as Bachi did not hesitate to describe them, the Italian university as a whole, and the small universities in particular, could not continue to pursue a traditional perspectives and actions, working according to the nineteenth-century elitist model outlined by the Casati law.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, the commitment undertaken in the following years by the small university of the Marche to create institutions and initiatives promoting the *specialization* of the educational syllabus and of the scientific and cultural initiatives, as well as to increase the harmony with the peculiar and more relevant needs of the region.

#### «NOT ONLY JURISPRUDENCE SCHOLARS, MAGISTRATES, AND LAWYERS»: THE UNIVERSITY OF MACERATA AND THE STRENGTHENING OF REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

In the fall of 1925, in this regard, the University of Macerata obtained the ministerial approval to establish, in agreement with the local Chamber of Commerce, a *Scuola Superiore di Ragioneria e lingue estere* (*School of Accountancy and foreign languages*), which, in addition to «the two-year course of Accountancy and foreign languages», which allowed the frequency of those with a secondary school degree, also included the activation of «a course on the relationship between Accountancy and private and public law», addressed to the students of the Faculty of Law, which could attend it and «take exams at no cost, enriching their knowledge with notions of accountancy and linguistics, so necessary to all the careers to which they can devote».

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<sup>12</sup> Bachi, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1923-1924», *ANNUARIO*, 47 (1924): 20-21.

The purposes of the *School of Accountancy and foreign languages*, in fact, were far more ambitious: it, in fact, through the gradual «introduction of other teachings on the relationships of accountancy with agriculture, industry and commerce, with the credit, which involves the study of *Banco modello* (model bank), and with insurances, that concerns the actuarial accountancy», would have to become a real laboratory of high-level education for new financial and accounting professions, related to the development and modernization of the agricultural and manufacturing companies, and of the trade and lending activities in the region.<sup>13</sup>

With the approval, by virtue of R.D.13 October 1927, n. 2228, of the new *Statute of the Royal University of Macerata*, which replaced the one adopted provisionally in 1924,<sup>14</sup> the projects developed in the previous years received a further significant boost, legitimating, from a legal and administrative point of view, the presence in the territory and the diversification of the teaching and scientific activity, which, as already mentioned, were now the two main axes of the small university of the Marche.

This was also underlined, in November 1927, by the then Dean of the University of Macerata, Bruno Breschi,<sup>15</sup> who, after having recalled how «the new Statute was considerably different from the temporary Statute in force until now», drew attention on the fact that the new rules made finally possible «a more accurate and organic determination of the structure and of the general functioning of the University» and «a greater and more specialized» training plan and initiatives to encourage the rooting in the local and regional reality and the socio-economic and cultural growth of the territory.<sup>16</sup>

In implementation of the Articles 29-34 of the new *Statute*, for example, in the following months the *Istituto di esercitazioni giuridiche (Institute*

<sup>13</sup> Alberto Zorli, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1925-1926. Relazione del Rettore Prof. Alberto Zorli letta nella cerimonia inaugurale del 15 novembre 1925», *ANNUARIO*, 49 (1926): 6.

<sup>14</sup> See «Statuto della R. Università di Macerata», *ANNUARIO*, 50 (1927): 131-144. See also the partially modified text of October 1928 «Statuto della R. Università di Macerata approvato con Regio Decreto 13 ottobre 1927, n. 2228 e modificato con Regio Decreto 25 ottobre 1928, n. 3483», *ANNUARIO*, 52 (1929): 81-96. A first draft of the Statute, approved by the governing bodies of the university on May 23, 1925, did not obtain the approval of the Superior Council of Education.

<sup>15</sup> Bruno Breschi was the Dean of the Royal University of Macerata from February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1927 to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1930. See «Personale 1961-1989», Atti posteriormente versati, MPE, e. 78, ACS; «Breschi Bruno», Facoltà giuridica, Personale, f. 18, AUMc.

<sup>16</sup> Bruno Breschi, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1927-1928. Relazione del Rettore Prof. Bruno Breschi letta nella cerimonia inaugurale del 13 novembre 1927», *ANNUARIO*, 51 (1928): 10-11.

*of legal practice*), that the teachers of the Faculty<sup>17</sup> had been asking for a long period of time, was established. It was be a sort of permanent seminar «for the special development of youth culture in the legal political and social sciences, and for their training contract»,<sup>18</sup> through the promotion of «lectures on special topics, practical exercises, and access to judicial hearings, public offices and jails, but also scientific research, discussion», and seminars aimed to support and complement the theoretical training traditionally provided by the official courses of the faculty.<sup>19</sup>

It is now proven —the Dean Breschi underlined at the end of 1927, explaining the purposes of the newborn *Institute of legal practice*— that to achieve a more effective learning, the teaching activity must be complemented by exercises, discussions, talks, putting into a more direct contact the minds of the young people with the teachings of the masters, and to develop in them the critical faculty of observation and control the which is essential to be exercised, both for scientific research and for professional practice. On the other hand, the recent regulations on the exercise of the professions of Lawyer and Attorney permit to spend the period of professional practice required for the admission to the State Certification Exams, in the seminars of the Faculty of Law. For these reasons, it seemed appropriate to create, along with the Faculty of Law, the *Institute of legal practice*, to which the students of this university and the graduates in law by no more than two years can enroll.<sup>20</sup>

The Statute of the R. University of Macerata approved by the R.D.13 October 1927, n. 2228, made also possible the establishment of the *Scuola di perfezionamento in Diritto agrario e in Economia e Statistica agraria* (*Graduate Schooling Agricultural Law and Agricultural Economics and Statistics*), advocated by the Faculty of Law for a long period of time. It was authorized by the Ministry of Education to confer degrees in agricultural

<sup>17</sup> See Bachi, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1923-1924», *ANNUARIO*, 47 (1924): 28-30.

<sup>18</sup> On the *Istituto di esercitazioni giuridiche* (*Institute of legal practice*) of the University of Macerata, see Paola Olivelli, «Brevi note sull'Istituto di esercitazioni giuridiche», *Annali di storia delle università italiane*, 13 (2009): 261-266.

<sup>19</sup> See *Regolamento per l'Istituto di esercitazioni giuridiche annesso alla Facoltà di Giurisprudenza* (*Riconosciuto con Decreto Ministeriale 26 marzo 1928*), *ANNUARIO*, 51 (1928): 111-118.

<sup>20</sup> Bruno Breschi, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1927-1928», *ANNUARIO*, 51 (1928): 12.

law and in economics and agricultural statistics, at the end of a biennium of highly specialized studies, to which could enroll law graduates and those who had graduated «in other Faculties or Schools, but that possessed the high school diploma of Liceo Classico».

It is necessary to speak about the peculiar role the *Graduate School in Agricultural Law and Agricultural Economics and Statistics* was destined to play, being it intended to start its activities in the academic year 1929-1930,<sup>21</sup> as long as the *School of Accountancy and foreign languages* established in 1925.

In the intentions of the leadership of the university, these two institutions had to go beyond the expansion and diversification of the educational syllabus, to represent the fundamental elements of a more comprehensive project. According to this, the University of Macerata was intended to be a real source of «high-level professionals», and, at the same time, the laboratory for the formation of a new local ruling class, capable of leading — by virtue of the specific legal and economic skills offered by the university— not only the cultural, but also «industrial, agricultural and commercial» growth of the entire region. This objective was underlined by the then Dean Arnaldo De Valles,<sup>22</sup> on several occasions in the late twenties and thirties, and repeatedly reaffirmed by his successors over the decade:

Our University —he new Dean Paolo Greco<sup>23</sup> declared in 1932— is characterized by two important features on which we must rely to intensify its progress. One is the fact that it is constituted only by the Faculty of Law. This condition, if on the one hand deprives it of the traditional variety of university courses, on the other hand

<sup>21</sup> See «Elenco degli studenti iscritti alla Scuola di perfezionamento in Diritto agrario e in Economia e Statistica agraria», *ANNUARIO*, 52 (1929): 72.

<sup>22</sup> See Arnaldo De Valles, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1929-1930. Relazione del Rettore Prof. Arnaldo De Valles letta nella cerimonia inaugurale del 17 novembre 1929», *ANNUARIO*, 53 (1930): 7-10; and Arnaldo De Valles, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1931-1932. Relazione del Rettore Prof. Arnaldo De Valles letta nella cerimonia inaugurale dell'11 novembre 1931», *ANNUARIO*, 55 (1932): 8-10. The prof. Arnaldo De Valles held the office of vicarious vice-rector from December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1927, to January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1929, thus exercising the functions of government of the university. Only starting from January 15<sup>th</sup> (and up to October 31<sup>th</sup>, 1932) he officially assumed the role of Dean of the Royal University of Macerata. See «Personale 1961-1989», Atti posteriormente versati, MPE, e. 171, ACS; «De Valles Arnaldo», Facoltà giuridica, Personale, f. 21, AUMc.

<sup>23</sup> For the whole duration of his mandate, prof. Paolo Greco had never really received the office of Dean by the ministry. He held the office as vicarious vice-rector from November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1932 to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1933. See «Personale 1961-1989», Atti posteriormente versati, MPE, e. 240, ACS; «Greco Paolo», Facoltà giuridica, Personale, f. 22, AUMc.

allows it to concentrate all the efforts, all the moral and material means, in increasing the legal and economic studies, so important in the fascist system. To this purpose the life of the University must closely approach, and I would say merge, with the life of the city, the province, the region of Marche. Isolation is not for lawyers. [...] The University must work in unison with the not only cultural, but also industrial, agricultural and commercial activity of our beautiful, hardworking and fertile region. [...] The other feature of our university is clearly connected to the dominant characteristics of the economy of the Marche. In the harmonious development of the national life, in the great variety of its aspects, the law faculties should try, I do not say to specialize with rigidly exclusivist criteria, but to understand certain characteristics of the environment in which they are, thus developing the more adequate addresses. Now, these characteristics are represented for our University by the importance and intensity of the agricultural life of Marche. If elsewhere there are agricultural high school, here there is the major center of the peninsula for the studies of law and agricultural economics. Let me speak for some minutes —said the Dean— about the future of our university, that we have to promote with fruitful and beneficial initiatives, without remaining on the achieved positions nor being satisfied only of statistical predictions.

The same Dean Greco, however, after recalling how the University of Macerata had «wisely provided to the establishment of the school of specialization in agricultural economics and law, a school that, as far as I know, is the only one in its kind», underlined that it was necessary not to be satisfied of the excellent results achieved in terms of teaching, but to go a step further in the direction of

improving this school, reviving and intensifying its activity, constituting a center and an observatory, in which data and information and economic statistics converge, and in which business practices and customs observed in agrarian relations are collected, enhancing their diplomas, spreading even outside the academic lessons the study of the most important problems of the economic and legal life of agriculture, drawing on them the public's attention.

It was worthwhile, then, making the *Graduate School in Agricultural Law and Economics and Agricultural Statistics* a tool for a real revival of the rural economy of Marche, in order to «give a new impetus to the university, perhaps prepare a future development for it».<sup>24</sup>

These initiatives, that would have further significant developments in the course of the thirties, were part of the overall strategy of relaunch the presence and function of the university at a local level, and reflected the desire to fully satisfy the requirements of the Gentile Reform of 1923 toward the small universities of the province. This is evident also from the programmatic guidelines outlined by the Dean Arnaldo De Valles on the occasion of the solemn inauguration of the academic year 1930-1931.

#### THE AMBITIONS OF A SMALL PROVINCIAL UNIVERSITY AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE FASCIST REGIME

De Valles was in line with the suggestions of his predecessors in the second half of the twenties and underlined the importance of corresponding to, not only the traditional functions associated with the education and training activities and scientific research, but also to the characteristics of every *universitas studiorum*, even to make the University of Macerata the real focus of the cultural growth of the city and of the surrounding territory, stressing that such a purposefully met the objectives established by the Fascist regime for the scientific institutions of higher learning:

It is my sincere intention —the Dean of the University of Macerata said— to intensify more and more these forms of activities, which are not strictly part of the sphere of academic activities, but should be considered an integral part of the duties related to university life. And it is indeed my intention to make the University participate more actively in every aspect of city life, establishing the fruitful connection between life and science, which is one of the most important tasks of the universities and is also one of the most characteristic expressions of the regime, which do not want a dry and abstract science, but a science in constant and intimate connection with reality.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Paolo Greco, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1932-1933. Relazione del Pro-Rettore Prof. Paolo Greco letta nella cerimonia inaugurale del 20 novembre 1932», *ANNUARIO*, 56 (1933): 11-13.

<sup>25</sup> Arnaldo De Valles, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1930-1931. Relazione del Rettore Prof. Arnaldo De Valles letta nella cerimonia inaugurale dell'11 novembre 1930», *ANNUARIO*, 54 (1931): 7-8.

Undoubtedly, we are far away from the times in which the then-Dean Niccolò Lo Savio, inaugurating the academic year 1886-1887, dismissed as a «stupid and unfounded accusation», the attitude of those who for «thoughtlessness» or «the bad habit of always finding faults and denigrating everything and everyone», distinguished between «the great universities», real centers for the renewal of culture and the processing of new knowledge, able to «educate young minds to the high ideals of science», and, vice versa, considered «secondary universities, and also ours», as mere «factories of professionals, [...] without high views and the supreme ideals of legal science».<sup>26</sup>

Actually, it was the fascist regime to downsize the expectations and the plans of the University of Macerata and to bring back to certain limits the aspiration to create a sort of laboratory specialized in economic and legal training and research in the agricultural field —an aspiration destined to collect widespread support within the institutions and the local economic and productive realities. In fact, the regime was little interested,<sup>27</sup> if not even suspicious, towards the excessive attention-seeking attitude of the University of Macerata on this side, and its aspiration to play a role of scientific consulting with in the planning and development policies of regional agricultural production.

This was also underlined by the Dean Paolo Greco, even if in a tone free of polemical hints as imposed by the political context, offering an appraisal both of the remarkable success of the initiatives undertaken at a local level and of the inexplicable silences regarding the ambitious proposals presented by the University of Macerata to the national government:

In relation to its cultural and educational functions –affirmed, first of all, the Dean– our University fulfilled the program to give here the greatest impetus to the study of law and of agricultural economics, fully respecting the university policy of Gentile Reform: that is, to favor, in the various Italian universities, the trend towards specialization, so as each University could find its particular characteristic and task. Therefore, in the course of the academic year, well-known professors

<sup>26</sup> Niccolò Lo Savio, «Parole del Rettore Niccolò Lo Savio inaugurandosi l'anno scolastico 1886-87», *ANNUARIO*, 11 (1886): 9-11.

<sup>27</sup> See in this respect the references in Bruno Breschi, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1927-1928» *ANNUARIO*, 51 (1928): 13-14; and in Arnaldo De Valles, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1929-1930», *ANNUARIO*, 53 (1930): 9.

of proven competence held the most important lessons of law and agricultural economics, also supplementing them with lectures on specific problems of agrarian legislation. [...] On the other hand, the seriousness of our intentions and the first evidences of their actual implementation, drew on our school the attention and benevolence of eminent personalities and institutions interested in the development of this important branch of study: His Eminence Serpieri, the Hon. Tassinari and Arcangeli, the Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria, the Confederazione Nazionale Fascista degli Agricoltori. They gave us assistance and moral support, sometimes also a financial one, and we have good reason to hope for further supports to ensure, even materially, the development and functioning of the School.

After such a result, continued the Dean Paolo Greco, the «difficulties» of the project of «a regional observatory of Agricultural Economics» seemed to be at least surprising. This project, while on the one hand, certainly went well beyond the training and scientific activities of the University of Macerata in the spirit of the necessary specialization of Italian universities promoted by the Gentile reform of 1923, on the other, it also could be considered as the logical consequence of the task of promoting «a science in continuous and deep connection with reality» considered by fascism as characteristic of the «renewed academic and scientific institutions», not to mention the benefits that such a project would bring to the territories and local communities, «given the importance that the province of Macerata and the Marche region have in the agricultural industry»:

The initiative undertaken by the Academic Board —in concert with His Eminence the Prefect and the other authorities of the Province— to create a regional observatory of agricultural economics depending on the National Institute, encountered many difficulties. I do not exclude that persisting tenaciously in our request, which seems to me entirely legitimate given the importance that the province of Macerata and the Marche region have in the agricultural industry, the difficulties could beat least partially overcome and that the intent to establish here, if not an observatory, at least a correspondence office, could be realized.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Paolo Greco, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1933-1934. Relazione del Pro-Rettore Prof. Paolo Greco letta nella cerimonia inaugurale dell'11 novembre 1933, XII», *ANNUARIO*, 57 (1934): 10-11.

In the following years, not only the project of a «Regional Observatory of Agricultural Economics» would not have seen the light, but some of the most innovative initiatives of the University of Macerata would have been downsized. Solemnly inaugurating the academic year 1934-1935, for example, the new Dean Guido Bonolis complained that the rigid constraints on university accesses imposed by Casati Law and then proposed again by Gentile Reform in 1923, prevented the Graduate School of Law and Agricultural Economics from developing its full potential, recruiting young graduates from different backgrounds to prepare a new generation of high-profile specialists for agricultural development and the management of companies in the sector:

And now I want to mention an important topic —Guido Bonolis said— that is the evolution of the Graduate School of Law and Agricultural Economics, established a few years ago, that is the only one of this kind in Italy, and so it was and it is the subject of the attentions of all of us. The number of the students belonging to the Faculty of Law and attending specific courses of the School is not small, but the number of graduates attending it to get the diploma is not yet what we would like. This depends largely on the fact that it was necessary, for the graduates who want to enroll, the possession of a diploma of Liceo Classico, and this prevents the access to the school to many doctors in economics and especially in agricultural sciences which have instead the diploma of Liceo Scientifico or a technical or agrarian license. Several of them have expressed the desire to attend this school, understanding how much it would be useful for them to complete and improve their legal and economic knowledge relating to agriculture, both for the direction of farms, both to occupy the offices of the National and Provincial Unions. Our Faculty, to overcome this problem, proposed an amendment to the Statute, in order to obtain the admission to the school also for graduates in possession of a scientific diploma or a technical qualification. We hope that the Ministry will approve the proposed amendment, thus obtaining a greater increase of these studies, which contribute to the impulse that the regime wants to give to agriculture.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Guido Bonolis, «Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1934-1935. Relazione del Rettore Prof. Guido Bonolis letta nella cerimonia inaugurale del 19 novembre 1934, XIII», *ANNUARIO*, 58 (1935): 13-14.

Actually, also in this case, the dispensations to the current regulation proposed by the University of Macerata to the Ministry of National Education was destined not to be accepted. The Graduate School in Law and in Agricultural Economics, moreover, would have been abolished a few years later because of the ever-decreasing number of enrolled students and the gradual disappearance of the majority of the requests that had suggested its creation<sup>30</sup>.

The reorganization of higher education promoted by the Minister of National Education Cesare De Vecchi with the R.D.L. 20 June 1935, n. 1071, in fact, led to the «absolute centralization» of the national university system: the distinction between royal Universities of first and second level, re-introduced by Gentile, was abolished, and also the university educational and organizational autonomy established with the reform of 1923 was eliminated; and, to complete this process, with the following R.D.L. 7 May 1936, n. 882, De Vecchi readjusted the *curricula* and the study plans, aiming at a general uniformity in the educational syllabus, thus reducing significantly, even on this side, the autonomous intervention and the personal characterization of the courses.<sup>31</sup>

Paradoxically, the process of centralization of the Italian university system started in 1935-36 by De Vecchi, while on the one hand, thanks to the equalization with all state universities, granted continuity and stability in the resources and financings to the University of Macerata, on the other, set aside the project tenaciously pursued in those years, i.e. to become a real laboratory specialized in legal and agricultural economic training and research, and, more generally, the idea to become the leading institution, from a cultural and scientific point of view, of the economic and productive development both on a local and regional level.

## CONCLUSIONS

Through the «case study» of the reconversion of the educational syllabus and the research activities of the University of Macerata in the aftermath of the university reform of the Minister of Education Giovanni Gentile with

<sup>30</sup> Roberto Sani y Sandro Serangeli, «Per un'introduzione alla storia dell'Università di Macerata», in *Annali di storia delle università italiane*, 13 (2009): 23.

<sup>31</sup> See Signori, *Università e fascismo*: 391-392 and 404-406.

the R.D. 30 September 1923, n. 2102, this contribution was intended, first of all, to focus on some particularly innovative processes started with the reform. In particular, the real downsizing of the negative consequences and of the negative effects produced by the traditional polycentric Italian university system.

As we have tried to highlight in our reconstruction, in this regard, the reform created the conditions for the minor universities to develop a specialization in relation to the specific needs of the areas of reference and to the cultural education of the local elites.

This innovation, without questioning the legal and institutional uniformity that characterized the Casati's system of higher and university education, significantly affected the role played by the Italian universities, introducing a significant differentiation of the functions and objectives the universities were called to pursue. And, even more, it made possible, for the first time in the post-unification period, new and more effective forms of presence of the university system in the economic and productive reality of the country, as well as the introduction of subsidiary training courses, the result of a new relationship between universities and local and regional areas of reference.

With reference to the specific case of Macerata, finally, we can certainly affirm that the leading role of the universities, in the social and economic development of their respective territories and in the coordination of the regional productive activities, led to a sort of supremacy of the cultural and scientific competence on the ideological and political belonging. This probably explains the considerable efforts of the fascist regime, before the final turning point represented by the reorganization of high education and universities started with the R.D.L. 20 June 1935, n. 1071 by the Minister of National Education Cesare De Vecchi, to contain and control the activities of the individual universities for the social and economic development of their respective territories and for the coordination of regional productive activities.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> About the different ways in which the Italian minor universities interpreted the theme of *specialization* introduced by the reform Gentile with the R.D. September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1923, n. 2102 in relation to the specific needs of the territories, see in particular: Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *L'Università di Catania*, in *Storia delle Università in Italia*, eds. Brizzi, Del Negro and Romano, III: 277-284; Andrea Romano, *L'Università degli studi di Messina negli anni Venti e Trenta del Novecento*, in *Messina negli anni Venti e Trenta: una città meridionale tra stagnazione e fermenti culturali*, eds. Rosario Battaglia et al. (Messina: Sicania, 1997), 2 vols., II, 405-433; Carlo Guido Mor and Pericle Di Pietro, *Storia dell'Università di Modena* (Firenze: Leo

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Olschki, 1975), 2 vols., I: 135-145; Marco Adorni, «L'Ateneo parmense tra l'Unità e gli anni Sessanta del Novecento: problemi finanziari, strutture edilizie, spazio urbanistico», *Annali di storia delle università italiane*, 9 (2005): 197-216; Giuliano Catoni, *L'Università di Siena negli ultimi cento anni*, in *La Toscana nell'Italia unita. Aspetti e momenti di storia toscana 1861-1945* (Firenze: Unione regionale delle province toscane, 1962), 547-549; Mario Ascheri, *L'Università di Siena: 750 anni di storia* (Milano: Pizzi, 1991), 96; Giuseppina Fois, *Storia dell'Università di Sassari 1859-1943* (Roma, Carocci, 2000), 222-232.

