Louis-André Vallet

Dr Louis-André Vallet, born in Angers (France) in 1957, was firstly educated in psychology, then got a PhD in quantitative sociology from the University of Paris-Sorbonne. He is currently senior researcher in the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). Before entering the CNRS in 1996, he was an assistant professor in the Catholic University of Angers during a dozen of years. Within CNRS, he belongs to the Quantitative Sociology Laboratory in the mixed research unit of CNRS and INSEE (the French Statistical Office) in the context of the Centre for Research in Economics and Statistics (Paris). He has been a member of the editorial board of *Revue française de sociologie* since 1991 and an Associate Editor of *European Sociological Review* since 2000. His main research interests are the sociology of stratification and social mobility and the sociology of education. In the context of French society, he has studied the social mobility of women, the trends in intergenerational class mobility, the trends in educational inequalities between social classes and the school trajectories of the children of immigrants. From a methodological point of view, he has expertise in the analysis of categorical variables with log-linear and log-multiplicative models. Among his most recent publications is the chapter about France in the *Social Mobility in Europe* comparative volume (2004, Oxford University Press) and a chapter in the *Globalization and Education* book that presents the proceedings of a joint working group of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and of Social Sciences (2007, de Gruyter).

These replies have been formulated after reading Four Future Scenarios for Higher Education by the OECD Centre for Education Research and Innovation (CERI).

In your view, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario with regard to social equity and higher education?

With regard to social equity and higher education, I think that the most probable future scenario is Scenario 3 (New Public Responsibility) because of the general tendency to increase the autonomy of universities, but that the most desirable scenario is Scenario 1 (Open Networking) because this model is based more on collaboration than on competition.

In your opinion, what is or should be the most important objective for higher education in the future? Why?

The most important objective for higher education in the future should be to disseminate knowledge as widely as possible. This is the reason why I definitely prefer Scenario 1 (Open Networking). This is not just for altruistic reasons: disseminating knowledge as widely as possible will increase the exposure of the population in the world to that knowledge and will thereby increase the capability and the probability that any individual in the global population will become able to add something significant, even small, to that knowledge.

What do you consider to be the main future challenge(s) for higher education systems? Why?

I think that the main future challenges for higher education systems are as follows:

- fighting against a tendency towards commercialization (or marketization) of education, i.e. combating against Scenario 4 (Higher Education Inc.);

- fighting against any temptation to adopt a too narrow and too exclusive *local* view of higher education, i.e. combating against Scenario 2 (Serving Local Communities);

- using the advancement of technology to foster collaboration-based teaching, training and research.

In your opinion, what would be the worst, but possible, way to tackle these future challenges? Why?

Although it is certainly not the *worst* way to tackle these future challenges, a not so desirable way would be to adopt Scenario 3 (New Public Responsibility). It is not the worst scenario because the state and public funding is still present, but it is not the most desirable scenario because the accentuation of the autonomy of higher education institutions will probably implicate, in mid term or long term, an accentuation of the differences between universities as regards quality of learning environment, quality of research opportunities, and so on. However, this is probably a plausible scenario, especially given the appetence of the XXIst-century society for worldwide rankings of universities!

What do you consider to be the best possible way to tackle the above mentioned future challenges? Why?

For all reasons explained above, I consider that the best possible way to tackle the above mentioned future challenges would be to adopt Scenario 1 (Open Networking), but it is certainly not so easy given that "imposing" collaboration (and simultaneously relatively high academic standards) is more difficult than letting autonomy and competition develop freely.