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Editors

RESEARCH EVALUATION AND SCIENTIFIC AUTONOMY UNDER PRESSURE

Conference Proceedings

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Sciences and Humanities Conference

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La Conferenza RESSH 2026 a Firenze

Questo volume raccoglie gli atti della Conferenza RESSH 2026, ospitata a Firenze dal 22 al 24 aprile nell'ambito della serie di conferenze RESSH promosse da ENRESSH – European Network for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and Humanities, la rete internazionale che riunisce la comunità scientifica impegnata nello studio della valutazione della ricerca nelle scienze umane e sociali.

Questa edizione è organizzata congiuntamente da ENRESSH e dall'Istituto di Informatica Giuridica e Sistemi Giudiziari del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR-IGSG), che curano anche il volume. RESSH 2026 riunisce oltre 170 autori provenienti da 30 differenti paesi attorno a un tema di stringente attualità: la valutazione della ricerca e l'autonomia scientifica nell'era delle trasformazioni geopolitiche, delle crescenti preoccupazioni per la sicurezza e della onnipresenza dell'intelligenza artificiale.

I contributi raccolti spaziano tra prospettive concettuali, empiriche e di policy, affrontando questioni cruciali quali la libertà scientifica, l'integrità della ricerca, la diversità delle pratiche valutative, l'impatto delle metriche sulle carriere e sui percorsi accademici e il ruolo crescente degli strumenti di intelligenza artificiale nei processi di valutazione. Il programma di RESSH 2026 si articola in due interventi di apertura, tredici sessioni tematiche, una sessione poster e un evento collaterale dedicato alla presentazione di un volume sui temi di interesse della Conferenza, riflettendo la ricchezza e la pluralità del dibattito in corso a livello internazionale.

Un ringraziamento sentito va ai componenti del Comitato scientifico e di programma, ai presidenti delle sessioni, alle due relatrici invitate e a tutti i revisori, il cui lavoro ha contribuito a definire la struttura e la qualità del programma. La più profonda gratitudine è rivolta agli autori: sono infatti i loro contributi a dare vita a questo volume e ad alimentare un dibattito vivo, ricco e stimolante, testimonianza del valore e della qualità del loro lavoro.

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**INTRODUCTION TO THE RESSH
2026 CONFERENCE /
INTRODUZIONE ALLA
CONFERENZA RESSH 2026**

The RESSH Series and ENRESSH

RESSH 2026 is the latest edition of a conference series initiated and sustained by the European Network for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and Humanities (ENRESSH). Since its founding, ENRESSH has established RESSH as the principal international forum for the critical examination of research evaluation in particular regarding the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), building a community of scholars, policymakers, and practitioners whose collective work has shaped both the field of research evaluation as well as the reform agendas now visible at European and national levels.

The association's credo is to support and integrate the diversity in views and voices of all stakeholders, disciplines, and countries and to thus promote a pluralist approach to research evaluation. While the association started on the basis of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts scholars, interest in ENRESSH's approach to research evaluation has spawned the interest of scholars (and evaluators as well as policy makers) concerned with Science, Technology, Mathematics and Engineering (STEM) disciplines as well, given the rise of the same concerns and criticisms in those areas that have been voiced in the SSH for a long time. Similarly, while the root of ENRESSH lies in a European network that sought to influence European science policy, the network grew considerably and its membership now extends to several continents, reflecting the inherently global nature of research and progressively building a more inclusive international community. Against this background, ENRESSH retains its European identity while fostering international engagement and dialogue.

Besides regular smaller workshops organised since 2012 as an informal network of evaluation specialists in the Social Sciences and Humanities, the international RESSH conference has been an important forum among stakeholders engaged in research evaluation reform since the foundation of the international association in 2014. Former conferences took place in Rennes (2015), Antwerp (2017), Valencia (2019), Galway (2024) and Helsinki (2025).

CNR-IGSG and the 2026 edition

The *Istituto di Informatica Giuridica e Sistemi Giudiziari* (Institute of Legal Informatics and Judicial Systems) of the National Research Council (CNR-IGSG) is honoured to serve as local organizer of RESSH 2026 and as co-editor of this Conference Proceedings. These roles are embedded within the broader framework of ENRESSH and reflect for CNR-IGSG not only an organizational responsibility, but also a deeper intellectual affinity.

The Institute has occupied a specific position within the Italian and European research landscape, working on the structures, norms and technologies through which law, institutions and knowledge systems interact. Since 2016, CNR-IGSG has performed research studies on the evaluation of legal scholarship and, more broadly, on the methodological and institutional challenges of assessing research in SSH. The study of how legal science is produced, communicated and evaluated and of how evaluation criteria transform and sometimes distort scientific priorities, has been a part of the Institute's research agenda.

CNR-IGSG's involvement in the ENRESSH network and community reflects a long-standing commitment to these issues, situating the Institute within a wider international effort to critically examine and advance research evaluation practices in the SSH. In this perspective, hosting RESSH 2026 represents both a continuation of

ENRESSH's ongoing work and a context in which CNR-IGSG's own research trajectory converges with the broader aims of the network.

The Florentine Conference at the right moment

RESSH 2026 gathers scholars, policymakers, research managers and practitioners from 30 countries, a breadth of representation that is itself a statement about the global stakes of the questions under discussion. The diversity of national contexts, disciplinary traditions and institutional positions represents an intellectual resource as well as a condition for the kind of comparative, cross-contextual analysis that a field as politically and institutionally embedded as research evaluation requires. The contributions collected in this volume span conceptual, empirical and policy-oriented perspectives. They address key transformations in research evaluation across SSH disciplines and beyond and reflect a wide range of methodological approaches, including case studies, theoretical work, quantitative analyses, surveys, legal analysis.

The theme of RESSH 2026 *“Scientific Autonomy Under Pressure: Rethinking Research Evaluation in the Context of Global Power Shifts, Security Concerns, and Artificial Intelligence Challenges”* captures an ongoing condition. Research evaluation is undergoing significant transformation, driven by multiple and often divergent forces. Geopolitical shifts are reshaping the conditions of international collaboration and influencing research priorities, so that judgments about what counts as valuable or legitimate research are increasingly intertwined with political as well as epistemic considerations. At the same time, security concerns, data sovereignty, dual-use research and the governance of open science infrastructures are introducing new constraints into academic practice.

Technological developments are also playing a central role. The growing integration of digital tools across the research cycle is altering evaluation processes, while raising questions about their reliability and implications. In parallel, growing evidence of research misconduct, including fabricated data, paper mills, predatory publishing and the misuse of generative tools, has intensified scrutiny of the scientific outputs, highlighting the limits of purely technical countermeasures.

What connects these transformations is their impact on the concept of scientific autonomy. This concerns the ability of researchers, institutions and disciplines to define their own priorities, standards and modes of knowledge production.

This volume's contributors consistently uphold scientific autonomy as a core principle, even as the political, technological and institutional environments in which science operates continue to evolve.

The program and its sessions

The program of RESSH 2026 is organized across two keynotes, 13 thematic sessions distributed over the conference days, a poster session and a book launch as a side event.

The technological transformation of evaluation is addressed in Session 1.1, where the integration of artificial intelligence into scholarly communication foregrounds questions of objectivity, bias and epistemic control. The institutional and political dimensions of research assessment reform are examined in Session 1.2, which situates

evaluation within broader governance frameworks and highlights tensions between autonomy, regulation and systemic change.

The poster component, introduced in Session 1.3 through a dedicated flash presentation slot, constitutes an integral part of the conference's epistemic architecture. It enables the presentation of diverse research contributions, methodological approaches and empirical materials, while fostering distributed forms of scholarly interaction. In this respect, it contributes to expanding the evidentiary and discursive scope of the conference, supporting inclusiveness and plurality in research evaluation debates.

The conceptual foundations of evaluation are developed in Session 2.1, where core notions such as quality and values are critically addressed. Issues of institutional diversity and inclusion are explored in Sessions 2.2A and 2.2B, which address, respectively, the variability of evaluation practices across diverse contexts and the role of collaborative and infrastructural arrangements in accounting for that diversity. The question of diversity is further extended in Sessions 2.3A and 2.3B, focusing on multilingualism and on the effects of evaluation on careers, gender and academic trajectories.

The criteria, notions of excellence and evolving dynamics shaping research evaluation are examined in Session 2.4A, while Session 2.4B situates research evaluation within the broader political and governance structures of national research systems, including questions of scientific sovereignty, societal impact and regulatory frameworks.

The relationship between research and society is addressed in Session 2.5, which considers the challenges of conceptualizing and assessing societal impact and public engagement.

The infrastructural requirements for a responsible research assessment are the focus of Session 3.1, which highlights the practical and organizational dimensions of open research systems. The relationship between evaluation, integrity and emerging technologies is explored in Session 3.2, where new risks and systemic effects associated with computational tools are brought into view. Finally, Session 3.3 addresses the limits of existing metrics and advances alternative approaches to the evaluation of SSH research.

Taken as a whole, all the sessions do not converge on a single model of reform. Rather, they collectively frame research evaluation as a contextual and evolving institution, whose transformation requires simultaneous attention to technological infrastructures, conceptual frameworks, governance arrangements and the diverse practices through which scientific knowledge is created.

The Conference in keywords

The keywords index that closes this volume functions as an implicit map of the field's current policy agenda. Read across, it reveals a dense cluster of terms associated with ongoing reform initiatives and actions such as CoARA, the Barcelona Declaration, responsible research assessment, open research information, pointing to a community that is not merely analyzing evaluation systems, but actively engaged in their transformation. These keywords reflect a shift from critique to implementation, where principles are increasingly translated into institutional practices, infrastructures and policy tools. The recurrence of terms such as scientific autonomy, researchers' freedom and knowledge sovereignty, alongside geopolitics and research security, further

indicates that research evaluation is now widely recognized as a domain of strategic governance shaped by geopolitical, technological and security-related pressures.

A second cluster maps the diversity agenda as a central policy priority. Keywords such as multilingualism, bibliodiversity, diversity of research outputs and the diversification of career paths signal a growing effort to align evaluation criteria with the actual epistemic practices of the SSH, where monographs, non-English publications and field-specific output formats remain underrepresented in dominant metric-based frameworks. In this sense, diversity is not only a normative commitment, but also a corrective to evaluation systems that risk narrowing the scope of recognized knowledge production.

A third cluster, including paper mills, predatory journals, retraction notices, research integrity and questionable journals, captures the integrity dimension of current reform efforts. Here, the focus shifts from individual misconduct to the systemic vulnerabilities of the research ecosystem, increasingly exposed by technological developments and intensified publication pressures. This highlights the need for coordinated policy responses, improved monitoring infrastructures and stronger links between evaluation practices and integrity safeguards.

Particularly relevant, from a policy perspective, is the density of terms related to careers and their human costs: career stage, academic promotion, career progression, inactive researcher, gender, inclusive excellence and social inclusion. These keywords underscore that evaluation systems function as powerful allocation mechanisms under conditions of increased competition and scrutiny, shaping research outputs as well as career trajectories and working conditions. Their effects are unevenly distributed, often reinforcing structural inequalities, call for more inclusive, context-sensitive and responsible approaches to assessment.

A note of thanks

These Conference Proceedings represent the collective intellectual effort of all those who submitted and reviewed contributions that helped shape the RESSH 2026 program. We are deeply grateful to the members of the scientific and program Committees for their intellectual guidance, to all session chairs and the two keynote speakers for their generosity with time and expertise. The contributors (a total of 173 authors), from diverse institutions play a central role in this volume, bringing their research, questions and critical energy to this conversation and shaping both its scope and its intellectual depth.

The Editors

Ginevra Peruginelli, Sebastiano Faro, Tommaso Agnoloni, Mimi Urbanc, Michael Ochsner

Firenze, April, 16, 2026

KEYNOTES

OPEN SCIENCE, RESEARCH ASSESSMENT REFORM, AND AUTONOMY OF RESEARCH(ERS). A CRITICAL DISCUSSION

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The objective of this contribution is to emphasise the critical interrelationships between open science, research autonomy and the ongoing reform of research evaluation, which involves institutions and researchers. The issue is examined from a philosophical-political perspective and is based on a historical reading of the problem which, when contextualised, helps us to reflect on the implications for the present day.

To develop this argument, the presentation will begin by focusing on some of the current challenges which pose pressure on research autonomy. These challenges for (open) science have been brought to the fore by the current geopolitical landscape and recent technological changes. The failure of the cosmopolitan ideal and the return to the ideal of secrecy and sovereignty are evident, with an unclear role for pluralism and epistemic diversity. The reliance on fragile digital systems (sustainability is a problem) and the dominance of big private companies over research platforms, tools and data are also apparent. Furthermore, the rise of misinformation and the problem of assessing research quality become more important (Leonelli, 2026). In addition, in the context of global power shifts and geopolitical challenges, it is imperative to consider the potential of research evaluation systems as instruments of power. The question that arises is: who determines the practices and content that are worthy of recognition? And to what extent can the pressure to produce high-impact research (driven by nations or institutions) undermine scientific integrity or reduce researchers' autonomy?

The subsequent discussion will then proceed to consider how research autonomy is conceptualised in the Agreement on Reforming Research Research Assessment (ARRA). The recent reform promoted by CoARA enshrines the autonomy of research (of institutions and researchers) as one of its core principles. Indeed, the ARRA stipulates the direct involvement of individual academics and scientific communities in the definition of new criteria and processes, emphasising that criteria, data, infrastructures and processes must be in the hands of scholars (Arentoft et al., 2022). Furthermore, the concept of quality is not perceived as a static value, but rather as an ongoing, procedural process that serves to uphold the integrity of the scientific method. In essence, the notion of quality/qualitative assessment is intrinsically linked to the paradigm of open science, which is characterised as a persistent issue that remains unresolved (Di Donato, 2024).

The last part of the presentation will address the relationship between research autonomy and open science by examining a specific discussion that occurred in Prussia between the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In the 18th century, universities in the German states experienced a period of significant challenges, precipitated by wars that resulted in significant population decline, a severe economic crisis characterised by rising living costs, low

purchasing power due to stagnant salaries, and a labour market crisis. Concurrently, there was a pervasive belief that obtaining a degree did not guarantee a higher standard of living (McClelland, 1986). In this context, Immanuel Kant and Wilhelm von Humboldt's university theories define the conditions for free and open science by establishing the role of research infrastructures (universities and academies) within the paradigm of scientific autonomy. In his essay on the Enlightenment (1784), Kant advocates a conception of freedom of public reason from institutions, only hinting at a future institutional evolution that would allow for freedom within them. A few years later, in a different political context, the philosopher tackles the problem of research quality by discussing the conditions for public research to be defined as such (Kant, 1798). In fact, according to Kant, research is considered to be autonomous and continuously subject to criticism by experts, whose status is grounded in scientific merit. Consequently, research cannot be other than open, collaborative and inclusive. From this perspective, scientific debate among peers plays a pivotal role. However, this is only possible if the political authorities guarantee the scientific republic and its infrastructures (namely, the university) complete freedom of research (Di Donato, 2006). Humboldt's (1809-10) conception of universities as emulating the open-ended nature of science posits that the state should foster and protect research autonomy by ensuring negative and positive freedom through a minimalist and reflexive regulatory framework, as well as recruiting teachers and academics in a pluralistic manner (Pievatolo, 2025). The conclusion will illustrate how this model can serve as a paradigm for open science both foreshadowing contemporary contradictions and suggesting how to address them.

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