



## Labour-Market, Education and Lifelong Guidance in the European Mediterranean Countries

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## **Labour-Market, Education and Lifelong Guidance in the European Mediterranean countries**

*Antonio Cocozza\**

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*Abstract:* This article analyses aspects of the interaction between labour-market dynamics, education and lifelong-learning policies, by examining the principal changes in the economic system and in the strategic role of education in today's knowledge society, in relation to critical global-scenario issues, like the labour market and the expansion of the jobless growth paradigm. In particular, some of the issues concerning the situation the labour market in European Mediterranean countries is obliged to face will be addressed and a number of possible solutions (designed to overcome the employment crisis and involving a relaunch of strategic industrial, innovation, education, training and jobs policies) proposed. Finally, a feasible pathway towards the determination of a new, socially-inclusive policy will also be presented.

*Keywords:* labour-market, jobless growth, lifewide learning, lifelong guidance policy

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## **Introduction**

This article aims at investigating aspects of current interaction between labour-market dynamics, lifelong education and guidance policies, by examining the main transformations the economic system and the strategic role of education in the knowledge society have undergone, in relation to some critical global-scenario, the jobs market and the expansion of the jobless growth paradigm. In particular, a number of issues concerning the difficult situation the labour market within Europe's Mediterranean countries will be addressed and a number of possible solutions (to overcome the employment crisis through the relaunch of strategic industrial, innovation, education and jobs policies) will be proposed. Finally, a possible pathway towards a new, socially-inclusive policy will also be presented.

This article sustains the need to address the complexity of society with regard to education and labour, by activating a series of public policies, so as to place education, training, guidance and employment services within the logic of integration. The emergency is a new management by the appropriate actors (scholastic and training institutions, universities, enterprise, regions, autonomous territorial agencies and ministries) of the various phases of transition, from junior to senior secondary school; from senior secondary school to university; from university to employment; from one job to another.

## **The transformation of the economic system and the strategic role of education in today's knowledge society**

Within the new global scenario of today's world, a number of existing opportunities for development are not, to date, easily accessed by many members of the world's enormous population, while many contributing factors exist that risk engendering even greater inequality, thus polarizing and crystallizing the structure of the economic and social-integration system of Europe's Mediterranean-area countries, turning them into a single oppositional, dichotomous phenomenon.

The aggregation of this particular category, known as "the Mediterranean-area countries", is due to a peculiar convergence, in recent decades, of specific welfare-model developmental characteristics, shared

by the countries examined here (Portugal, Spain, Italy, France (only in part) and Greece (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Naldini, 2003; Ferrera, 2012).

To this regard, we owe the first efficacious classification of welfare systems to Esping-Andersen (1990)<sup>1</sup> and his *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, where the author points out that, in the course of the long expansion of Keynesian capitalism, three consolidated models of Welfare State have emerged: the liberal, the conservative-corporative and the social-democratic welfare regimes. By *Welfare Regimes*, Esping-Andersen does not refer only to the social policies a state sets up, but also to the entire web of links between these and the labour market, on the one hand, and families, on the other. The first model is based on liberalist doctrines and is an expression of the hegemony of a capitalist bourgeoisie (Australia, United States, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom); the second is characterised by staunch corporative traditions, the prevalence of moderate or conservative political parties, a predominance of the middle classes, the influence of the social doctrine of the churches (Italy, Japan, France, Germany, Finland, Switzerland); the third is the outcome of a strong proletariat and is characterised by considerable institutional influence on the part of the trade unions and leftist parties (Austria, Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden).

Later, Naldini (2003), in his essay *The Family in the Mediterranean Welfare States*, noted that the southern European countries presented a rather hybrid picture and that, to understand it, it was necessary to propose a fourth reference model: the family-and-kindred solidarity regime. This welfare regime is the outcome of strong inter-generational family ties, of corporative policies, of the intrusion of the Catholic Church into politics, as well as of bitter political opposition between right and left.

More recently, Ferrera (2012), in an essay entitled *Le politiche sociali* [Social Policies], proposed an interpretational paradigm called *La quarta Europa sociale* [The Fourth Social Europe]. Mediterranean Europa includes Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece as fully-fledged members. They represent a variation on the conservative-corporative theme, a case unto themselves, due to a number of noteworthy peculiarities found in the configuration and aims of the most relevant policies affecting issues such as pensions, health-care, and assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> An anticipation of these data was provided by the author in 1989 in vol. 2 of the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Antropology*.

These specificities are due to a series of variables (Ferrera, 2012, p. 42): a markedly dualistic regulation of the labour market, characterised, on the one hand, by public servants and those employed by the major enterprises who enjoy very strong protection and, on the other, by all the other labour categories who enjoy little or none;

- a) the centrality of a family and kindred-solidarity network which operates during a person's entire lifetime; this network is based on staunch family bonds and on the way the family is solidly rooted in the culture, the social and care systems of the Mediterranean;
- b) the national health-care and scholastic systems based on universalist principles;
- c) high degrees of particularism, low levels of statehood, lack of assumption of direct responsibility by state institutions as well as the considerable independence and autonomy of the political and social institutions.

With regard to the specificity of the Italian welfare system, it should be noted that Italy spends 26-28% of its GDP, on social policies, a percentage more or less in line with the European average. However, the Italian system of social protection contains a number of specific functional and distributional distortions, compared to other European countries. As regards functional distortion, Italy's main prerogative lies in the structure of its public expenditure, highly imbalanced in favour of a pension system targeted mainly towards "old age and survivors" and absorbing about 62% of its total welfare expenditure against a European average of 46%. No equally weighty intervention exists in favour of active policies aimed at the protection and promotion of social and working conditions for the younger generations. At active labour-market policy level, however, Italy invests only 1.7% of its GDP, compared to an EU-15 average of 2%. France allocates these policies 2.4% of its GDP, Spain 3.6%, while Germany, albeit with a figure similar to that of Italy (1.8%), invests much more in active policies (0.35% compared to our 0.031%) rather than in ancillary labour-income solutions (income assistance and social safety nets). This is, therefore, a functional type of distortion, which is not found in any other European country.

In fact, again with reference to Ferrera's indications (2012), it should be recalled that, on the basis of these indicators and specific territorial, social and economic conditions, one may assume the existence of a fifth Social

Europe, comprising new Eastern-European member countries. A propos the deterioration registered in these countries, one notices that one of the most worrying phenomena is the erosion of the economic and political space and role of the middle classes which, by diminishing their social-capital level, impact on the lower social strata and on the underprivileged, whose inadequate human capital and scarce cultural resources do not permit them to deal with the crisis. As shown by the data published recently by Eurostat (2014) relative to income-distribution inequality and, more in general, to wealth as measured by the Gini Index coefficient<sup>2</sup> (ranging between 0 and 1) the average figure for the 27 EU countries stands around 0.30, with two important countries presenting, substantially, the same values: Germany 0.29 and France 0.30. If one takes a closer look at the 2001-2012 series, it emerges rather clearly how deeply the economic and financial crisis, bringing in its wake high unemployment rates and severe austerity measures, has impacted on the distribution of income, causing a significant inversion of trends within those European countries whose economic systems are, at present, somewhat weaker. The worst data regard, in actual fact, those countries, like Italy, hit hardest by the economic crisis and which register a serious drop in job opportunities, especially for the young whose index passed from 0.29 in 2001 to 0.31 in 2012 and Greece whose index increased from 0.33 to 0.34, while Spain and Portugal were already suffering from considerable losses that brought their coefficients from 0.33 to 0.35. The United Kingdom, with a 0.32 index for 2012 and regardless of the crisis, presents a lower wealth-inequality rate than that of 2001 (0.35), while the trend has taken the opposite turn in countries traditionally known for their high wealth-distribution inequality rates like the USA (0.40), China (0.47) or Brazil which, despite the implementation of President Lula's anti-poverty policies, has still a long way to go, with an index of over 0.50.

According to this specific rating system (which might also act as an index of "social cohesion") for well-known reasons of a sociological, economic and political nature, the most egalitarian countries prove to be Sweden (0.24) and Finland (0.25), while Norway (which does not belong to

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<sup>2</sup> This interesting index was introduced by Italian statistician Corrado Gini to gauge income and wealth distribution rates with a given country. It is a value scale ranging between 0 and 1, where a low coefficient indicates a relatively homogeneous distribution, with 0 indicating a "theoretical" condition of maximum equal distribution, and higher coefficients testifying to greater degrees of distribution inequality.

the European Union) has the best datum of all (0.22). To understand the nature of this trend and the different trajectories existing within the European countries, the contributions of Sen (1986) and Dahrendorf (1957, 1995) may prove particularly useful, especially the claim made by the latter, who holds that in modern societies many conflicts of diverse origin are at work, but that only one assumes a truly antagonistic role within the social classes: the conflict between citizenship and wealth, or, as he phrased it, between provisions and entitlement.

Dahrendorf pointed out that he owed these two definitions to Sen (1981), who, in his book *Poverty and Famines*, while examining various concrete situations in different African and Asian countries, realized and demonstrated that famine was not due to a true decline in food availability, but rather, to problems of entitlement. In other words, it was not a matter of scarcity or lack of food, but of the possibility and the right individuals had to access it, or rather, the entitlement modalities certain groups enjoyed, at the risk of declining, even of disappearing. Dahrendorf observed, perceptively, that this study demonstrated that, in certain extreme cases, it is not a dearth of goods that causes the deaths of thousands, of hundreds of thousands, even, but the existence of social barriers.

In line with this paradigmatic approach, Dahrendorf (1957) himself held that it was necessary to find a way of favouring the coincident advancement of provisions and entitlements, so as to guarantee simultaneous economic development and social progress; a thesis shared by a number of important reformers of the period between the two world wars, like William Beveridge and John Maynard Keynes, and to a certain extent, Max Weber.

To this regard, as Esping-Andersen (1999) pointed out, the golden age of capitalism, where all seemed to function, has reached its decline. It may happen that, within the new economic order in the making, the welfare state – probably one of modern history's most extraordinary conquests – prove unsustainable. The problems that assail it are associable to the bad functioning of labour-market and the public-benefits systems. The former fails to guarantee employment and equality, at one and the same time; the latter risks being unstable and barren. From this point of view, it is not so much a question of “importing” reference models that work elsewhere, as stabilizing the present welfare model, also within the ambits of education and training, while keeping in the mind the important role that subsidiarity policies are still capable of playing, locally, within a framework of

multilateral partnership, along with the fundamental contribution families can provide.

In this sense, therefore, in order to counteract the impoverishment of the European Mediterranean countries' middle classes, the spread of economic inequality and ensuing social exclusion, it appears necessary to adopt job-orientated, integrated-development training programmes, by improving the governance of education-training-work transition processes, by promoting effective lifelong guidance and large-scale operational implementation of so-called "active work policies". In other words, it is a question of aiming, contextually, at increasing youth employability rates, also by means of self-enterprise projects, and by enhancing the quality of the skills, know-how and competence of workers employed at present in large firms, as well as in the myriad small and middling-sized companies found frequently in these countries.

Besides, as Giddens (2006, 265) sustains, with considerable efficacy, when discussing the institutional mission and development of the role of education from a social inclusion standpoint: "In industrialized countries education is one of the issues of greatest importance to both politicians and citizens. The scholastic system plays a fundamental role in the socialization of children and young people, in the promotion of equal opportunities, in professional training and in the creation of an informed and active citizenry".

With this in mind, it is necessary to point out, in fact, that among the more innovative of the Oece countries it is widely held that permanent, lifelong learning is becoming a more and more essential prerequisite for access to and integration into the labour market, just as on-going updates of competence and efficacious guidance policies have become key factors in the fight against unemployment and related social exclusion.

Regarding the relevance of these issues, recently a series of particularly significant phenomena has highlighted the need and the urgency to adopt decisive intervention when dealing with matters of education, school-university- work alternation and permanent learning and guidance, informed by the new lifewide-learning paradigm (Coccozza, 2012b). This paradigm aims at favouring and valorising the acquisition of formal, non-formal and informal competences in different places and environments and at different stages of the life cycle, reaching beyond the lifelong learning horizon, as is already the case in European countries like the United Kingdom, France and Germany and, in a different way, in the USA,

Canada and Australia. These countries have matured significant experiences in this field and have adopted innovative educational policies, action, tools and norms.

It is a question of activating targeted policies and provisions as soon as possible and placing them at the core of political agendas, especially those of the European Mediterranean-country governments, who, as we have seen, have obtained the worst scores on the occupation, economic-development and equity scales, as well as on the index related to the distribution of wealth among the population.

Moreover, we now live in a knowledge-society era, where, as posited by Hanushek, Machin, and Woessmann (2011) in their fourth volume *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, it is necessary to ask address a number of open issues: the value education brings to society in terms of social cohesion and democracy; the role it might play were principles of autonomy, “positive competition” between schools and between networks of schools, as well as between state and non-state universities, fully and completely implemented; the prospects of what a serious teacher valorisation policy might lead to were an effective system of assessment and incentives applied; returns, in terms of community benefits, that investments and incentives in the field of education and training might reap and the economic and social impact they might produce.

It is mandatory, therefore, to draw up a strategy of policies capable of addressing these challenges in a more adequate manner; a strategy based on modalities agreed upon at European level and grounded in a smart, socially-inclusive approach, with a view to establishing a new paradigm for the governance of global competition and aimed at valorising the education and empowerment of people, in terms of a proactivity inclined to attribute greater responsibility to territorial institutions and communities.

### **The critical nature of the global scenario**

In a scenario affected by processes of continuous change, induced by increasing degrees of complexity, it is necessary, first of all, to refer to the International Labour Organization’s 2013 *World of Work Report* which, with regard to the world’s economic and social fabric, states that (ILO, 2013, p.1): “On the present course, global unemployment is expected to approach 208 million in 2015, up from 200 million today. And long-standing labour

market imbalances - such as high levels of labour market informality in developing countries and long-term unemployment in advanced economies - will remain acute". Again, according to the ILO's 2013 Report: "The EU needs to create 6 million jobs to return to pre-crisis levels but labour market conditions continue to worsen accompanied by widening inequalities and higher risks of social unrest worsened by subdued investment and uncertain demand prospects. The challenge is to shift towards a more job-friendly approach".

This is a worrying trend which may be attributed to the spread and consolidation of the *Jobless Growth* paradigm even within the recently industrialised *BRICS* (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa); it underlines a tendency whereby growth and development, within a framework of the evolution of organizational models and strong thrusts from innovatory information and communications technologies, do not always signify an increase in employment. Even if the World Bank (2014) claims that: "Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are no longer a luxury for developing countries. In fact, many of the innovations are emerging from developing countries. They are creating new ways of communicating, doing business, and delivering services. Through extending access to ICTs and encouraging the use of ICTs, the World Bank aims to stimulate sustainable economic growth, improve service delivery, and promote good governance and social accountability".

As to the concept of *Jobless Growth*, it must be pointed out that technological innovation has always created a reduction of the workforce, a change in its mix during the first, second and third industrial revolutions, shifting maximum employment first from agriculture to industry, then from industry to the more or less advanced services sector. This shift was accompanied by a steady spread of greater, general wellbeing especially among the middle classes, whereas now, the broad-ranging impact of the digital revolution is shuffling the cards and producing a paradigmatically different situation. From WWII until 2000, the productivity and income-growth curves were always positively correlated, but from that moment on, there has been a substantial drop in the second variable and a constant loss of jobs within the economy of the whole world. Regarding this particular issue, in his essay *Supercapitalism*, Reich (2008) explains that since the 1990s, the global economy has begun producing anywhere in the world at the lowest possible cost, also exploiting the advantages offered by the Web to extend the market to the utmost. Today,

however, this business model is developing into a further form, because, while as consumers and investors we aim at doing business, as citizens we disapprove of the many the social consequences it engenders, especially those associated with the recognition of primary economic and social rights.

In this new scenario, as documented in several recent papers (Cowen, 2013; Lanier, 2013; Negrelli, 2013; Brynjolfsson, McAfee, 2014; Rifkin, 2014), the digital revolution produces two disturbing phenomena: an increase in business results for enterprises with a simultaneous worldwide reduction in jobs; a polarization of the distribution of wealth, according to a *winner-takes-all* logic, where those who remain on the market take everything. With regard to this, Brynjolfsson, McAfee (2014) mention a case in point: the Kodak company. Founded in 1880, when it reached its peak it employed around 150 thousand; but now that it has been replaced in the photographic-exchange sector by Instagram, founded in 2010 with thirteen employees and bought in 2012 by Facebook (whose greatest resource is the millions who avail of its online service) for a billion dollars. In this new economic and social order, that bases its competitiveness principally on the extreme pervasiveness of the new technologies, the differences in income and opportunities between citizens / workers / consumers are polarized. Companies comprising a handful of electronic programmers or engineers impose themselves on the market and aim at providing billions of people useful services while generating billions in profits for very few shareholders. Many jobs are disappearing and being replaced by new integrated technology systems; this trend began with operational jobs, like those of supermarket check-out cashiers and bank clerks or, in the future of drivers, once the *driverless car* spreads. With the integration of quick databases, it may soon be the turn of lawyers, market analysts, accountants and other professions. As this profound transformation is now affecting not only the blue-collar but also the white-collar workers, it is necessary to rethink the economic role of the new technologies and provide them not only with a *labour-saving* role, but also with an inclusive social-innovation perspective, aiming at enhancing the contributions of human resources.

In any case, the forecasts of the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank certainly do not shine for optimism as far as boosting employment is concerned.

To this regard, in fact, the International Monetary Fund's latest paper *Jobs and Growth: Supporting the European Recovery* is a cry of alarm that proposes pursuing the following strategy: remove obstacles to growth, lay the foundations for employment, achieve sustainable growth in a globalised world.

As Ms Lagarde (Proietti, 2014), director general of the International Monetary Fund pointed out, on the occasion of the presentation of the Report: "Until the effects on employment are reversed, we cannot say that the crisis is over. It is not possible even to pretend to forget that cohort of 20 million people currently unemployed in the Old Continent".

For these reasons, one might hold that, at the moment, the labour policies of the various European countries, in particular those of the southern regions of the continent, which, due to the limitations imposed by their high public debt and an excessively strict European Fiscal Compact policy, risk becoming uncontrollable and ungovernable unless the buffer measures applied, enter a dimension of structural reform of the economic, social and educational system, in such a way as to guide an integrated economic and labour development policy, in the direction of social inclusion.

Secondly, Italian Statistics Office (Istat) data indicate that, in Italy, annual participation in training programmes for adults (aged between 25 and 64) stands at about 2,000,000 persons, equal to 6.2% of the reference population. This figure "nails" this country to position number 17 on the European Union's ranking scale for the 27 countries, falling very short of the Lisbon Strategy indications, which established the target for 2010 at 12.5% at least, and of the European *Education and Training 2020* Programme which set the figure at 15%.

The trend is the opposite as regards the industrial and labour policies of two groups of countries: the USA, Japan, Canada and Australia group; the New Zealand and Southern Korea group; which have either, as in the case of the former, begun to emerge from the tunnel of financial, industrial and employment crisis, or, as in the case of the latter, never entered it.

Thirdly, and to the contrary, it is necessary to recall the positive datum regarding experiences within the lifewide learning field and recognition of the formal, informal and non-formal skills of workers and students, in a number of European countries particularly sensitive to these issues, such as France, the United Kingdom and Spain. Recently, in Italy, the Prime Minister's Office ratified an agreement reached within the ambit of a State-

Region Conference regarding the implementation *route* that the labour-market Reform should follow as far as permanent learning and guidance (as per law 92/2012 and decree 13/2013) are concerned. Within this ambit, a series of decisions was reached, at last, regarding a number of key issues requiring attention for some years now, that is: a draft decree concerning a national system for the endorsement of skills, an agreement for the institution of centres / regional networks for lifelong learning, involving schools, universities, regional centres for adult education, chambers of commerce, industry, handicraft and agriculture, firms and their business associations and an agreement aimed at the establishment of a national permanent learning-guidance system.

The chance of realising these ambitious goals poses a sizeable challenge and offers a considerable opportunity, when designing active policies promoted by the local and regional institutions, of re-launching joint efforts, based on contributions by the social partners (employers' associations and workers' trade unions), but, above all, based on the strength of the innovative and original contributions that the education system (schools and universities) and the professional and managerial training agencies should be in a position to provide, in this sense. To this regard, the new scenario that is emerging tends to attribute equal priority to all those working in the field of inter-professional support to continuing education, to persons who, in the first place, are willing to accept the challenge and make the expected innovation operational.

In actual fact, the process of innovation, production, technology and organization of the economic and social systems, requires that schools and universities and, above all, the complex world of training, exceed the present, traditional bureaucratic, self-referential set-up based on supply, and launch an organizational development strategy aimed at providing an adequate response to the demands of the enterprising world and of the regional and territorial institutions.

### **The Mediterranean countries' difficult labour-market situation**

As mentioned earlier, the economic and social situation in the Mediterranean countries is particularly critical and the on-going crisis, which began in 2008, is impacting negatively on almost all the indicators and increasing the internal differentiation of the individual countries,

marking a noteworthy and clear separation between traditionally strong and weak areas of the economic, social and employment fields, as well as in that of income distribution. As to the specific characterization of the labour markets of the Mediterranean countries, it is necessary to take into account the fact that in Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal we witness a profound historical and internal differentiation of the dynamics of economic development and, consequently, of the labour markets, between the stronger areas, with less dire unemployment rates (like that of northern Italy, particularly the Northeast, or that of Catalonia and the Basque Country, in Spain) and the weaker areas (such as the southern regions of Italy - Campania, Calabria, Sicily, Puglia-, Spain -Andalusia, Murcia, Extremadura and Valencia- and Portugal -Alentejo and the Azores- or Greece).

In this dichotomous situation, in Italy we find Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol with an unemployment rate of 6.1%, the Veneto Region with 7.5 %, while, at the opposite end of the spectrum, in Calabria and Campania, the figure is 20.3%. Even in terms of employment rates (one of the most effective indicators for measuring the degree of the development of an economic and social system) we find 68.5% for Emilia-Romagna and Trentino-Alto Adige, 67.0% for Valle d'Aosta, while the lowest rates are those of Campania (40.8%), Calabria (43.1%) and Sicily (43.5%). In the first two above-mentioned northern-Italian regions we find the country's highest female employment rates, while in the southern Italian regions the figures are negative as far as employment of women and young people is concerned. In terms of income distribution too, Italy's richest region has always been and continues to be Lombardy (131% of the real gross domestic product per capita compared to the EU average), followed at a close second by the Val d'Aosta (130), by Emilia Romagna (126) and Trentino Alto Adige (124). In the South the poorest region continues to be Calabria with a real GDP per capita of 60% of the EU average for the "Europe of Fifteen". In second place is one of Southern Italy's least prosperous regions, Basilicata, the only one to have also recorded a decline in income between 1980 (71% of EU GDP) and 1993 (66%).

This image of European development, particularly when applied to Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal, becomes even more weighty (becoming an essential strategic objective to be pursued at all costs, given the current economic crisis and the dynamics of the labour market) and presents a gloomy picture. It reveals a genuine social emergency represented by six

different phenomena clearly testifying to the “malaise” of the European economic and education system (Istat, 2013; 2014; Eurostat, 2014):

- a) overall unemployment figures, which tend to increase and have already reached critical levels of 27% in Greece and Spain and of 16% in Portugal; in Italy the figure is 13%, with an aggregate number of jobless on the critical threshold of 3.3 million people. This is the worst figure since 1977. The situation is better in other EU countries, like France with 10.8%, the United Kingdom with 7.4% and Germany 5.2%;
- b) the high youth unemployment rate which, in Greece and Spain stands at the dramatic level of 50%, in Italy, has reached an alarming 43%, while in Portugal and Ireland the figure stands at about 30%. Similarly, the percentage of young inactive Italians has reached a record 38%, with even more alarming figures for the country’s southern regions. This negative phenomenon concerns these countries in particular, given that the average youth unemployment rate for Europe is 24%
- c) the alarming school dropout rate affects 18% of Italian students, for a total of 120,000 young people abandoning school each year, while the present European average is 15%, the Community’s “Europe 2020” Strategy aims at reducing the figure to 10%. At the moment the UK registers a 13.5% drop-out rate, France 11.6%, Germany 10.5%;
- d) the wrong choice of senior secondary school by students (and their families), during transition from junior to senior secondary school; from research carried out by Alma Diploma in 2013 (AlmaLaurea, AlmaDiploma, 2013) it emerges that at the end of the secondary school cycle in Italy, 44% of the students claim having chosen the wrong kind of senior school. It is likely that similar data accrue also to transition between school and university;
- e) the number of so-called Neet (Not in Education, Employment or Training) those who neither study nor work, has reached a record 2.2 million in Italy, the highest figure at European level;
- f) the growing paradox of job mismatching (the non-encounter of employment supply and demand) in Italy means that over 45,000 jobs remain vacant, particularly in the commercial and services sectors where 47.6% of the applicants do not turn up for interviews and 52.4% do not possess the prescribed credentials. Similar data probably apply to other European Mediterranean countries (Grassia, 2012).

Taking a closer look at this critical situation, it is necessary to underline the grave phenomenon of school drop-outs, which, according to research

carried out by Checchi on behalf of the Agnelli Foundation, costs Italy 70 billion Euro per annum, hypothetically 4% of the country's GDP (Parola, 2012). It is a complex economic and social phenomenon (not simply an "educational issue") and presents markedly different characteristics according to the type of school (the rate is highest for technical and vocational secondary institutions), the social class (it usually regards poorer families) and the geographical area (in Italy the southern and north-eastern regions) involved.

Similarly, job mismatching represents a powerfully striking anomaly the causes of which need to be investigated in greater depth, so as to be dealt with more efficaciously. On the Italian scene, according to data provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Crafts as well as the General Association of Artisans (Cgia of Mestre), the professional figures most difficult to find within the variegated labour market — though, considering the marked regional, territorial, economic-district differentiation one finds in Italy as in Spain, it might be more appropriate to speak of "Labour Markets" — are shop-assistants (5,000) waiters (more than 2,300), hairdressers and beauticians (over 1,800 jobs), computer and electronic technicians (1,400), accountants (1,270), electricians (over 1,250) car mechanics (1,250), sales technicians (1,100) plumbers and fitters (more than 1,000), and bartenders (1,000). But, as we know, there are other important areas to cater for which some countries, including Italy, have been importing labour for years, including paramedics and home help for families and individuals (domestics, carers of the elderly and baby sitters).

The greatest difficulty encountered today by those trying to enter the working world, especially the young, now translates into an increasing willingness to accept less skilled jobs. There is a growing gap between the skills demanded by businesses and those possessed by the young people entering the labour market. The so-called skills mismatch, which in Italy stands at 40% - against the European average of 36% - is equally distributed between the 20% occupying positions that require skills higher than those possessed, and the 20% employed in jobs requiring lower skills. The latter phenomenon is called over-education or underemployment, and obliges policy makers to address a paradox: although a university degree offers better opportunities than a secondary-school diploma, four out of ten graduates now hold jobs requiring a lower level of education.

### **Emerging from the employment crisis by re-launching a strategic relationship between industrial policy, innovation, education, training and labour**

With this perspective in mind, as we know, the European Union has launched the Europe 2020 Programme (European Commission, 2010) a strategy aimed at favouring emersion from the global crisis and structural transformation of the European economy, by providing a Smart, Sustainable, Social Inclusive development plan with a strong thrust capable of guaranteeing employment for 75% of all people (between the ages of 20 and 64), by investing 3% of the GDP in Research and Development, bringing the school drop-out level down below 10% and seeing to it that 40% of young people obtain a degree, and that 20 million fewer Europeans risk poverty.

More in particular, in the field of education, the “Europe 2020” programme establishes four strategic goals to reach:

- a) guaranteeing that lifewide/ lifelong education, training and job mobility become a reality;
- b) improving the quality and efficacy of education and training;
- c) promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenry;
- d) encouraging creativity and innovation, including enterprising spirit at all levels of education and training.

More recently the Youth Guarantee Project (European Commission, 2012) was launched on the basis of definitions contained in the EU Council’s Recommendations, aimed at guaranteeing rapid transition from formal education to the job reality and from conditions of unemployment and Neet to that of student, worker and/or entrepreneur, by means of partnerships between public and private employment agencies, workers’ and employers’ unions, representatives of youth organizations. The aim of the Guarantee project is to assure that young people up to the age of 25 never remain inactive for more than four months running. Each of the member states is invited to implement a guarantee scheme of its own, indicating the public agency charged with running the scheme and coordinating the partnerships. The Youth Guarantee will be accompanied, in the various European countries, by intense communications and awareness campaigns. The available financial resources amount to 6 billion Euro for the 2014-2020 period.

Within the ambit of this programme, three important countries have already been informed about the funds the European Commission's Youth Guarantee Project intends putting at their disposal: Spain will receive 881 million Euro, Italy 530 million and France 289.7 million. After this initial procedural step, the European Commission will examine the operative programmes presented by each applicant country and express an appraisal. In the light of this prospected reform, the issue that arises is whether the Mediterranean countries' present employment agencies are sufficiently efficacious and functional to be reformed and re-launched as an *integrated system* in conjunction with the other public and private agencies that already provide services to labour, enterprise and the trade unions, on the one hand, to the world of education, training and youth organizations on the other. An opportunity for social and institutional policies, which, in the case of Italy, ought to foster the country's three apprenticeship modes (vocational, third level and research), as regular forms of admission to employment.

In the light of this, faced by a particularly critical and, to a certain extent, potentially explosive, situation, it is imperative that the Governments of the European Mediterranean countries, their Ministries of Education and Labour, as well as their Regional Authorities, each according to its particular competence, design a course aimed at putting to the test integrated "activating" policies, involving, in an accountable and responsible manner, the educational institutions, the economic and social system, young people and their families, in order to achieve a number of goals; at strategic level, that of rethinking or better still, "repositioning" industrial policy, especially in those countries whose real economy presents the greatest structural difficulties and drawing up an innovating plan such as to permit them to compete adequately within the global market, by directing their productive activities towards market sectors of medium to high standard products and services, underscored by research, innovation and quality. This, in the case of Italy, means an exalting and structural re-launch of *made in Italy* labels. As Porter (1985) might say, it is necessary to gain a competitive edge on innovation and quality and not simply on production costs. To challenge the newly industrialised countries, the *BRICS*, on the basis of costs (in particular as regards any significant chance of reducing European labour costs) is a battle lost before it even begins, given the role that Vietnam and Cambodia are now beginning to play in place of China, as the "world's factory", because of being able to offer

goods at even lower prices. A broader issue which calls a number of matters into question:

- a) the role and modalities of policies aimed at contrasting social dumping and the composition of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Gat);
- b) greater dialogue between schools and universities, valorising the principle of autonomy, and establishing closer links (aimed at improving the provision of training) with the regional and territorial institutions, the world of productive activities, the professions and the tertiary sector;
- c) the re-engineering of inter-professional funds for continuing, permanent education on the basis of a design logic, which takes into account goals, methods and systems by which to assess and appraise the teaching/learning processes adopted and the results achieved, as well as their degree of concrete transferability to the organizational and productive activities of Italian firms;
- d) a study and careers guidance policy to foster the conscious and responsible involvement of students and their families;
- e) obligatory internships and work placements as a facet of all school and university curricula, a more active role on the part of universities in matters accruing to matching labour supply and demand;
- f) enhancement of the potentialities of a new kind of apprenticeship, leading to and governing vocational, professional, higher-educational and research qualifications and contracts;
- g) greater diffusion of technological transfer between universities, enterprise and start-up initiatives and the expansion of training projects tending to strengthen self-enterprising skills and the promotion of support to innovatory companies created by young graduates.

It is imperative, therefore, to establish a fruitful dialogue between three worlds, that of education and training, that of the enterprising system and that of the national and territorial institutions, which still stand too far apart and appear too separate and distant, today. These are worlds which should, on the contrary, be in a constant relationship of reciprocal attention and cooperation, on the basis of the exercise of their social and institutional responsibilities (Coccozza, 2012a).

Within this new perspective, as Granovetter (1985; 1995; 2005) so eloquently posits, it is clear that enterprises, and more so, institutions, are

not separate from the context in which they operate, but have a “socially embedded” character, strongly rooted in their social context and, that they trigger off interactive relational processes (of a dynamic and dialectical kind), with the cultural (human capital) and institutional (social capital) dimension of the reference territory. They interact constantly with a series of stakeholders (the enterprising ecosystem) and a whole set of more general communities, by means of their (direct and/or indirect, aware and/or unaware) involvement, constantly defining and redefining business strategies.

### **For an inclusive lifelong guidance policy**

In this new perspective, as indicated in the important European Council Resolution of 21st November 2008, the member countries need to implement a set of public policies aimed at the following objectives (European Union, 2013): the acquisition of empowering career management skills; access to guidance services, in particular for people belonging to disadvantaged socio-economic groups; the quality of guidance services; coordination and cooperation among all relevant stakeholders at all possible levels.

As has been indicated in the EU “European area of lifelong learning” document, Europe’s future depends on the extent to which its citizens are enabled to face economic and social challenges. A European area of lifelong learning will empower citizens, enabling them to move freely between settings, jobs, regions and countries in pursuit of learning. Hence, lifelong learning focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and know-how from the pre-school education to the post-retirement stages of life (“from the cradle to the grave”) and covers all forms of education (formal, informal or non-formal). In the context of the strategic objectives established by the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, aimed at enabling the European Union (EU) to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world, the guiding principle of the “Education and Training 2010” integrated policy’s cooperation framework is lifelong learning, in synergy with the relevant elements of youth, employment, social inclusion and research policies. The new integrated guidelines adopted in 2005 in connection with the Lisbon Strategy also include the lifelong learning goal. The central role of the learner, the

importance of equal opportunities, quality and relevance of learning possibilities must be the focus of strategies capable of making lifelong learning a reality in Europe.

On the basis of this resolution, by guidance is meant: “A continuous process by which citizens of all ages, at any stage of their lives, are enabled to identify their capacities, skills and interests, to reach decisions on matters of education, training and employment to manage their individual life-paths regarding educational and training activities inherent to their professional world and any other environment where it is possible to acquire and/or exploit these capabilities and skills. Guidance also includes the individual and collective information, counselling, skills-assessment and teaching competences required to make decisions and manage a career” (European Union, 2013).

As to the Italian reality, an excellent picture of the trend taken by this phenomenon was presented in the Isfol Report (2012), an important research project with a twofold aim: to outline a picture of supply and demand in the area of guidance; to solicit mind-set renewal regarding this topic.

In this sense, in order to generate an efficacious guidance policy, also on the basis of the results of research carried out in recent months by Fondazione Italia Orienta, it appears necessary to address the following critical issues raised by the teachers acting as mediators in school and university guidance:

- a) lack of training of guidance-mediating teachers and the possible, sometimes annual, turnover of this personnel, do not allow for efficacious structuring of the guidance route itself;
- b) lack of curricular space allotted to guidance within scholastic programmes;
- c) poor information, knowledge and scarce training in strategic approaches to guidance, which often takes the form of mere “university marketing”;
- d) absence from the scenario of “non-academic” in-training opportunities (for Technical/Vocational secondary Institutes) and of opportunities of obtaining work guidance;
- e) total absence from educational institutions of all levels of self-guidance endeavours, with the exception of a last-minute guidance spurt during the final year of senior secondary school and this often of a merely informational kind, when not for essentially “promotional” purposes;

- f) inadequate methodologies, overly bent on transmitting erudition, little suited to the creation of critical-analytical, self-assessment, proactive, planning and creative abilities in young people.

In the face of similar critical issues, it is opportune to recall that the activation of efficacious guidance policies is a complex matter, which requires implementation upon different levels of complexity, a clear strategic vision as well as complementary and synergetic cooperation between different profiles and competences. In short, it is imperative that all the actors be involved in a joint institutional and training effort catering for teaching institutions, teachers, students, families and enterprises how to engage in dialogue, with a view to promoting an educational approach capable of bestowing true value on customised guidance and re-guidance policies and projects, informed by a continual paradigm, because guidance represents a strategic factor indispensable to schools and universities inspired by principles of autonomy and quality.

In the light of this, an efficacious, customised and interactive guidance policy should aim at the following:

- a) to increase young people's skills and their ability to be independent when making life choices, by accompanying their choices, providing them with a complete view of the range of training-professional opportunities available;
- b) to contribute to a diminution of levels of disorientation and school and university drop-out rates;
- c) to enhance the information society by contributing to the identification of training pathways related to changes in the world of labour, at both national and international level.

For these reasons it is imperative to draw up a coherent plan in support of a new industrial strategy, an active labour policy and an educational and training project based on the innovation of teaching methodologies and contents. These elements assume a crucial, strategic role because the expansion and improvement of workers' skills is expected to increase levels of employability and the relative competitiveness of production system at global level. Similarly, as has been demonstrated, through the implementation of intensive school-university-work programmes, it is possible to enable young people to learn about the working world and to enable enterprise to guide the educational school and university systems, in

such a way as to bring them more into line with the actual demand for labour.

### **Conclusions**

In this increasingly complex and globalized world of ours (characterized by increases in economic flexibility and the growing importance attributed to the role of knowledge within the new paradigms of competition) the centrality of the person and lifelong learning are the key strategic factors the Council of Europe has identified as those capable of promoting a new kind of economic development aimed at social inclusion and sustainability within its member states. With its ten-year “Europe 2020” programme, the European Union’s international commitment is that of fostering the enhancement of life-long-learning education opportunities, aimed at furthering employability and social cohesion, as well as preventing the premature school and university dropout phenomenon.

To comply with the ten-year “Europe 2020” strategy, it is essential that the Mediterranean countries recognise, in terms of legislation and implementation, the strategic value of guidance aimed at preventing this premature academic dropout phenomenon and the need to create preconditions capable of favouring conscious educational choices, consistent with students’ real levels of maturity. With this in mind, institutions and stakeholders are called upon to act according to the logic of subsidiarity, by promoting positive synergies between education and training systems, labour and territorial resources. Besides the commitment of individual schools and teachers, today, it is imperative to provide guidance policies on systems-logic bases capable (also from an educational point of view) of delivering practical diachronic guidance and propagating methodologies such as to sustain guidance shared and agreed on by all the actors participating in the process, while also providing concrete support to teachers by means adequate training in teaching skills from the very beginning of their university career.

In keeping with an approach that assigns a strategic role to guidance, the Mediterranean countries, whose scholastic guidance activities, when they actually exist, are, more often than not, a matter of improvisation and often confused with marketing campaigns carried out by private or state schools and universities to attract enrolments and matriculations. Therefore, one

will find little or no shared policies or standards validated by the various stakeholders involved in education and training. This new type of guidance policy is still relatively new within the Italian school reality, as are the professionals called upon to play guidance roles.

This role is intrinsically complex and requires a necessarily multidiscipline kind of training. Structured guidance work should be based on a number of traits relating to certain critical variables:

- a) the development of the person and of the personality;
- b) an analysis of the context as well as of interpersonal, communications and language skills;
- c) aspects related to reference values, multimedia modes/tools for acquiring information;
- d) the performance of a role within the social, economic and professional world.

In the long run, it is necessary to address the growing complexity of our society in the field of education and labour, appropriately, by activating a series of public policies, in the light of *Transition Governance*, so as to involve education, training, guidance and employment agencies synergistically.

The real emergency, therefore, regards the joint management by competent actors (scholastic and training institutions, universities, enterprises, the Regions, autonomous territorial agencies and Ministries) of the various phases of transition: from junior to senior secondary school; from secondary school to university; from university to employment; from one job to another.

In the light of this, the management of the lifelong guidance process cannot be left in the hands of single individuals, but must be brought within the range of team intervention (comprising transition governance experts, counsellors, guidance tutors, specialised journalists, pedagogues, educators, sociologists, psychologists, experts in human resources and organizational communications).

A similar team should, on the basis of well-made plans, be capable of providing young people with tools useful for guidance and re-guidance during the entire course of their professional and human lives.

Furthermore, as Hanushek stresses (2012, p. 2): “In this time of crisis, we focus on the present, but we do not think in the long term. On the contrary, we should take greater care of our future. The future depends

exclusively on the human capital of a country, it is people's skills that make the difference and quality is closely related to the quality of the schools. This means that improving the education of our children involves making important changes in schools, but it is the school systems themselves that do not want to change, and do not consider the fact that this leads to a disastrous impact on the future of our children".

In other words it is a question of taking up this challenge because, as Nobel Prize winner, Amartya Sen points out so efficaciously in his *Developing Human Capacity For Innovative Organizations*, "Capabilities are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead".

A modern and effective education system, therefore, needs to guarantee two basic conditions to citizens: freedom and opportunity. At the same time, a greater sense of autonomy and responsibility is spreading among younger people, because, as Bandura states (1997, p. 98): "the ability to guide oneself is becoming a key factor of life and on the job".

Concluding, within this new institutional scenario, the educational and training system might make a significant contribution by providing fundamental competences and disseminating innovation and social capital: elements indispensable to the revitalization and re-launching of a lasting economic, social, civil, just kind of development, also as far as employment opportunities and the promotion and support of self-employment enterprises are concerned.

This panorama imposes in-depth reflection on the part of the Italian education system so that it may meet the challenges it must now address if it is to diffuse a mind-set based on autonomy and responsibility, one capable of involving young people and families in educational and "active guidance" processes, of training educators, of providing those involved in guidance with a specialist and systemic approach to orienting. This continuous educational commitment is difficult, though fascinating and stimulating at the same time, because, as the Irish poet William Butler Yeats<sup>3</sup> so eloquently put it: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire".

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<sup>3</sup> The Irish poet, born in 1865, received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923.

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