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## **Between Work Flexibility and Higher Education: the Digital Workers in Southern Italy**

*Gennaro Iorio\**

### **Author information**

\* Department of Political, Social and Communication Sciences, University of Salerno, Italy.

### **Contact author's email address**

\* [iorio@unisa.it](mailto:iorio@unisa.it)

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## **Between Work Flexibility and Higher Education: the Digital Workers in Southern Italy**

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*Abstract:* The article presents an analysis of digital workers with degrees in Humanities: political, social, and communication sciences. In the context of the Mezzogiorno of Italy, characterized by a depressed economy, a qualitative study is used to analyze the new works of the knowledge society. The paper explores the important flexibilization process of subjects with high human capital and under-employment. After having discussed the labour market context and, in particular, the types of demand for work in the South of Italy, the Author analyzes the consequences on identities, the meaning of worker's lives and the effects on the reduction of relationships. The results are based on thirty qualitative interviews of digital workers. The paper argues that precariousness does not reduce the expectations of the workers and their professional ability, but has an impact resulting in a decreased material standard of living.

*Keywords:* digital workers, Mezzogiorno, identity, flexibility

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\* Department of Political, Social and Communication Sciences, University of Salerno, Italy.  
E-mail: [iorio@unisa.it](mailto:iorio@unisa.it)

## **Introduction**

The subjects of this paper are graduates with a degree in political, social and communication sciences, the conditions of their inclusion in the work force in the knowledge society, the modalities of self-comprehension of one's identity and the analysis of one's professional profile in relation to technological change.

In the context of Southern Italy, this research has the aim of analysing the working conditions of communication professionals who use new information technology – the so-called digital media workers. On the basis of the analysis of the demand for work for digital media workers in the South of Italy and in the context of the research, the results of thirty qualitative interviews carried out in Salerno and the surrounding province are presented. It is worth noting how the investment in support of the knowledge society is undermined by a scarcity of qualified work. It presents itself at the same time with the traits of hyper-specialization and under-employment. Furthermore, consistent flexibilization processes are seen among digital professionals, which translates into a decreased material standard of living (Gallino, 2008), since it is not enough to build independent lives and the majority of them continue to need economic support from their families. However, the flexibility transformed into precariousness does not reduce the expectations of those workers interviewed, nor their professional ability (Barbieri and Scherer, 2009), but touches on the meaning of their lives, which is reduced to an unease in their relationships (Sennett, 2006).

## **The transformation of employment demand**

In the networking economy, work has undergone profound transformations, even though it remains the main resource of productivity, innovation, and competition of an economy. The change brought about by globalization processes, the Internet and digital technologies have produced a new labour model founded on work flexibility, as a predominant type of job. Part-time work, temporary work, self-employment, short-term contracts, informal or semi-informal occupations and the growth in professional mobility are all key factors of the current work market, that in a networking economy work is highly individualized.

Within this context, the worker needs to mature transversal abilities, such as how to navigate the Internet, which means being able to use, both in a technical sense as well as in terms of content, the sea of information one is immersed in, knowing how to organize it, focusing on what could be useful to him/her and to transform it into specific knowledge, appropriate to one's tasks and to the particular work processes (Lyman & Varian, 2000).

The labour market is strongly polarized and is made up fundamentally by autonomous professional work and general labour (Castells, 2000a). Self-employment is a work of quality requiring an elevated educational level, not necessarily measurable by years spent in academia and university, but rather in competences and knowledge capable of adaptation and evolvement of the work environment, consequently the need for a continuous education throughout the span of one's working life. In an ever-changing economy, marked by 'web weeks,' in which businesses have a flat hierarchy, the use of working groups is widespread with constant interactions on-line and off-line amongst workers, between high level administration and the various levels of the business itself (Bresnahan, Brynjoffson & Hitt, 2000).

General labour of the networking economy includes those workers who have no particular competences or abilities, nor do they acquire them during the work process. This is work which is increasingly being replaced by technology, or immigrant workers, which is lacking in knowledge and information, with it being of necessity quantitative rather than qualitative.

In this contemporary economy, there is a process with a double movement in the digital economy, which tends, on the one hand, to start a process of integration and concentration of financial capital, and on the other, to disintegrate and individualize the work-based relationship.

Digital workers, therefore, are typical professionals of the age of information. Their work is characterized by a scarce organizational structure, high intellectual content, and by belonging to a community of practices. Professional work is identifiable as: 1) ownership of a vast baggage of abstract and formal knowledge; 2) substantial autonomy from hierarchical controls; 3) authority towards clients and/or work recipients; 4) usage of own knowledge to the advantage of those receiving and clients (Hodson & Sullivan, 1995).

From the point of view of organizational structure, professionals enjoy advantages that other workers do not, linked to their ability to resist pressures from their superiors. They tend, therefore, to have greater

autonomy and freedom from forms of organized control. They further enjoy a significant symbolic resource which gives their job meaning and significance, such that they are able to draw from sources independent from the organization employing them. Professional identities are cultural constructs which effect social institutions, including the economy. This is an aspect of social life effectively highlighted by Max Weber, who retraced this tendency to the Protestant ethic, in which work is considered an individual vocation where the individual must proceed with absolute dedication and coherence (Weber, 1948).

### **The effect of education in the Italian digital economy**

On the empirical plane, education in Italy does not satisfy the societal demands for knowledge. The relationship between education and employment seems to be negated by the presence of under-employment among the most qualified workers.

First of all, it is worth highlighting that during the last ten years Italy has increased the percentile effect of graduates by 6.8%, going from 15.6% in 2004 to 22.4% in 2013. However, the growth of graduates is not sufficiently close to the average of other European countries. In fact, if the objectives of the European Strategy 2020 for higher education foresee that at least 40% of young people between the ages of 30-34 pursue a university degree, the deficit clearly regards the cultural capital. In 2013, more than half of the European Union had registered the achievement of the agreed upon objectives. Italy placed last in the European rankings (OECD, 2015).

To explain the lower levels in university education, it is worth looking at the structure of the work market and the interactions between training and work. The production structure is characterized by micro-businesses and individual self-employment. According to Istat data, the average number of those in charge/owners/supervisors in the business is equal to 3.9%, which is one of the lowest in Europe, for which the average is 6.2%. To this data, it must be added that Italy presents a double percentage value regarding the presence of self-employed workers, i.e. businesses with only one worker. This data is at 30%, compared to the 13.7% European average (Istat, 2015).

If these are the data which show the characteristics of the Italian productivity structure and its peculiarity in regards to the rest of Europe, it

is possible to link the negligible use of higher specialized knowledge to the characteristics of the Italian entrepreneurial system, which bears a mediocre attitude towards technological innovation and, as a consequence, a lower attraction for one who has pursued a course of study that is highly professional (Ramella, 2014).

The weakness of the relationship between university education and labour markets creates a crisis in the idea that greater investments in human capital could favour greater employment. Such an hypothesis is supported by data compared at an OECD level, which show a worsening work possibilities for those having a degree in recent years (OECD, 2014). In fact, employment disparity levels between degree and high school diploma holders was reduced in the decade between 2004-2015, by 3.6% for degree holders and 3.5% for high school graduates. The data shows that higher education is not more attractive for employment than holding a high school diploma would be. The study by Checchi et al. puts in relation economic yield and having a university degree, and shows that this particular piece of data is especially critical for Italy, compared to other European nations (Checchi et al., 2013). In fact, for those holding a degree in the 25-34 age bracket, the difference in income with those holding a high school diploma is a mere 9%, while the average of countries in OECD is 37%. The research carried out by Ballarino and Scherer confirms the weak relationship between having a specialized education and economic income, confirming a decline of economic return in educational investment for the period considered, between 1985 and 2010 (Ballarino & Scherer, 2013). To complete the picture of overall gravity, it is worth considering the research by Maestripieri, which shows the phenomenon of inflation by education, or of the underutilization of knowledge by degree holders compared to the tasks done in the workplace. The research estimates that 15% of employees do a job that requires knowledge and competences below the level of their qualification. This data reaches 19% for the group of workers between 25 and 34 years of age. The phenomenon of underemployment occurs within a framework of an evermore difficult transition of degree holders into the world of work (Maestripieri and Sabatinelli, 2014). Even Istat, in its 2016 Annual Report on the situation in the country, shows that the level of unemployment of the more educated does not correspond to an adequate placement in the work market. The percentage of over educated has gone from 18.9% in 2008, to 23.5% in 2015, with the highest levels between women (25.1%), young people 15-34 years of age (34.1%) and foreigners

(40.9%). When these three variables are added to those in the South, the values reach alarming peaks (Istat, 2016).

This picture of the productivity structure documents the existence of a demand for work which does not seek qualified workers, and is therefore more oriented towards a flexible organization and salary than to innovation, so as to face international competition. Specialized competences of human capital do not function as a productive fabric of the country, even though necessary.

In conclusion, two aspects of the same phenomenon can be discussed. On the one hand, there is a lower quantitative level of competences in the Italian labour force compared to other countries of the European Union, because there are less people holding a degree. While, on the other, Italians with a degree have greater difficulty in finding employment compared to their European peers. Furthermore, a considerable number of workers with degrees are carrying out jobs requiring lower educational levels than a university education, or, rather, are under-employed. Finally, the differences in income earned are minimal between those with degrees and those with diplomas. All the data shown discourage the undertaking of higher education.

Such a relationship between education and employment is similar in the South of the peninsula to the other regions of Italy, although it presents more radical values.

### **The Research Context**

The context object of this research is Salerno and the surrounding province. It presents data confirming a production structure which can be defined as 'dwarf' in terms of responsible, in relation to the rest of the country. Examining the latest census data on active businesses in web sector editing, information and communication, those companies with 14 or more workers, represent less than 1% of the province of Salerno (See: Appendix, Table 1). Though dramatic, such data is substantially in line with the area of Campania and the South of Italy. Here we observe a percentage of businesses with more than 14 people in charge respectively at 1.78% and at 1.35%. Regarding this data, there is concordance with the rest of the country, insofar as the Italian data is equal to 2.03%, which, although more elevated, represents a statistically negligible difference.

Taking into consideration the average number of workers in companies with less than 15 employees, there is a piece of data that in Salerno and province is equal to 2.1, while in the Campania region, it is 1.6, in the South 1.2, and 1.8 in Italy as a whole. This is an empirical element underlining the extreme fragility of the general productive system in the field of work connected to the digital economy. Such a structure in employment demand prefigures a request for more specialized workers, who must however offer their services in the various fields required by the productive process.

The qualitative survey consisted of in-depth interviews of 30 young people holding degrees, integrated into the world of digital professionals. The interviews were led with the help of a very detailed graph, subdivided into sections, changed according to the interviewee by researchers purposely formed in the non-directive conduction of interviews.

Those interviewed were chosen using the 'snowball' method, by asking the interviewee to indicate other people known to them who were in the same professional situation as them, having received the same university education. The dimensions considered were: gender, field of study (degrees in Sociology, Communication Science, and Political Science), occupation, employed in the area of digital media, family situation, societal and cultural capital of the family, the university, their perception of precarious/temporary work. The number of people interviewed was 30, while the distribution of the group divided by gender was comprised of 17 women and 13 men. Nineteen of them live with their family of origin, although they are between 23 and 45 years of age. From the contractual point of view, only 4 have a temporary contract and 13 have an income above 1000 Euros per month. Temporary work is shown by the fact that only 10 among the interviewed declared having had only one job, while the rest had already changed job two or three times or had held more than three.

The work of analysing the qualitative material proceeded with the classification of the 30 cases in question according to a grill in multiple dimensions for the interpretation of their professional-academic choice and life plan. The interviews to both the young people and the adults involved underwent content analysis through treatment with N-vivo software.

Undertaking a study on employment processes with qualitative methodology is an operation rediscovered in the Eighties with various interpreters of the same method such as Morris (1990), Pahl (1985), and



Stankevicz (1985). The awareness of the importance of subjective variables in the study of life-paths and answers on working conditions was present foremost in classical studies of the 1930 – 40s. Those were the years in which the School of Chicago was established, which first considered personal documentation and life stories to be the privileged sources of social analysis. In this study, life stories were integrated with those of employment, with the aim of better gathering the dynamics and processes of individual construction, temporariness and/or flexibility as well as the presence in the public sphere of work in the digital world.

The life histories, as well as the employment history of those interviewed, are told in the course of the analysis of the main topics and their affirmations are frequently reported in the text with the aim of integrating general problems and individual specificity. In the follow-up, the length of the educational paths and their significance to the job being done, the precariousness of employment and the building of one's identity will be analysed in particular.

### **University education, flexibility and identity.**

The interviews<sup>1</sup> searched for the employment and professionalism of digital workers in relation to their chosen field of study, going in-depth into the reality of their current employment and how they live the matter of flexibility, if it is lived as a positive element of professional growth or as a 'injurious condition' of working life that leads to precariousness/instability. Moreover, the interview questions whether flexibility is a premise to professional growth or whether it causes a consistent reduction of biographic and professional expectations.

The educational path is seen, by the interviewed subjects, in an ambivalent light. In a positive way since it offers the tools to learn innovation without end, and in a negative light because the images and specific competencies learned in the university classrooms did not find validation in the work force. It is the gap between knowledge and know-how which emerges from this data.

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<sup>1</sup> For an outlook of the main characteristics of interviewees, see Table 2 in the Appendix.

*How do you rate the university education in view of the working situation?*

Let's say that there is a gap between what we did in university and that which is asked of us in our jobs, mainly concrete practice, as one then goes on to learn, and it all turns out. But I must admit that my choice of thesis was fortuitously helpful. My choice to talk about e-marketing and online communication, as it is very much a current matter since all businesses are coming onboard digitally, was useful to me during my job interview as well, as its ideas on on-line reputation were quite appreciated. But that had been a personal choice, not a requirement of my study path, as it was I who wanted to go deeper into a topic which seemed to be very current to me (female, 28 years old).

The woman interviewed showed a gap between attitude and behaviour: in fact, if on the one hand she perceived the distance between university knowledge and reality, she went on to state that she had found a position thanks to her thesis topic, revealing a low reputation for the university, more than an efficacy of the university system. The ability to learn new things provided by university programs is also highlighted by the next person interviewed:

Yes, it was useful in being able to acquire the understanding of how to interpret problems, to have some bases so to speak, some theoretical keys that allow you to implement things on a concrete level. This is the most important thing it equips you with, since from a practical point you could find yourself facing various situations and different needs, whereby having some base knowledge and competencies enables you to face them and understand them... (female, 26 year old).

As soon as I arrived at my newspaper job I started to get involved in politics, but keep in mind that what you study at university is one thing, and the politics you deal with on the outside is quite another! Therefore, practically speaking, there's no connection with how things are these days! To tell the truth, I don't use the sciences I learned at university in my present job! Yet, in the way one writes, perhaps you can say. Well, I went to university, therefore I can write! But even so, the journalistic way of writing is definitely not the literary one. It is more concise, more somber, with lots of punctuations and short phrases! You just can't read a romance by Flaubert in order to write an article! You understand? There you are! In order to be a good journalist, you must be able to understand quickly. you must have creativity, imagination! You also have to be a very speedy writer!

To be truthful, I'm not one to look too much to form, though I try to be correct from a syntactic point of view. No, university is not helpful! One can study maths and still be a journalist! Even in Communications Sciences they don't teach you how to become a journalist! You learn this in the field! (male, 30 year old).

What is the concrete work these innovative, digital workers really do, tied to a job where the technology of communications is essential? Who are they, and what do they really do?

Well, look! A typical day is very precarious and fragmented because... working in a television editing room, the working hours are a bit different from those in a newspaper room, meaning that we start at nine thirty in the morning but the day can continue till eight or nine in the evening. This is so late because of a more stringent, supporting economy... so, because of the costs of employment. Before, when we were employed full time, we were covering from nine in the morning till ten at night! We have had our hours reduced of late... as for example, we don't work on Sundays if we are in politics, but those covering sports do. Hmmm, we practically have split hours, as we start at nine or ten in the morning and then... those working outside coverage can quit at two, as it is the time the TG News goes on, but the ones who have to read the news finish up around 3:15 or so, the length of the newscast. Then we have a pause and restart in the evening, depending on the programming appointments, otherwise around five o'clock onwards... five to eight! So, we have a little break between 2 and 5... then we are free! (female, 42 year old).

The work done, and the task carried out are below the educational level attained. The prevalent experience is that of under-utilization of competencies reached, and temporary positions seem to be the only ones available in the productive sector. The working itinerary follows the 'logic of poverty' rather than the 'logic of integration.' Rather than representing a modality of emancipation and recognition of one's personal dignity and multiplier of jobs and income, it most often becomes a state of stabilization and crystallization of the condition of permanent precariousness, an under-utilization of the degree received through education and employment, social security and health as well as other benefits.

*Does one get paid at the end of contract?*

Sure! Yes!, when one finishes a job, and therefore if there is no other work, or ongoing projects to lead on to, I do not even have a basic salary to live on..... some days one works 24/7 without hourly limits, some absurd propositions! The majority of these positions are agencies formed by the owner and his/her mate, the owner and a partner: therefore very small! They do not have internal competition! There are also people whose integrity I appreciate who say, "I have these two jobs at the moment. Before we had more clients, but this is the situation at present. However, if we grow.... This is a phrase we hear often in a job interview: "If we were to grow more, we all benefit!" It means being a part of a co-operative, having shares in the business, and the employee cannot grow.... he can only grow if the business grows, but I need certain assurances to begin with, and if you can't give me any, I might as well stay home! (female, 28 year old).

So then I said: Well, in the morning I will do those 4 hours and at the end of the month I will bring in 400 Euros, while the afternoon I will dedicate to going for interviews, to look for something else.... I have been job seeking three months now. My job of the moment is to look for a job! (female, 28 years old).

The future becomes a chimera, discouragement dogs your motivation to do projects, not only because of the lack of demand, but also for the fact of 'having connections', the search for possible contacts that accompanies public life, which mortifies the value of meritocracy:

I keep hoping, but all I see is a difficult situation.... and it is very problematic. One needs a lot of luck.... but at times I get feeling very down. You hope and keep going, looking for new contacts... but other times ones sees others that keep going on the same way, and you don't understand how! One is hard put to not to lose hope! I am not....well, the type who plays today to the new politician on the block. That's just not me, and definitely not my mind set! So it can be really difficult! (female, 30 years old).

*Are there possibilities for growth?*

That is a good question, which I can't really answer! Sometimes I think that, yes, there has to be, and others..... absolutely not! Because in reality, the sector is very limited! I mean, if you live in Avellino and you write for the paper "Il Mattino" you have reached the peak! But what is next? What will you do afterwards? (female, 25 years old).

Research has shown that the increase of instability and temporary work in people's careers generate uncertainty and anxiety (Biggart, 1998). These studies show that, on the one hand, the ideal type of today's modern organization, represented by bureaucracy and by the Fordist system of production, is no longer the dominant one in our current economy; and on the other, they show that the digital economy is more articulated than the preceding one and seems to be developing in contrasting directions. One of the contradictions is derived from the fact that while modernization brings about the separation of the working situation from that of one's family and personal life, as a characteristic and distinctive trait, compared to pre-modern society, the use of new technologies of digital communication such as computers, cell phones, the Internet, etc., has made the option of working outside a physical place of work possible. The office and the home, therefore, are no longer two separate places, which does away with the thoroughly modern distinction between working hours and time off, personal life and work life (Hochschild, 1997).

I mean...I can't see myself anywhere else since it has been a few years now.... and this is a profession which really absorbs you. I mean, you become what you do! For instance, if while talking with you I were to see someone hitting himself, I will leave you and go snap a picture, even though I may not be working at that moment! One becomes what one does to that point, notwithstanding the matter of payment, no matter what! (female, 31 years old).

One's identity is reinforced by self-employment. To start a company or co-operative is not an isolated experience. It becomes a totalizing experience identity wise, a true vocation.

Actually, we thought of setting up a partnership using three different taxation brackets, as it was the only way to carry out a particular business model. One of us has digital know-how, another a more creative mind-set at the core, so the two things combine perfectly since there is the more technical ability, and besides, he's got an ILAS certification, hence....a very strong specialization from the creative point of view, while the rest of us, speaking of digital technology, have a deeper knowledge of web-marketing let's say.... this is how we began our collaboration and have great team work! (male, 30 years old).

The cost to one's personal life is very high:

Yes, this kind of work totally effects my life! Working hours are really.... well, one has to really work for one's victories! We are not afraid to go after things since to earn by one's sweat is the first thing! But something has to give somewhere. Unfortunately, it's one's private life! You give up some things, and you carry problems with you, since there's always something not going right.... like my love life, or other personal circumstances.... because of distance, or because you allow it. You finally get to Saturday or Sunday truly tuckered out! Yet, you are aware that the alternative would be to go to a bar, or to stand around doing nothing, so I keep doing it since it is always fruit of my passion! We do this kind of work discounting its effects, since we are doing what we like! So, I come to work in the morning and leave at night feeling good about it! (male, 30 years old).

Therefore, if the trajectory of modernity has been characterized by the differentiation of specialized institutional activities, in the current economy we are witnesses of a de-differentiation in which these limits and separations are decreasing. We are not referring to the research by Gouldner (1954), which in the 1960s showed the not yet complete separation between formal work relationships and informal human relationships. What we are seeing today is the erasing of the border between work and the rest of life. The cultural change of professional working organizations puts the emphasis on self-realization and on the ways of opening up one's potential. However, if work becomes a totalizing experience that is never completed, frustration comes about as well as self devaluation. The working experience drags everything else into it, for good or for bad.

I think any job will bring you satisfaction only if you do it because you really like it, since you must do something only if you truly feel like doing it. I think; if I was to have children one day, and my son was to tell me he wished to become a baker, I would be okay with it, but I would want him to do it with success, as with anything worth doing.... (woman, 32 years old).

In the Southern context, in the Italian structure founded on micro-businesses, the inner needs are not followed by satisfaction, materially speaking, and this effects self-realization.

I have this idea: precarious/temporary work, before being a working condition, is almost an existential one.... I don't mind precarious work, as I don't want a regular 9 to 5 anywhere! Perhaps because I have entered this mind set as I started working at sixteen, so it's fine, but once health problems start to arrive, for myself or for my family, well.... (female, 32 years old).

This tendency has an effect and organizational implication. The professional world has never tolerated bureaucratic style controls. Companies have always tried to foster personal and 'human relationships' that exist outside the working environment. The service sector depends more on the building of a social relationship between the service provider and the client, than say, in manufacturing, and an adequate emotional attitude has an effect on the delivery.

Network contacts are fundamental, because if you live by doing occasional work and your task is to be, say, a consultant, communication cannot but be such. Although it creates opportunity, though trite, the truth is that your name is at stake, meaning that if you enter a person's heart, that's what gets you work, as the communicator is a person whose technical competence is hard to define. So and so, may be a very good communicator, who can say? There's no such thing as an objective parameter, or a technical schema, since what allows you to get work is done by entering into the heart of a person, as that is your password. Otherwise, you are just a supplier (female, 32 years old).

The contemporary world of work is characterized by a confusing mixture of old organizational forms and new ones. Modern bureaucracies still exist but they mix with and coexist with other forms of organization and with pre-modern ones as well, such as those based on intrinsic motivations, while others represent new developments such as virtual electronic networks comprising professional groups of working colleagues.

I happen to be a very intuitive person, and as I was saying before, I have been very fortunate in that I wisely stood alongside people who were better than I at a job. I found people who understood.... and appreciated my willingness, and I became a sponge, absorbing from those with more knowledge. I have never had a problem being the less informed, and humbly attached myself to those who knew more and I acted like a leach would... to learn new things, otherwise I would not have learned them... Like

the time I went to a printing shop... I strove to not go in the guise of a teacher in communications close to thesis dissertation, but rather, I would sit myself down by the typesetter to try and understand techniques in printing, photo-shopping, or illustration, and once at home.... I have to say that with the majority of the people I learned from, I still have a good relationship with them, as with this printing shop. When certain financial funding is approved, I call them up to funnel them work. It is my way of being grateful and saying thank you. It's just one more way of creating contacts (female, 32 years old).

This is a world of 'anxiety-provoking' innovation. Change rhythms take decades to rise, mature and die. This is not a foreign process in those people's lives who understand the Pandora's box-like nature of technology: it shows you the promised land, but can be lethal at the same time:

I mean, you don't foresee the instability of work, economic difficulties or a company's crisis! Keep in mind that ever since I received my degree till today, the new normal has been filling the life of local TV stations, terrestrial digital, and then the satellite, followed by the social media networks, and the internet! Obviously, ten years ago we knew nothing about them, yet I think that students now are still not learning about them and this is all still not easy for any of us to grasp effectively through studies, as it is something you learn in the field! We ourselves did not understand the passage to terrestrial digital format even though we are bearing its impact daily on our own skin! The same with social networking and the internet! I believe we are all in an experimental phase! I am speaking about the local TV networks as I am not as competent in other realms. We experiment each day on television with the newscasts and transmissions, as we try to understand if they can be of help or whether they are killing us! (female, 43 years old).

## **Conclusions**

Research has brought to light the radical flexibilization of professional work tied to the transformation produced by digital technology in economic organizations. If, on the one hand, the interviews highlight an ambivalent relationship with university education, underscoring a formative weakness regarding know-how; on the other, they are aware that knowledge and intellectual formation is a necessary resource and a helpful one from which



to draw upon in the course of one's professional career. In the professionals interviewed, there is a lack of awareness that the working condition of economic instability and tasks is a structural fact tied to the demand for work characterized by firms which have no more than two employees in this sector. The positions offered are highly qualified, using the most up to date digital software to create information or organize the work done by a television broadcasting station or a radio network. These professionals identify themselves with their job turning it into a reason for living, to which they dedicate all their time, even their life. However, this is not enough in order to build independent lives, since the majority of them need economic support from their family of origin, a spouse or life companion who has steady work.

This is a situation of flexible employment which sweeps away every aspect of life, which mortgages their entire existence. Notwithstanding this, they offer everything to their profession. These young workers from the middle class, in high-tech environments, are convinced that by following their own inclinations, in developing their potential, running after temporary work in the now, might be able to better their situation, but there is the impression that their lives are being tossed away and that a sense of futility may overcome them.

These workers have the challenges exposed by Sennett (2006) in their very lives. The first, dealing with time and its short-term horizon, which is not reconcilable with family life. They find themselves having to improvise a coherence of their existence, their own story, in which individual identity does not always find confirmation in what they do.

The second challenge deals with professional education: how to educate oneself in order to stay in step with innovation. The alternative is education on innovation: the second option which better answers the institutional expectations of continuous change is learning to learn, plus learning to use the latest innovation produced.

The third challenge is a society that requires a worker to look more like a consumer than a proprietor. The new professional must have the inclination to throw away the old, in order to acquire the new, unlike the owner who keeps what he owns. At the depth of these professionals, there emerges a typical need to be human, to be able to express a coherent biography, seeing their abilities, which have grown in time with dedication and effort, recognized, to be appreciated for experiences they have gathered throughout their lives.

Professionals often feel damaged by this context, because, while sacrificing many aspects of their social and human life, it forces them towards a material and moral lifestyle that pushes them towards social uselessness/worthlessness.

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*Appendix - Table 1. Percentage of active businesses in Web editing, information and communications, for number of people in charge*

| Range workers | 0 - 14<br>% | More than 15<br>% | Total           |
|---------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Salerno       | 99,05       | 0,95              | 100<br>(3819)   |
| Campania      | 98,22       | 1,78              | 100<br>(30246)  |
| South         | 98,65       | 1,35              | 100<br>(104988) |
| Italy         | 97,97       | 2,03              | 100<br>(858737) |

*Source: Based on Istat data, 2011, Industry and Services Census, [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)*

Table 2. Characteristics and features of the interviewed subjects

| Work Year | House        | Degree        | Age | Gen. | Income     | Contract                  | Public/ Private | Occupation     | Type business        | Numbers of works |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----|------|------------|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------------|------------------|
| 1         | Orig. family | Communication | 26  | F    | < 600      | Part-time                 | PU              | Not Applicable | Not Applicable       | 2 - 3            |
| 2         | New family   | Communication | 28  | F    | < 600      | nothing                   | PR              | Not Applicable | Communication agency | 1                |
| 10        | Single       | Communication | 41  | M    | > 1000     | full time                 | PR              | Journalist     | Not Applicable       | 2 - 3            |
| 6         | Orig. family | Political     | 36  | M    | > 1000     | full time                 | PR              | Journalist     | Newspaper            | 1                |
| 17        | New family   | Communication | 43  | F    | 600 - 1000 | part time                 | PR              | Journalist     | TV                   | 2 - 3            |
| 8         | New family   | Communication | 30  | M    | > 1000     | Autonomy                  | PR              | Journalist     | Web news             | 1                |
| 19        | New family   | Communication | 37  | M    | > 1000     | full time                 | PR              | Journalist     | TV                   | 1                |
| 6         | Single       | Communication | 30  | F    | > 1000     | Part-time                 | PU              | Not Applicable | Radio                | 1                |
| 10        | Orig. family | Communication | 30  | M    | > 1000     | Autonomy                  | PR              | Journalist     | TV                   | 2 - 3            |
| 4         | Orig. family | Literature    | 25  | F    | < 600      | Nothing                   | Pu              | Journalist     | Radio                | 2 - 3            |
| 6         | Orig. family | Communication | 31  | F    | < 600      | Autonomy                  | PR              | Journalist     | Web news             | 2 - 3            |
| 1         | Orig. family | Graphics      | 32  | M    | 600 - 1000 | No                        | PR              | Not Applicable | Communication agency | 2 - 3            |
| 8         | Orig. family | Communication | 32  | M    | 600 -1000  | Autonomy                  | PR              | Journalist     | Web news             | 2 - 3            |
| 3         | Orig. family | Communication | 30  | M    | > 1000     | Autonomy                  | PR              | Not Applicable | Communication agency | 1                |
| 16        | Orig. family | Literature    | 44  | F    | 600 -1000  | Autonomy                  | PR              | Journalist     | Web news             | 1                |
| 7         | Orig. family | Communication | 30  | F    | > 1000     | Autonomy                  | PR              | Not Applicable | Communication agency | 1                |
| 15        | Orig. family | Literature    | 39  | F    | > 1000     | Part-time                 | PR              | Journalist     | Newspaper            | 2 - 3            |
| 3         | Orig. family | Literature    | 30  | F    | < 600      | Autonomy                  | PR              | Journalist     | Communication agency | 2 - 3            |
| 5         | New family   | Political     | 31  | F    | 600 -1000  | Autonomy                  | PR              | Journalist     | Newspaper            | > 3              |
| 7         | Orig. family | Literature    | 32  | F    | 600 -1000  | Part-time                 | PR              | Journalist     | Web news             | > 3              |
| 6         | New family   | Unassigned    | 32  | F    | 600 -1000  | Part-time                 | Pu              | Not Applicable | Not Applicable       | > 3              |
| 12        | Orig. family | Communication | 28  | M    | > 1000     | Autonomy                  | PR              | Not Applicable | Communication agency | 1                |
| 3         | Orig. family | Communication | 27  | M    | < 600      | Part-time                 | PR              | Journalist     | Newspaper            | > 3              |
| 15        | Orig. family | Sociology     | 34  | F    | > 1000     | Co-partner                | PR              | Not Applicable | Radio                | 1                |
| 15        | Single       | Political     | 30  | M    | > 1000     | Freelance with VAT number | PR              | Journalist     | Web news             | 2 - 3            |
| 10        | Orig. family | Communication | 25  | M    | 600 - 1000 | Part time                 | PR              | Journalist     | TV                   | > 3              |
| 10        | New family   | Literature    | 42  | F    | > 1000     | Part-time                 | Pu              | Journalist     | Not Applicable       | 2 - 3            |
| 6         | Orig. family | Communication | 30  | F    | < 600      | Part-time                 | PR              | Not Applicable | Radio                | 2 - 3            |
| 16        | Single       | Communication | 42  | F    | 600 -1000  | Part time                 | PR              | Journalist     | TV                   | 2 - 3            |
| 3         | Orig. family | Political     | 30  | M    | 600 -1000  | Autonomy                  | PR              | Not Applicable | TV                   | 2 - 3            |