

Recalibrating lifelong learning and active citizenship: implications drawn from the capability approach

*Rosangela Lodigiani*¹

Abstract: Lifelong learning is one of the main routes of the European welfare systems reform. Such a reform is linked to the idea of an active and enabling welfare state. For these reasons, LLL stands in the middle of those activation policies that are focused on empowerment. However it is not enough to guarantee the subjective right to learn lifelong: it is necessary to ensure everyone has the capability to enact that right.

This paper goes deep into these issues, moving in the perspective of the capability approach. This approach leads us to see LLL as a crucial factor to convert individual resources into functionings. This means acknowledging the link between human capital and human capability. It also means giving a central role to the learning to learn competence and to the construction of a “learnfare system” truly capable of making LLL a factor of social protection and active citizenship.

Key words: lifelong learning, activation policies, active citizenship, capability approach, learnfare.

¹ Department of Sociology, Catholic University “Sacro.Cuore” of Milan, Italy, e-mail: rosangela.lodigiani@unicatt.it

1. Introduction: lifelong learning as the core of activation policies

Ten years after the *Memorandum on lifelong learning* and the launching of the Lisbon Strategy, we can affirm that lifelong learning (LLL) now represents a mainstay of the European policies for employment, social inclusion and protection. Its importance is such that it has been placed at the centre of the Lisbon agenda also for its follow up until 2020 and according to some authors it should be the starting point for revitalising European policy, particularly in the current situations of crisis (Lundvall, Lorentz, 2009).

The *Memorandum* drawn up by the Commission of European communities in 2000 [SEC(2000) 1832] was the first to specify that the aims of the LLL would go well beyond the traditional educational policies. This document explicitly affirms that the LLL is called upon to pursue two distinct but at the same time interdependent objectives:

- *promoting worker employability*, that is, the capacity to secure and keep employment, the capacity to be competitive in the labour market and adaptable to the demand of employers;
- *promoting active citizenship*, that is, the capacity of people to cooperate increasingly actively at various levels (from local to European Community level) in all spheres of public life, in particular in the social, economic and political fields.

As the same document states (*ibidem*, p. 5): “both employability and active citizenship are dependent upon having adequate and up-to-date knowledge and skills for taking part in and making a contribution to economic and social life”, in the awareness that in a knowledge-based competitive and inclusive society and economy, participation in learning processes is crucial. By means of these processes we gain access to accumulated knowledge and we compete to produce more of it (Rullani, 2004). Thus a virtuous circle can be created that is capable of enabling the active participation of the citizens in economic and social life and of supporting the competitiveness of the productive systems, guaranteeing at the same time a dignified level of work opportunities, social protection and living standards to all workers. By the same token, the greater the level of

exclusion from these processes the greater the marginalisation, giving rise to new inequalities.

From a theoretical point of view, the *Memorandum* represented a turning point for European educational policies, causing a shift in attention away from continuous vocational training (a protagonist of the educational and occupational policies ensuing from the *European Year of education and training* of 1996 and the subsequent passing of the EES in Luxembourg in 1997) and towards continuous learning. As can be read in the institutional documents, LLL does not end with continuous training, rather re-encompassing it, broadening its role and significance. If anything, LLL constitutes a methodological principle that must characterise any learning context, in order to offer individuals of all ages and socio-economic and cultural levels the opportunity for education and training, and for the developing of competencies and knowledge of various types, i.e. not necessarily professional or linked to the condition of employment. Thus the aim is not only to raise the overall qualification level in the population but, in more general terms, to promote a predisposition in the latter for tackling new situations and adapting to change, playing an active role in society.

Intended as such, LLL constitutes one of the strong points of the reforms of the European welfare systems, and specifically that which is defined as their “activation”. The reform aims for an active and dynamic welfare state: a state that invests in its citizens – first and foremost in the development of its human capital – in order to activate their capacity for choice, for responsible action and for coping with situations of need or risk (Vandenbroucke, 1999; Giddens, 2007; Jenson, 2009). The purpose of this reform is twofold: on the one hand to combine the need for rationality and economic efficiency with the objectives of justice and social equity, and on the other hand to make individuals aware of their responsibilities regarding their own wellbeing and that of the community.

For the welfare systems, activation implies a Copernican revolution. The welfare state ceases to provide assistance and insurance (as was typical of the industrial welfare state) and becomes empowering and enabling. In other words, state intervention is no longer centred on the distribution of benefits and passive subsidies (which, however, do not disappear, especially in this period of economic downturn; Auer 2010), but is based on the offer of the so-called activation policies. These consist of both

monetary and fiscal policies and active policies and services aimed at stimulating and developing the resources of self-protection and autonomy (in work benefit, employment services, counselling, parental leave, training leave etc.). The special feature of these provisions is that their fruition is always subordinated to the obligation of “conditionality”: the respect for certain requisites is a precondition for access to the guaranteed benefits (e.g., to receive unemployment benefit, one has to be immediately available for work and agree to any educational proposals).

The emerging welfare state model is activating in two directions (Barbier, 2006): a) towards individuals, since it aims at preventing situations of risk or need, carrying out an emancipatory function and striving to develop autonomy and empowerment in the individual; b) towards the systems of protection, since it reduces the passive part of their fruition, increasing their conditional benefits.

LLL is at the core of this “activating system of social protection”, configuring as a means of empowerment and of active citizenship. Training, requalification and the updating of competencies become the strong points of the activation policies. In this way, a direct relationship is established between permanent learning and the functions of active welfare to protect and promote citizens. Since this stance has important consequences for LLL, we would like to devote some attention to it.

2. Employability vs capability?

Broadly speaking, the concept of activation is that of an “umbrella” under which are gathered experiences of active participation that are diversified on the basis of the fields of actuation and the degree of empowerment that they imply. This concept of activation includes, for example: a) participation in the labour market with a paid or subsidised job; b) participation in the definition of how to rise above the condition of need (thanks to such devices as vouchers, expense budgets and service agreements – provided that they leave margins for negotiation and direct involvement of the subject in the decisions that concern him); c) participation in the creation of services and even social policies thanks to mediation on the part of the organs of civil society (Paci, 2005).

Despite what has been said, the main objective of activation policies tends to coincide with work activation, in accordance with the objective of full employment at the centre of the Lisbon strategy. In effect, activation policies are largely identified with the “welfare to work” measures, the objective of which is to place the unemployed or idle in work as quickly as possible. This idea of activation is centred around the strengthening of the link between social protection and paid employment (Barbier, 2006).

According to the most critical interpretations, this model ends up being strongly disciplining regarding behaviours: work for the market is considered as being a moral and civic duty. To ensure that this duty is respected, a system of conditions and sanctions is implemented to regulate access to benefits and to combat opportunistic behaviour. As a consequence, while it is affirmed that the individual is responsible for his own wellbeing, practices are set up that show a lack of faith in his motivations and capability, an example of this being those workfare programmes that interpret the mandate as an extremely stringent “welfare to work” measure, in the conviction that any employment is better than dependence on subsidies.

Thus is defined the “orthodox” vision centred around a sort of enforced activation (Van Berkel, Møller, 2002). However, the outcome is not the desired valorisation of the autonomy of the individual but rather an overload of responsibility for him (putting collective responsibilities in second place) and a limitation on his freedom of choice and action. The existence of strong criteria of “conditionality” thus risks giving rise to a paradox: the capacity for active participation is no longer an aim but a pre-requisite (Bonvin, Farvaque, 2005; Borghi, 2006).

From this viewpoint, it is useful to analyse employment service practices of taking charge of the unemployed. If the described logic prevails, the services tend to adopt an “individual approach” to activation, as defined by Van Berkel (2005). Unemployment is essentially interpreted as an individual risk, determined by the obsolescence of the competencies possessed, poor capacity for adaptation or weak motivation for finding employment, rather than by structural factors, such as the absence of opportunities for quality employment. The services define the obligations and responsibilities of the unemployed with the objective of motivating them to work, although they actually aim to place them in work again in the shortest time possible, evaluating in this light their aptitudes, behaviours

and requests for protection. Although this approach has the objective of giving autonomy to the individual, it proceeds to treat him like a passive consumer who can expect to be monitored and evaluated in his behaviour (Crespo, Serrano Pascual, 2005).

However, when the constraints are not so tight and when the unemployed have a real voice, an individual approach geared to demand, “reflexive and client-oriented”, can be achieved (Van Berkel, 2005). This is an approach in which the person, his expectations and his possibilities are the true point of departure for intervention. In this case a reciprocal adjustment is made: a negotiation between the employment services and the unemployed takes place so as to reach an agreement as to the means and aims of the activation process. The employment services do not appear merely as structures for the certification of regulations but as places that offer a real opportunity to increase the individual’s employability and capability for active participation. In this way there would no longer be enforced activation, but inclusion through participation (Van Berkel, Møller, 2002), achievable through the effective strengthening of the responsibility and autonomy of the individual. Furthermore, the European stance, beyond the restrictive view that has prevailed, maintains that activation does not end with paid work for the market but may include other working conditions such as volunteer work, informal care giving, civil service work or training (Supiot, 2003; Gazier, 2010), and, in the broad sense, participation in the production of welfare and the possibility to exercise the right to choose.

This dual approach – “individual” and “reflexive and client-oriented” – is inevitably reflected in the interpretation of LLL, to the extent to that it is, as we have said, a device for activation.

In the first approach, LLL tends to be characterised solely by the activities of continuous vocational training, its only aim being employability. In some cases (the less virtuous), it tends to be reduced to a simple fulfilment: a mere constraint imposed within the course of activation. In all cases the mandate of the *Memorandum* is disregarded. This is what could happen in Italy with the exceptional devices of social security cushions introduced among the anti-crisis measures of 2009. These were funded with the contribution of the European Social Fund. These resources are utilised to integrate income support paid out by the state, funding training and professional guidance initiatives and other activities of

active work policies. The objective is to link active policies to passive ones in an innovative way. There is the possibility that training will be considered merely as an exchange within the framework of employment policy reform prompted by workfare strategies.

In the second approach, continuous learning, and, in certain aspects, also continuous training, acquire a wider significance. These are of value not only as being functional to occupation, but also as being oriented towards supporting the growth of the person and his empowerment as well as strengthening the individual capacity to implement choices that are significant for his self-fulfilment and personal objectives. We could say that, in this second approach, continuous training and learning pursue the objective not only of employability but also of reinforcing the “capabilities” of the subject, in the meaning given by Amartya Sen (1992; 1999) to this term.

Opting for a more participatory approach capable of creating a space for the voice of individuals to be heard in the activation processes, and thus opting for a vision of LLL marked by empowerment, implies reviewing the objectives of public policies. Using the categories of the “capability approach”, we can say that these policies are no longer oriented towards promoting the attainment of defined functionings (e.g. employment) but towards supporting the freedom of the individual in acquiring the functionings desired (a certain type of activation) (Bonvin, Farvaque, 2005). Hence they are geared towards developing the freedom to promote or achieve valuable beings and doings, along the lines of Sen.

Public intervention regarding activation can also be reformulated. In the light of these new objectives, the latter aims at the development of a “substantial freedom”. This type of freedom implies for individuals the capacity to transform the resources available to them in order to follow their aims and to lead the kind of life that they have reason to value (Sen, 1992). In this meaning, freedom is an expression of responsibility and of the possibility of self-fulfilment; it is emancipation from ascribed conditionings and forms of forced appurtenance, including the conditionings of welfare; it is a guarantee of self-fulfilment and of the possibility to have a greater say in his relationship with the services and with the actors that plan and supply them (Paci, 2005).

According to Sen, the attainment of this type of freedom (substantial, positive and active) is an inalienable dimension of human development.

Personal wellbeing is not attained merely through the material conditions of existence and the guarantee of rights (although both these factors – material conditions and the guarantee of rights – are presumed as being inalienable), but also through the possibility to take responsibility for them in first person, choosing what to evaluate it on. This is achieved when two essential dimensions of freedom are able to stand together, defined by Sen in terms of “opportunity freedom” and “process freedom”. With reference to public and activation policies, guaranteeing “opportunity freedom” means to increase the set of real opportunities for all those involved (for example, the opportunity for quality employment), ensuring effective possibilities of choice between various options, including the “exit” option (for instance, that of refusing a job that does not correspond to one’s qualification); guaranteeing “process freedom” implies the possibility for individuals to contribute to the policies themselves, recognising their effective right to a voice (the “capability for voice”) with which to express their own preferences and opinions and to make themselves heard in the processes of policy making (Bonvin, 2006). If these conditions are fulfilled, the pivotal principles of activation can be rewritten.

3. Lifelong learning: conversion or stratification factor?

If seen in the perspective of the capability approach, as maintained by Bonvin and Farvaque (2003), activation policies could continue to promote the “capability for work” (as an expression of employability), or rather the capability for employment, in accordance with the principles of workfare, although they would not be limited to these objectives. They could aim to develop the “capability for valuable work”, that is, the effective possibility to choose a form of working condition having a value for the individual. The capability for valuable work requires the recognition of various forms of activation and of the meaning that these take on within the personal life plan, so much so as to place the latter before work. The capability for valuable work would be joined by a “capability for life”, or rather a “capability for a valuable work/life balance” (Dean, Bonvin, Vielle and Farvaque, 2005) necessarily integrated with the above mentioned capability for voice, the latter becoming of central significance.

The capability for voice enables the exercising of an active citizenship that prevails first and foremost on the plane of participation. This implies that the individual is capable of expressing and asserting his own opinion in the public arena, in all its aspects: the workplace, political contexts, services of which the individual is the beneficiary (Bonvin, Farvaque, 2003).

For this to happen, however, the social and institutional context must guarantee the conditions (regulatory and effective) for all these capabilities to be achieved.

Following Nussbaum (2003), we can distinguish between “internal capabilities”, linked to the characteristics, skills and personal abilities of the individual, and “combined capabilities”, which are a combination between these internal characteristics and the external conditions (that is, the opportunities and means that society offers). It is the external conditions that allow for the development and elucidation of the former. Without these conditions there would not be the possibility of an authentic human achievement. That is to say that the capabilities develop in the interaction between the individual subjective dimension and the social institutional one.

As shown above, in this perspective the aim of public policies is thus not to ensure the achievement of certain functionings, the choice of which must remain the prerogative of the individual or at any rate must be traced back to responsible and participatory procedures of social choice. Instead, the aim of public policies is to guarantee the individual his effective rights and freedoms (that is, not merely formal ones) to attain the objectives of value for his life. This implies that rights – such as civil, political and social rights – translate into capability of action only when they are integrated with the “rights of capability”.

The rights of capability undoubtedly depend on the individual, his intrinsic characteristics, his abilities and gifts, although to a large extent they are also determined by the institutional and social structures of the context in which the individual acts. To support the development of these rights cannot be considered as being merely an individual responsibility since it requires a commitment of the institutional type. Hence, in valorising individual responsibility with respect to wellbeing, the active welfare state cannot disregard either the link that ties responsibility to

substantial freedom, or the role of living conditions in which both elements are defined.

This double plane – individual and social-institutional – re-emerges with the scrutiny of the conditions, the “conversion factors” (Sen, 1999) that enable the individual to transform the resources and assets available into concrete actions (that is, to transform commodities into functionings), to demand the putting into practice of his rights, to express his point of view, to achieve his personal life plan. The conversion factors can be of various types: personal (age, gender, education, ethnic origin, health, character, etc.), social (norms, conventions, discriminations, etc.) or environmental and insituational (infrastructures, public institutions, climatic conditions, etc.) (Robeyns, 2006).

In this framework, if the above assertions regarding activation policies and active citizenship are true, LLL can be counted among the conversion factors. According to this picture, investing in human capital (increasing one’s personal store of knowledge and competencies) is not only conducive to a higher work productivity and hence a greater financial retribution (as confirmed by the classic Human Capital Theory), but also increases the possibilities for individuals to understand the reality that surrounds them, to develop a critical way of thinking, to face risks and needs, and to take on the responsibility of an active role in the pursuit of personal and collective wellbeing².

In this perspective we can read what the European Union states on the subject of key competencies for lifelong learning in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the European Council (2006/962/CE) and, more recently, in the Communication of the European Commission [COM(2009)640]. These are multifunctional and transferable competencies which should be developed in the course of formal education, in particular in compulsory education and training (and in fact they are referred to in terms of learning outcomes), and which should constitute the foundation on which to build other learnings, formal and non-formal (hence other competencies) in the course of life. They are defined as combinations of knowledge, skills and aptitudes appropriate in a particular situation and which include both general knowledge and abilities (such as mathematics

² This requires the recognition – as affirmed by Sen (1997) – of the close link between human capital and capabilities and prompts us to adopt a more extended and more complex vision of human capital going beyond its merely economic interpretation.

and languages) and psychosocial aptitudes, starting from the critical and reflexive capabilities. Among these, learning to learn is the true pivotal point of lifelong learning and at the same time of citizenship, in that possessing the cognition and knowledge to work out and interpret the reality around us and to act efficaciously in these surroundings is a prerequisite for personal self-fulfilment, social inclusion, employment and participation.

However, it is not enough merely to acknowledge the central role of LLL and of human capital for active citizenship.

If it is true that the level of competencies and knowledge attained affects the employability and agency of an individual, then the access or not to continuous learning and training opportunities (and their quality) determines new lines of social stratification and defines new categories of “included” and “excluded”. The question is significant if at least two aspects are considered. First: the spur towards individualisation that is at the basis of activation policies, while emphasising and valorising the responsibility of the individual, tends increasingly to amplify individual differences that show up even in the capability or not to take advantage of educational initiatives and consider them as opportunities. Second: fruition of LLL initiatives is more frequent among those who already possess high educational credentials and those who have more stable and qualified employment. The evaluations of the European Union on the fruition of LLL in adults bear witness to this.

According to the *Adult Education Survey* carried out by Eurostat (the latest data available refer to 2007), the participation of individuals (between 24 and 65 years) in formal and non-formal education and training³ is strongly conditioned in Europe by age, gender, educational qualifications already obtained and occupational position. In this regard, there exist marked disparities among European countries, although on average participation is higher among the young (dropping significantly after 34 years of age), graduates, those in stable employment and those who have a qualified job (Eurostat, 2009).

These correlations are particularly accentuated in the case of Italy, where one of the lowest values of participation in Europe is recorded (22.2% vs 35.7% EU avg.). The gap between Italy and the European

³ In the 12 months preceding the interview.

average is high above all among less qualified individuals (Isced level 0-2: 8.2% vs 18.0%), being lower among the more qualified (Isced level 4-5: 30.2% vs 36.3%; Isced level 5-6: 51.4% vs 58.8%). Italy registers a serious imbalance in participation in LLL initiatives also among the employed, the unemployed and the inactive, penalising those outside the labour market (Isfol, 2009). If we add to this that in Italy the choice of a secondary and tertiary course of study, successful training and the achievement of higher levels of education are all phenomena still correlated to the cultural (as well as economic) capital of the family of origin, we can begin to understand the seriousness of the situation in this country (Ballarino, Checchi, 2006). In the first place, the LLL system still appears to be far from having reached the effective democratisation of opportunity (Benadusi, 2006). This occurs clearly not only in formal education, but also in the field of continuous training, which has a hard time attracting the weakest elements of the workforce, i.e., those with lower qualifications, who take scarce advantage of opportunities for training (MLPS, 2009). In the second place, the gaps produced and the failures undergone at the initial stages of education and training courses tend to accumulate over time, triggering vicious circles from which it is difficult to escape and for which it cannot be taken for granted that adult education and training are a solution (Gazier, 2010). The efficacy of continuous and permanent training also has its roots in the cognitive and learning skills acquired prior to entering the world of work, and in training courses, both institutional and non. Skill begets skill and learning begets learning, as has recently been affirmed by the Nobel prizewinner for economics, James J. Heckman (2009).

4. The capability for learning lifelong

Without adequate investments, LLL runs the risk of increasing inequalities instead of wiping them out and thus risks failing exactly where it aims to act: in constituting a permanent opportunity for the recovery of competencies (and hence of employability and active participation) on the part of those who are weakest and most disadvantaged. This gives rise to an unforeseen and paradoxical effect (“perverse”, as Boudon would call it) that could lead to a growing distance between insiders and outsiders. In fact, account must be taken of the accumulative effect (accumulated

advantage, according to the original definition by Merton) that characterises knowledge and learning. This phenomenon, also known in the literature as the “Matthew effect”, shows that training and continuous learning “fall upwards”, involving during the lifespan above all those individuals already possessing a high initial level of human and cultural capital, and failing to reach as far as they would like (and indeed should) those individuals with little inclination for learning. To combat this trend, action is needed on various fronts.

The solution to making LLL efficacious is to ensure equal learning opportunities over the whole life span. The issues of access and quality should thus be of prime importance. Side by side with these issues, priority should also be given to the safeguarding of the subjective right to LLL: a right that should be assigned to each individual independently of his social and professional role and supported by means of adequate measures (for instance, training leave). In this, Italy still has a long way to go.

Law 53 of 2000 laid down the basis for an initial recognition of the right to continuous training, although the question of permanent learning independent of employment purposes remained unanswered. Although this law was a first step, the objective remains out of reach, partly because the exercising of this right is linked to the employment of the beneficiary. In fact, the law allows for training leave for public and private employees with a service record of at least five years.

Apart from the selectivity of this measure, one of its strong points is the introduction of training vouchers as a means of funding individual training needs. In line with the philosophy of activation devices, the purpose of the vouchers is to encourage the individual’s responsibility in defining his personal needs for new knowledge and competencies and in identifying the best strategies for answering these needs. However, the expression of an individual’s training needs depends on various factors, an important influence being exerted – as has already been said – by his employment position and the education credentials he possesses. This carries the risk of unwittingly leaving a sizeable part of his needs latent and unexpressed.

In recent years, Parliament has examined various bills regarding LLL, none of which has been approved: a sign of the extent to which its importance to active citizenship is still underestimated in Italy, since it does not take on any political affiliation. This underestimation does not enable the formulation of a reform programme involving education systems

together with work, welfare and development policies capable of finding a convergence of interests that can cut through the taking of sides (Farinelli, 2004). It must, however, be recognised that some significant breakthroughs have been achieved that have strengthened the role of collective bargaining in promoting continuous training.

However, as can well be appreciated, the effective availability of training and learning opportunities, the equality of access to these, their quality, and the formal recognition of the subjective right to LLL are necessary but not sufficient conditions for guaranteeing the concrete possibility to exercise this right. In fact, as Nussbaum (2003) asserts, together with Sen, it is not enough to affirm a right so that it can be put into practice: the conditions must be ensured under which the right becomes a “capability to function”, all the more so if the possibility to claim the right depends on the activation (and the choices) of the individual.

For LLL to be a real factor of empowerment and to be free of the risk of becoming a factor of social stratification, another capability needs to be developed. This is the “capability for learning lifelong”: the capability to acknowledge learning as a real chance and the capability to choose an opportunity of education and training that one can value (the capability for valuable learning), that is, the capability of transforming the training resources available into resources for action (the possibility of choosing one’s training path) and into effective functionings (making choices in accordance with one’s study and work) (Lodigiani, 2008).

The possibility that LLL can be a pillar on which the activation policies, considered in the wider sense described above, are erected does not depend only on the availability of training opportunities, but also on the value attributed to them and on the effective conditions in which the choice between them is made. The capability for learning lifelong aims therefore to make substantial the equality of opportunity of education and training during the course of active life, in a framework of social justice allowing LLL to contribute to the reintegration with time of individual resources to combat the trend of social and occupational vulnerability and of inequalities.

5. Conclusion: recalibrating LLL

For the above affirmations not to remain pure theory, or worse still, mere rhetoric, LLL must undergo a “recalibration process” similar to that indicated for some time now as a strategy for the modernisation of the welfare state (Ferrera, Hemerijck, Rhodes, 2000). Like the welfare state, the LLL system should also be recalibrated acting in four dimensions: 1) functional, 2) distributive, 3) normative, 4) institutional. We shall attempt to discuss this proposal in the light of the Italian case.

1. To recalibrate LLL from the *functional* viewpoint means redesigning the educational system as a whole and its policies. It is not simply a case of effecting a general boost in education levels, but of building a system of education, training and learning that is heterogeneous and differentiated - in a word, “plural” - in which there co-exist various clearly recognisable paths, diversified as to approach and purpose but equal in quality and social legitimation, and equally geared towards developing the learning to learn capability. The aim is to combat hereditariness and the cumulative effect of disadvantages in human capital. The heterogeneity of training and learning courses becomes a value to be defended, to be placed in a framework of equality of dignity and social recognition since it enables the exercising of substantial freedom of choice regarding the option deemed as being of value: in other words it is a precondition for ensuring what we call the “capability for valuable learning”. This is an important indication if we consider the difficulty in Italy to guarantee such a pluralism, a difficulty that erodes both “opportunity freedom” and “process freedom”, to use the terms quoted above. For instance, initial professional training continues to be thought of merely as a remedial recourse, important for the social function it takes on by dint of responding to the needs of the weakest strata of the student population but for this reason considered as being less prestigious (and less appealing) for young people and their families. Although the importance of hands-on learning is becoming increasingly obvious and despite the efforts at integration between the various segments of the educational system, there is a failure to put into operation proposals

for relaunching this fundamental sector that has been penalised in these years of short-sighted choices. Equally significant is the near-absence of pluralism in the tertiary education system, in which the universities play a leading role. Then there is the question of the relationship between state and private schools, which remains mired in ideological issues.

This recalibration also requires the development of systems of recognition and certification of knowledge and competencies acquired lifelong so as to enhance each opportunity of learning (as is happening with the European Qualification Framework already mentioned).

2. Recalibrating LLL from the *distributive* point of view means recognising the right to training independent of occupational position or economic, family or social capital possessed. There are many implications leading from this that inform the making of policies: the support of individuals over time so that there exist equal opportunities of satisfactorily carrying out a course undertaken; the setting up of policies aimed at those individuals that are most disadvantaged right from their very first years of life; the development of universalistic training opportunities, also at pre-school levels. This means investing, for example, in education and training starting from primary and even pre-primary education, since it is the latter that provides opportunities for breaking down the vicious circles that lead to an increase over time in early educational and training disadvantages. Since learning begins at birth, investing more in policies of early childhood care and education produces positive effects on LLL (UNESCO, 2006; Heckman, 2009) helping everyone to acknowledge learning as a real chance throughout the lifespan. Recalibrating LLL from this viewpoint requires us to consider a redistribution of the economic resources among the various segments of the training system. The aim is to free up resources earmarked for adults and to invest them in children, with effects that in the long run will be positive for tomorrow's adults. The issue is a relevant one, as witness the emerging tendency among immigrant families to forego nursery school – which is viewed as being too costly – and to opt for early enrolment for their children in primary school. Without the benefit of the opportunity for emotive and cognitive maturation, education and socialisation provided by the

nursery school, these children meet with greater difficulties in school and risk joining the ranks of the early school leavers.

3. A recalibration of LLL from the *normative* standpoint involves assuming LLL as being a priority policy for the building of a welfare state investing first and foremost in the human capital of citizens so as to be promotional, qualifying and activating in their regard: a *learnfare*, as several authors call it, in which everyone is enabled to claim his or her right/duty to learn (Gazier, 2006; Ruffino, 2006; Ferrera, 2008; Lodigiani, 2008). In a system of this type, education, training and learning are seen as a right of citizenship. In support of this plan, the fruition of certain welfare services can be linked to participation in the educational system: *learn for your welfare*. This is what happens in Italy with the above mentioned exceptional measures of social security cushions, which make training obligatory as a requirement for taking advantage of grants. The same happens in other ways in America and in Britain, where the issuing of family allowances is linked to the school attendance or professional training of under-age children (Ferrera, 2008)⁴.
4. Finally, a recalibration of welfare from the *institutional* point of view requires the valorisation of the various actors that contribute to the definition of a widened educational system and its governance, in addition to the educational institutions, and specifically businesses and civil and local society as a whole, to strengthen the capability for voice of each actor according to the participatory perspective introduced above. Some steps are being taken in this direction. To quote but a few of these: on the strength of school autonomy, schools are being spurred to encourage active participation on the part of parents (also in associated forms) and of the local community in which they live; in apprenticeship courses, businesses are completely valorised as places of learning; in the field of continuous professional training, the introduction of interprofessional funding prompts the social partners to lay emphasis on the right to training and the calculation of professional needs.

⁴ Consider also MISA, *Minimum Income Schemes for School Attendance*, which was recommended by ILO for experimentation in all developing countries (*ibidem*).

If this recalibration process is carried out with references to the four dimension suggested it will enhance the effectiveness of LLL and its capacity both to reinforce the capability for learning lifelong and to support social inclusion, personal wellbeing and active citizenship. Obviously, lifelong learning and the development of human capital cannot be thought of as being the sole keystone of an active system of social protection. However, if the above conditions prevail, the active welfare state can constitute a “welfare of capabilities” that seeks to enable the individual to claim his rights (starting from that of learning lifelong), to pursue self-fulfilment, to contribute to the collective wellbeing. In this perspective LLL can be geared towards supporting the employability and empowerment of the individual and his capabilities to lead a life he has reason to value in a fair, equitable, participatory and inclusive society.

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