

EMPLOYABILITY AND TRANSITIONS TOWARDS WORK: MSC DEGREE PROGRAMME IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF THE SACRED HEART OF BRESCIA

*Alessandra Vischi (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart)**

ABSTRACT: The acceleration of changes underlines the need to enhance our efforts to adapt education to the dynamics of the current economic situation and the issue of employment. In the framework of the *circular economy*, pedagogy, which is based on the educability of individuals, takes into consideration forms of educational planning to identify a long-lasting balance between economic prosperity, social wellness, and environmental development. The challenge of the future is the possibility of increasing youth employment; this calls for pedagogical expertise and organizational planning to ensure that everyone's development is authentic and holistic. To this end, the MSc Degree programme in Educational Planning and Human Resource Development offered by the Catholic University trains graduates to become professional figures with expertise in coordinating and managing the development of human resources (guidance, selection, personal services); the professional training and retraining of *project managers* in social and educational contexts for both academic and corporate spheres. The guiding vision behind the MSc in Educational Planning and Human Resource Development is fully in line with the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart's educational project, to support a culture of responsibility and creativity, entrepreneurship and collaboration, multi-disciplinary knowledge and skills, and scientific research for the purpose of holistic human development. Educational planning, in a period of socio-economic and social change, involving the whole planet in many respects, can relaunch an 'integral model of development', based on long-term well-being, technological innovation, 'human development', and the dignity of work.

KEYWORDS: employability, educational planning, work.

1. The circular economy, work, educational planning

In response to the current socio-economic situation in Italy, marked by a high rate of unemployment (ISTAT 2016), the education sector must reflect on the employability models and interventions adopted by universities.

The acceleration of changes highlights the need to enhance our efforts to adapt education to the dynamics of the current economic situation and the issue of employment. The debate on education, which is based on the educability of individuals, takes into consideration forms of educational planning that can characterize a long-

* Alessandra Vischi, PhD, Researcher in general and social education and Training Coordinator at the School of Advanced Studies in Environmental Studies (ASA) – Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Brescia, Italy. Email: alessandra.vischi@unicatt.it.

lasting balance between economic prosperity, principles, and human achievement. The value of education is undeniable, since «development is now complicated to an unprecedented degree, and requires multiple approaches and interpretations, which must come together in a humanist and pedagogical cultural synthesis, essential for authentic implementation» (Maritain 1947: 30).

An ethical and educational interpretation of the transitions to work and employability, seek the identification of a positive relationship between socio-cultural processes and individual development. According to the available data, which, accompanied by an ongoing increase in registration figures, reveal high placement rates, the educational ‘construct’ of the MSc Degree programme in Educational Planning and Human Resource Development is a relevant case in point for this issue.

We must make people capable of expressing their own talents and making the most of their knowledge to create innovation; we must ensure that policies are designed to pursue sustainability, both locally and globally, and are connected to and based on principles of collaboration and responsibility, so that the financial resources invested generate human value and not short-term profit.

The challenge facing Italy and the international community is to reduce unemployment and facilitate economic growth, while encouraging wellbeing and care for the environment. The importance of education arises from this perspective, especially the education of young people, as a means of teaching them how to enjoy responsible freedom in pursuit of justice and the common good. *The Europe 2020 Strategy* (<<http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020>>) aims to create the conditions for a more competitive economy along with *smart* growth, by investing in teaching, research and innovation; *sustainable* growth, by protecting the environment and encouraging responsible choices; and *supportive* growth, to increase employment and reduce poverty. Educational expertise must be applied to the question of the heuristic scope of transformations underway, the *governance* of which require economic, cultural, and ethical changes, in which universities, professions, and businesses must play their part.

The professional sphere contributes to achieving long-term integrated development objectives, reinforcing social dialogue and public/private partnerships, while encouraging the sharing of responsibility with regard to sustainable production and consumption methods. Organizations as educational contexts, work as a means of ‘taking care’ of one another, and the talent and experience of individuals, can all serve as the matrix upon which to establish new forms of *governance* and professional responsibility, which recognise the ontological value of human beings. To encourage individual development as much as

possible, we must be aware that a «gradual investment in humanity as a strategic resource goes beyond simply cognitivization of work»; it means appealing to the human resource within a culture of work, through which people «operate, learn and collaborate in redefining the entrepreneurial systems of the global market, with an ever-closer connection to the deepest meanings of the ego» (Bocca 1998: 101). This postulates an ethical convergence towards the 'good' of the organization, which requires long-sighted, strategic planning that is informed and imaginative and involves economic consensus, with the enhancement of personal competences and training-related elements as an opportunity to spread and share workplace culture.

Within the framework of the *circular economy*, an economic model targeted at «using resources in the most efficient way to guarantee the continuation of such efficiency, so as to bring important economic benefits», Europe issued the communication: «Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe» in order to raise awareness among citizens and promote interventions for the gradual elimination of waste, in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy. Please see: <[http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52014DC0398R\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52014DC0398R(01))>.

In this context, of note are the so-called *green jobs*, which either involve new professional profiles, purely technical in nature, or a re-training in existing competences within existing professional fields, as long as these relate to sustainability in the broad sense. According to the *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low Carbon World 2008* report promoted by the United Nations Environment Programme, *green jobs* can be defined as jobs in various fields, from agriculture to transport, energy efficiency and construction, that address environmental impact, avoid all forms of waste and protect biodiversity and ecosystems (<<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/jobs/>>). In Europe by 2012, 3.4 million people were employed in green jobs and the figure is continually increasing; in Italy in 2015, there were 2,964,000 with competences relating to the *green* sector, corresponding to 13.2% of the employed population in the country as a whole. Please see: <[http://www.symbola.net/assets/files/GreenItaly%20.Presentazione%20\(con%20testi\).DEFINITIVA_1476974725.pdf](http://www.symbola.net/assets/files/GreenItaly%20.Presentazione%20(con%20testi).DEFINITIVA_1476974725.pdf)>.

Despite the positive impact of *green jobs* within the professional landscape, we are obliged to focus our attention on the critical question of youth employment: in Italy, in July 2016, the level of unemployment fell overall by 11.4%, a decrease of 0.1 percentage points since June, however, the number of employed people also fell at the same time. While in June there was an increase (+1.3%), in July, the monthly estimation of unemployment levels fell by 1.3% (-39 thousand). This fall concerned both men (-1.4%) and women (-0.2%),

and all age groups except the 15–24 (+23 thousand) and 25–34 (+38 thousand) (See <<http://www.istat.it/it/>>). The reduction seems to be related to an increase in inactive people, i.e. people not engaged in seeking work, categorized as NEET (Rosina 2015), i.e. young people between the ages of 15 and 29 who are not working and are no longer enrolled on a study course (Not in Education, Employment or Training). There are more NEETs in Italy than in any other European country. The OECD, which analyses social wellbeing and its trends in the 34 industrialized countries each year, found the percentage of NEETs in Italy prior to 2007 to be around 20%, or 4 points above the average, as published in their *Society at a Glance 2016 – A Spotlight on Youth* report on Italy (see <<https://www.oecd.org/italy/sag2016-italy.pdf>>). Between 2007 and 2014, this rate increased to 27%. Since 2015, the rate has fallen slightly, to roughly 2.5 million NEETs, however it remains above pre-crisis levels and almost double the OECD average (15%). Italy has the highest proportion of young people with low literacy skills (20%) and the second highest rate of young people with low numeracy skills (26%); another factor behind the increase in NEETs is a lack of jobs: 11.4% of NEETs in Italy are unemployed. The number of young people who have left the education system and are without work constitutes a ‘significant economic cost’ – emphasises the OECD – of between 360 and 605 billion dollars, or 0.9%–1.5% of the global wealth.

The challenge of the future is to address the NEET phenomenon and the possibility of increasing youth employment; this calls for pedagogical expertise and organizational planning to ensure that everyone’s development is authentic and holistic, *smart* and specialized, *green* and supportive. Educating the younger generations today involves recognizing the importance of creating educational models and processes to develop not only the competences currently required, but also critical awareness within a culture of sustainability and responsibility.

With a view to increasing employment, also in Italy, in 2014 the European Union Council launched the Youth Guarantee plan, through which the state and regions undertook to make young people under 25, who neither study nor work (NEETs), a high-quality offer of work, further study, apprenticeship, internship, or another form of training within four months of the beginning of their unemployment or of their leaving formal education. There are two targets within the NEET group: young people registering as unemployed or first-time jobseekers, who are not following a course of education or training, totalling 537,685 for young people between 15 and 24, and 906,694 for young people between 15 and 29; and young unemployed people who leave a course of education or train-

ing early and do not register as unemployed or first-time jobseekers, but are seeking work (even if not actively) or are unavailable for work, amounting to 390,282 for young people aged 15-24, and 659,247 for young people aged 15-29: For details on Italy (*Garanzia Giovani*), see: <<http://www.garanziagiovani.gov.it/Documentazione/Documents/Piano-di-attuazione-italiano-della-Garanzia-per-i-Giovani.pdf>>.

The plan is also an important opportunity for companies, who, benefiting from the subsidies allocated to the various Italian regions, can invest in motivated young people, offering on-the-job training and self-entrepreneurship opportunities to achieve the programme's objectives. The Ministry is also involving companies through agreements with the main trade associations to promote internships and apprenticeship contracts, as well as publishing job and workplace-training opportunities on Italy's Youth Guarantee national portal (*Garanzia Giovani*).

Recent Italian legislation on the right to work emphasizes the importance of supporting young people, either school- or university-educated, throughout their first professional experience; work-based training and encouraging the 'talents' of individuals, including those who struggled in the traditional education system, are now key objectives.

Schools and universities, together with institutions and companies, have a responsibility to promote the acquisition of competences, with a view to engaging young people in the world of work; this must become an educational context in which individuals can express their own creativity and productivity in the form of ideas, actions, and products. «Work-related learning can bring about effective improvements in professional contexts, with a particular focus on youth cultures» to combine professionalism and responsibility, «embedding education and training in the job itself» (Alessandrini 2010: 266).

Investing in the education of individuals and developing a specific culture of initiative in an integrated way is currently the most eagerly awaited mid- and long-term project to take advantage of the negative experiences behind the current economic crisis and navigate towards promising entrepreneurship and an ethically sound horizon: «Old models are disappearing, but promising new ones are taking shape on the horizon» (Benedict XVI 2009: no. 40); we must «place training at the heart of innovation» (Margiotta 2016), along with knowledge, professions and productive processes. Managerial creativity, inter-generational responsibility, and values shared by both companies and stakeholders are all key elements for encouraging socio-cultural progress, the benefits of which are supportive and long-lasting for the younger generations of today and tomorrow.

2. Educational planning, human resource development and employability

In recent years, the world of work and the education professions (Federighi 2010) have undergone significant transformations; working environments, characterized by rapid technological innovation and high levels of uncertainty and precariousness, are calling for a brand-new approach to educational planning to promote the development of organizations along with new competences.

The Catholic University of the Sacred Heart has increasingly focused on the challenges of the job market in a cosmopolitan context, by means of academic courses and scientific research, networks throughout the region, and an international outlook.

To this end, the MSc Degree programme on Educational Planning and Human Resource Development offered by the Catholic University: (<<http://brescia.unicatt.it>>) trains graduates to become professional figures with expertise in coordinating and managing the development of human resources (guidance, selection, personal services); the professional training and retraining of project managers in social and educational contexts for both the academic and corporate spheres. This programme, classed as LM 50 under the Italian degree classification system, is multidisciplinary in nature, combining theory and practice, planning activities, and the development of competences.

In agreement with local organizations, this programme provides graduates with expertise in: the educational coordination of services targeting children, adolescents, young adults, adults and the elderly; human resource development and management in for-profit and non-profit organizations; educational planning in the region (project management) to promote and manage a network of interventions involving various stakeholders (schools, business, entities and associations); combining relational skills with knowledge of innovative techniques in educational and vocational guidance interventions, empowerment and professional retraining; valorizing gender-based differences and participatory leadership in welfare projects in the field, from needs analysis to the assessment of changes in an ever-changing context, be they socioeconomic (*Circular Economy*, *Smart City*) or legislative (extended work-related learning,) in nature. The programme lasts two years. To pass the programme, students must gain at least 120 university credits. For each module students achieve a certain number of credits and a mark out of thirty, which is determined by means of an exam. The integrated teaching programme includes curriculum-based apprenticeships and workshops: on the two-year course, the curriculum-based apprenticeship consists of 200 hours in total, of which 140 are carried out in an organization outside the university, and 60 inside the uni-

versity, including group sessions and individual meetings. These activities have been taking place in the Faculty of Education since the academic year 1992-1993 on the Degree programme in Education, at the time the *Facoltà di Magistero* or Teaching Faculty, and has always been considered an integral part of the university curriculum and «in order to meet requirements, must maintain a sound and ongoing connection with the theory and discipline of the Degree programme to which it belongs» (Pati 2012: 7). Activities related to apprenticeships require the university to «update the system governing its own educational offering, learning to skilfully combine theory and practice», and meanwhile local organizations define the practical knowledge, offering students an experience of «the culture of educational work/training» undertaken (Pati 2012: 11-12). Workshop activities, which consist of one workshop in the first year and one in the second year, are led by experts from the working world, enabling students to learn about specific issues in a practical way.

Graduates of this programme, benefitting from knowledge across several disciplines, find employment in the following fields: social and educational, human resources development, professional guidance and training; consulting and supervision services for local organizations, companies and training providers; and educational planning, both on a local and international scale. They enter and grow professionally within organizations (for-profit, non-profit and public) as experts in educational planning; educational coordinators; training managers; educational consultants for public and private organizations; directors and project managers of educational and cultural interventions (conception, planning, implementation and evaluation); human resource managers in corporate settings; inter-institutional coordinators working between social areas covered by public and private organizations; experts in assessing educational and socio-educational interventions; tutors in professional training and on staff-training courses; and directors in the area of public-sector staff management.

The placement rate for graduates is high: within a year of graduating 84.3% of graduates have found work, rising to 91% within three years; 80% of the graduates state they are satisfied with the Degree programme and would re-enrol, while 100% confirm that the workload is manageable.

Beyond ministerial obligations, this programme maintains a constant relationship with its social partners, through events held at least three times a year dedicated to the target professional role/s and professional competences, in order to remain up to date and meet the demands of the job market: the inaugural event *Sogni e Bisogni* ('Dreams and Needs') in October, the Career Day in spring and Graduation Day in July.

The first event – *Sogni e bisogni* (Dreams and Needs) is a seminar on sharing routes and experiences, takes place in the month of October during the first week of lectures, and sees the participation of local organizations from the for-profit and non-profit sectors, as well as institutions. The university, represented by the professors and students from the Degree Course, meets and engages in dialogue with stakeholders who, for their part, collaborate with the training course in question.

Following a well-established and respected tradition, an orientation and networking event is also held: the Career Day. This event is intended to facilitate the transition to work from higher education and as a contribution to offer new professional contexts by creating networks between the local culture, the city, the region, and the students of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. The Career Day is addressed to those who have already enrolled, those who are about to enrol, and those who wish to do so, in order to build their own career paths by playing a central role in a dynamic and innovative professional field.

The course delivers knowledge and skills across several disciplines, and actively engages first-year students at all stages, combining relational competences and techniques for interventions in services across all ages, from children and adolescents, to adults and the elderly; and within for-profit and non-profit contexts, which are collaborating increasingly often these days. All within the field of educational planning and human resource development. Graduation Day takes place in July outside the university: this is a day of festivities and celebrations, but at the same time an important opportunity for reflection on the themes of education, pedagogical planning, and economic and social development.

The representatives of the social partners, who contribute to the study course in numerous ways, show appreciation for the professionalism demonstrated by the educational planners, whose energy has enabled them to enter multiple professional areas, from for-profit to non-profit or public administration. These representatives, from the main entrepreneurial and non-profit organizations in the region, emphasize how important it is to further enhance the collaboration between the educational and production spheres, in order to continually improve opportunities for networking and planning training activities and workshops for the benefit of the community. Companies require a professional figure capable of noticing and bringing to light the developmental needs of the organization and the demands of the region with the intention of drafting targeted interventions for change.

The guiding vision behind the MSc in Educational Planning and Human Resource Development is fully in line with the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart's educational project, to support a culture

of responsibility and creativity, entrepreneurship and collaboration, multi-disciplinary knowledge and skills, and scientific research for the purpose of holistic human development (Giuliodori, Malavasi 2016).

The results achieved demonstrate the efficiency of its governance choices: models and interventions that the course pursues to improve the employability of its students in numerous ways (Boffo, Federighi, Torlone 2015). It is equally important to further reinforce the dialogue between universities and the world of work, in order to identify new patterns of research and partnerships, thereby ensuring that the course framework (teaching modules, apprenticeships, workshops and public events) is constantly improving in terms of how integrated and strategic it is, against a dynamic and uncertain socio-economic backdrop.

«Planning is a key issue for all professions involved in education and training, obliging us to remember the past and commit to the future, taking into consideration the roots of the problems, the demands, the desires, and the changes of the interlocutors involved, referring back to imagination and ideals that are the drivers of pedagogical action» (Birbes 2012: 132). Educational planning, in a period of socio-economic and social change, involving the whole planet in many respects, can relaunch an integral model of development (Pope Francis 2015), based on long-term wellbeing, technological innovation, human development (Gennari 2001), and the dignity of work.

References

- Alessandrini G. 2010, *Elementi dello scenario e ruolo dell'approccio di pedagogia del lavoro*, «Pedagogia Oggi», 2, 264-266.
- Bertagna G. 2011, *Lavoro e formazione dei giovani*, La Scuola, Brescia.
- Bocca G. 1998, *Pedagogia del lavoro. Itinerari*, La Scuola, Brescia.
- Birbes C. 2012, *Progettare competente. Teorie, questioni educative, prospettive*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano.
- Boffo V., Federighi P. and Torlone F. 2015, *Educational Jobs: Youth and Employability in the Social Economy. Investigations in Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain, UK*, Firenze University Press, Firenze.
- Fabbri L. and Rossi B. (eds.) 2010, *Pratiche lavorative. Studi pedagogici per la formazione*, Guerini Studio, Milano.
- Federighi P. 2010, *Professioni educative e lavoro*, «Pedagogia Oggi», 1, 70-86.
- Gennari M. 2001, *Filosofia della formazione dell'uomo*, Bompiani, Milano.
- Giuliodori C. and Malavasi P. (eds.) 2016, *Ecologia integrale. Laudato sì. Ricerca, formazione, conversione*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano.
- Malavasi P. 2007, *Pedagogia e formazione delle risorse umane*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano.

- Margiotta U. 2016, *Formazione e innovazione: un binomio generativo*, in Costa M., *Capacitare l'innovazione La formatività dell'agire lavorativo*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 217-228.
- Maritain J. 1947, *La personne et le bien commun*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris.
- Pati L. (ed.) 2012, *Tutorship e attività di tirocinio: tra pensieri, vissuti, azioni*, EDUCatt, Milano.
- Pope Francis 2015, Lettera enciclica *Laudato si'*. *Sulla cura della casa comune*.
- Rosina A. 2015, *NEET. Giovani che non studiano e non lavorano*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 2008, *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World*.
- Vischi A. 2016, *Entre Pedagogía Y Trabajo. Circular Economy, Jóvenes Y Desarrollo De Los Recursos Humanos*, Pensa Multimedia, Lecce.