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“LAVORO LIQUIDO”

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IN QUESTO NUMERO

“Lavoro liquido”. Nuove professionalità nella società dei “lavori”

Il presente numero di MeTis, è dedicato al tema delle trasformazioni che la globalizzazione e la planetarizzazione dei processi produttivi,

economico-finanziari, politici e sociali degli ultimi decenni hanno determinato nel mercato del lavoro, con la conseguente, continua riprogettazione dei “lavori” e la permanente ridefinizione delle professionalità e delle relative expertise.



La notizia della scomparsa di Zygmunt Bauman ci ha colto di sorpresa proprio mentre stavamo pensando a questo numero e rileggendo alcuni suoi testi, annotando le suggestioni con le quali ha saputo rappresentare magistralmente la società contemporanea, indagandone gli aspetti più controversi e “oscuri” ma, allo stesso tempo, offrendo considerazioni e riflessioni per un impegno (politico, sociale, professionale, etico) a cui tutti dovremmo sentirci chiamati in prima persona.

Il crollo delle ideologie, le dinamiche consumistiche, la sorveglianza e il controllo hanno determinato, ha sostenuto Bauman, un disorientamento e una condizione di permanente incertezza (di “liquidità”) che ha interessato tutti gli ambiti di vita e di esperienza del soggetto tra i quali, a nostro avviso, sicuramente il mondo del lavoro.

L'intento del numero è, dunque, tracciare analisi e proposte pedagogiche che, senza trascurarne le criticità, sappiano disegnare la “faccia buona” del lavoro: un lavoro innanzitutto dignitoso, ma soprattutto capacitante e autorealizzativo, quel lavoro che l'Ilo (Organizzazione mondiale del lavoro) definisce *decent*, ovvero buono e sano, che non inibisca ma anzi esalti la creatività dei singoli e delle organizzazioni. I saggi e i materiali proposti attraversano la relazione tra *sapere pedagogico* e formazione-lavoro, nella prospettiva dell'apprendimento permanente, diffuso e profondo (*lifelong, lifewide, lifedeep*). Ciò a partire dalla consapevolezza che l'idea di educazione al lavoro si sta trasformando potentemente, anche condizionata da una spinta europeista (OECD per es.) che invita a promuovere occupabilità e *self-placement* dei giovani in una società in cui il lavoro, più che trovarlo, bisogna imparare a cercarlo, inventarlo, riprogettarlo, governarlo in forma critica, costruttiva e creativa.

Alla formazione (e a chi si occupa di essa, sia sul piano della ricerca che della prassi educativa) spetta una sfida difficile: quella di educare al lavoro, attraverso il lavoro e sul lavoro, rivendicando la sua dimensione esistenziale ed educativa, dunque *umana*, in una prospettiva allargata all'intero pianeta.

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The University and the Permanent Learning as resources for employability in a *Liquid Modernity*

di Manuela Gallerani, Paolo Di Rienzo, Maria Ermelinda De Carlo [1]

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Abstract

In an increasingly precarious economic and social framework, in a *Time of Uncertainty* (Bauman, 2007), lifelong learning is one of the most effective strategies to escape a crisis that affects not only the University, but businesses, and especially the lives of men and women.

In the past, work was of crucial importance in defining the identity of an individual. It was characterized by a place and, often, an indefinite period of time. Today, work has become a path of entries and exits where men and women are faced with mobility, impermanence and flexibility, signifying the start of dangerous processes of social exclusion and individual distress.

The Universities of Bologna (by *Cestriell*), RomaTre and Salento with the cooperation of Bi-oSelfLab-s.r.l. are involved in planning the service structures, beginning from an initial definition of Lifelong Learning Centres, in order to foster concrete actions for more sustainable employability, with specific focus also on the employability of women who do not yet have complete gender equality in our country. The action-research benefits from the experience of the American Teaching Centres and European experience of recognition of prior learning, and includes a synergistic cooperation with companies in order to help develop the right conditions for dialogue and increase the chances of success. The research reconstructs the professional experience, with the support of technology, of *narrative approaches*, and of social transitions, in order to support the recognition and *narrative skills* of unemployed women.

In the *permanent learning workshops*, the implementation of the ‘personal portfolio’ worker focuses strategically on both the individual and the collective: in this way the University can expand access and can concretely contribute to a new social function of education.

The paper has been designed jointly by the three authors: part 1 is attributed to Paolo Di Rienzo, part 2 and 2.1 are attributed to Manuela Gallerani and part 3 is attributed to Maria Ermelinda. The introduction, conclusions and references are compiled in common.

Keywords: lifelong learning, university policies, female employment, *equality of opportunity*, gender performativity

Introduction

The present article is first of all a contribution to the broad field of adult education in the lifelong learning perspective, that, starting from literature and theories in this field, develops a reflection based on action research, related in particular to the use of qualitative methodologies in the learning process of unemployed women enrolled in university.

The first part of the paper foregrounds the innovative mission for universities: a new mission related to the necessity to provide adequate feedback to new potential beneficiaries, such as the unemployed women, and to ensuring continuing opportunities for learners throughout their lives. To face the phenomenon of an increasing participation of women at the university, a strategy is necessary to guarantee real, not only formal, rights to access and fair opportunities for adults, as well as the recognition of prior experiential learning.

In Italy, in order to effectively address the connection between gender equality and the “human development index”, it is necessary to reflect deeply on the cultural model of the relationship between men and women (the “human development index” measures the development of a nation not only

regarding the national income, but also considering the life expectancy of its citizens, disparity, social inequality and the extreme poverty rate).

In fact, the Italian learning system, starting from early childhood through to university (except in isolated cases), is not yet based on a gender education able to reveal the false *neutrality* as much of language (with its *dissymetries* and lexical and semantics *ambivalences* concerning male and female gender), as of the cognitive processes (Gallerani, 2015); given that language can create and produce our thoughts and reality (and not only *reflect* the reality).

The third part introduces an innovative action research, designed for women. The proposal considers the start up of autobiographical workshops for recognition of women's skills. The portfolio worker becomes a process and a path for a smart employability. Women create their digital curricula story, write their experiential learning, reflect on their actions, and exchange thoughts and ideas in order to explore their generic and specific skills and improve key competencies. The project considers lifelong learning and adult education methodologies as strategies for social sustainability and at the same time as standards to organize every aspects of didactic work, valuation and governance.

1. An educational approach to lifelong learning: inclusion and participation

The University and lifelong learning are the ingredients of an issue which in the past decade has been seen by the scientific community as a decisive aspect concerning the role of education and training in the post-modern era, that is essential to a new model of development which does not exclusively depend on financial factors (Di Rienzo, 2012; Sen, 2001).

In this context lifelong learning is a framework for the innovative mission of higher educational systems, such as the University, in order to develop more inclusive, responsive, sustainable strategies. Lifelong learning represents a key challenge to open up to a wider range of learners.

In this sense, the university has to respond to the new needs of women returning to education: a new emerging demand of emancipation, empowerment and active participation in university life (see part 2).

Expanding the range of learners becomes the key strategic issue, and the key activities for universities to develop are the establishment of systems for fair assessment and validation of all forms of prior learning, and providing relevant, creative and innovative educational programmes (European University Association, 2008, p. 4).

At one time, work was of crucial importance in defining the identity of an individual. It was characterized by a place and an indefinite period of time. Today, work has become a path of entries and exits where men and women are faced with mobility, impermanence and flexibility, signifying the start of dangerous processes of social exclusion and individual distress.

Space and time are distorted. If these categories, then, are existing models today, lives are subjected to unprecedented challenges in which education can and must offer a concrete and immediate answer for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Europe 2020).

Knowledge, skills and know how are no longer enough. Of course these are valuable premises but they must be integrated: *being able to become*, this means learning "to manage a life project and respond dynamically to the continuous challenges of social life" (Alberici, 2008). This interpretation focuses on the development of competences such as "learning to learn", seen as core competences within lifelong learning and depending on the implementation of reflexive and proactive behaviours (Alberici, Di Rienzo, 2014).

In an increasingly precarious economic and social framework, lifelong learning is one of the most effective strategies to escape a crisis that affects not only businesses, but especially the lives of women. It concerns a perspective which – going beyond the traditional conceptions of economic development – focuses on people's abilities to live their lives and appreciate them, while multiplying the realistic opportunities at their disposal by acquiring and developing those competences which

represent a strategic condition for the individuals' fundamental freedom; it also focuses on the likelihood of carrying out an active role within the economic and productive process (Alberici, Di Rienzo, 2014).

Such an interpretation of the concept of lifelong learning as education focuses on the reflexive character of human action, on the capabilities of individuals to structure cultural behaviours in a global dimension of life, characterized by the lifelong learning potential and it can contribute to define a theoretical reference frame for the actions realized in the university arena: actions that have as their goal the valorisation, recognition and validation of prior learning acquired in formal and informal contexts (Morgan-Klein, Osborne, 2007; Beck *et al.*, 1999).

A lifelong learning paradigm gives value to all kinds of learning, whatever it is formal, non-formal and informal. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning forms a cornerstone in the lifelong learning strategy (Alberici, Di Rienzo, 2011). Learning outcomes should be recognised and valued, regardless of where and how they are achieved. Such themes are developed and systematised in the European Guidelines for the Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning (CEDEFOP, 2009).

There is a growing focus within educational and work institutions on non-formal and informal learning. The international debate, more and more centred on competences acquired not only in formal education, but also at work, in voluntary activities and in life experiences in general, focuses on the development of pathways between the formal educational systems and the non-formal and informal learning systems. This is necessary in order to establish procedures for the recognition and accumulation of past knowledge and to strengthen physical and professional mobility within European systems (Alberici, Di Rienzo, 2011; Evans, 2007). For women in particular, the possibility to benefit from such pathways between the different systems has a positive effect on motivation and on participation in lifelong learning activities (Di Rienzo, 2012).

The valorisation of competences becomes crucial in a lifelong learning-oriented system, including also institutions of higher education, such as universities. The new economic scenario emphasises individual learning and the different ways and places where it occurs.

To achieve this, it is important to re-think the role of the University and educational institutions for excellence which have to cooperate with stakeholders and companies in order to foster active policies and actions for more sustainable employability.

Employability means not only the ability to find work, but also the ability to know how to maintain, improve and/or change it, by free choice or because individuals are forced to by restructuring processes due to crisis or to the perverse effects of globalization (Seddon, Levin, 2013).

It can be claimed, therefore, that the University is facing educational needs that are completely different from the usual ones- now aimed at focusing on the value of subjects and their skills within organisational contexts, precious resources that are in need of development and continuous implementation to face change. The new role of universities is also examined in a context where they are faced with permanent educational needs coming from labour market, citizens and society in general (Morgan-Klein, Osborne, 2007).

In this respect, the recognition of prior learning based on experience represents one of the most important stimuli to make lifelong learning become a reality, contributing in this case to reinforce the presence of the university system within the field of higher education.

Redefining work, therefore, requires the University to design new curricula and new professional profiles, in terms of not only developing new skills for new jobs, but also in terms of recognition of prior acquired experience, in a perspective of an efficient and competitive job placement.

In the wake of European Directives regarding Lifelong Learning, from the Lisbon strategy to the present time, the Italian National Law 92/2012 and the relative Legislative Decree 13/2013 attribute permanent learning as an institutional task of Italian Universities for the first time, re-designing both on the level of organization and planning and on that of teaching and evaluation.

In view of a solid development of lifelong learning and of the introduction of the accreditation of prior learning, universities must adopt a series of methods and instruments aimed at singling out more inclusive organisational-didactical strategies (in order to allow a broader access to the university) and

more flexible (more adaptable to students' needs). This means a need for the adoption of individualisation practices in the educational pathway, so as to increase the decision-making power of women entering the University, and their positive self-image in the society as a whole. These approaches place the learner at the centre of the educational process and at the same time, when addressed to women, can represent an experience of the acquisition of new learning strategies and a new way to plan personal development or discover tacit motivations, so as to exercise an active citizenship in a more conscious and powerful way, becoming actor and author of her own educational, professional development and in all aspects of their lives.

These methods and instruments are expected to be actually capable of assessing the learning outcomes based on European academic standards and common devices employed in the description of the learning outcome, such as the so-called Dublin descriptors and the Tuning project devices. They should be aimed at developing procedures and services capable of giving transparent, rigorous and efficient answers to the recognition and validation applications undertaken by adult learners and/or workers (Alberici, Di Rienzo, 2011).

It is also made clear the importance of precise procedures that the universities should conduct, such as: accompanying, orientation, assessment and validation.

The procedures that limit themselves to giving information, gathering demands and examining them, are insufficient. Nonetheless, it is obvious that the most significant activities such as welcoming the person, counselling, orientation, organizing group meetings or training labs, help the individual in drafting the dossier for the recognition of prior learning.

Assessing the competences resulting from non-formalized experiences require a profound, reflexive and incisive participation from the individual. From this perspective, the concept of competence calls into question the meaning that reduces it to a purely technical and functional dimension aimed at acquiring specific vocational skills, by referring to the studies that interpret it in its generative, procedural, metacognitive, proactive and strategic value (Alberici, Di Rienzo, 2014). From here derives the task of educational systems to predispose and launch all the initiatives and devices necessary in the accompanying of students, in order to support the process of reflexive reconstruction of experiences (Pouget, 2007); and also derives the relevance of models and procedures that promote and support the processes of meaning construction within reflexive-biographical qualitative models (Demetrio, 1996). . The qualitative methodology envisages reflexive, biographic and narrative devices that focus on the abilities of the subjects to give meaning to what they do and that give value to the actions of individuals well beyond efficacy and efficiency (see part 3).

2. Permanent learning for the empowerment and the female employment

Although European surveys and studies on (Eurostat, 2011; OECD, 2012), choosing secondary school show that girls prefer artistic, social and pedagogical, literary studies, unlike their male contemporaries (with percents that change between the 85 and 67%), whose preference for technical and scientific studies is around 44%. For boys the inverse phenomenon happens and this trend remains, above all in Italy, in the choice of university studies. In Italy, the promotion of gender policies in the education sector still remains a partially *secondary aim*. A secondary aim, because it is mostly correlated to the incentive of female employment in the labour market, and so the increase in the degree of female education is still considered a tool to get through the horizontal segregation of the job market and to allow women's scientific access to the professions typically considered male, as those for instance bound to the scientific and technological sectors (Istat, 2012). The immediate consequence, with reference to this mainstream - in a disorientation and uncertainty condition of *liquidity* (*à la* Bauman) that has severely and profoundly affected the experience and the spheres of public and private life of the European citizen - is that gender policies remain a social issue (or a problem) considered not very urgent, In Italy, and not very connected to employability. Besides this reveals a clear discontinuity in the objective and strategies for encouraging and supporting female empowerment.

For the above mentioned reason the Universities of Bologna, RomaTre and Salento are involved in planning the service structures, beginning with an initial definition of the Lifelong Learning Centres - sponsored by *Cestriell* (Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning) at the University of Bologna - in order to foster concrete actions for more sustainable employability. Specific attention is paid also to the employability of women who have not obtained yet complete gender equality in our country.

The Italian learning (and training) system, starting from early childhood to university - excepted in isolated cases - is not yet able to ensure *equality of opportunity* for children: boys and girls. Both the family and the school system (parents, caregivers, educators, teachers) are not able to reveal the false *educational neutrality* (Butler, 1993, 1999) vs the *gender performativity* (Butler, 2004) as of language (with its *dissymetries* and lexical and semantics ambivalences concerning the *male-dominance* and the gender roles: social expectations of men, women), and for the cognitive processes. It is to consider that language can create and produce our thoughts and reality, our subjective experiences (and not only *reflect* the external reality).

This sort of gender education - to actively promote *equal opportunities* and to encourage participation and cooperation in children - can recognize the character of the cognitive processes and transform the cognitive and interpretative processes of reality towards a personal (self-empowerment) and social empowerment (Gallerani, 2016).

Gender education, starting from infancy, means educating children (i.e. the *women* and *men* in the future) to *complexus* learning (*à la Morin*) and to a transversal *forma mentis*. It means being able to promote social, cultural, political and existential choices, critical and thoughtful learning: choices that develop *learning by doing*, “learning to learn”, self-empowerment and lifelong learning (Le Boterf, 2004, 2010; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). In this respect, the French sociologist Edgar Morin *examines*, particularly in its so-called “*educational trilogy*” - *La Tête bien faite* (1999), *Relier les connaissances* (1999) and *Le Sept Savoirs nécessaires à l'éducation du futur* (2001) - how educators and teachers can rethink the task of *Repenser la réforme* and *réformer la pensée* (Morin, 2014) in the scenario of a complex society.

The above mentioned gender education (Gallerani *et al.*, 2013; Gallerani, 2014) can supply the tools to understand sexist stereotypes, the power paradigms and mechanisms that define and originate the prevailing “symbolic order” (male), that is a hierarchical order (Butler J, 2004; Cavarero, 2014) among male and female, between *public* and *private* dimensions of life and experience, or between female care professions and male professions often described with higher prestige.

This brief analysis shows how gender education and lifelong learning are essential to focus and to facilitate a better role and task adherence (in adult people and children) both in relation to the meaning that they really have in everyone’s life (and therefore to personal self-realization) and to the cultural development (i.e. social representation of gender roles).

Still in the European context, gender policies have been recently interpreted as policies focused on ensuring equal opportunities, that is equality of wage treatment, antidiscrimination policies oriented to the inclusion of women in the existing social, economic and power structures, rather than being policies for a deeper *transformation* of the social and cultural society that oppose to and reduce male power conditioning. The value of inclusiveness and of respect of all differences - confirming the concept of equality (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011) in the differences (that is the equality according to all differences), and of a “differences citizenship” - really passes through a gender education able to make gender an analytical category, rather than a descriptive one.

Hence, the importance of telling, of the narrative techniques and of the autobiographic laboratories (see more in part 3). In fact, according to Bruner, telling has to be understood as a way of thought and a vehicle to produce meaning (Bruner, 1996), that shows how the competence in doing and in tales and their comprehension is essential for “making our own life”, since we rely on the tales to transcend the limits of our reality, to elaborate our experience, to know, to recognize ourselves and to let us be recognized by others. It is important, therefore, to promote in schools and universities an expertise

(know-how) that constantly questions the reality to find creative solutions to well known or unexpected problems. A complex and divergent thought that learns in creative ways and that can move in a flexible way, towards the “flexicurity” (EPSCO Council, *Employment Common Report*, March 2011) as shown by the Europe 2020-Program considered, moreover, that in Europe the female employment rate is equal to 62,4% of the population between 20 and 64 years. Furthermore, there are still problems for the reinstatement of parents’ parental leave, as work timetables to support women between employment and private life lack real flexibility.

2.1 The gender equality and the “human development index”

In order to address the connection between gender equality and the “human development index” effectively, it is necessary to reflect deeply on the cultural model of the relationship between men and women. It is essential to remould the relationship starting from a real equality of roles and tasks, as well as from a constructive and mutual collaboration with the aim of enabling women to reconcile work commitments outside the home while providing (*caring*) for the family. However, thanks to theoretical contributions such as the *capability approach*, it is clear that economic progress cannot be separated from the processes of inclusion based on the development of human *dignity* (Sen, 1985) or rather *responsibility*, participation and the reduction of social inequalities, in relation to a more general well-being for the entire community (Fenwick & Farrell, 2012). The learning experiences of one person become social experiences that *form* and *transform* the *habitus* (or the way of life) of a large people system.

The “human development index” measures the development of a nation not only considering the national income, but also the life expectancy of its citizens, their literacy rate (Seddon & Levin, 2013), gender disparity, social inequality and the extreme poverty rate. Assuming that in order to develop the capabilities of each individual it is necessary to convert the capabilities and the available resources into “operations”, they must be put in a position to achieve results according to their talents (Nussbaum, 2011).

Italian policies which are in favour of female employment refer to European policies, including the *Charter for Women* (see EU Communication 2010/78; Communication 2010/491) based on *flexicurity*, the European Pact for Gender Equality and the strategic Plan *Europe 2020*, with the aim of carrying out a series of specific actions in order to ensure: 1) equality in the labour market; 2) equal pay and reduction of the gender pay gap; 3) decision-making equality; 4) the dignity of women and the fight against gender-based violence; 5) the promotion of women's entrepreneurship, including female immigrants and foreigners. In particular, *Europe 2020* has set 3 priorities, 5 main objectives and 7 “flagship initiatives”. The goals are: a) a sagacious growth based on knowledge and innovation, b) a sustainable growth in terms of human and natural resources; c) a comprehensive growth which aims at: encouraging an economy with a high percentage of female employment, favouring social-territorial cohesion and investing in women as factors of economic development (assuming that the proportion of women workers is much lower than the proportion of men in employment), and to encourage women’s social inclusion and active citizenship, also focusing on continual and permanent training and education.

The 5 main aims are: 1) to raise the employment rate of the population aged between 20 and 64 from 69% to 75%, since it is estimated that in 2020 the European economy will require 31, 5 % of highly educated and qualified employees, 50% of employees with intermediate levels and 18.5% of workers with lower levels of qualifications. However, in Italy, the percentage (i.e. 37.5% against 19.5% of the EU average) of low-skilled workers or limited-skilled workers in *literacy* and *numeracy* is almost double compared to the European average (OECD, 2012); 2) to invest 3% of the European Union's GDP in Research, Experimentation and Development (RE&D), in order to improve the conditions for stimulating private sector investment in RE&D in addition to defining a new indicator for monitoring processes in the field of innovations; 3) to reduce the levels of greenhouse gas emissions

(at least by 20% compared to 1990), to increase the share of renewable energy sources and improve energy efficiency; 4) to reduce the rate of early school leavers from the current rate of 15% to 10% and to increase the share of population aged between 30 and 34 in possession of a university degree from 31% to at least 40%; 5) to reduce by 25% the number of Europeans living below the poverty threshold (compared to each national average). Concerning the seven “flagship initiatives”, we will only refer to those linked to the relationship between gender and employment and especially those regarding the following issues: a) promoting innovation, meaning all the initiatives for improving access to state funding for research in order to strengthen the innovation process; b) promoting employment and proficiency by referring to *The European Agenda* for new proficiency, in order to create new jobs for women’s integration or reintegration into the labour market thanks to the acquisition of new skills obtained by means of lifelong learning; c) education, by means of the “Youth on the move” initiative related to the Education and Training Program (ETP, 2020) which is aimed at improving the efficiency of education systems and increasing the interest of young people and adults for attending training courses or gaining work experience abroad as well as enrolling in European institutes of higher education in order to make it easier for them to enter into the labour market as highly skilled workers; d) competitiveness aimed at developing an industrial policy at global level especially in the case of small and medium-sized enterprises in order to improve their competitiveness at world level; e) to continue the fight against poverty by means of a European policy against poverty in order to ensure territorial and social cohesion and an equal distribution of work from a *gender* point of view, and to favour the social inclusion of people who are at risk for *poverty* and *marginalization* (Bauman, 2005). According to Bauman, in a *global age*, the new poor (frailty; marginalization) are the *collateral damage* (one of the most striking dimensions of contemporary social *inequality*) of a consumerist-individualized way of life instilled by a profit-driven, consumer-oriented society (*vs* collective values of solidarity). This analysis shows the relationship between “the growth of social inequality and the rise [...] of collateral damage” and considers its implications and its costs, which will be paid by the Postmodernity (Bauman, 2011).

Finally, in order to reach the goals concerning the connection between *lifelong learning* - as education focuses on the *reflexive* learning (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983 e 1987), on the *capabilities* of individuals to structure and to enhance the *creativity* in a global dimension of life - and *gender*, we think it is essential to develop specific *tools* and qualitative *methodologies* such as permanent autobiographical laboratories for employability and the recognition of skills, or to refer to the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, for the recognition of prior experiential learning, in a *lifelong*, *lifewide*, *lifedeeep* perspective.

3. Autobiographical Workshops for female Employability in new organizational and educational models of the University

The challenge for sustainable employability needs reform in the organizational models of the University; it requires a conjugation of learning experiences in different contexts, through flexible and integrated educational projects.

It is necessary to structure a network of excellent services in lifelong learning in order to activate collaborative processes of research, experimentation and reflection in the “doing” of the University, in a logic of University-Business Cooperation (UBC), as well as the internationally crucial node for the University of Lifelong Learning.

Since the Bologna process, Erasmus + calls and forums promote the modernization of universities, through good practice and active partnerships with the local areas, to reshape curricula and facilities management, according to a triadic model of university- enterprise- local area to a more functional smart employability (EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, *European Parliament resolution of 20 May 2010 on university-business dialogue: a new partnership for the modernisation of Europe’s universities*, 2010).

University of Bologna, RomaTre and Salento with the cooperation of BioSelfLab s.r.l. are starting a project for female employability.

The aim is to educate women on their cognition and storytelling of prior learning in order to encourage a smart vocational guidance.

The project actively involves the educational and research system and the business system, northward to south of Italy.

In this way, three Universities, in collaboration with local businesses and the local area, concretely expand access, through actions for citizens, not only aimed at the acquisition of academic qualifications; but through learning actions that exploit the prior learning of the women, as learning, not necessarily from the formal context of education.

Business partnerships facilitate dialogue with the labour market, offering educational perspectives more closely connected to the work environment.

The target audience is women in search of employment, but also women workers and unemployed female students.

The construct "employability" is not just about the student graduates, but everyone who enters for the first time the labour market, who has lost their job or has never had one, but also those already working or who want or need to reposition themselves (Alberici, 2010).

The project idea comes from more than 300 life stories collected through narrative interviews of female students, temporary women workers, freelance professional women, unemployed, women with competences, that are unique, special, but often invisible, unconscious and of which society forgets the value.

The-project fosters, for the first time inside the University, the autobiographical workshops for female employability, in order to accompany the recognition and narration of competences acquired throughout the lifecycle in a perspective of working "marketability".

The project gives the opportunity to unemployed women, temporary workers and permanent workers to explore their skills, their competences, without valuation purposes, in order to learn to recognize, improve and narrate them; to extrapolate them from the background on which they often are; to deal with life transitions becoming carriers of change, not passive spectators, but as resources for each other.

The aim is to mitigate that deep gap between training and the labour market, the central theme in *European Parliament Resolution on University-Business Dialogue* (May, 2010) and in the *Sustainable Education for Development* (Unesco, 2009).

Operatively, the use of *monocognitive*, *metacognitive* and *fantacognitive* biographies allows the promoting of alternative routes, to activate processes of surfacing of implied competences, pulling out from the background those capabilities, acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, making each woman as a unique and special resource.

The device, used in the narrative reconstruction of prior learning, is the Portfolio Worker, a device that shows the memory, the continuous learning and the professional, educational and social experiences of storytelling. It is a great tool, not only for human resources management, or to select the staff and help it evolve, but also for a smart orientation in the labour market.

The Portfolio's construction is made possible by testing in the last few years the devices and procedures for the recognition and certification of prior learning, and represents a significant opportunity and a chance in order to read the experiential worlds and offer services and activities most appropriate to new needs.

In permanent autobiographical workshops for female employability, the portfolio becomes a Multimedia narrative Portfolio, which starts from the past, goes through the present and exposes the future projects. Videos, audios, photos, stories discover, describe, examine and provide documentary evidence of the dimensions of competence:

- Cognitive dimension (cognition, metacognition, knowledge and meta-knowledge, skills and meta-skills; problem solving, reflexivity, self-evaluation and hetero-assessment, choice of objectives, resources and learning strategies, etc...);

- Aptitude dimension (creativity, resilience, critical curiosity, sense making, strategic awareness);
- Emotional-affective-relational dimension (values, commitment, confidence, self-esteem, self-control);
- Social dimension (interpersonal relationships, perception of support to the development of other meanings, cooperation and interdependence);
- Development of lifelong dimension (times, experiences);
- Development of life wide dimension (formal, non-formal and informal places).

These dimensions are not isolated, but their quality depend on inter-relationships. The dimension of problem solving links together the evaluative dimension. In the same way, the reflective dimension is closely related to the social dimension. The social dimension is also inside the affective-relational dimension. The components of competence are also components of *learning to learn*, that every day help humans to act "in a competent manner", giving meaning to the paths and creating paths of meaning, in a perspective of *lifelong and life wide learning*.

The portfolio is flexible and dynamic, constantly evolving. You can update it whenever you want, and if you like; it is personal (in the sense that it belongs to those who build and update) and modular (you can set the order that is best suited to those who represent it). This device, designed to recognize prior learning for validation, is an effective tool for exploring the many women's skills, acquired in informal context and invisible in a *curriculum vitae*.

Italy is full of extraordinary women stories. We think of women entrepreneurs who run between work and family; women who run innovative business ideas; but also of women who no longer work after maternity leave or of women who are involved in social activities (kids, prisoners, elderly...). There are women who have developed excellent organizational skills and social skills in familiar and other contexts and have an excellent dexterity.

In most cases, especially in southern Italy, self-esteem is low. Women are not always aware of what they know and are able to do.

There is no lack of incentives and funding for women's entrepreneurship, but women can use this, or undertake a course of study, if they become aware of their potential.

The University for lifelong learning can support these processes.

In the workshops, the group dynamics are essential and the process of social construction, through co-evaluation and co-design group actions is interesting.

In the creation process, the device considers life stories based on the three-pole model, developed by Gaston Pineau (2000), which gives importance to dialogue and co-investment between subject - group - facilitator. In the process of self-training and co-education, the "cognitive biographies" are effective when the reading of the path and the possibility to assess their professional learning are shared socially.

The workshop is an ideal setting for the development of the path, because it allows you to switch from individual to collective writing and reading, without interruption.

The choice of this epistemological model - based on a logic belonging to adult education requiring the explicit knowledge and knowledge of the experience - is the result of a co-investment of introspective processes, linked to individuality, and of explicit and expressive processes, linked to the relational and social sphere.

The meaning of life stories cannot be reduced either to self-analysis (as the model proposes simple autobiographies), nor to the external evaluation of the facilitator (as the model proposes biographies).

The portfolio cannot be confined to a form to fill in, but requires activation of workshops providing assistance for co-design and co-evaluation but also for self-assessment and self-designing, which also involve the "jury".

The life stories of women through the social-emotional and communicative dynamics represent a heuristic/discovery learning situation, based on communication and comparison with the others. The construction process is dynamic and involving. In carrying out their excavation work into prior experience, women are not alone in their learning stories, and have the chance to distance from their selves

and reflect and co-construct through group dynamics. In this reflective process of double location, they reclaim its capabilities.

The group becomes a place of exercise, a gym of identity and meta-identity, opportunities of discovery of otherness and of the untapped potential or latency of their own biography (Formenti, 1998).

The portfolio is constructed in the workshops in the framework of “dialogical experiential learning” (Desmond, Jowitt, 2012), encouraging the “reflective conversation” with the experience (Schön, Argyris, 1996). The experiences of women become social experiences (Fenwick, Farrell, 2012) that form, deform and transform (Mezirow, Taylor, 2009) the individual and collective.

Strategic self focus becomes reflection learning in action and on action (Bruner, 1998; Schön 1987) and *community learning*, and through different active methodologies integrated with narrative approaches: autobiographical brainstorming, graphic role play, *monocognitive*, *metacognitive* and *fantacognitive* biographies, “*allostorie*”, digital storytelling. During the process, women create the *digital curricula story* (based on experiences of the recent European project *Kvalues Key Competences Validating Adult Learners’ Educational Experiences*). This becomes an opportunity to test women’s skills in multimedia processes and also to acquire and refine digital key competences.

Autobiographical workshops for female employability are placed, therefore, in a very real perspective in Italy of activation procedures for the validation of competences and represent an important and strategic action in order to contribute to the new social function of the University. The knowledge and the knowledge of the experience, belonging to different backgrounds, acquire the same value, where value is defined by their social use in several contexts. To do this it is important to re-think the universities’ role, which must interact with the local area and the different stakeholders through active policies.

The University can be a resource for female employability and for employability in general, if it develops the tools to become a sort of “magnifying glass” and at the same time a “bridge” across places and non-places of personal building, plural learning opportunities, self-empowerment, self-care and self-realization, self-efficacy, skills and experiential learning.

Conclusions

Universities should go through a comprehensive reorganization and develop actions aimed at broadening and facilitating access to lifelong learning as a new educational strategy. This will allow them to face the constantly increasing demand for education coming from society, including taking into account the latest developments in increasing female participation at the University.

Finally, in order to achieve the goals concerning both the connection between lifelong learning and gender, and between personal (self-empowerment) and social empowerment (Gallerani, 2016), we think it is essential to promote specific strategies such as the “permanent autobiographical laboratories for employability” and the recognition of skills (see the *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*).

People feel now the recession, especially women. The aim of the University is to value experience and capabilities in order to achieve social and professional inclusion and help men and women to leave crisis. Behind this is the new social mission of the University for lifelong learning.

Notes

[1] The paper has been designed jointly by the three authors: part 1 is attributed to Paolo Di Rienzo, part 2 and 2.1 are attributed to Manuela Gallerani and part 3 is attributed to Maria Ermelinda De Carlo.

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