

EDUCATION AND TRANSITION TO WORK: PROMOTING PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE

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*“A man, without the proper use of the intellectual faculties,
seems to be mutilated and deformed in a still more
essential part of the character of human nature”*

(Adam Smith, 1776)

1. Introductory Remarks

This paper considers a number of questions in the current discussion on the transition to work, most notably the definition of the pedagogical approach by which the issues at hand are investigated, the review of the relationship between education and development in reference to employability, and the interpretation of the right to education in light of the precarious nature of the productive processes. This contribution also points to the relevance of the notion of “human development” as explored by Martha Nussbaum, professor of Politics and Philosophy at the University of Chicago, and Amartya Sen, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics. It ends with a reflection on a welfare model supported by people empowerment that enhances individual capability. The argument put forward is that major shortcomings can be found in welfare systems in terms of employability. Against this background, the author welcomes a system which enables the full development of one’s capability.

In this sense, social scientists should engage in pursuing new avenues for creativity in order to build a new approach to social responsibility. In other words, this means moving away from resignation and catastrophism

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which are peculiar to Nihilism, and being open to full development of both the individual and social fabric to generate a common ethos.

2. The Notion of Work: a Pedagogical Perspective

Pedagogy sets itself as an important component of the “culture of development”. In this connection, ascertaining whether certain aspects concerning changes in the way people work—either at a conceptual and practical level—and the manner today’s work culture can be supported and addressed by pedagogy is crucial in the present analysis. This is particularly the case when devising strategies to further professional and social development.

Work thus plays a major role in human development while gaining civil and educational values, which are dependent upon cultural and geographical factors in one’s social history.²

Work lies at the heart of the “social question” which currently has been given momentum. This is particularly the case if one considers factors such as business relocation and the supremacy of finance over economics, which set the conditions for ongoing inequalities worldwide, to the extent that in some countries rights such as freedom and democracy are jeopardized. In this connection, reference has frequently been made in the West to the concept of the “erosion” of social capital, with the middle-class which now face hardship and social imbalance which might endanger civil coexistence.

If one were to reconstruct, yet ideally, the historical and semantic characteristics through which the concept of “work” has been referred to as a source of humanization over the years, mention should be made of figures such as Augustine of Hippo, Benedict of Nursia, Comenio, as well as Rousseau, Locke, Frobel and Hessen. Yet this effort, albeit fascinating, is beyond the scope of this paper and priority will be given to other questions.³

The notion of “work” has been investigated during the nineteenth and the twentieth century by scholars with a different educational background—economics, sociology, labour law, and so forth—who have examined a wide

² For a more detailed analysis on the notion of “work” from a pedagogical perspective, see my book: Alessandrini, G. 2004. *Pedagogia delle risorse umane e delle organizzazioni*. Milan: Guerini Editore, and the bibliography therein. An attempt has been made to provide a brief overview of the main interpretations of work in pedagogical terms in Renaissance, Enlightenment and Modernity.

³ Alessandrini, G. 2004. *op. cit.*

range of topics which formed the basis of modernity. Among other topics are the relationship between individuals and social groups, the forms of power and authority in socio-organizational contexts, delegation systems and management structuring, workers' safeguards and rights.⁴

An overview of the modern concept of "work", if cursory, calls for the following question: At which point has "work" become the driving force of society in conceptual terms? In order to provide an answer to this question, mention should be made of a fundamental economic theory. It was Adam Smith in 1776 who explained the wealth of nations considering the ratio of productive workers out of the total population. This novel approach was illustrative of the central role of work in society, as opposed to the traditional feudal system which was still in place in British society at the time of his writing.⁵

The growing importance placed upon the notion of work throughout 1800 and 1900 in proto-industrial society represents a unique phenomenon, chiefly if one considers individual behaviour. As pointed out by the German sociologist, Ulrich Beck, "industrial society is in all its aspects a society based on salaried employment".⁶

With time, the concept of "work" will also become the subject of a special area of investigation in human and social science, with social pedagogy which broached the main anthropological and educational aspects.

In the last thirty years, a number of significant changes in the regulation of the employment relationship—e.g. de-standardisation—led to the establishment of certain "drivers": the gradual decline of the Fordist system of production, the emergence of the networking system, and the consolidation of information and the knowledge economy. Accordingly, changes in the notion of "subordination" and a review of work hierarchies—particularly in large-sized enterprises and the public sector—have been key components in today's world of work. Another main element

⁴ Accornero, A. 1997. *Il tempo del lavoro*, Bologna: Il Mulino; Dell'Aringa, C. 2011. "Disoccupazione strutturale e *labour hoarding*. Un confronto internazionale," in *Osservatorio Isfol*, 1; Friedmann, G., and P. Naville. 1963. *Trattato di sociologia del lavoro*. Milan: Comunità; Izzo, A. 1991. *Storia del pensiero sociologico*. Bologna: Il Mulino; Tronti, L., and M. Centra. 2011. "Capitale umano e mercato del lavoro," in *Osservatorio Isfol*, 1; Zamagni, S., ed. 1997. *Economia, democrazia, istituzioni in una società in trasformazione*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

⁵ Smith, A. 1776. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nation*. London: W. Strahan & T. Cadell.

⁶ Beck, U. 2000. *Il lavoro nell'epoca della fine del lavoro*. Torino: Einaudi.

which is worth mentioning is the rise of numerous contractual arrangements, the growing relevance of self-employment, as well as the increase in precarious work, which can be found particularly in those sectors marked by low levels of protection.

Echoing Bauman and his famous metaphor, the precarious nature of employment has become an endemic aspect of the “liquid society”. Factors such as temporariness, uncertainty, and vulnerability, are increasingly characterizing the interaction between work and the individual. Indeed, the emergence of more flexible forms of work places upon the individual certain responsibilities and assigns him more bargaining power which thus far has been the preserve of external entities, such as trade unions and social partners. The Italian labour market is particularly fragmented and certain ongoing trends can be seen, viz. increased unemployment levels for a qualified workforce, high rates of precarious work if compared to stable employment, noticeable differences in terms of employment at territorial, sectoral, and geographical level, chiefly between the North and the South.⁷

The structural changes occurring in the employment schemes increased the levels of flexibility, but this came along with uncertainty and discontinuity, mainly as a result of the economic crisis.⁸

⁷ On 21 December 2012, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) released data on quarterly estimates concerning certain indicators which supplemented yearly figures on unemployment already issued on 19 April 2012 and 10 November 2011. EUROSTAT coordinates such publications, and also provides the same data for all European countries. The foregoing indicators are arrived at considering a European-wide standard methodology which gathers data on the workforce. The resident population is grouped into three mutually exclusive categories (employed, unemployed and inactive), drawing on the criteria set down by the ILO and implemented by Community regulations. In order to provide a full picture of the labour market, three main indicators have been set at a European level which allows one to move away from the hard-and-fast distinction mentioned above. More specifically, the first two indicators refer to inactive people, that is: a) those who are willing to work, but are not actively involved in finding employment b) those who look for a job, yet they are not willing to work immediately. The sum of the two aggregates provides the so-called “potential workforce”. The third indicator concerns those who are employed and refers to the number of those working on a part-time basis who are willing to work more, that is c) underemployed workers operating part-time (www.istat.it).

⁸ On this topic, particularly in terms of commitment, the document drafted on occasion of the 46th Social Week of Italian Catholics deserves particular praise. See *Cattolici nell'Italia di oggi, un'agenda di speranza per il futuro del paese*, EDB. Bologna: 2010.

The question at hand that needs to be addressed by scholars of social science and pedagogy is to what extent the foregoing transformations affect the anthropological perspective underlying the notion of “work”, on which dignity and identity are premised. Indubitably, the economic downturn had a particularly strong impact on the most vulnerable groups that is young people and those over 50 years old. Against this background, one might ask in which respects precarious, unqualified and low-paid employment can legitimate one’s identity. In order to ask this fundamental question, it is necessary to recall that the increasing levels of service economy also caused rifts between individuals at a collective level and altered the ensuing social integration. In the past, and in line with the central role of salaried employment in a Fordist-type society, employment status was the only way to gain social citizenship. Things work differently today, for there are many factors which contribute to challenge this state of play.

Previously, continuity of employment was associated with maintaining the same employment status. Nowadays, on the contrary, the increasing discontinuous nature of education and professional career jeopardizes the identity construction and the individual social and ethical background.

The relevant debate is marked by diverging views. On the one hand, there are those who favour an approach based on economic and functionalistic education. On the other hand, proponents argue for an inclusive approach according to which society should invest in people and their talent, irrespective of their occupational status. Whether one approach or the other prevails is dependent upon legislation regulating the welfare model deemed as most effective, and the ensuing concepts of citizen and citizenship.

The pedagogy of work—also in consideration of the range of interpretations conveyed by new meanings over time—questions the merely functionalistic approach of the existing relation between work and individuals. The pedagogical notion of “work” can be looked through a dualistic approach, which serves to promote an educational dimension and to prepare the individual to social commitment (Here “social commitment” refers to both the idealistic perspective related to the ethical State and the more active engagement to democratic participation to public life).

Evidently, the latter echoes Dewey, as he argued that “the educational process is one with the moral process”, adding that “according to this novel approach—gaining skills and possessing knowledge and education is not to be intended as the final goal, but as an indication of growth and a reason to carry on”. Dewey also maintained that “Democracy has different meanings, yet its moral meaning lies in deciding that the supreme evaluation of

political institutions and productive assets draws on the contribution provided by every member of society to steady growth”.⁹

3. The Relationship between Education and Development

Over the last few years, educational levels in Italy have been universally reported to be on the increase, yet whether the skills gained are marketable rests on a number of variables (geographical area, gender, industry and so forth). In this connection, it might be useful to recall that the relationship between unemployment and enrolment rates in Italy is less significant if compared to that in the United States or the rest of EU Countries. Somewhat paradoxically, within the Italian economy it is difficult to provide positions requiring high-level qualifications.

If one looks at the main EU publications—among others the Delors Report and the e-Europe Report from the Lisbon Conference—a “European” perspective prevailed. This is because economic and civil development bring together resources on education and networking, social support and cohesion.

This set of principles laid the foundations for “the European route towards a knowledge society”, and, since 2001, fostered a new approach to work and learning. This approach can be regarded as an alternative one and involves aspects such as employability, access to knowledge networks, strategies to overcome the digital divide, the role of universities in local development, and the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises. Tellingly, what has emerged from the EU documents is support provided to education as pivotal to foster democracy. Investing in individual and organizational learning furthers equity and social cohesion, and thus better “educability” also by opening up access to knowledge to disadvantaged people and promoting their employability.

Another element which is increasingly and universally acknowledged as crucial is that of placing formal, informal and non-formal learning on the same footing. Indeed, vulnerable groups—low-skilled youngsters, the unemployed, socially disadvantaged people, workers facing skills obsolescence, and people with disabilities—are those who are concerned the most about this aspect. Providing support to individuals and widening their range of opportunities are tools to promote lifelong learning in Italy. A

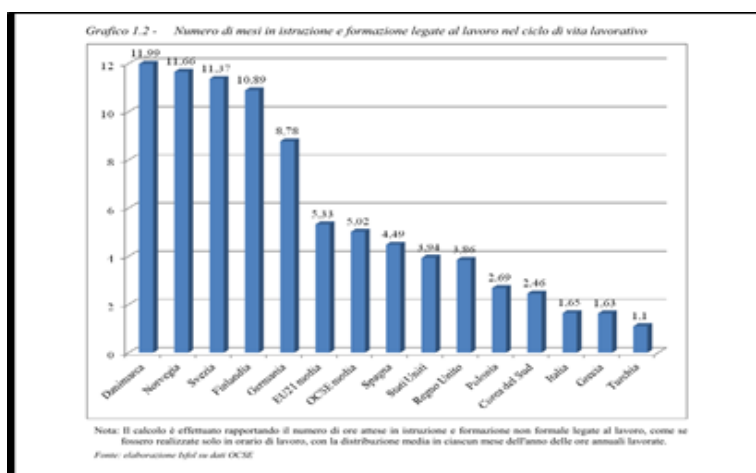
⁹ J. Dewey. 1916. *Democrazia e educazione*, Firenze: La Nuova Italia.

number of provisions—among others Act No. 236/1993 and Act No. 53/2000, as well as the setting up of ad-hoc funds called Interprofessional Funds—contributed to emphasize the significance of educational plans, whether at local and company level, agreed upon by social partners through specific joint bodies which help to identify specific research areas.

In this connection, workforce planning—particularly in terms of supply and demand analysis—as well as the strengthening of those actors who carry out such activities becomes pivotal.

The most recent data on investments on lifelong learning reveal that Italy ranks poorly with on-the-job training in relation to other European countries. In considering the ratio between hours spent in education and hours worked (Table 1-1) Italy places third last among European countries:

Table 1-1. Hours in Education per Hours Worked



In addition, the OCSE indicators show that investment in adult education in Italy is far from deserving of this name, and available financial resources are unequally distributed among different funds, with this state of affairs which produces serious forms of diseconomy.

Hence the need to review the system of lifelong learning not only as an important component of labour politics but also in view of establishing new forms of welfare state governance. In Italy, there is a common consensus on the part of institutions and social partners about the effectiveness of certain initiatives carried out on an experimental basis—e.g. awarding credits to

certify the level of expertise—or the provision of the Citizen’s Training Booklet.¹⁰

As far as the Public Administration is concerned, it is undisputed that the set of educational values in the public sector needs to be revisited in light of new elements that can foster the establishment of new learning process encouraging real innovation. Emerging from a recent survey conducted by the Italian Ministry of Labour, 2020 projections on labour demand and supply show that Italy may face difficulty in dealing with future changes in the labour market.¹¹ As for labour demand, a number of surveys carried out by CEDEFOP point to a trend towards a services and

¹⁰ In this connection, it might be interesting to have a look at the outcomes of the meeting promoted by ISFOL (*Tavolo Nazionale sul Bilancio di Competenze*) which are well illustrated in the paper by Grimaldi, A. 2010. “Il documento Isfol sul bilancio di competenze,” *Professionalità*, 17-26. Another initiative which is worth mentioning is that involving researchers from the Centre of Lifelong Learning and Communication (CEFORC) and trade unions representing certain categories of workers (UIL TEMP) concerning the implementation of a system certifying work experience (so-called “*Libretto Esperienziale*”) for agency workers. This initiative is aimed at fulfilling two objectives: providing an effective instrument for skills certification and management, and helping workers—also those who take part in lifelong learning—to devise individual vocational programmes tailored to their aspirations and flairs.

¹¹ Great strides have been made in reference to school-to-work transition, which are illustrated in the Europe2020 strategy. The accompanying report provides a comprehensive analysis of the social market economy in the twenty-first century. More specifically, it is submitted that there is a need to foster growth that is smart—in order to develop knowledge- and innovation-based economy—sustainable—so as to promote green economy and more efficient strategies in terms of resources and competitiveness—and inclusive—with a view to increase employment rates while favouring social cohesion also at a local level. The Europe2020 strategy also set certain objectives, to be met by way of special initiatives: a) providing 75% of those in the 20-64 age group with a decent occupation b) investing 3% of GDP in initiatives in Research and Development, by improving the conditions to favour investment in this area—especially in the private sector—and defining a new indicator to assess the progress made. By 2020, 31.5% of those entering the European labour market will need to possess high-level skills and 50% of new workers will necessitate medium-level skills. Low-skilled workers will make up only 18.5% of the workforce (tellingly, they were 33% in 1996). For an in-depth analysis, see *EUROPE 2020—A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*, European Commission, 2011.

knowledge economy, which will call for highly-skilled workers.¹² Strategies enhancing adult education are an integral part of an effective welfare model, for they further protection through the commitment and the central role carried out by individuals. Some considerations can be made, if in passing, also on vocational training which concern funds for education and the role of pedagogy more generally, which can fuel the theoretical debate and give rise to political solutions:¹³

a) Individual development needs to be accomplished within a more articulated system of skills certification and mapping, which should bring together technical expertise and relationship skills (knowledge sharing, reciprocity, trust, and commitment).

b) Vocational guidance—which includes skills assessment, coaching, and individual interviews—should be given priority, to help boost employability, particularly among younger people.

c) Vocational training programmes for adult workers should be devised to favour the transition between jobs, particularly if one considers the precarious nature of many occupations. In this connection, they should enter such programmes while waiting for a new job.

d) On-the-job training should be implemented in order to foster growth in terms of social capital. Favouring active participation to working life—at both individual and collective level—might benefit workers in cultural and professional terms.

The existing gap with other countries in terms of investment in human capital is a penalising factor for Italy. In other words, risks might arise in terms of competitiveness, for human capital in Italy is characterized by low

¹² The stress on the need for high qualifications at the time of entering the labour market runs counter to the statistics. According to the IX Report from the organization AlmaLaurea, there has been a 23% decrease in the demand for graduates on the part of employers. On 1 September 2010, in commenting upon the data from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), an authoritative newspaper reported that “1 out of 4 young people are unemployed. Unemployment rates stands at 8.4%: 15 million people among those in the 15 to 64 age group are without an occupation, and 7 out of 10 of them are inactive”.

¹³ On the debate on vocational training and its future development, see Alessandrini, G. 2010. “L’apprendistato professionalizzante,” *Nuova Secondaria*, 7.

level of qualifications (19.5%) if compared with the EU average (37.5%). Another all-important aspect is that 80% of the Italians between 16 and 64 years old lack functional literacy, against 30% in Norway, or 50% in Canada, USA and Switzerland.¹⁴ Low demand in highly qualified workers on the part of the employers in Italy can be explained by the recourse to mature technology, the prevalence of small-sized enterprises and by strategies in competition intended to reduce costs rather than invest in innovation. Hence the urgent need to encourage employers to hire qualified staff. Data from AlmaLaurea reported a decrease in employability of graduates for the year 2012: up to 9% for those with a bachelor's degree, 6% for those with a masters' degree. Remuneration also dropped by 11%.¹⁵ Table No. 2 shows other relevant information in this connection:

Table 1-2. Facts on Unemployment in Italy

Facts on Unemployment in Italy
There are 2,870,00 unemployed in Italy. A decrease of 2,000 units has been reported which only concerns female workers. On an annual basis, the unemployed rates increase by 21.4% (507,000 units). Unemployment is higher in the South (35%) particularly among young women (36%).
The employment rate is 56.8%, thus with a 1% decrease if compared to the previous year. Among those who are employed, the number of workers in involuntary part-time work is on the rise, while a decrease has been reported of those operating full-time.
1 out of 4 workers among those in the 15 to 24 age group do not look for a job (jobseekers in Italy are 641,000 people, that is 10.6% of the population). The incidence of the unemployed on the number of employed people or jobseekers is 37.1%, amounting to a 7% increase.
The most serious aspect concerns a significant rise in the number of inactive people (38%), especially among women in the South (65.4%).

¹⁴ The report from OECD, *Indagine ALL. Adult Literacy and Life Skills. Competenze alfabetiche funzionali e abilità per la vita* (<http://nces.ed.gov/Surveys/ALL/index.asp>).

¹⁵ AlmaLaurea. 2012. *XIV Indagine AlmaLaurea sulla condizione occupazionale dei laureati*.

Source: ISTAT, December 2012

4. The Notion of “Competence”

The agreement concluded on 12 February 2010 concerning a set of guidelines on training is intended to devise a national system of professional standards and skills certification. In this connection, it might be useful to provide a cursory overview of the notion of “competence”, a concept conveying a wide meaning which has been given much exposure in the literature.¹⁶ It is this notion which helps to define the level of professionalism in educational paths and organizational analysis. According to the relevant literature, what is meant by “competence” is “a combination of proficiencies” where a range of skills comes into play, e.g. technical, theoretical, methodological skills, procedural and operational abilities and relationship skills allowing people to operate in ever-changing contexts. When it comes to education and training, investing in someone’s competencies might be seen as an attempt to help adults further develop their skills. In this sense, gaining competencies becomes even more important for it exemplifies the way individuals behave and express their potential in a given organization. The essence of “competence” lies in the individual ability to combine different proficiencies—hence the evolutionary dimension—taking as its starting point already existing cognitive, emotional and valuable experiences, not only to produce controlled performances, but to promote the willingness to develop planning capacity so as to take concrete action. As such, the idea of “competence” thus refers to a process marked by dynamic and evolutionary aspects. One must certainly agree with the argument that work must be investigated considering the concept of “competence”—particularly at the time of planning training activities. Yet it must be acknowledged that the skills evaluation for certification purposes necessarily needs to take a wider

¹⁶ A vast amount of literature exists with reference to the concept of “competence”, among others: Civelli, F., and D. Manara. 1997. *Lavorare con le competenze*. Milan: Guerini e Associati; Boam, R., and P. Sparrow. 1996. *Come disegnare e realizzare le competenze organizzative*, Milan: Franco Angeli; Di Francesco, G. 1994. *Competenze trasversali e comportamento organizzativo*, Milan: Franco Angeli. On the educational dimension, see Alessandrini, G. 1998, 2005, 2011. *Manuale per l’esperto dei processi formativi*, Rome: Carocci, in particular the chapter “I modelli di competenza”. The *Rapporto ISFOL 2012* is also relevant in this connection.

approach than that examining the production process. Such analysis necessitates an inclusion of ‘transversal’ competence, and emphasis on the role of those emotional and cognitive components which act as a catalyst for individuals to contribute to their own learning. A number of studies—among others, the PIAAC project mentioned above—highlighted the positive effects that workplace training has on workers.¹⁷ Informal learning provides an important contribution in terms of skills acquisition, whereas—to the contrary—skills decline might frustrate previous efforts in terms of educational attainments. According to OECD, taking into account learning outcomes in formal education only, thus disregarding the effects of informal learning, would compromise the evaluation of human capital.

5. Human Development

Human development can be examined from perspectives other than those including quantitative analysis—based on a merely functional approach which considers economic growth—which might also investigate the issue referring to aspects such as social life as a whole. According to Martha Nussbaum, profit is the means intended to support human existence, yet “the aim of global development, as well as that of effective national politics, is to allow people to live a purposeful and creative life, developing their potential and organizing a meaningful life in line with their dignity”.¹⁸

In this sense, there is common consensus that it is necessary to investigate the pathways to human development in a more detailed way, thus beyond merely calculating the GDP. Here, it might be worth recalling the Human Development Index (HDI), according to which national development should be measured not only on the basis of national

¹⁷ The 2008 PIAAC Programme aimed at assessing the skills of the adult population—viz. those in the 16 to 65 age group—and it is fully compliant with strategies of lifelong learning, for priority is given to those job-related skills regarded as fundamental in terms of economic growth, therefore widening the evaluation criteria for this share of population. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs oversaw the implementation and coordination of the PIAAC Programme at an international level, whereas ISFOL fulfills planning duties within the national boundaries. The programme consists of a direct skills evaluation for both theoretical and more practical reasons related to aspects of methodological research which impact on reliability of evaluation. The survey provides an assessment for two sets of skills in adults: skills acquired at the workplace and cognitive functions.

¹⁸ Nussbaum, M. 2010. *Non per il profitto*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 175.

income—although this was common practice in the past—but also taking account of such aspects as life expectancy, literacy rates, multidimensional inequality, gender imbalance and extreme poverty.¹⁹ The Human Development Index appeared for the first time in 1990 in a report published by the United Nations Development Programme. As already pointed out, the premise behind the establishment of this index was that—apart from national income—the development of a country should be measured also controlling for such elements as life expectancy and literacy rates, for which data were already available in other countries for comparative purposes. The human development perspective affected a whole generation of policy-makers and social development experts, also those within the United Nations.

Economic growth in its own right does not improve the quality of life, especially if one considers sectors such as health care and education. In a recent publication, Martha Nussbaum has shown that an increase in GDP does not impact on political liberty. China and India are suitable examples of this trend. In a similar vein, the US gained 1st place in GDP rankings, yet placing 12th on the Human Development Index. Overall, average HDI rose by 18% since 1990 and 41% by 1970.²⁰ This year, the HDI Report provides three new criteria to measure the development rate: multidimensional poverty, gender inequality and extreme poverty. HDI is measured for the majority of world countries, providing valuable insights to both economists and experts of social science.²¹

¹⁹ United Nations, *Human Development Report 2010*. The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development. 20th Anniversary Edition.

²⁰ The *Human Development Report* is an independent publication commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Its editorial autonomy is guaranteed by a special resolution of the General Assembly (A/RES/57/264), which recognizes the *Human Development Report* as “an independent intellectual exercise” and “an important tool for raising awareness about human development around the world”. Autonomous *National Human Development Reports* have been issued by more than 140 countries over the past two decades. The *Human Development Report* is translated into more than a dozen languages and launched in more than 100 countries annually.

²¹ The Human Development Report classifies the countries surveyed according to the Human Development Index (HDI), which considers three main indicators at a national level: life expectancy, educational levels (enrollment in primary, secondary and tertiary education, schooling of adult population) and adjusted GDP per capita (which is often expressed in PPP US\$). At the time of calculating the HDI, each indicator is assigned the same value. Significantly, the methodology to measure the HDI has been reviewed three times between 1990 and 1994, yet remaining

6. Development and Practical Intelligence

The issue of development calls to mind the needs to promote the wealth of practical skills which are somehow related to the notion of “practical intelligence”. Simply put, drawing on the concept of *homo faber* becomes pivotal to devise policies in education which help to boost employability while increasing individual potential. Here it might be fitting to make mention of *The Craftsman*, the first of three volumes by Richard Sennett, who praises craftsmanship as a necessary skill to face everyday life, the result of the interconnection of technical proficiencies and human thought.²² According to Sennett, workshops are places of culture where social rituals—or solidarity of a ritualized kind—have been established with time. The idea of autonomous work underpinning the concept of “citizen/craftsman” have existed since Ancient Greece, and further developed in China, Italian Renaissance and the *Encyclopedie* movement.

According to Sennett, technical expertise means “narration”, ongoing reflection which can also turn into “obsession” with quality. It is embedded in the community and translates into criteria, rituals, and rules. It means re-laborating through language and, finally, challenging entrenched dogma.²³

unchanged ever since. HDI is given a value ranging from 0 and 1 which shows to what extent the country surveyed complied with the following objectives: a) rising life expectancy up to 85 years old b) access to education c) guaranteeing minimum income. When HDI is equal to 1, it means that all the foregoing objectives have been met. The three indicators consider the following variables, respectively: life expectancy at birth; the educational levels (this one measures a country’s relative achievement in both adult literacy and combined primary, second, and tertiary enrollment. Indexes for adult literacy and combined enrolment are calculated. Then these two indices are combined to create the education index, with two-thirds weight given to adult literacy and one-third weight to combined enrolment), and the standard of living, which is arrived at by calculating per capita GDP (PPP US\$).

In the first years of publication, the minimum and maximum values were calculated considering the poorest and the richest country, respectively. Of course those values were subject to change from year to year, depending on the results of the countries at either end of the ranking. This is a serious issue for it hampers comparative analysis in years other than those surveyed.

²² Sennett, R. 2008. *L'uomo artigiano*, Milan: Feltrinelli.

²³ In this connection, Gehry sets an example of outstanding creativity which shows a break with the past. The intention here was to develop innovative solutions by making use of titanium foils to reflect light emanating from the river next to the Guggenheim. His ideas challenged the existing rules on architecture.

It is the education system which should prioritize issues such as practical, cooperative and collaborative learning, providing the fundamentals to run projects and developing entrepreneurial skills also related to practical intelligence. In Sen and Nussbaum's terminology, capability is the real potential upon which "human flourishing" is built.²⁴

People's wellbeing goes far beyond their wealth, for it involves the opportunity to develop their life plan in accordance with their capability. Hence the reference to a new economy, concerning human development, which should promote either personal growth or wellbeing and support the setting-up of active policies intended to further such development. One might dare to talk of "hermeneutics of practice".²⁵ Practice does not rest upon theories worked out beforehand, but it is dependent on the ability to interpret ever-changing reality, a task which is possible only through everyday experience.

Far from being granted at once, such capability is the result of ongoing interpretation and "contextualisation"; this is the main essence of thinking, which thus starts from experiencing.

In Italy, the relationship between practical knowledge, learning and employability is a thorny issue which has been the subject of a number of proposals put forward by relevant authorities at a regional and company level. However, major shortcomings exist, particularly in terms of skills certification gained through on-the-job learning. The apprenticeship system—which has been devised by the Legislator to favour the matching of labour demand and supply, is still regarded merely as a contractual arrangement to reduce the labour costs and make this working scheme a temporary one.²⁶

²⁴ Nussbaum, M., *op. cit.*

²⁵ Mortari, L. 2003. *Apprendere dall'esperienza. Il pensare riflessivo nella formazione*, Roma: Carocci.

²⁶ Bertagna, G. 2011. *Lavoro e formazione dei giovani*, Brescia: La Scuola; Friedmann, G., and P.Naville, *op. cit.*; Senatori, I., and M. Tiraboschi. 2008. "La sfida della occupazione giovanile nel mercato globale tra produttività del lavoro e investimento in capitale umano," in *Diritto delle relazioni industriali*, 3; Tiraboschi, M., ed. 2011. *Il Testo Unico dell'apprendistato e le nuove regole sui tirocini. Commentario al decreto legislativo 14 settembre 2011, n. 167, e all'articolo 11 del decreto legge 13 agosto 2011, n. 138, convertito con modifiche nella legge 14 settembre 2011, n. 148*, Milan: Giuffrè.

7. Capability and Empowerment

By developing “educational capital”, people empowerment is the first step towards “substantial freedom” that is—to use Sen’s words—“a kind of freedom which involves the capability to convert available goods and resources into freedom to pursue one’s objectives and goals, conduct alternative lifestyles and develop one’s life plan according to individual values”.²⁷

Capabilities are thus essential rights that, yet differently, need to be safeguarded and granted to all citizens. The theoretical framework underlying the capability approach was already formulated by Sen in the mid-1980s. Recently, the original frame of reference was expanded by a number of authors to consider such aspects as public policy and to investigate issues such as law and ethics from different perspectives (among others, Robeyns in 2005).²⁸

Protecting human dignity calls for high levels of capabilities on the part of citizens. According to Nussbaum, ten capabilities are necessary to accomplish social justice, which can be classed in internal capabilities (personal traits, intellectual and emotional capabilities, capabilities in terms of perception and movement) and combined capabilities (resulting from interaction with environmental factors) and might result in certain “functionings”.

“Agency” is another important concept in Nussbaum’s capability approach, for it clarifies the process intended to change values and objectives.²⁹ By way of example, let us imagine a high-school professor

²⁷ A similar approach can be found in the OCSE Job Strategy and in the EU Employment Strategy, See also Sen, A. 2000. *Lo sviluppo è libertà. Perché non c’è crescita senza democrazia*, Milan: Mondadori.

²⁸ *The Human Development Capability Association* (HDCA) has been established in 2004 to gather experts and scholars who are interested in the topics of human development and capability approach. The HDCA carries out interdisciplinary research on the foregoing subjects related to quality of life, poverty, justice, gender studies, and environment. Further areas of research are economics, philosophy, political theory, sociology and development studies.

²⁹ One might note that the idea underlying the notion of “capability” draws on Aristotle’s *dunamis* (power) and *energeia* (action). *Dunamis* also means being capable of generating a change, active capability (soul also possesses a “wealth of capabilities”). On Aristotle, see Berti, E. 2004. *Aristotele. Dalla dialettica alla filosofia prima*, Milan: Bompiani; Howie, G., and P. Innocenti. 1975. *Aristotele sull’educazione*, Firenze: La Nuova Italia.

which needs to provide young students with some theoretical insights on sustainability. To do so, he might refer to relevant literature and reports. This state of play represents a set of values. However, whereas the same professor commits himself to implement these values—e.g. for instance, by developing innovative items in the academic programmes and supporting research groups which set-up out-of-school initiatives (through the Internet, web communities and so forth)—he prompts his students to develop a number of agents, for he sets some objectives in order to endorse certain values. A just society should be accomplished throughout the realization of equality concerning the capabilities of its members. Consequently, it is not utility that should be pursued—e.g. to redistribute primary goods—but to develop capabilities to utilize such goods, in order to convert them into standards of living. As discussed earlier, Nussbaum talks of ten capabilities, most notably:³⁰

1. *Life*. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. *Bodily Health*. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.

3. *Bodily Integrity*. Being able to move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. *Senses, Imagination, Thought*. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason, and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self-expressive works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able

³⁰ A detailed definition of Nussbaum's ten capabilities is provided in Nussbaum, M., *op. cit.*

to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way. Being able to have pleasurable experiences, and to avoid non-necessary pain.

5. *Emotions*. Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves. Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association.

6. *Practical Reason*. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's own life. This entails protection for the liberty of conscience.

7. *Affiliation*. Being able to live for and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedoms of assembly and political speech.). Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails, at a minimum, protections against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, caste, ethnicity, or national origin.

8. *Other Species*. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. *Play*. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. *Control over one's Environment*. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. Being able to hold property in terms of real opportunity; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. Being able to enjoy the right of property.

Table 1-3. Nussbaum's Ten Capabilities

Nussbaum's Ten Capabilities
Life
Bodily Health
Bodily Integrity
Senses, Imagination, Thought
Emotions
Practical Reason
Affiliation
Other Species
Play
Control over one's Environment

Source: author's own elaboration.

7. Capability, Liberty and New Welfare

The reading provided by the Italian pedagogist, Umberto Margiotta, of Sen's work points to an overlapping of the concepts of justice and liberty which takes place through capability. In other words, Sen investigates the set of resources, opportunities and principles regulating both justice and liberty to conceive their functioning and opt for those available in order to decide how to live. By way of examples, those suffering from health problems or facing economic hardship possess a limited set of capabilities, while the reverse is true for wealthy people.³¹ One major point is that the range of capabilities measures one's freedom. Drawing on this argument, it

³¹ Margiotta, U. 2013. "Dal welfare al learnfare: verso un nuovo contratto sociale," in *La formazione al centro dello sviluppo umano. Crescita, lavoro, innovazione*, ed. Alessandrini (Milan: Giuffrè); Margiotta, U. 2009. *Genealogia della formazione. I dispositivi pedagogici della modernità*, Venice: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina; Sen, A., *op. cit.*

is also possible to appreciate the criticism made by Sen to “human capital”, for the manner this notion is employed in everyday discourse falls short of the wider meaning of “human capability”.

Investing in education can translate into increased productivity. Yet the essential component of a just society lies in the link between education and the right to choose the way to live one’s life. Safeguarding this right results in effective freedom. The main goal of a just society should be that of providing its members with the same range of capabilities. Hence the goal to maximize utility, as previously discussed.

The author agrees on Margiotta’s approach, according to whom “It can be argued that the notion of a ‘4th generation welfare’³² is making inroads, which prioritises individual capability and is based on the active contributions of citizens to society. In this sense, decision-makers at a public level do not replace private actors, but grant them the opportunity to act in compliance with fair rules based upon recognition of freedom to participate and express one’s talent”.³³ The gap between the “the weak” and “the strong” can be filled. Most notably, there is a need to reduce the share of those who are low-qualified and enhance their skills as a way to safeguard their rights also in terms of democratic participation.

Accordingly, a just society needs to acknowledge the individuals’ potential and combine it with other aspects such as merit and talent. Merit should serve as a means to diversify the outcomes and single out outstanding qualities. Thus it is within the work environment that talents should be nurtured and honed, for here workers’ abilities should be free of social and cultural influences. It is against this background that the shift from employability to capability originates. This aspect is a relevant one for it provides an innovative perspective through which the educational processes, and the relationship between education and training, more generally, are discussed. Social justice and equality are given new momentum. The foregoing approach can be found in a number of economists—among others Adam Smith—and restores a new value to education. Yet a question arises about the structural factors which enhance social inclusion and the freedom to fully develop individual potential.

According to Sen, three elements need to be considered in order to appreciate the role of capabilities: the direct relationship with human wellbeing and freedom, the indirect impact of capabilities on social changes, and the indirect effect that capabilities have on economic

³² Donati, P., ed. 1999. *Lo stato sociale in Italia*. Milan: Mondadori, 1999.

³³ Margiotta U. In Alessandrini, G., *op. cit.*

production. In Sen's terminology "the welfare of capabilities" allows individuals to demand the exercise of their own rights, first of all learning.³⁴ This right is a lifetime one and relates in important respects to the right to citizenship. The validity and forward-thinking which characterize "lifelong learning"—a concept which has been circulating since the 1990s—should be given more significance and form the basis of new welfare. There is a need of developing political awareness of the issue. This includes widening the right to education through life, devising a system of skills certification and validation to ensure full active participation to social life. To do so, people should be helped to familiarize themselves with such an evolutionary approach, focusing on capability through "lifelong guidance".

The key aspect of development as freedom—which also recalls the title of Sen's volume—lies in the idea of economic growth combined as democratic development arising out of everyone's participation—thus not of the elite on an exclusive basis—to opportunities in terms of people's capabilities, for they improve themselves through education and training.

The issues discussed above pose a number of questions for academic research, two of which are particularly relevant:

- To what extent can the capability approach translate into an education theory on which it can be experimented in practice?

- Which educational strategies—either at a local, national, international level—can be devised to safeguard the capability right of those facing problems in terms of the school-to-work transition?

By way of conclusion, one might quote Sen, who has argued that "Development is a great adventure to live through freedom".³⁵ This passage is significant, for the development Sen is making reference to is far from being accomplished.

³⁴ Sen, A., *op. cit.*

³⁵ Sen, A., *op. cit.*, 297.

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