

The institutional mapping of Italy's education system: Europeanization, centralization and regionalization

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Introduction

Over the last twenty years the Italian education system has undergone a series of more or less completed transformations, at times announced and then abandoned, disavowed or only formally implemented, all against a background of constant political instability and fragmented policies. Furthermore, this scenario of uncertainty is made even more complex by a resistance to change in the ministry offices and educational establishments. This was compounded with a tendency to cultural conservatism and scarce perception of education as a common good enhancing the development of both individual and collective capacities¹.

The incessant and equally incoherent doing and undoing has accentuated the complexity of the system, piling on layer after layer and overlapping more or less virtuous experimentation. Moreover, it never resolved the issue of unequal access to education and training. Inequality and imbalance are still substantial on a national level, especially in the north/south divide but also between the different kinds of educational establishments and between individuals: social, class and rank inequality lead to the creaming out and branding of weaker pupils in a context where different education/training courses are extremely rigid and hierarchical.

The aim of this paper is to offer a general overview of Italian educational policies and identify and discuss some important aspects of the system. It will be carried out in the following stages: (1) the identification of the key institutional actors in the system together with a picture of their competences; (2) the identification of the figures for public spending and the

¹ Though for reasons of space, a full account cannot be given of the parliamentary history of the innumerable legislative interventions over education (reform of the school cycles, secondary schooling, university), a brief, paradigmatic outline will be useful for indicating the path that has led to the lengthening of compulsory schooling. In 1997 the Berlinguer Reform (centre-left majority government) raised it from eight to ten years, a move which was abolished in 2003 by the Moratti Reform (centre-right government) only to be re-introduced in the 2007 Financial Law by Fioroni (centre-left majority). In 2008 the present Minister for Education Gelmini (centre-right majority) intervened again, classifying all possible vocational training courses as compulsory education.

financing channels; (3) an analysis of the specific features of the system with special attention to disadvantaged pupils and the problem of drop-outs; (4) an indepthing of the relation between education and employment; (5) the presentation of two case studies: the first dedicated to the Lombard Region (in the north of Italy) and the second to the Region of Campania (in the south), to give an account of the progressive regionalization of education in Italy.

The institutional picture was defined by means of a series of passages and enquiries which included: a first phase of analysis of the literature on the transition education/employment in Italy; a documentary analysis of legislative texts and plans both on national and local levels; a phase of depth interviews with key witnesses. The latter involved institutional representatives from the Ministry of Education and Research, Regional School Authorities, Regional Offices responsible for training and employment, employers' associations, welfare authorities and training bodies.

1. The governance of the Italian educational system: actors, powers, relationships

The principal institutional bodies governing the Italian education system are: at national level, The Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR)²; at regional level, the Regional School Authorities (USR) and the Regions³; at local level, the Provinces, Municipalities and schools.

The Ministry of Education, University and Research has complete authority over the programming/funding of the education system, school rules/regulations and personnel recruitment. The Regional School Authorities act as the peripheral seats of the Ministry and are territorially responsible for implementing national policies through their administrative, supervisory and inspectorate duties. The USRs assign the economic and human resources to the schools (MIUR, 2003).

The competences attributed to the Regions are undergoing redefinition at the moment, in the wake of a constitutional reform. This, which began in 2001⁴, led to the 2009⁵ Law on fiscal federalism which decreed the transfer of powers/ competences from the State to the Regions

² Besides the Ministry there are the National Council of Public Education, the Higher Council of Public Education, the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (INVALSI), the National Institute of Documentation for Innovation and research into Education (INDIRE).

³ Also: the regional councils for Education and the Regional Institutes for Research into Education.

⁴ Constitutional Law (Legge costituzionale 18 ottobre 2001, n. 3 "Modifiche al titolo V della parte seconda della Costituzione").

⁵ Law (Legge 5 maggio 2009, n. 42 "Delega al Governo in materia di federalismo fiscale, in attuazione dell'articolo 119 della Costituzione").

(Poggi, 2010). At the moment, however, relations between the various levels of government are suffering from overlapping, conflict over competences and hedging/holding back in an institutional scenario which is instable, inorganic and incoherent. Devolution introduces on paper a reorganization of the competences shared between State, Regions and local authorities which effects government decision-making over education. MIUR is to be left with jurisdiction over the definition of general norms⁶, the essential levels of services (LEP), while the Regions and local authorities are to be in charge of regional programming as well as managing and allocating staff and personnel over the territory. What the results will be is uncertain, apart from the fact that they are already producing regional diversifications in a system now going ahead at different speeds (Bordignon, Fontana, 2010).

The Provinces and Municipalities have also found an increase in their duties and functions over the last few years. The Provinces are in charge of the plans for organizing the school network as well as running, maintaining and building new secondary schools, while the Municipalities are responsible for kindergarten and primary school buildings.

Since the year 2000, educational institutes have enjoyed greater organizational autonomy in compliance with art. 21 of the Law 59/1997⁷. They can plan and realize interventions in education, training and instruction, adapting them to different contexts in line with the objectives of the National Education System. The above law introduced the concept of autonomy into the Italian system, providing for each school to draw up its own annual list of offers (POF, educational offer plan), to be presented to pupils/families in the enrolments phase. Schools are allowed to adopt flexi-hour timetables and activate personalized courses (for example, in order to integrate disabled pupils or non-Italian speakers), create training programmes to answers the special needs of the territory, choose methods and instruments in line with the training/teaching opportunities on offer. Nonetheless the autonomy should observe the freedom of teaching and the indications and objectives established at national level by the Ministry. The introduction of school autonomy has certainly created opportunities for renewing the education system bottom up, favouring projects for tailor-made teaching/training courses, though in an extremely centralized scenario where economic and human resources are distributed in an ever-decreasing quantity top down. (Bertagna, 2009; Campione, 2008).

⁶ That is: the definition, limits and contents of school autonomy; definition of school regulations; evaluation of learning; compulsory school; public exams, rules and procedures for issuing school certificates, diplomas; definition of essential levels of services; evaluation and monitoring; criteria for the training, selection and recruitment of school personnel; rights and duties of private and accredited schools.

⁷ Legge 15 marzo 1997, n. 59 "Delega al Governo per il conferimento di funzioni e compiti alle regioni ed enti locali, per la riforma della Pubblica Amministrazione e per la semplificazione amministrativa".

1.1 Which governance for the Italian educational system?

As mentioned above, the Italian educational system is characterised by a specific relationship between the centre and the peripheries. One of its main distinctive features is the relation and distribution of powers, responsibilities and roles between central and local levels.

In this respect, two issues have to be considered: the first is the 2001 reform of Clause V in the Constitution, that tried to reset competences and powers between State and Regions, attributing new powers to the Regions and local bodies. The second is that Italy features decentralization processes especially in the social policy field. So that many Italian Regions have developed and tested very different approaches according to their political outlooks. The result is a fragmented policy landscape and ever-increasing inequalities in the welfare system⁸ (Bifulco, Bricocoli, Monteleone, 2008).

The education system belongs to this context, as can be seen by some of its characteristics. While it is grounded on an authoritative formal model based on the sole rights of the State and its hierarchical and centralised administration, it is also inserted in a regionalization of the education system which has passed through a series of reforms and experiments and has created very different educational situations and contexts shaped by varying administrative policies tied to different territorial considerations.

In this respect the constitutional law 18/2001 granted new legislative functions for the Regions in the field of educational policies. A distinction was drawn between “education” entrusted to the integrated legislations of State and Regions (except for the general norms and fundamental principles which remain the exclusive prerogative of the State) and “professional training” under the exclusive legislation of the regions, except for the LEP (essential levels of services), which belong to the State alone.

More precisely Clause V, article 117:

- authorizes the State to issue «general norms on education» for the government of the national education system;
- keeps State authority over decisions on the modalities of evaluation/controls over the functioning of the system and pupil progress;
- assigns the running and normative organization of the education system on the territory to the integrated legislation of the Regions, who take the decisions on the basis of the «general principles » established by the State;

⁸ However, this differentiated context “opens opportunities of experimentation on institutional and organizational structures at a regional scale, creating a variety of practices for research and policy analysis” (Bifulco, Bricocoli, Monteleone 2008).

- reformulates the old concept of regional “trades and crafts training” and speaks meaningfully of “training and instruction” under the sole legislation of the Regions;
- confirms that since in all fields regarding the satisfaction of “civil and social rights”, the essential levels of services must be “guaranteed over the whole National territory”, the State keeps exclusive legislation over the LEP (Bordignon, Fontana, 2010; Poggi 2010).

In spite of the reform and the constitutional law on one hand and the strong territorialization and regionalization of policy systems on the other, the Italian education system still features Regions and local authorities with limited power. At the same time the central level reveals a loss of power and responsibility, so risking leaving local actors without relevant guidelines capable of defining priorities and directions. And yet the system remains centralist over two issues of fundamental importance: personnel management, totally financed by the State (it covers 80% of the total spending on the education system) and the allocation and management of other financial resources. The process of decentralization, as can be seen, is substantially incomplete.

As will be shown in the section dedicated to the case studies, the Regions have significantly different modalities and political targets in following the management of the new competences deriving from devolution, with consequences also on the governance of the regional education systems.

2. Funding the Italian education system

In 2007 spending on schooling was recorded at 4.5% of the GDP, slightly lower than the average of OCSE countries, which stood at 5.7%, and corresponded to 9% of total public spending, against the 13.3% of the OSCE average. One reason for the lower spending on schooling (in GDP percentages) is the modest contribution made by private financing: 92.3% of funds for schooling are public, 6.0% from families and only 1.7% from privates (OECD, 2010).

The overall spending in 2009 stood at €52,901 million. In 2007 82% of these sources came from the State, almost all of which was transferred to the USR. The State is the main financer of the system and bears almost all the costs of teaching and non-teaching staff (over 80% of the total resources is used for salaries). 11.5% of expenditure comes from the Municipal Authorities, who also deal with school buildings and some services like transport, canteens, and support for handicapped pupils ; 2.9% is borne by the Provinces who are responsible for school buildings and some of the expenses for running upper secondary and vocational

training buildings; the Regions bear directly 3.4% of the total, transferring their own resources to the local bodies (provinces and municipalities), to finance school assistance, independent schools and less wealthy pupils (Bordignon, Fontana, 2010; MIUR, 2009).

Contrary to what happens for the overall spending, the per capita spending for primary and lower secondary schooling is above the OSCE average (7,252 dollars against 6,611), while it is lower in upper secondary schools and even more so at tertiary level (5,531 dollars against 8,467) (OCSE, 2010).

There follows below the breakdown of public expenditure for the different levels and types of instruction and disbursing body for 2007.

2007	Pre-school and primary education	20,428
	Pre-school	4,748
	Primary	15,680
	Secondary education	22,254
	Middle	9,019
	Secondary	13,236
	Post-secondary courses & diplomas	101
	Higher Education	8,140
	Research and Development for Education	22
	Education not otherwise classifiable	789
	Total Education	51,734

Tab. 1: State expenses for education by category (millions of euros). Source: Rendiconto generale dello Stato. (Bordignon, Fontana, 2010).

	State	Regions	Provinces	Municipalities	total
total	43,138	1,311	1,510	6,024	53,648

Tab. 2: Consolidated public spending on schooling according to disbursing body in 2007 (in millions of euros) (Bordignon, Fontana, 2010).

3. The characteristics of the Italian educational system

Overall, there are nearly 9 million pupils in Italian schools (MIUR data: school year 2007/2008) and 941,756 teachers (MIUR data: sch.yr. 2009/2010). In sch. yr. 2007/2008 there were 57,459 schools: 43,032 public, 13,252 recognised private and 1,175 unrecognised (MIUR, 2009). A breakdown of the Italian population by education level, as in the table below, records one of the lowest percentages of degrees and diplomas in Europe, although younger annual take-ins are filling in the gap rapidly, partly as a result of the university reforms, which

have introduced three-year and master's degrees.⁹

	qualification	2008
Italy	elementary/primary school	20.1%
	middle /technical schools	40.9%
	secondary school	28.7%
	degree	10.3%

Tab. 3

Source: ISTAT (2009a)

In 2010 the high school system (classical, scientific, pedagogic, linguistic and artistic) was chosen by 49.3% of secondary school pupils while the other 50.7% opted for technical institutes and vocational schools. The following tables record the distribution of students per upper secondary schools in Italy and a comparison with other European countries.

classical upper secondary schools	8.4%
scientific u.p.s.	24.9%
pedagogical u.p.s.	6.6%
linguistic u.p.s.	5.5%
artistic u.p.s.	3.9%
technical schools	30.9%
vocational schools	19.8%
total	100%

Tab. 4: The types of schools in upper secondary education (2010).

	General	Pre-vocational	Vocational	Combined school and work-based
Denmark	52.0	-	48.0	47.5
Finland	32.1	-	67.9	13.4
France	55.8	-	44.2	12.4
Germany	42.5	-	57.5	42.8
Ireland	66.1	31.8	2.1	2.1
ITALY	40.6	32.7	26.7	-
Netherlands	32.9	-	67.1	20.2
Norway	44.8	-	55.2	15.9
Portugal	69.3	8.5	22.2	-

⁹Law on teaching autonomy in universities (Legge 15 maggio 1997, n. 127, attuata con decreto del Ministro dell'Università e della Ricerca Scientifica e Tecnologica 3 novembre 1999, n. 509 "Regolamento recante norme concernenti l'autonomia didattica degli atenei").

Spain	56.2	-	43.8	1.8
Sweden	43.2	1.0	55.7	-
Switzerland	35.2	-	64.8	-
U.K.	68.6	-	31.4	-
OECD average	54.9	3.5	43.5	11.7
EU average	47.3	5.0	47.9	16.1

Tab. 5: Upper secondary enrolment patterns according to course typologies in some European countries (2008) (values % secondary school enrolments =100). Source: OECD, Educational at a Glance, 2010.

The system works along three very hierarchical training tracks:

- high schools (general): the programmes/ syllabuses are designed to build up a strong, general knowledge, but not to train pupils for specific professions/trades, nor undertake any further courses of professional/technical training.
- technical institutes (pre-professional): the pre-professional courses are mainly designed to introduce pupils into the labour market and train them to go on to further courses of vocational/technical instruction. No professional qualification with a direct impact on the labour market is awarded.
- vocational institutes: vocational courses, which lead to technical /vocational qualifications, train pupils for direct access to specific professions without any further training.

The 1923 Gentile Reform set up the Italian school system on a model placing at the centre the classical high school as the centre of excellence, with all other types of school in descending order. The old structure still exerts a marked influence on the choice of contents and teaching methods in Italian schooling:

- the central position of the teacher, considered the expert in the subject, the only source of knowledge, so that successful teaching/learning is perceived exclusively to be due to the teacher's academic competence and charisma.
- a prevalently deductive kind of teaching, which hampers the use of methods, practices and teaching centred on pupil activity, focusing on single pupils or groups.
- a clear-cut separation between the school and the outside world, in particular the labour market (Associazione TreeLLLe, 2008).

The public offer is extremely unelastic, and furthermore since the 1990s some partial education reforms have uniformed courses, basing them around a nucleus of key abstract competences, and consequently putting to the side technical and practical know-how.

The system creates hierarchies among pupils and programmes, between those destined to go on studying and those destined to go out and work. There are in fact still marked distinctions

of prestige and social recognition between the different school choices with foreseeable results of social selection over access to upper secondary school instruction.

In such a scenario, choosing the school to go to can become an act of exclusion. Less able pupils are directed towards technical/vocational training, which tends to lead them towards less prestigious social positions. Career guidance becomes a negative operation, with pupils not choosing technical training according to tastes and competences, but because of a poor school performance. This leads to mechanisms of "self-selection", or school courses grouping together those with similar socio-economic status and levels of achievement (ibidem). Thus pupils' needs are defined and classified once and for all by the State. They are generally not recognised as citizens able to express their voice and capability to make choices in the educational process. More often than not the State's offer turns out to be unheeding of family requests and the interests /projects of the young.

There seems to prevail a tendency towards seeing compulsory schooling as an obligation to attend school rather than an obligation towards education understood as attending school or training courses or mixed learning-working courses (Benadusi, Niceforo, 2010). In this direction, over recent years, the school has seen a reformulation of its function as a social ladder, its role to help rise through social stratifications; so that it has often found itself delegated to secondary, more or less explicitly attributed roles (custodian, parking lot, site for disciplinary action).

The 2006 PISA researches highlight another particular characteristic i.e. the great variety of results obtained by the regional systems, in spite of being a formally uniform. There are exceptional regional differences, with a divide between north and south. For example, in 2006 the average science mark in national testing was 534 in Friuli Venezia Giulia (north east of the country) while it was only 433 in Sicily (south) (with a deviation of > 100 points) (INVALSI, 2010).

3.1 Italian and foreign pupils

The number of foreign pupils in the Italian school system has risen sharply and consistently only over the last ten years, climbing from 86,522 to 628,876. In 2007/2008 there were 574,173 foreign students, representing 7.4% of the overall school population.

In secondary schools there are fewer foreign students than in the primaries (4.3 for every 100 enrolments, against 7.7 in primary schools), but the number has more than doubled since 2003/04, and has risen ten-fold over the last ten years.

After obtaining their middle school certificate, foreign students opt for schools facilitating

access into the labour market, like technical institutes, where almost 41% of non-natives enrol, against 19.4 % of Italian students (2007-2008 data).

A very meaningful indicator of the difficulties met by foreign students in their school career is the high percentage having to repeat the school year, limited in primary schools (0.9% against 0.2% of Italians), but consistent in middle schooling (6.3% against 2.7%) and slightly lower at secondary level (9.2% against 6.9%) (MIUR, 2009; 2010b).

3.2 Students with disabilities

In 2007 172,114 disabled pupils, corresponding to 2.2% of the total in primary and secondary schools, obtained special help at school from 80,000 support teachers. Disabled pupils are put in ordinary classes and are not singled out for different courses/classes. In this Italy is considered abroad a positive example to follow (Rossi-Doria, 2009: 96), even though cuts in school finances over the last few years have been weakening this potentially inclusive system. Though access for disabled pupils is better than elsewhere, there are still barriers and continual bureaucratic, financial and organizational difficulties to be met and overcome.

The following table furnishes data on the distribution of disabled pupils in upper secondary schools. As can be seen, almost 82% attend technical or vocational schools.

classical upper secondary schools	1.65%
scientific u.p.s.	2.37%
pedagogical u.p.s.	5.22%
linguistic u.p.s.	0.22%
artistic u.p.s.	1.48%
art schools	7.39%
technical schools	19.36%
vocational schools	62.31%
total	100%

Tab. 6: Students with disabilities in upper secondary education a.s. 2007/2008 (MIUR, 2009).

3.3 Drop-outs

In the Italian school system, the transition between the various grades and orders of educational/training tracks gives rise to wide-scale dropping out and dispersion, with structural factors of imbalance and social exclusion affecting first of all the more disadvantaged. About 900,000 youngsters between 16 and 24 (20.9% of this age group against a European average of 14.9%) leave school with no qualifications at all. In the present

situation the school is unable to give sufficient support to or emancipate those starting off with social and cultural drawbacks: the territories where the greatest poverty is concentrated are those with a high level of teaching/training failure. In the south in particular the young are greatly penalized because they have to face a situation which is precarious on several fronts - not only schooling, but also health, economic, training and work. In Italy in fact 2,623,000 families (11.1%) live under the poverty threshold with 1,713,000 in the South (Rossi-Doria, 2009: 116).

The phenomenon of dispersion is consistent within the education system especially in the first year of upper secondary schooling, and in technical and vocational institutes where there is a concentrate - due to dynamics of selection and self-selection - of the most disadvantaged pupils. Those risking dropping out are normally male, with cultural and social drawbacks in addition to unpromising school performances. For them, the rite of passage from lower to upper secondary schooling is more critical than for others (MIUR, 2009; Benadusi, Niceforo, 2010).

The most important systemic actions directed at containing school losses come from programmes sourced by the European Structural Funds (FSE, FESR). Public vocational and technical schools have benefited from these, besides many primary schools of the Italian Regions/ Objective 1 of the European Intervention Policies (Benadusi, Niceforo, 2010).¹⁰

If school drop outs are considered a sign of the inclusive capacity of the system and the quality of teaching rather than a sign of individual failure, it must be underlined that this phenomenon points to some of the principal problems of the school system and more in general of the Welfare State. In general terms it must be said first of all that what is offered is substantially rigid and standardized, with little possibility of personalizing curricula according to the needs of the weaker pupils. Furthermore, the chronically weak milieu is shot through by left-over welfare policies and scarcely integrated policies and social services, all of which should be guaranteeing support and opportunities for the disadvantaged.

The state education system, built to access all citizens to instruction and compensate for cultural and social inequalities of individuals at the starting point, does not appear to be able to absolve the function of redistributing social opportunities. As Marco Rossi-Doria (2009: 14) remarks, "the hundreds and thousands of boys and girls who fail at school are saying many things about the general malfunctioning of the school itself [...]. The school has fallen so

¹⁰ For the seven-year period 2007-2013, following the entry in the EU of other late developing countries and regions, the number of Italian regions to benefit from European structural funds in Objective Convergence went down to four Campania, Calabria, Puglia and Sicily.

seriously ill that it excludes the weaker part of those who attend". This process of creaming out the young and vulnerable often reinforces processes of ethnic, gender or geographic discrimination instead of opposing them. The institutional resources set up to face the problem of access to education do not seem able to reduce social inequalities, which risk being taken for granted and almost naturalized by an education system which makes selections, without distinguishing the disparity at the beginning , so giving rise to deeply iniquitous effects.

3.4 Lifelong learning

In 2007 in Italy the participation in vocational training for the adult population (25-64) was 6.2%. These figures are quite distant from the European target of 12.5%: the international comparison below shows the great disparities in adult training opportunities. In fact Italy lies in one of the bottom places in Europe for lifelong education (ISFOL, 2009; OECD, 2010).

Country	Adult Education Survey (AES)	Labour Force Survey (LFS)	AES Ranking	LFS Ranking
Sweden	73.4	32.0	1	1
Finland	55.0	23.1	2	3
Norway	54.6	18.7	3	4
United Kingdom	49.3	26.6	4	2
Germany	45.4	7.5	5	7
Slovakia	44.0	4.1	6	14
Estonia	42.1	6.5	7	10
Austria	41.6	13.1	8	5
Cyprus	40.6	7.1	9	8
Bulgaria	36.4	1.3	10	17
Lithuania	33.9	4.9	11	12
Latvia	32.7	6.9	12	9
Spain	30.9	10.4	13	6
Italy	22.2	6.1	14	11
Poland	21.8	4.7	15	13
Greece	14.5	1.9	16	16
Hungary	9.0	3.8	17	15

Tab. 7: Percentages of adults taking part in scholastic and non scholastic learning/training, ages between 25 and 64 (AES and LFS-2006 survey, %). Source: Eurostat, 2008.

4. The relation between education and employment

The transition from education to employment is one of the most delicate moments in the Italian context. The times of transition are long and cause long-term unemployment, at higher levels of qualifications too, while the results themselves are fraught with difficulties. Indeed, the percentage of those with degrees or diplomas whose jobs have nothing to do with their qualifications is the highest in Europe. Italy is also the European country with the lowest number of young people finding work immediately after training, while the percentage of those taking two years to find a job is the highest (ISTAT, 2009a). In spite of this, the probability of entering the work market increases by 2.4% with every year of school attendance and the effect of each teaching year on the probability of getting a job is an average of 1.6% and 3% in the South. (Rossi-Doria, 2009: 96).

Within the Italian context where educational, economic development and employment policies have a greater tradition of separation than integration, the corporate and school worlds also live a mirroring condition of self-reference, with very few exchanges and poor capacity for communication, with some virtuous exceptions.

It is an economic context in which the labour market shows difficulty in expressing a clear-cut demand for training, partly because companies are prevalently small in size and consequently need no highly specialised workers. In general employers ask for "diploma-holders with some work experience however limited". Nevertheless, we have to highlight that a diploma would not have been necessary for almost half diploma holders with permanent jobs, and only 35% of those with technical diplomas have jobs where their particular diploma is essential (Associazione Treelle, 2008). These figures become even more worrying if it is taken into consideration that more generally 43% of 15 to 35 year olds have jobs which have nothing to do with their training. Moreover, 35% of teenagers between 15 and 19 are inactive, non-school attenders - a figure much higher than the European average (ibidem).

In September 2009 the Minister of Work, Health and Social Policies together with the Minister of Education, Universities and Research, presented a project entitled "Italy 2020. A Plan of action for youth employment by integrating learning and working", based in particular on re-launching technical-vocational education, enhancing apprentice contracts and on the need to reform the university offer to reduce mismatches between demand and offer of work. This strategy has led up to now to the reform of the second cycle of education which passed through parliament 1° September 2010, providing for a completely reorganized and simplified panorama of choices, in order to replace the hundreds of experiments that have followed one another in attempts to renew the secondary school offer since the 1990s.

The Law provides for: 6 high schools; two sectors of technical institutes with 11 courses typologies; 2 sectors of vocational institutes with six course typologies; a system of vocational instruction and training run exclusively by the Regions (IFP).

The technical institutes have been reorganized and reinforced with a new identity based on a scientific-technological axis, while vocational training concentrates on economic and productive matters.

The Regions control the IFP courses leading to a three-year professional qualification or a four-year professional diploma recognised at national level. Provision is also made for re-entry in the school system to obtain a secondary school certificate or attend a specific training course organized jointly with universities (MIUR, 2010 c-d).

Aiming to establish a connection between education and employment, the system of higher education has been undergoing reform since 2000, in the context of the Bologna process, an international reform of higher education which aims to realize within 2010 the European Space of Higher Education.

The reform introduces into the university regulations a first level degree (three years) and a second level specialist degree (two years). The new short three-year and specialist degrees were intended to reinforce professional competences to be spent immediately in the labour market, and strengthen the link between education and labour market. However, the three-year degree system has not encouraged the access of the young into the work market; it has rather led to an incredible and uncontrollable multiplication of degree programmes, with self-referential and self-serving moves from the universities.

The development of IFTS (Higher Education and Technical Training) (IFTS)¹¹ is still very uncertain and has not managed to assert itself as an alternative to tertiary academic education, partly because of the centrality and hypertrophy of the university in spite of the legal innovations ¹². Some regions, however, (especially Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and Piedmont) are making investments in these post-secondary non-university courses.

¹¹ The IFTS system is a training channel of higher technical specialization which aims primarily to facilitate the access of the young into work or requalify workers with previous experience. It is a training track integrating school, vocational and university resources with the labour market.

¹² The IFTS system was introduced with the law (legge n. 144/1999) entitled "Measures for investments, delegation of power to the Government for the reorganization of incentives for employment and norms regulating INAIL, as well as dispositions for the re-organization of social security bodies", and amended with the DPCM del 25 gennaio 2008 "Decree of the Prime Minister with the wording "Guidelines for the re-organization of the system of Higher Technical Education and Training and the creation of Upper Technical Institutes" in order to accelerate the entry of young people into the labour market and re-qualify those with also previous work experience.

5. Towards the regionalization of the education system?

As we have seen, the Italian education system reveals severe inequalities and imbalances between the territories, especially between the north and the south of the country. The process of re-organizing powers between State and Regions is leading progressively towards the constructing of regional education system with different strategies, organizational models and objectives. In order to give an account of this increasing complexity and at the same time offer a more vivid and dynamic picture of the transformation in progress, a comparison will be made between two different regional systems, bearing in mind some of the dimensions already investigated in the above analysis of the national context: the issue of access to education and training, the contrasting dynamics leading to dropping out and dispersion, strategies for reducing mismatching between education and employment.

The next paragraph will focus on Lombardy, the economic engine of the country, since the nineties involved in creating a strong regional government calling for autonomous competences and powers in the prospect of devolution, a political workshop and avant-guard of federalism at a national level. The paragraph following will be instead dedicated to Campania, one of the four Italian regions of the Objective Convergence (together with Puglia, Sicily and Calabria), one of the poorest and most densely populated areas in Europe, featuring a strong informal economy fed by broad swathes of unofficial work.

5.1 Lombardy

Lombardy has 9,852,170 inhabitants (as of 04/30/10), 16.3% of the Italian population. It is the largest region in Italy, considered one of Europe's four power-houses, producing 18% of the GDP (2010). Eurostat data class Lombardy in second place in Europe, behind the region of Île-de-France, with a GDP of €326,130,5m.

5.1.1 The labour market

According to ISTAT data on the workforce in the second quarter 2010, there are 4,294,000 in work in Lombardy. Male unemployment stands at 5.2%, female at 6%, while for the same period the national level is 8.2% (ISTAT, 2009b).

However positive these data may seem, a recent research promoted by Milan's Chamber of Commerce and Unioncamere Lombardia reveals how the effects of the present economic crisis have affected the young and, though to a lesser degree, the better educated too. In 2009 20% of the previous year's graduates had not found work and the overall rate of graduate unemployment under thirty rose from 7% in 2008 to 10.8%. Of those who have found work,

only one out of four has some stable form of employment. Overall, one job out of three (36%) is temporary, offering a low level of security. Thanks to internships, more than one out of ten graduates has worked, though often not remunerated. Instability affects women more than men, given that in spite of being better educated (55.7% of graduates at a regional level), 70% of females have temporary jobs against 56% of males.

5.1.2 Education and training

13.5% of the schools present in Italy are in Lombardy: 3,074 kindergartens, 2,463 primary schools, 1,216 middle, 888 secondary, 12 universities. Of the over 7,500 schools present on regional territory, 67.5% are public and the remaining 32.5% accredited. Lombardy has 19% of accredited schools with 9% of pupils in 2007/2008 against a national average of 5.1%, up 0.6 points in the last few years (0.4 the national average) (IRER, 2010).

In 2007 public spending on schooling in Lombardy was 7,137 billion euros, with a cost per capita of 6,721 euros. (Bordignon, Fontana, 2010).¹³

Schooling rates in Lombardy are higher than the national average: 17.4% of the population has only an elementary school certificate (national average 20.1%), 42.6% possesses a lower secondary school or vocational qualification (national average 40.9%), and 28.6% has a high school leaving certificate (national average 28.7%) while 11.4% are graduates (national average 10.3%) (ISTAT, 2010a).

In Lombardy the drop-out rate from education/training stood at 19.7% for 2009, a figure well above the ceiling set by Lisbon at 10% for 2010. Of the northern regions only Piedmont recorded a higher level (20.6% in 2009), while there is a clear distance from the other northern regions (11.3% in Liguria, 15.0% in Emilia-Romagna and 16.3% in Veneto). The Lombard drop-out rate has risen in the last three years (from 18.3% in 2007 to 19.8% in 2009), a trend which puts Lombardy with other northern regions (Piedmont and Veneto but not Emilia-Romagna or Liguria), and which is a real reversal of a moderate long-term reduction in drop-outs (IRER, 2010). As we shall see, the recent reform of the regional system of vocational education and training furnishes the main strategy for opposing school drop outs at a regional level and is worth discussing for its implications and importance.

Lombard figures for lifelong learning are not very different from national statistics, which see about 6.2% involved in courses (ISFOL, 2003, 2009). As confirmed eloquently by the words of the Regional Secretary of a specialized trade-union:

¹³ The distribution of spending in Lombardy per public body source, expressed in millions of euros is the following: State 5733m; Region 4m, Provinces 225m, Municipalities 1175m.

“The education system is insufficient in that it forgets the forty and fifty year olds. There is no education on offer for adults, it does not exist. We need a system of lifelong training to be just that, capable of following the needs first of primary education and then the rest, training, capable of meeting requests for conversion and in-training, or simply to have a good life, a dignified life in terms of knowledge and competences”.

5.1.3 Lombard governance of education

The Lombard method of governance is defined by a particular neo-liberal interpretation of the principles of subsidiarity. While horizontal subsidiarity is seen in terms of attempts to build conditions of competition, with an emphasis on freedom of choice, vertical subsidiarity is perceived in terms of a regional, strongly hierarchical neo-centralism. Within this framework Lombardy privileges the role of the demand of “citizen-recipients” in choosing services to purchase, thanks to a voucher system of money transfer. This is very evident mainly in health care, but it is also a progressive tendency in the social sector and, as will be described, in education, introduced by a gradual “voucherization” of services. The Lombard mode of governance mixes a hierarchical structure with a marketing rationale, so tending to weaken all intermediate subjects and reinforce the power of the centre as the dispenser of resources and distributor of benefits. Such a centralist type of governance is characterized by a strong tendency to privatize services (Bifulco et al., 2008).

Over the last ten years the Lombardy Region has been very active in the field of educational policies with interventions in line with its dynamics. For this reason it created a single council department for education, training and work (Arifl – Agenzia regionale per l’Istruzione, la Formazione e il Lavoro), which deals with regional programming. In the year 2000 a school voucher was introduced, distributing funding for all children enrolled in primary or secondary schools secondary level, either public or private. The voucher was configured as a right to purchase educational services from accredited public or private providers. It gave a partial reimbursement of the sums paid for fees, taxes, enrolment charges and school attendance. Between 2001 and 2007 417,000 pupils benefited from this voucher for an overall cost of about 275 million euros. In this period of time there was a rise both in the number of beneficiaries and annual costs (IRER, 2010).

In 2007 the Region then presented a law of organic reform of the system of education and training (l.r. 19/2007), assuming total control over the running of these courses. The law provides for the unification of the system of public technical and vocational training (IFP) under the control of the Lombard Region. The cardinal principles of this law place emphasis on the central importance of the individual, freedom of choice and the educative function of the family (art. 2). It was established that in order to remove obstacles to access and free

choice of educational courses, the Region can attribute contribution and subsidies (art. 8). The Region has decided to no longer finance training activities directly, but distribute individual tokens which can be used to buy training packets offered by accredited training bodies. The voucher principle has been put in place in the whole education system by means of the introduction of the so-called "tokens" including: "school token" (ex school voucher); "vocational and training token" which finances attendance at vocational /training courses; and "training tokens " for lifelong learning for those beyond school age. The token is a funding instrument aimed at demand, and designed to replace the distribution of resources according to offer¹⁴.

5.1.4 Education and reformed vocational training

The three years of vocational courses reformed by the 19/2007 Law have registered a notable increase in pupils, passing from 620 in 2003 to 36,296 in 2008. 13,555 pupils enrolled in the first year in 2007/2008, and counted for 13.1% of the total number of first year students in secondary schooling. The regional system of vocational instruction / training is affirming itself as an alternative to traditional studies, to such a point that Lombardy is the region with the most pupils in vocational courses in Italy. In general terms Lombardy's 2007 Reform seems to have drawn up a model for an early streaming and division between traditional education and vocational training. With this model, education for academically weaker pupils passes exclusively under the Region, which directs them to be quickly inserted in the labour market. Thus there is a risk of creating a dual model based on inclusion/exclusion, reflected in terms of opportunities and taking part in a democracy and having aspirations (Appadurai, 2004).

Vocational courses are offered by about a hundred accredited operators (public and private) all belonging to a Regional Register, and receiving funding of 120 million euros a year. The offer is based, however, on only a few traditional qualifications (hairdressing, beauty care, catering, mechanics, electrics, electronics) which count for more than 70% of the courses on offer in the various Lombard provinces. Their professional profiles do not coincide completely with employers' demands and do not appear to be in line with the economic development of the territories involved. As an interviewee confirms:

"the risk (is) having totally fragmented education levels with peaks and exaggerated dips and with discriminating policies the consequence of the fact that you know you can take part in the democratic life of your country and contribute with your ideas to your country, if instead you do not know, do not know, you cannot take part. Therefore, besides, the risk is of a very heavy process of exclusion. In short, if I know

¹⁴ Resources destined to the token system in Lombardy were distributed as follows: schooling was financed for €195,921,000 euro (€120,439,000 for vocational education and training and €75,482,000 for the school system), and for training €25.000.000 euro (IRER, 2010).

I have a right to take part, if I do not know even if I want to I have no right to take part, because I have not got the competences to withstand comparisons" (Regional Secretary of specialized trade-union).

In this context the introduction of a token system has accelerated competition between training bodies who try both to cut costs and to guarantee for themselves foreseeable funds by offering the most requested courses in order to reduce risk of failure. A recent study on the token system for schooling and vocational training, commissioned by the Region itself, holds that "the token, which the Region proposes as a mechanism to stimulate competition among the bodies and nail the offer of training to the demand, has for the moment awarded the bodies most adept at applying for tokens and not necessarily those offering more innovative courses and new job openings. It has awarded students quicker at enrolling and not necessarily those making better job choices". As confirmed in our interviews:

"To manage the mechanism (of the token) a lot of work and bureaucracy goes into the information system and calls for attention to procedures and admin which has changed the work of operators: I deal with coordination and much of my activity is taken up in telling centres how to work and what the procedures and times are, with an eye on detail which is not at the heart of the educational offer [...] Not all courses reach the maximum number of students [...]there are not tokens for everybody. The Region decides that there are 50 tokens for mechanics at Lecco, and when they are finished there are no more, but every body can present offers for mechanics. In order not to get in one other's way, bodies make agreements, but in some situations, like beauticians, there is much competition" (Head of vocational training institute).

There is in fact little pupil guidance, briefing is not organized and anyway entrusted almost exclusively to the training bodies themselves. The token eliminates all mediation because it assumes that token-holders apply directly to the service providers, and therefore individual needs are not perceived in social terms. And then the system leaves token-holders very little time in which to obtain information and thus make informed choices, paradoxically creating an asymmetric power relationship allowing very little freedom of choice to students and encouraging the construction of unadaptable training packets which are difficult to personalize.

"Furthermore it's a rigid packet because once I have decided (on a personalized individual project) or a teaching project, it is difficult to change it, the procedure is complex and not immediate and this hampers any change of direction" (Head of a vocational training institute).

5.2 Campania

With its 5,824,625 residents, Campania is the second most highly populated region after Lombardy, and has the highest density of population (428,15 inhab/km²). It is a region with very marked imbalance, first of all in the distribution of its inhabitants over the territory. Some provinces are scarcely habited while the regional capital, Naples, is one of the most

heavily populated cities in Italy (2,632 ab/km²). On a social level, an insufficient and poorly distributed quota of socio-sanitary infrastructures, an increase in poverty and unemployment, supply a fertile ground for social unrest and an ever-increasing criminality.

Campania is one of the poorest regions in western Europe: the Region's GDP is 6.3% of the Italian whole and the GDP per capita in 2005 was 15,492 euros, against an Italian average of more than 24,000 euros per head, and a Lombard one of more than 30,000 (ISTAT, 2010b). Nevertheless, as will be explained below, the role of illegal work and its GDP production needs to be remembered, though obviously they cannot be considered in these statistics and numbers. In ISTAT estimation in 2008, illegal work in Italy is between 16.3% and 17.5% of the total GDP (ISTAT, 2010a).

As one of the Italian regions belonging to the EU Objective Convergence, Campania has a total EU funding of €6.9 billion, with €3.4 coming from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), 11.8% of the total EU funds coming into Italy in the 2007-13 Convergence campaign (Regione Campania, POR 2007-2013). Nowadays, though the Region possesses a substantial economic potentiality, it is still afflicted by some endemic, apparently insurmountable problems (refuse disposal, gangs and organized crime, submerged workforce, a sluggish economy).

5.2.1 Educational and employment systems

In 2009 there were 1.59 million with jobs, with an employment rate of 40.8%, well 16.6% below the national average and poles apart from the Lisbon target of 70% (ibidem). The unemployment level is about 14.3% against the national 8.2%. The gap between men and women is very wide: male unemployment is about half the female level (11.9% against the female 20.8%). For the 15-24 year-olds it is 38.8%, in comparison to a national rate of 24%. In addition, 50% of the young unemployed have been on the search for jobs for at least 12 months.

The data reveal in fact a labour market with a great many structural problems. On one hand there is a gap between demand and offer, partly due to the low demand for personnel and an unskilled/semi-skilled offer. On the other hand, there is a high level of illegal work, which in 2007 stood at 17.3%, well above the national rate (11.8%). This is a partial reason for such low GDP figures in Campania: a substantial part of work productivity cannot be included in the official statistics. It can neither be perceived nor identified, given its invisibility. For this reason there have been many projects to make this issue emerge and transfer workers to the legal job market. Over the last few years, in fact, there has been a noteworthy reduction of

illegal work, falling from 23% in 2001 to today's figure of about 17 % (ibidem). Lastly, the low participation of women in the working environment and the higher level of female unemployment indicate the lasting resistance to women entering the labour market, but it is also partially explained by the high level of illegal work.

On the education level, the indicators on schooling in the region – percentages of primary and secondary school education and diplomas – are not only lower than the national average and the Lisbon target, but also under regions in the Convergence area. There are high levels of dropping out between the ages of 6 and 14. Campania is, indeed, one of the Italian regions where middle-school children are regularly enrolled, though never attend. The Lisbon indicators show that in 2005 27.9% of those between 18 and 24 in Campania possessed pre-secondary school certification, and did not follow any further courses of instruction/training. The figure goes down to 27.4% for the Convergence Area and, still further again to 22.4% for Italy (Regione Campania, POR FSE 2007-2013). The percentage of secondary schooling among 20 to 24 year olds is on the increase, but in 2007 only 66.9% of 20-24 year-olds possessed a secondary school diploma, against the 73% of the national average. There is also a high percentage of adults (25-64) who have at the most a middle-school certificate. 49.4% of those between 19 and 34 possess a secondary school certificate (national average 57.9%) (Regione Campania, POR FSE 2007-2013). As regards lifelong learning, there are lower percentages than the national average (5% against 6.2) for workers or non-workers in post-school age who take part in training activities (ISTAT, 2009a).

In the adoption of teaching equipment Campania seems to be growing well above the national average (131.8 against 100), but the high regional average depends largely on the figures registered in the province of Naples, which with an index of 188 registers a value that is above the regional average and almost twice that of the Convergence (103.6). Nevertheless, the significant increase in the adoption of teaching equipment does not always go side by side with an efficient, continuous and widespread use, and risks a slow and progressive decline in quality and functioning.

Though a tendency to create paths for facilitating transition from education to the labour market can be identified, education and employment are both complicated areas in a poor region like Campania. Unemployment, indeed, makes Campania one of the most problematic regions in Western Europe, which is why it is included in the Convergence Objective, the EU cohesion policy aiming at converging European regions with slow development.

5.2.2 Multilevel policy making

The context of the Region's educational policies reveals some specific logics, dynamics and interventions. In particular it is relevant to highlight the roles of EU and the Region that are, for different reasons and institutional duties, the two main actors in the frame of policy intervention.

Since Campania records a GDP 75% lower than the EU 25 average, it is included in the Objective Convergence, the EU cohesion policy aiming at converging European regions with slow development. Two EU funds play a part: one is ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) and the other ESF (European Social Fund). One of the axes of the POR (Operating Regional Plan) 2000-2006 FESR was the focus on human resources with special attention to the labour market and training/education. It focused especially on reinforcing and guiding territorial and individual competences towards innovation and the creation of resources in the region. In the FESR POR 2007-2013, the axis "Urban development and life quality" refers particularly to education and smoothing the passage of young people into the labour market with the "Supportive cities and open schools" programme. It takes the form of general interventions helping the young and facilitating their getting jobs¹⁵.

Nevertheless, the investments have not produced the desired results, and the region is still one of the poorest and most problem-afflicted in Western Europe. Trying to reduce the inter-regional gaps and inequalities, the POR EFS 2007-2013 has followed in the footsteps of its predecessor, increasing and diversifying the context and modalities of intervention. 54% of the expenditure will be placed on the objectives of the Lisbon strategy, with a significant support to research and development, technological innovation and its diffusion through the region. The intervention is divided into seven axes: Adaptability, Employability, Social inclusion, Human capital, Trans-nationality/Inter-regionality, Technical assistance, Institutional capacity. The first two focus on training and employment, the third on moving actions opposing discrimination also at work (with specific reference to immigrants) and the fourth focuses on education systems, training and lifelong learning, drop-outs, access to education and training, vocational and university.

Even if the actors identified are just the same as in Lombardy, a real model of education and training does not exist. This is partly due to the comings and goings of councils and the

¹⁵ Interventions including polyfunctional neighbourhood centres for the young willing to collaborate with schools, universities and youth associations; the creation of centres for the potentially emarginated, socially and economically, also to help them re-enter the labour market; the creation of social, sports, cultural and leisure infrastructures in schools, so as the favour access out of school hours as well as the quality and accessibility of educational services and to incentivate use to promote occasions fo metings on the territory (P.O.R FESR 2007-2013).

consequent modifications in competences and departments. In fact, in the past there was only one department in charge of educational and vocational policies, but nowadays there are two: one is a department covering education and school buildings, cultural promotion, museums and libraries, while the other deals with work, training and training guidance, emigration and immigration policies. The issues of corruption and patronage/string pulling, the problem of organised crime in the region are part of the political decision-making. They play a relevant role in administering all policy levels and create some peculiar dynamics that need to be considered in order to understand the context and circumstances.

With the aim of achieving the targets set by the Lisbon Strategy, helped by the financial support of the EU, Campania has invested in the last few years in education and training. Hence the passing of the Regional Law¹⁶ guaranteeing the full exercise of the right to study and training as well as life long learning, not only foreseeing instruments of economic support but also projects preventing pupils dropping out. The region keeps the function of financing, general and specific programming, coordination and experimentation, while the Provinces will approve intervention plans, drawn up jointly with the Municipalities, schools, training bodies and cultural institutions present on the territory, and will manage resources and intervention together with the Municipalities.

The general norms for vocational training are in the Regional Law 14/2009¹⁷, passed by the previous city council towards the end of its mandate. A legislative intervention was set up to create an integrated regional system of services for the use and creation of an agency for work and the schools, with the function of monitoring and implementing the programming lines defined by the region and containing measures for sustaining female, immigrant and disabled employment as well as for contrasting unemployment and social exclusion. Also foreseen are interventions for vocational training and apprenticeships. The specific target of the T.U. is to bring into the open all the irregular work, which is about 20% in Campania, as well as decentralize the training functions between Regions and Provinces. As for the system of vocational training, the Region carries out the role of total system coordinator via programming, controlling and supplying of support services, passing to the Provinces the implementation, management and monitoring of vocational training. An Individual Formative Plan was also created. It is a tool for fragile pupils that aim to define for each of them an appropriate training course and extra-scholastic activities in relation to the qualification to be obtained.

¹⁶ "Norme regionali per l'esercizio del diritto all'istruzione e alla formazione".

¹⁷ "Single text for the betterment of work and professional training".

5.2.3 Access, opportunities and capabilities

As shown above, both European and regional programming seem to be equipped to answer the main problems of the Region. Nevertheless, the level of policy implementation reveals aspects which are worth discussing and analyzing. In fact, as has emerged from some privileged witnesses, the resources destined for the vocational training of the young and adult lifelong learning are improperly used, side-lined for social welfare in a context of a labour market with ample margins of illegal labour, very high percentages of unemployment and little work for some specific groups (women, immigrants, the young):

“about vocational training politicians have always reasoned in an incorrect way in the sense that they have used it as social benefits without any professional outlets. Unfortunately it has always been an investment for unemployment benefits, which has led to two distortions: the person is in some way “drugged” into not working, in that he/she is not directed into the labour market. Unemployment benefits should come in monetary form not training. Besides, trainers should be trained, to avoid operators staying in training for life” (President of a Campania employers’ association).

Moreover, a different kind of deviated use of resources emerges. In some cases, as different interviewees explained, funds for vocational courses and non-public secondary instruction have been used for patronage. Since its institution in 1978 vocational training has become an instrument for distributing power among various interested political groups rotating around the council departments and the Region. As the President of a big consortium operating in the Naples area providing paths of escorted insertion in the labour market and courses of vocational training:

“vocational training is a big problem in the region... Three years ago an enquiry was carried out at regional level showing that training serves to combat unemployment among the trainers. In the sense that the students are selected by the regions, the rationale of belonging to workers’ movements prevails over the selection; therefore they serve to distribute power and money among them, but the people come a couple of times a week for two hours and sign as if they were there all the time. And if you throw them out, you risk it, because you go against the association, the movement, the party they belong” (Head of a vocational training agency in Campania).

What emerges from the interviews is a very confused panorama, especially from the point of view of the vocational training of the young and the channels for inserting the more disadvantaged into work. As the President of the Consortium underscores:

“and especially for boys and girls, training practically does not exist. The previous town council made Law 14, a regional employment law which provides for schools making applications to bans; only that the bans are not published because the money has already been used up with courses for adults in workers’ movements and the basic income measure. To give an idea, since we have been a training body the only bans to come out in 3 or 4 years have been for the 306, in-service training for those in employment” (Head of a vocational training agency in Campania).

The situation seems therefore to be far more complex than it appears from statistics and number-crunching. If in fact from an analysis of the regional operative plans and the measures

drawn up to tackle the question of unemployment and the education/employment transit, the possibility seems to emerge of building personalized paths and interventions adapted to specific circumstances, difficulties emerge on a practical level regarding both capabilities and opportunities. It is not that only personalized programming based on specific student needs does not exist, but neither does programming itself. The only chance is in "self-financed" private courses held by recognized private agencies, where fees must be paid without any hope of financial help or reimbursement:

"for self-financing, there are no problems: students pay and should have 600 or 800 contact hours. At the end they have an examination and certificate recognized by the State. It's about 2000 to 3000 euros; but often you come to an agreement, pay half, under the counter, and we say you have attended even if you haven't, you buy the certificate and do your workshop" (Head of a vocational training agency in Campania).

The message that is spread, the rationale arising from these practices is that the "real" craftsmanship is only learned via an apprenticeship. Nevertheless, to access this possibility, a privileged channel is needed, which can be purely economic or the result of string-pulling. And in this case self-financed courses are a quick way of accessing vocational training and the labour market. It is however a channel opens only to a few, and ruled by the rationale of patronage and payment rather than equality and the promotion of a student's capacities.

Moreover, there is the issue of the European funds which Campania and the South of Italy have used both in these and similar fields (health, social policies), which seem to have gone down in value because of the continual transfer of financing duty from State to Regions. The situation has worsened in the last few years partly because of the economic crisis. What seems to have happened is that resources coming from the EU and the programmes based on them have ended by taking the place of State intervention:

"we have the feeling that the South has not used national but European funds for normal activities and for IT, and therefore there is no surplus of IT in the school of the South of Italy" (Campania regional department for work).

Furthermore, the emergency habit, i.e. the political definition of every question of every issue as an emergency, means that funds allocated are always channelled for projects that aim to fill in existing cracks, not for long-term programming:

"yes, if there was a POR for 13 million, it is lost money, not really used... if perhaps the will was there chances would be there too, but the emergencies are so many that other things are done. Beside the fact that vocational training has been used very much for patronage" (Head of a vocational training agency in Campania).

As for the drop out rate, Campania features high levels in the age-group 6-14. In 2003, 4.7% of the children did not appear to be enrolled in a regular course of study (against 4.5% in the

South and 3.7% in Italy as a whole) (DPS Annual Report 2006¹⁸). However, between 1994/95 and 2004/05, the number of pupils attending upper secondary schools increased by 20%, settling at 90.6%, while the percentage of drop-outs in the first two years of the secondary school remains high (10.6% in 2004/05, against 9.3% in the Convergence Area and 7.1% in the whole of Italy) (ISTAT, 2010a).

Social policies targeted at minors and families, which have seen the multiplication of services and projects have helped reduce the number of drop-outs from the educational circuit by cutting down losses at primary school level. Nevertheless 4.7% of children between 6 and 14 are not recorded as enrolled in regular courses of study (against 4.5% in the South and 3.7% in Italy).

The gap registered between national averages and other indicators is worrying. An example is given by the figures relating to losses in middle schools. The highest percentage in all Italy is in Campania, and seems to be linked to the unemployment rate and the level of relative poverty. What helps worsen the situation is the drop-out rate in the first year of the secondary school, which in 2003/04 was at 14.7%, above both the national level (11.7%) and that of the south (13.4%).

In order to contrast this situation, the Campania Region issued "Guide Lines to contrast dropping out of school and for new integrated courses" in 2006. An overall strategy is described – involving all the bodies interested in the educational/training system of the Region – to sustain the full exercise of the right to study for a whole schooling career, but also to prevent, contrast and retrieve school losses and training failures. Thus the creation of PAS, experimental alternatives courses, which aim to try to bring back and keep in the system the young who have been mislaid, those who have completed the middle school successfully but who do not appear in any school/training course. The PAS aims to forge a link between schools, training bodies and employers.

Nevertheless, the situation is discouraging, from what the operators say. Schools are perceived as cages for pupils from the weaker classes, who find it difficult to go along with the regularity and obligations required by the formal courses and contact lessons featured by the school system. The scarcity of other options, paths and tracks means that these students can only exit the system. As the head of a vocational training agency says:

"those expelled do not find a suitable school for their competences, which are anyway complex, like those of the students still in school [...]. We must have the strength to say that a school does not necessarily mean being shut up in an institute and that education is not just what is in the Gentile Plan. Partly because those lost do other things, but there is also a percentage who does nothing. As for the latter,

¹⁸ 1st DPS on interventions in under-used areas 2006.

either the families do not know it and imagine they still go to school, or they do nothing" (Head of a vocational training agency in Campania).

No voice seems to get promotion: the students or in general young people coming on to the labour market and particularly those in difficulty struggle to find solutions and paths which allow them to structure effective opportunities and promote capacities and free choice. The driving force behind these types of courses are need and zero-choice in a regime of opportunities out of kilt with a capacity approach.

In spite of the creation of policies and interventions based on rights and the definition of the young as citizens, the low level of resources leaves no space for effective capacitation practices.

Conclusions

As we have seen, the process of constitutional reform has tried to re-adjust relations and powers between the various levels of government with overlapping and conflicting competences, uncertain and contradictory results.

The national education system is undergoing a progressive diversification operating at different speeds in the various regions. In general terms structural factors of imbalance remain among the regions, risking emphasizing inequality in the access to education and worsening the disparities affecting the most disadvantaged pupils.

If education is not held in consideration, protected and supported by public policies as a common good, the running of education systems according to criteria of economic performance risks making meaningless the concept of the right to education itself. In the context of the Italian policy, the institutional resources destined to education appear insufficient for keeping count of the differing starting points of the students and upholding heir capacities. The school system is unable to emancipate those who start with social and cultural disadvantages by redistributing opportunities via education. Consequently the areas where most poverty is concentrated generally feature a high level of drop-outs.

The high rate of pupils dropping out of school points to intrinsic limits in the overall functioning of the system. The numbers can be considered to highlight the inclusive capacity of the system and the quality of teaching. Failure cannot be reduced to being an indicator of individual failure alone, but should be recognized and discussed publically as the sign of an institutional stalemate. Public agencies should be measured on their capacity to furnish support and a system of opportunities to the weakest individuals. As Marco Rossi-Doria

(2009:15) suggests, "a request for special attention and help from the weakest group of pupils must not be understood as being just for them - for those who have fallen out of the school - but instead involves everyone. Indeed the pupils who have fallen out of school are doubtless in a state of total exclusion from opportunities and are bearers of special urgency and requests".

But what Italian schools offer is too rigid and standardized, with very little chance of any personalization to suit the training/teaching needs of pupils. Pupils' needs are predefined and generally they themselves are not recognized as individuals with a right to voice within the training process which concerns them. Programmes and subjects are mainly indifferent to the requests of the young, and poorly equipped to recognize their capabilities. Educational policies are above all scarcely integrated with social and work policies. The sectoral nature of the interventions does not allow sufficiently structured courses which take into account the social background of the pupils. This explains why weaker individuals are creamed out and discriminatory processes are not forestalled.

Even the move from education to employment is anything but seamless: in the third quarter of 2010 the percentage of unemployed youngsters reached 24.7 per cent with a peak of 36% for women in the South (ISTAT, 2010a). The young take a long time to enter the job market and the passage has its problems: the percentage of employed possessing diplomas or degrees which are inappropriate for the work they do is the highest in Europe. It needs to be added that given that education, economic development and employment policies have a tradition of separation rather than integration, the widespread use of atypical contracts for the young and the international economic crisis risk transforming in the Italian context the "credit crunch" into a "youth crunch", or into a real and proper instrument for mincing the young (Ferrera, 2009).

It is interesting to highlight how the Regions use their own institutional and organisational arrangements to respond to the problems of education and the transition from education to employment. Lombardy has laid its stakes on building a regional system of vocational education and training as an alternative to the traditional school programmes. Diversifying the system is seen as the principal strategy to contrast school drop-outs and at the same time seamlessly link education and employment. A precocious channelling model separates off education and vocational training, which is considered the natural point of reference for more disadvantaged pupils, who are to be oriented towards getting jobs.

Lombardy has introduced a new means of financing education and vocational training based on accredited training agencies set in competition against one another in order to attract

students with education vouchers. The personalization of course programmes is brought about via these instruments, which are recognized and defined as devices capable of sustaining by themselves freedom of choice for students, who can seek out the offer which is more in line with their own needs in the quasi-market of professional training. Freedom of choice is exercised via the acquisition of a predefined training packet from competitive service providers. The latter try to minimize work costs and at the same time guarantee a foreseeable source of financing by offering the courses most requested not necessarily by the labour market but by the training market in order to reduce the risk of failure. The voucher mechanism eliminates any social mediation from the applications and no mechanisms of collective and social elaboration are foreseen.

Campania has instead to take into account the highest national drop-out rate in lower secondary schooling plus widespread poverty. Resources coming from EU finances to Objective Convergence regions are programmed to take the place of state interventions rather than flank them. What stands out is that resources destined for vocational training are widely used incorrectly for social benefits, and distributed to educational agencies via a rationale of string-pulling, in a milieu featuring wide swathes of illegal work and very high levels of unemployment.

The links between employment and education are weak and poorly structured, left above all to the whims of local initiatives. Though regional programming of events to contrast schools drop-outs and unemployment refer continually to the language of social and citizen rights, the scarce and distorted use of resources does not appear to leave much space for effective capacitation practices.

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