Incubator of Projectuality: An Innovation-Based Approach to Mitigate Criticalities of the Massive Alternance Scheme Designed for the Italian School-Based Educational System

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the recent introduction of a massive alternance scheme in the Italian schools by means of the so called “Buona scuola” (good school) law. In this article, the authors report on a) the outcomes of a survey carried out on a large sample of high school students attending schools located in the South-East area of Rome; b) a comparison of such outcomes with those contained in a recent report released by Unindustria, the entrepreneurs’ union of Lazio Region. The comparison highlights the cultural and organizational limits that affect both the school and the productive systems that have not been able to fully dampen the impact produced by the new alternance scheme. As a consequence, politicians and scholars are called to imagine alternative models and solutions that, at the same time could mitigate the skills gap, increase the students’ capacity to read entrepreneurial organizations and, ultimately, contribute concretely to the economic development of the territory. In response to this pressing need, the authors propose, as ASLERD, an approach that has been designed to mitigate the criticalities emerged from their survey and Unindustria’s report. The core of the strategy is based on the in-situ simulation of innovation processes and in the development of an open badge system to certificate competences/skills and roles.

KEYWORDS
Incubator of Projectuality, Innovation Process, Massive Alternance Scheme, Open Badge Certification, Skill Gaps

INTRODUCTION

Due to the high level of youth unemployment, also consequence of the economic crisis, a large part of the EU countries has committed themselves to improve the responsiveness of their education systems and smooth the education-to-employment transition. A sustainable transition from school to work is, in fact, one of the priorities of the European 2020 strategy (CR, 2013; EUROPE 2020) and this put learning ecosystems, even more, in a pivotal position with respect to the development of the territory.

Central to the European strategy is the work based learning that has been implemented differently from country to country (Chatzichristou et al., 2014). Well known is the dual educational system
adopted in Germany and Austria, that combines well-regulated apprenticeships in a company with vocational education at a vocational school (VTA, 2005; VET REPORT DE, 2015). Other European countries have adopted “lighter” alternance schemes (for definition of alternance see (CEDEFOP, 2008) where work-based learning may vary from weeks to a year and students, usually, have not an apprentice status. Benefits and obstacles of the work-based learning are well documented by European Training Foundation (ETF, 2013): possible benefits span from skills and competence progressing, the development of a professional identity, greater employment opportunities and productivity gains. On the other hand, to produce such benefits relevant challenges have also to be faced: a) the development of an efficient placement that include also prioritization of sectors and qualifications; b) the identification of engaging opportunities; c) ensuring an adequate quality of the pre-training experience that may not be easy to guarantee when founds are limited; c) the involvement of micro and small enterprises that may not see a sufficient pay back to get engaged in alternance schemes.

Despite of all the above well-known criticalities, recently the Italian government decided to tackle a huge challenge: the implementation of a massive alternance scheme – School-Work Alternance (SWA) - for all students of the last three years of high and vocational schools: 200 hours for high school students and 400 hours for the vocational school students. The law prescriptions imply a huge effort from both schools and productive systems that, actually, were not prepared to withstand the impact of the law 107, better known as “Buona scuola” (good school) law (BUONA SCUOLA). In fact, considering that in Italy 0,7 ML of students are attending the last three years of the high school cycle and 0,8 ML of students the last three years of the vocational schools, the expected work-based learning days foreseen by SWA are overall 62,5 ML (about 21 ML each year) that in principle should be offered by about 5.7 ML enterprises and productive activities, more than 90% of which are micro and family enterprises (Giovannella, 2016b). Actually only 151 thousand companies and productive activities accepted, till 2016, to be involved in such big effort. To cover partially the needs of the massive alternance scheme also no profit associations, public administrations and universities have been involved in SWA, with predictably questionable results.

Unavoidably SWA is one of the aspects of the educational process that influences the students’ opinion and contributes in a significant way to determine their perception about the “smartness” of the learning ecosystems. Consequently, we have included in the 2016 version of the ASLERD’s school questionnaire (ASLERD) - designed and used to benchmark the schools’ smartness (Giovannella, 2016a) - also a question on SWA. As far as we know this is has been the first attempt to detect systematically the students’ opinion about SWA experiences. In the following we present a detailed analysis of the answers we collected and compare the students’ point of view with that of enterprises to: a) make emerge problems that are preventing the massive alternance scheme to work properly; b) inspire the design of a win-win solution aimed at mitigating, at least partially, such problems.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The 2016 version of ASLERD’s school questionnaire has been filled by 4558 students belonging to 9 high and vocational schools of the south-east area of Rome. The questionnaire is composed by 68 questions and is intended to perform a fully bottom-up multidimensional evaluation of the perceived level of smartness of the schools.

The analysis of the whole questionnaire is beyond the scope of the present paper. Here we concentrate on few questions concerning SWA and related aspects.

Perception-Satisfaction

The first and most relevant question on which we intend to focus here is the following: “On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 is the max of the scale) how much are you satisfied about your SWA experience? Please, use the input field to motivate your opinion.”
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