The Labor Market and Workers' Identity

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Technological innovation is affecting the organizational models of companies, paving the way for a thorough transformation of jobs. As a direct consequence, **the demand for skills from companies is highly mutable and increasingly focused on soft skills**, such as problem solving, the ability to independently organize and carry out the assigned tasks or to adapt to changes. **Moreover – especially in recent years – scholars are witnessing new social trends that also have an impact on the labor market.** Climate change, globalization and demographic trends that outline the persistent aging of the population point out the need for mutual adaptation between companies and workers with increasingly diverse needs.

Nowadays, the speed of transitions inside, outside and in-between the labor market and the complex needs of workers and companies make education, training and work policies inadequate as they only intervene in a reactive way and without accurately addressing the needs of the beneficiaries and the labor market's trends. In this context "the personalization of interventions in the face of the diversification of the risks of fragility of careers and exclusion", and "the valorization of off-market activities in terms of transitional employments" play a major role (L. Casano, *La riforma del mercato del lavoro nel contesto della "nuova geografia del lavoro",* in Diritto delle Relazioni Industriali n. 3/2017*)*.

Training courses are adapting to the new needs of companies and learners because of the obligation imposed by emergency legislation to turn to online teaching to counter the spread of Covid-19. Thanks to **distance learning** it is easier to split training courses, to make them more personalized and specific and at the same time shorter and more accessible, overcoming geographical barriers. **One example of this is the growing diffusion of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), on-line modules and the free distribution of educational material from universities.**

Accordingly, in the European context the **Skills Agenda for Europe for sustainable competitiveness, social equity and resilience** proposes the use of the so-called micro-credentials to value learning experiences that students and workers face during the course of their lives.
This strategy was implemented – for example – on Vocational Education and Training with the **Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020**, which aims at "removing obstacles for recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and learning periods abroad".

The Recommendation highlights that **the vocational training system responds to the learning needs of individuals and that personalization and flexibility are cornerstones of VET training courses**, and in particular:

- **Paragraph 5** states that "Vocational education and training programmes are learner centred, offer access to face-to-face and digital or blended learning, flexible and modular pathways base on the recognition of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and open up career and learning progression; continuing vocational training programmes are designed to be adaptable to labour market, sectoral or individual up- or reskilling needs.
- **Paragraph 6** explores the concept of **modularity** of programmes: "Vocational education and training programmes are based on modules or units of learning outcomes and validation mechanisms are in place allowing the transfer, recognition and accumulation of individual's learning outcomes with a view to gaining a qualification, a partial qualification, as relevant in the national context; In initial VET the primary goal is to progress to a full qualification.

The certification of short modular courses, such as those envisaged by the Recommendation, **can be achieved through the use of blockchain protocol and Open Badges**, the latter defined as tools for digital certification of professional identity aimed at outlining the framework of competencies that the owner possesses and the documentary support that guarantees its effectiveness (Pellerey et al., *Progetto di ricerca-intervento sul ruolo del portfolio digitale*, Rapporto finale, 2019).

The use of Open Badges can be a starting point for the **creation of a worker identity which represents a form of protection of skills**. In Italy, the definition of workers' identity has been unsuccessfully attributed to the **Worker's e-dossier Electronic Worker File** – introduced by art. 14, Legislative Decree 150/2015 – which should collect "information relating to educational and training paths, working periods, the use of public provisions and contribution payments for the use of social aids".

Using Open Badges, the information would also remain fully available to the workers, who can decide, for instance, to publish it on their social media or attach it to their *Curriculum Vitae*. The data relating to knowledge, skills, competencies and experiences acquired by the worker could also be transferred to **public and private operators in the labor market** and can be used to quickly obtain a description of the worker which – depending on the case – could be the recipient of an active or passive policy or the candidate for a vacancy.

Finally, the information that contribute to create workers' professional identity – when adequately anonymized – could represent one of the constituent elements of the **monitoring and anticipation models of professional skills** at national, regional and sectorial level. This data could also enhance the use of real **labor market and skills intelligence** systems described by the European Training Foundation as "the design and use of Artificial Intelligence algorithms and frameworks to analyze data related to the labor market for supporting policy and decision-making" (European Training Foundation, Big data for labour market: an introductory guide, 2019), findings recently described by the International Labor Organization as strategic for the governance of meeting dynamics between job supply and demand and skills (ILO, *The feasibility of using big data in anticipating and matching skills needs*, 2020).

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