

The transition to work: Higher Education and future

La transizione al lavoro: Alta Formazione e futuro

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Abstract

The theme of the transition to work following university courses is of significant interest if it is associated with the aspects of transversal and technical skill-building, curricula creation, implementing formation for employment and taking care of learning pathways. To pose the problem of improving the transition by way of Higher Education policies is to prepare graduates who are aware of building their career through and with the career services offered by universities. It also means connecting universities with the world of work, through technology transfer, entrepreneurship education, relations between business, research and institutions, while overreaching the boundaries of teaching knowledge and directing university teaching towards skills and capabilities.

Keywords: transitions; work; adult education; higher education; career services.

Abstract

Il tema della transizione al lavoro in uscita dai percorsi universitari ha un interesse rilevante se ad esso vengono associati gli aspetti di costruzione delle competenze trasversali e tecniche, di creazione di curricula, di implementazione della formazione al lavoro, di cura dei percorsi di apprendimento. Porre il problema di migliorare la transizione per le politiche dell'Alta Formazione significa preparare laureati che siano consapevoli della propria costruzione di carriera attraverso e con i servizi offerti dai Career Service Universitari. Significa anche connettere l'Università con il mondo del lavoro, mediante il trasferimento tecnologico, l'educazione all'imprenditorialità e le relazioni aziende-ricerca-istituzioni, oltrepassando i confini dell'insegnamento delle conoscenze e orientando la didattica universitaria su competenze e capacità.

Parole chiave: transizioni; lavoro; educazione degli adulti; alta formazione.

1. Introduction: why speak of transitions

The topic of the transition to work in Higher Education could be considered central from many points of view, at least in those countries, such as Italy, where some structural issues in the economy and education prevent graduates from tackling a delicate period for their personal and professional lives in the awareness that they will be able to get the best from their studies, work and training.

The constantly updated figures provided by Eurofound (2018), European Commission (2016), the OECD (2016; 2017) and Istat (the Italian National Institute of Statistics, 2019) have enabled reflection on two kinds of problems that have persisted in the last decade, namely, the education-employment mismatch and overeducation, that is, the phenomenon owing to which university graduates enter the workplace at school-leaver level and the skills acquired during the years of university study may not be useful to improve their professional position (Garrouste & Rodrigues, 2012). Little is said of these questions in terms of pedagogical or adult education research. Indeed, traditionally, educational research sidelines problems connected to economic aspects and, from another point of view, adult education has paid scant attention to young adults with high levels of education coming out of structured learning courses. These topics are deemed to belong to economic, political, sociological and psychological but not pedagogical studies.

Instead, I think that employment problems can and must be dealt with in view of the essential nexus between the topics of learning, education and training and construction of the professions, professional figures and the future world (Federighi, 2016; 2018). In short, on one hand, dealing with the transition to adulthood entails involvement in the classical field of the investigations inherent to learning in the workplace, educational contexts and lifelong learning. At the same time, however, it requires us to look towards new frontiers and make innovative reflections on the paths, ways and strategies young adults can follow, during the period of their school and university education, to enter the world of work.

In particular, research in Italy (Boffo & Fedeli, 2018; Boffo, Fedeli, Lo Presti, Melacarne & Vianello, 2017) and internationally (Salas-Velasco, 2006; Schomburg & Teichler, 2006; Teichler, 2007) has shown that the transition to work already begins during school and university. The topic is situated in a boundary area, between formal and higher education, touching on political choices and requiring us to rethink how we form the future of our countries and our world.

Dealing with transition, therefore, brings us to research how students' educational pathways and learning environments are built and evolve, from primary school onwards. What is more, it leads us to deal with the workplace, and how to create the right amount of synergy between the workplace and educational institutions, as well as to study and research active educational, training and employment policies. These are complex and broad topics. In this essay, therefore, I will limit my attention to the transition of young graduates and observe it from the viewpoint of the activities carried out by universities to support and accompany that transition.

Educational research and adult education can contaminate each other to create reflection that goes beyond the boundary wall between formal, informal and non-formal education and set up transversal, transdisciplinary directions of research. The problem of transitions, like that of university education, is too complex to be observed from a single point of view, whether this be teaching or the third mission. Accompanying individuals to adulthood is central to civil society and the construction of a democratic culture. It is a topic that lies

within the field of lifelong learning research and the ambit of adult education. It concerns the subject's learning, education and formation.

As I have already indicated, transitions lie at a complex point where the plates of subjective and objectual research collide (Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2010).

Hence, we are interested in the topic of the *education-to-work transition* indicated in twentieth-century sociological studies as the passage to *adulthood* (Buzzi, 1997; Buzzi, 2013; Cavalli, 1993; Gauthier, 2007) which now, instead, marks a period of uncertainty and complexity (Bauman, 2000). Hence, it becomes all the more important to underline the significance of the transition towards the world of work precisely because of the change that it marks in the construction of young adults' subjectivity. It could be said that the topic deals with the adult's debut on the stage of life while, at the same time, focusing on how this passage is left up to the young people in their solitude if they receive no backing from suitable education and employment policies or, in formal situations, such as university studies, from a culture that supports these transitions and considers them in their evolutive and transformative capacity.

In Italy, from the 1980s to the early 2000s, a renowned research institute, IARD (Network for Research on the Condition of Youth and Youth Policies), published research on young people's education-to-work transitions. However, the clear sociological snapshot that these studies provided is now out of focus and marked by very different conditions: "The transition studies performed by the IARD Institute in the period 1983-2004, under the methodological directorship of Antonio de Lillo, following a consolidated tradition, placed [...] entry to the labour market at the centre of the process of becoming an adult. With their first job, on one hand young people experienced roles of responsibility and competence within a production process that assessed their capability to respond to the requests of the world of work. On the other, for the first time they entered a payment logic that led them towards complete economic autonomy. This is why 'finding a job' was a decisive step in the transition, preceded by the event, necessary, but of lesser psychological, social and structural impact, of finishing schooling, followed by the successive, highly impactful event of leaving the family home, which cannot fully take place except in the presence of relatively stable employment"¹ (Buzzi, 2013, p. 149).

The pathway we are currently looking at, instead, is different. The transition is gradually becoming longer with "the postponement of the age when the stages are completed, the extension of the time necessary to fulfil one stage and the one immediately afterwards, the downfall of the established social order in which the stages are completed" (Buzzi, 2013, p. 149) altering the linearity of the pathways to enter adulthood. At present, it could be said that the lengthening of education, the impossibility of finding employment security, the change in market demand and remaining in the family home have modified and upset the twentieth-century models of constructing adult subjectivity. As such, I believe that universities and higher education have to ask themselves searching questions and reflect on career advice before and during this phase of education, as well as on finding work. Faced with changed social conditions, it is fundamental to understand how higher education can support the eminently pedagogical task of young adults' formation.

¹ All the citations were translated by the author.

2. Employability and university pathways

The topic of the transition from education to the world of work is linked to a wide field of research, namely, the topic of employability. It could be said that education and employability are tightly bound since, as we have already seen, education naturally slots in with work and professionalism, in the sense that the skills acquired during schooling, as children, adolescents and youths, all go together to form us as adults. Elsewhere, I have defined employability as a process incorporated in the educational pathway of the subject, student, graduate and doctor of research (Boffo, 2018).

In the 1990s, higher education and universities in the Anglo-Saxon world started to create tighter connections to facilitate graduates' entry to the world of work (Yorke & Knight, 2002). This phase of reflection and political, scientific and academic history resulted in the construction of direct connections with the world of work and university policies that overturned the placement flows of young adults. At present, many Anglo-Saxon university courses are centred around work experience (DCU, 2017), supported by intense reflection and reflexivity on the academic pathways, disciplines and learning outcomes. Employability is enacted during course programmes and learning, alongside the provision of career and professional services. Work becomes an integral part of the educational pathways in the sense that universities put themselves in the situation of rethinking their course programme goals. This is not the place to deal with these historical processes but it is useful to bring them up to underline the value of employability at the macro level, political strategies at the meso level, and the construction of university curricula at the micro level, in the formation of the subject starting from the professional prospects that universities are able to give to the single graduates.

What is employability and why have we started to study it through a pedagogical lens, considering it as a category of education?

The definition of employability that we acquire from Yorke and Knight was drawn up at the end of the 1990s and then elaborated to achieve its most famous formulation in 2004. The concept of employability is defined by the Robbins Report (Robbins, 1963) as one of the main axes of higher education. The difficulty in defining the concept has led many authors to carry out further research which has given us a substantial series of studies, above all in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, as already indicated.

One of the first definitions, from 1998, stems from some case studies investigated by Hillage and Pollard (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). At that time, the concept was already common in the literature and the two researchers gave a definition that is centred around personal capabilities and work: "In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 3).

This first definition referred to the ability to look for, find and keep a job, and underlined career organization competences as central. Thereafter, an interesting investigation was carried out by Harvey (1999a; 1999b; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2006) and, at the same time, by Yorke and Knight (2002; 2004; 2006). Both Harvey's and Yorke and Knight's perspective connect the concept of employability with higher education and pose the problem of the use and presence of *life skills* so that suitable and solid bridges can be built with the world

of work. In a social context that requires ever more graduates to hone more and more specific skills for better production growth, it becomes central to reflect at length on the category of employability to understand which direction to point efforts in to improve university teaching, create work experience opportunities and forms of apprenticeship, and construct specific connections with businesses, associations and public and private production sectors.

The definitions of Harvey, on one hand, and Yorke and Knight, on the other, introduce didactic-pedagogical elements and expand the concept until it becomes the basis of an innovative way of considering higher education. In 1999, Harvey provided this definition, again in a very critical manner: “Employability of a graduate is the propensity of the graduate to exhibit attributes that employers anticipate will be necessary for the future effective functioning of their organization” (Harvey, 1999a, p. 4). Harvey indeed underlines how the fundamental problem is considering employability as a process and that it ultimately prompts a real problem: “employability raises fundamental questions about the purpose and structure of higher education. Employability is not about training or providing add-on skills to gain employment. On the contrary, employability is about how higher education develops critical, reflective, empowered learners. Despite appearances to the contrary, the real challenge is not how to accommodate employability but how to shift the traditional balance of power from the education provider to those participating in the learning experience” (Harvey, 1999a, p. 13).

Yorke and Knight’s definition, for a long time the most common and decisive, gives equal rise to reflection: “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke & Knight, 2005, p. 3).

The work of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) coordinated by Mantze Yorke since the start of the 2000s has provided a singular point of reference for understanding the passage from considering employability as a vaguely economic concept to a category with a clear link to learning, namely, the pedagogical and didactic spheres of higher education (Knight & Yorke, 2002; 2003; 2004). Starting from the series of texts, research and books drawn up using an evidence-based research methodology, the possibility has begun to make headway of reflecting on the didactic pathways, didactic practices and pedagogical contents of employability.²

² The Employability Research and Publications Advisory Board reviews all Higher Education Academy Employability publications, and comprises Professor Peter Knight (Open University), Professor Lee Harvey (Sheffield Hallam University), Professor Stephen McNair (Surrey University), Dr Brenda Little (CHERI), Professor Kate Purcell (University of the West of England), Mike Hill (Graduate Prospects) and Val Butcher from the Higher Education Academy. Some of the most important titles in the two published series are: SERIES 1 Learning and Employability: 1. Employability and Higher Education: What It Is – What It Is Not (Mantz Yorke); 2. Employability: Judging and Communicating Achievements (Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke); 3. Embedding Employability into the Curriculum (Mantz Yorke and Peter Knight); 4. Entrepreneurship and Higher Education: an Employability Perspective (Neil Moreland); 5. Employability and Work-Based Learning (Brenda Little and ESECT Colleagues) 6. Pedagogy for Employability (The Pedagogy for Employability Group); SERIES 2 Learning and Employability: 1. Work-related Learning in Higher Education (Neil Moreland); 2. Employability for Research Postgraduates (Janet Metcalfe); 3.

According to Yorke and Knight, taking a critical look at some aspects can make us understand the importance of the evolution of the category of employability:

“Higher education has a longstanding engagement with the national economy.

- Employability refers to the potential a graduate has for obtaining, and succeeding in graduate-level positions. There is a need to recognise that the co- and extra-curricular achievements of students contribute to a graduate’s employability.
- Employability is taken to be a more complex construct than those of *core* or *key* skills. It connects with a range of discourses and has many facets which range from understanding of one or more subject disciplines to *soft skills* (such as working effectively with others). It also encompasses both academic intelligence and *practical intelligence*.
- Employability and good learning are seen as being closely aligned and not as oppositional constructs. The USEM account of employability accentuates this alignment.
- Curriculum auditing offers a way of testing how and where employability-related learning is incorporated into curricula. It may also point to the need to rethink pedagogic and/or assessment practices.
- Support for employability can be incorporated into curricula in a range of ways: there is no *one size fits all* solution.
- Some aspects of employability take time to develop, suggesting that the focus needs to be on employability across a whole programme rather than on individual programme components (modules). The *Capability envelope* is offered as one prompt to thinking about the way in which a programme-level focus might be achieved.
- Employability can be enhanced through personal development planning, but success will depend upon the extent to which students see a *pay-off* for the effort that they put in” (Yorke & Knight, 2005, pp. 2-4).

What underlies the Higher Education Academy research group’s work is “the consideration of a close connection between education for employability and good results in terms of learning, teaching and didactic assessment” (ibidem, p. 4), not so much generically as aimed at the more conscious growth of every student and his or her capabilities (Harvey & Knight, 1996; Yorke, 2005; Yorke & Knight, 2002; 2004; 2005; 2006) .

Some types of models have been built from the different conceptions of employability, sets of competences and technical or generic or transversal skills. The studies of Yorke and Knight’s research group gave rise to the USEM model³ which took four broad and interrelated components into consideration: “1. Understanding (Appropriate subject knowledge, apprehension and applicability); 2. Skills. (Subject-specific and generic abilities. The term is used here because of its significance in political and employment circles, but there is a real danger of its being given a simplistic and unhelpful interpretation. A term such as *skilful practice* is probably more appropriate.); 3. Efficacy beliefs, (Awareness and understanding of one’s self and one’s abilities) (The ability to reflect on and regulate one’s own learning and behaviour) students’ self-theories and personal

Employability and Part-Time Students (Brenda Little); 4. Ethics and Employability (Simon Robinson).

³ USEM = Understanding, Skills, Efficacy, Metacognition.

qualities. Of critical importance is the extent to which students feel that they might ‘be able to make a difference’ – not every time, but in a probabilistic way; 4. Metacognition, encompassing self-awareness regarding the student’s learning, and the capacity to reflect on, in and for action” (ivi, p. 5).

The model centres its attention on personal qualities and individual capabilities, suggesting how it is the task of the subject, student, graduate, PhD student or doctor of research to acquire employability. We have to thank the USEM model for the broad studies on “work-related” didactics as well as the elaboration of a pedagogy for employability (Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac & Lawton, 2012).

Another model to understand the construction of career pathways is the DOTS model⁴, based on four assumptions, drawn up by Anthony Watts (2006): 1. Decision learning (being capable of planning and orienting acquired knowledge); 2. Opportunity awareness (being capable of both grasping and building opportunities); 3. Transition learning (being capable of transferring and orienting opportunities); 4. Self-awareness (being capable of expressing and recognizing motivations, abilities and responsibilities that can provide support in a career).

Again in the second half of the first decade of the 2000s, a new employability model incorporating elements of the USEM and DOTS models gained popularity. The new model, proposed by Dacre Pool and Sewell in 2007, is known by the acronym CareerEDGE and completes what was missing from both previous models. Based on five elements, it introduced the new *emotional intelligence* as the capability to remain balanced and connect with others in professional relations. The model sums up, integrates, looks more closely at and develops the previous ones. It consists of: (i) Career development learning (this point sums up all the points of the DOTS Model); (ii) Experience (this point underlines the importance of experiences gained both in the workplace and the informal contexts of daily life); (iii) Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills (like in the USEM Model, knowledge and skills are essential as the base of reference); (iv) Generic skills (this point underlines the need to possess transversal or soft skills, here defined as generic); (v) Emotional intelligence (the point introduces the crucial element of motivation and awareness of the self and others for personal development and teamwork).

If we are to reflect on and assess these five elements, they can boost the positive effect of good levels of self-efficiency, self-esteem and self-confidence. As Dacre Pool and Sewell (explain in their article, the first model design presents the web of elements needed to achieve greater employability. The successive development of the model assumes the metaphorical form of a *key* to open the door, we could say, to the world of work, including all those capabilities that can consciously accompany the student not just towards work/a profession, but also towards his or her own continuing education (Sumanasiri, Yajid & Khatibi, 2015a; 2015b).

3. The role of services for students

“In contemporary [...] Higher Education, there are continuing questions, among others, about mission and purpose, the diversity of person being served, and the effectiveness with which this is being achieved, as well as the implications for the content and services offered

⁴ DOTS = Decision, Opportunity, Transitions, Self-awareness.

by higher education institutions as they continue to implement national goals of democratization of access to the collegiate experience. Within the array of issues related to the purpose or mission of higher education in a time of dramatic change in the political, economic, and social challenges being confronted by the nation, there continue to be questions about whether the collegiate experience should focus on education for its own sake or education as preparation for more instrumental ends: citizenships and work [...]. Career Centers are unique entities in higher education institutions because they stand astride two cultures: academe and the corporate world of employment.” (Herr, Rayman & Garis, 1993, p. 1993).

These words, written over 25 years ago, seem to illustrate the present-day situation and pose very topical questions for Italian universities at the beginning of the 2020s. Career services were established in the United States of America at the end of the 1890s for the very purpose of building connections with the world of work, in particular to enable soldiers to get back into higher education. Beyond the history of career services, already celebrating 200 years in Anglo-Saxon universities, the places providing guidance on careers and the education-to-work transition have increasingly become contexts of connections with the world of work. In addition to the present-day career services, other measures also underline the connections with the world outside university. Work experience, both as part of the curriculum and not, work-related didactics and on-the-job theses are measures that support the development of employability. From recent Italian research, for example, Italian and German students are seen to take different approaches to the institution of work experience (Boffo, 2018; Boffo & Fedeli, 2017).

In order to create the conditions to build appropriate education-to-work transitions, it is necessary to foster employability in the university courses themselves. At the same time, however, innovative didactic structures are needed to aid professional development. Therefore, we might ask ourselves what it means to build employability in the university environment. Mere talk and awareness of the theoretical models is not enough. Empirical practice is needed in order to transform not just situations but also the culture of knowledge, learning and application. Study programmes are not enough either. Didactic innovation is needed, by way of contamination, ties and educational actions that can guide the graduates' minds and outlooks.

It could be said that it is necessary to build a *Pedagogy of Employability* (Pegg et al., 2012) that orients the subjects, namely the students, guides the course planning or synchronizes the course teaching and disciplines, and supports work-related learning. As such, the employment services that every university builds within its services for students can be observed as *best practices* for work-related learning.

As I have said, career services have a long history, first established in US universities at the end of the nineteenth century and coming down to us as career services for students in higher education. The literature on employability is starting to become immense, that on services less extensive. However, what I would like to underline is the importance of these academic contexts for graduates' transition to work and above all the *service* role that they offer, not only accompanying the degree courses and providing a point of reference for starting a career, but above all evolving as centres of learning correlated with the disciplines and study courses.

The progressive evolution of career services can be traced as indicated by Day and Cruzvergara (2014, p. 6): “1. The first career service was created in Boston in 1900. In the twenty years from 1900-1920, career services were for ‘vocational guidance’ and universities took the responsibility of guiding their graduates towards their future

employment” (Herr, Rayman & Garis, 1993). 2. “In the period 1920-1940, the guidance was designed mainly for primary and secondary school teachers. Professional guidance was still not widespread in the United States” (Day & Cruzvergara, 2014, p. 7). 3. 1940 to 1970 marked the beginning of the change into placement centres responsible for joining supply and demand, graduates’ competences/skills and the criteria required by the world of work. The centres still boast these characteristics today. “Driven by a reactive approach and philosophy, and fueled by the increased demand for workforce in manufacturing and mining, career staff played the roles of job fillers and measured their success by placement numbers” (Day & Cruetzvergara, 2014, p. 7). 4. From 1970 to 1990, the career service model changed once again, becoming a place where listening, career planning and preparation for the employment process were associated with each graduate’s learning outcomes. In this period, counselling became the central process. 5. From 1990 to 2010 the career service model became more complex. It became centred around a host of services whose purpose was to enable connections between universities and companies. Interactivity between students, families, companies and the world of work became the characteristic of these services for students. And for the future? Career services are set to become meeting places for the different worlds that participate in university development. The connections will have to increasingly expand to include families, companies, teachers, administrative staff and the university top management. This is the situation in the United States and Anglo-Saxon countries where the tradition of career services, as I have related, has been historically present since the end of the nineteenth century (Day & Cruetzvergara, 2014; Herr, Rayman & Garis, 1993).

Career services therefore assume a crucial role in the graduates’ transition to employment: “The mission of the career center of the future will be to build meaningful connections through partnerships with employers, experiences and mentors, and [develop] career communities of learners and networkers that will engage students and alumni for a lifetime” (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014, p. 15).

All of the evolution that has taken place in these service centres around relations: between subjects, students and professionals, contexts, course programmes and companies, students’ needs and the necessities of day-to-day life. If we think about it, those services that set out to develop university studies should be centred around attention towards building the future professionalism of every graduate coming out of a university course. Higher education is linked to the formation of the future adults that the graduates will become (Garis, 2014; Hayden & Ledwith, 2014).

From this brief historical summary, it can be seen that the employability process cannot be separated from care for career guidance services. At the same time, however, one might maintain that these services can be increasingly connected to and incorporated in the study programmes. The evolution that I am proposing might be audacious, but it comes about from the necessity to understand that learning, knowledge and competence are transversal, interconnected actions and can be reread in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary manner, as Morin (2000; 2001) had already proposed at the start of the 2000s. We could speak of care for the formation of adult subjectivity and point at attention to building the life skills needed to enter a world of work presently undergoing rapid and sudden evolution.

4. Formation for employment

In material terms, career services propose various programmes that range from activities aimed at self-knowledge, typical of an educational pathway more centred around growth of personal awareness and autonomy, to activities for the acquisition of typical tools for a first transition to employment, such as CV writing, drawing up presentation letters and building an e-portfolio or simulating a first job interview. Another front on which career services are engaged is the creation of connections with the world of businesses which I was talking about previously. It is not a matter of just offering matching opportunities, but of providing (in)formation about/for the world of work, going into companies, introducing students to the local production fabric, bringing the world of learning closer to the world of professions. In Italy, thanks for the development of university career services must also go to Italia Lavoro (2015) which, as of 2006, aided placement offices, where they existed, and career guidance offices in the definition of career services: “the experience linked to activities carried out by the University Line of the Italia Lavoro (then transformed into AnpalServizi) FIO programme [...] which, as of 2006, supported first of all the introduction and then the improvement of guidance and placement services in Italian universities. In particular, these actions to improve the quality of the services on offer mainly consisted of trialling a participatory standard-setting procedure [...], support for the personalization of services aimed at specific targets, the promotion of higher education and research apprenticeships, strengthening the counsellors’ capabilities to identify the graduates’ skills and, more in general, support for all those not just placement services which foster graduates’ coherent entry to the labour market on a level with the studies and research that they have carried out (e.g. services for self-entrepreneurship and the creation of spin-off businesses, employment services in the sphere of technological transfer aimed not only at the target of graduates but also doctors of research, etc.)” (Montefalcone, 2017, p. 8).

The guidelines published by Anpal Servizi and drawn up by Marco Montefalcone (2017) give career services an even more central position and provide indications for their complete realization. In particular, they provide ten strengths for the optimum development of these services which were then expanded following real meetings with Italian universities and exchanges of opinions with placement officers at the Italia Lavoro offices in 2015 and 2016 (Candia & Cumbo, 2015; Cumbo, 2017): “1. Governance and commitment; 2. Networking, connections and partnerships; 3. Knowledge of employment demand; 4. Communication and marketing; 5. Personalization; 6. Appeal and segmentation of services to businesses; 7. Promotion of the dual system; 8. Sustainability and fundraising; 9. Staff capacity-building; 10. Monitoring and assessment” (Montefalcone, 2017, p. 7).

From these points of observation, we can reread the role and functions of career services in higher education in Italy and also trace the structure of career services in universities worldwide. In particular, employment services also become a point of development for the Third Mission (Anvur, 2018), the third pillar of higher education, which has only recently also become established in the Italian university context (Anvur, 2015; Law n. 240/2010). Let us take a closer look at the indications given to us by Anpal (the National Agency for Active Labour Policies), also on the strength of two decades of engagement with the university facilities dealing with the education-to-work transition.

Some of the topics that seem more important to me are governance, connections, knowledge of the labour market, personalization and capacity-building. As far as governance is concerned, what appears of great importance is the involvement of the top

university management which has to activate its sense of responsibility towards the topic of every graduate's formation for employment and transition to the *world of work*. It has to concern every level of the university structure which must take part in a programme of strategic actions, as well as the course organizers and network of career service and placement officers.

The second point concerns networking, connections and partnerships: as I stated in the previous paragraphs, connections with the world of work are crucial, namely knowing how to relate to companies, institutions and the world of the third sector. Constant dialogue with the world of production, services and the local area can enable universities to grasp the evolving professional world, the necessities that emerge from the work on offer, and the employability potential given by university courses. The career service guidelines state that: "Roots in the local area and networking (with the connected communication and marketing actions aimed at students and companies and the construction of strategic partnerships with potential employers and the various subjects involved) are what form the condition to ensure personalization of the services (namely the capacity to guarantee individualized attention and the continuing accompaniment of users), as well as promoting the quality of the measures and the different tools and devices for the users' introduction to employment (e.g. work experience, Level 3 apprenticeships, creation of spin-off companies, etc.). The present challenge for universities is to involve not only the career service personnel in responsibility for the students' employability but all those who gravitate in the university ecosystem, that is, the whole network of students, alumni, teachers, university faculties, employers, students' families and surrounding communities. The task of the career service is to help students build connections and relations to develop a significant career that responds to their passions and expectations and makes the most of the education that they have received. The will, conviction and commitment of the rectorate is fundamental for the promotion of relations with businesses. Involvement of the rector or pro-rector is indeed a determining factor in setting up a collaborative dialogue and stipulating alliances with businesses" (Montefalcone, 2017, p. 81).

At the third point we find knowledge of the labour market: a career service must be aware of the production sectors into which the local and national area is divided. This can provide knowledge of the required skills, understanding of the rapid evolution of the professional world and awareness of the companies' requirements and needs, which directions the labour demand is taking, which professional sectors are emerging and which professions have more difficulty hiring as well as what the future situations and the requested figures will be.

Personalization is another highly significant topic in the construction of a career service. It means building services that can meet students' needs, reconstruct the underlying motives relating to the choice of a university course, put students in the position to understand which skills they have acquired in their educational pathway and tackle the concept of *curricula vitae* as storytelling. In this connection, personalization also means availing career services of the most avant-garde tools, one of which being the e-portfolio. Indeed, career services are no longer the place where you look for work, but where you acquire skills for work, they are the place where you construct a professional self, learn to come into contact with work and shape up for the responsibility of what is already an adult life (Montefalcone, 2017, p. 102). The possibility of achieving professional goals will depend on the life project that has been built. As such, the institutional organization of the services works for the person, to put motivations and capabilities at the centre of the picture (Nussbaum, 2012). Employment services contribute to *formation for employment*. The students must learn

from their life stories and create a professional story: there is no room for improvisation. The universities also have to learn new visions of learning and student centrality.

A last central factor for the sound and proper development of a career service is capacity-building. “The career and placement service workers’ background is often not suitable for the role that they are called upon to carry out and without doubt constitutes a critical aspect for urgent intervention. The necessity has emerged to concentrate on staff training not just to strengthen their competences in the face of a series of emerging training requirements, but also to promote motivation and a renewed enthusiasm and commitment towards the direct role that they can perform in boosting the employability and building personalized career routes for graduates and doctors of research. The main training requirements for career service workers in Italy, pointed out in special seminars organized by Anpal Servizi, relate to: project management; human resource management; professional figures with pedagogical skills linked to career guidance; coaching; setting up businesses; updates on labour reforms, skills certification and Level 3 apprenticeships; skills analysis (including those acquired in non-formal and informal contexts) and the students’ training requirements; marketing; employer branding; networking; corporate scouting; planning; fundraising; standard setting; in addition to elementary notions about statistics (for labour market analysis), text analysis techniques (to analyse job offers) and basic IT and English language skills. Finally, the necessity has been identified for staff specialized in a particular business sector because this guarantees personalization of the pathways offered to students. The most common professional requirements for career service directors at international level outline a manager capable of developing and maintaining relations with companies and employers, identifying employment opportunities, negotiating work experience and apprenticeships, promoting marketing actions directed at students and employers, forming strategic partnerships with companies and employers, carrying out fundraising, assisting students in developing job-seeking skills, conducting seminars, workshops and training courses to give students information on labour market opportunities, etc. In perspective, the career service director should be a figure with a general vision in an important role (pro-rector, rector’s delegate, director general), a strategic political leader and agent of change capable of involving the various stakeholders, developing personalized and multifaceted connections at all levels and exploiting the potential of the university network. The personnel of these new services, on the other hand, will need skills in facilitating, summing up, creating connections and other specialized skills. Career service personnel are not only called upon to update their skills and knowledge, but also to change their attitude and approach to the new requirements of users and ways of supporting students in the transition from university to work. The new emphasis on connections and communities will indeed lead the service to change identity, going from simple guide to group facilitator, expert consultant and network catalyser able to guide communities and develop significant connections among its users” (Montefalcone, 2017, p. 171).

Lastly, the career service, or the evolution thereof, can become the place for the acquisition of entrepreneurship, creativity and understanding of problem-solving through business simulations or challenges thrown out by companies (Ryman, 1993; Smith, 2014). These activities are on the increase and are at the forefront of skills learning. They are services that educate in *entrepreneurship* (Lackéus, 2015), where the application of *design thinking* or tools such as *Lego serious play* stimulates innovation and opens up new scope for thought. Some examples can be found in the University of Florence career services programme, with its *enterprise workout and training* activities devised to develop teamwork and team-building skills but above all to create new ideas from the real challenges set by companies.

5. Conclusions

At the end of our journey, let us make some notes to reconstruct the initial picture. The topic of transition from education to the world of work and the professions is definitely one of the central issues facing universities today. In this paper, I have not taken into consideration the dependent variable of the labour market. Situational sustainability counts in our case too, employment depends on the context. Nevertheless, if there is no synergy between university and the world of production, we will not have a healthy picture of *employability*. We can therefore reflect on some key points for the future:

1. the role of intermediary allocated to universities by the Biagi Law n. 30/2003 makes it obligatory to know detailed graduate employment figures. In quantitative terms, the AlmaLaurea survey is very important, determining even, but we cannot yet know what effect career service activities have on graduates' future employment. It is all the more important to know the final results of the services' application, because this can give us indications for reflection on the efficacy of what we do and how we do it.
2. the capacity to support a growing number of students poses the problem of the use of IT platforms and the passage of certain types of services to a digital format: drawing up a CV, a cover letter and learning to contact companies are training actions that we can implement with efficient use of e-learning methodologies. As has already been said, telling one's story can interest companies: knowing how to tell this story can be a crucial factor for good recruitment.
3. Education in creativity and entrepreneurship is not yet very widespread. Services that stimulate, support and create entrepreneurship are central places for promoting new critical learning attitudes.
4. understanding the local area's needs is important in order to grasp the professional opportunities and make a connection between educational pathways and professional careers. The focus on investigating companies' necessities must continue in order to strengthen the network of relations and communication with the world of work.
5. last, but not least, taking care to boost the services offered in universities. All students must and will be able to prepare the best future career so long as they use their technical and soft skills in the most creative way possible. Giving all students in higher education these possibilities will be one of the best results not only for the world of work but also for the many graduates who dedicate themselves to their studies knowing that they will have to adopt an immense spirit of criticism to find their way in the twists and turns of their social lives, but that they can use the services offered by universities to give them a helping hand.

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