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## **Graduate employability in rural economies**

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## **Abstract**

Employability can be seen at three levels, which encompass the main components of an individual's life over time across systems: (1) macro-level, which is the structural system-level related to policies and on how educational systems are coordinated within the framework; (2) meso-level, which refers on how employability and people's work related activities are mediated by institutional-level processes in institutions, in this case, universities and businesses; and (3) micro-level, which is constructed at personal level and includes relationship with a range of subjective, biographical and psycho-social dynamics, individuals' cultural profiles and backgrounds.

This work focused on meso e micro level, by analysing employability needs of graduates from universities located in rural settings, in order to identify distinctive elements that can guide universities in draft their strategies in relation to local labour markets, which are most of time the destination markets of graduates.

Field work included a multiple case study in three European universities, questionnaires to students, and interviews to graduates of Cultural Heritage and Tourism's degrees at the University of Macerata (Italy).

Results highlight specific characteristics of transitions from education to work in rural economies, and identify main issues that should be considered by universities in terms of employability provisions.

## **Key words**

Employability; rural economies; graduates' employment.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BA – Bachelor Degree
CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
EC – European Commission
EU – European Union
EURES – European Employment Services
EUROSTAT – Statistical Office of the European Communities
FE – Further Education College
HE – Higher Education
ILO – International Labour Organisation
ISCO – International Standard Classification of Occupations
ISTAT – Italian National Statistics Institute ( <i>Italian: Istituto Centrale di Statistica</i> )
L (+number) – Degree + numerical code specifying field of studies ( <i>Italian: Laurea Triennale</i> ); it corresponds to Bachelor’s degrees
LM (+ number) – Degree + numerical code specifying field of studies ( <i>Italian: Laurea Magistrale</i> ); it corresponds to Master’s degrees
MA – Master Degree
OECD –Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES – Public Employment Services
PRIN – Research Projects of National Interest ( <i>Italian: Progetti di Ricerca di Interesse Nazionale</i> )
SME – Small and Medium Enterprise
UBC – University Business Cooperation
WBL – Work Based Learning
WEF – World Economic Forum
WIL – Work Integrated Learning

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## **Introduction**

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### **1. Background**

Major changes in the labour market took place in past decades, in particular in Western countries, following technological advancements and changes in economic policies toward less regulated labour markets. Transitions from education to work, which had been relatively stable for the most of the past century, have consequently changed: instead of cohorts experiences, as before, now transitions happen in a very fragmented and largely unpredictable way, as individual biographies dealing with constantly changing scenarios. Employability as term shifted from the objective of securing a paid job to the capability of the individual to find and retain a job.

Alongside with a cultural and social focus on “self”, both in terms of self-fulfilment and self-responsibility, the individual has been asked to take over the duty of ‘being employable’. Education system has been entitled to support this journey, particularly in the case of higher education, that was in past decades asked to increase dialogue with business in order to provide “knowledge workers”, for whom shortages in workforce were foreseen. Higher education institutions have been then challenged to provide employability provisions to support smooth transitions from Education to work, by increasing their links with the world of work and by being active players in regional development, and at the same time use new knowledge acquired through this process to feed curricula, and equip graduates with employability skills.

Narratives of employability tend to be focused on the positive side of careers in the ‘new’ economy, as opposed to the protected labour markets that have characterised Western countries until about the Seventies. There are however also researchers who questioned employability, as concept and as implementation in education system, as well the impact on the individual, which is burdened with the enormous responsibility of design and re-design him/herself all over his/her life. Variables affecting the employment potential of an individual, and those affecting education and market systems overall, should be taken into consideration – reviewing therefore the idea that if an individual is skilled enough, or smart enough, then s/he will surely find a satisfactory job.

### **2. Problem statement**

A remarkable amount of literature addresses the issue of employability, encompassing diverse disciplinary fields, at least business and economics, education, psychology, and sociology, at a first instance. From the Bologna Declaration (1999) henceforth, debates took place about two main areas: how employability issue affects higher education and its nature, as well as its organisational settings; how ‘employability skills’ can be taught within formal education. Instead, although recognising that geographical location of the university’s plays a role, little attention has been paid to differences between rural (intended as not-urban) and urban universities and differences that can affect development of employability related to reference territories within the same country – sometimes even within the same region. For example, whereby in Italy it is acknowledged that there is flow of

graduates from the South to the North of the country, as well a trend to graduates urbanisation, and research focused on the explanation on the phenomenon, little work has been done to investigate potential ways to mitigate the phenomenon. As well, policies in higher education, both educational and ‘social’ (as the university is asked to be in its so-called ‘new role’), often are not aligned between them, and i.e. smart specialisation provisions are poorly embeddable in educational provisions as depending from different public authorities.

### **3. Rationale of the study**

Employability can be seen at three levels, which encompass the main components of an individual’s life over time across systems: (1) macro-level, which is the structural system-level related to policies and on how educational systems are coordinated within the framework; (2) meso-level, which refers on how employability and people’s work related activities are mediated by institutional-level processes in institutions, in this case, universities and businesses; and (3) micro-level, which is constructed at personal level and includes relationship with a range of subjective, biographical and psycho-social dynamics, individuals’ cultural profiles and backgrounds.

While some of these elements can be common across countries and regions, most of them refer to place-based features (e.g. national/regional laws; economic performance of country/region; etc.), and very particular aspects related to individual biographies.

Looking at the employability provisions of a higher education institution, thus, implies analysis at least of the economy within the reference territory, which is the main labour market for graduates, particularly when the university is not based in a big town, and/or in a country where economy is wealthy; the cultural and social features of the society where the university is located; and the type of students’ expectations and personal characteristics (framed as possible within an overall context). In addition, policies, intended as educational, economic and welfare policies, need to be embedded within the picture.

The study is therefore organised in order to capture as possible all those elements that draft the picture of ‘graduate employability’ and understand which aspects are characteristics of universities located in not-urban areas.

### **4. Research questions**

- How do higher education institutions support employability of their students in relation with the reference territory?
- How can higher education institutions located in rural area enhance the employability potential of their students?

### **5. Research objectives**

The research has the aim of identifying specific aspects of universities located in rural (or suburban) areas with reference to support building of employability potential in students, having the following specific objectives:

- To understand how in practice universities from urban or not-urban settings deal with employability issues, and identify differences, if any;
- To assess which is the perception of higher education students in relation to the labour market – how much they know about the market, how much they consider themselves employable;
- To understand how transitions actually took place for a sample of graduates, and identify common or divergent elements, both within the sample group and in comparison with the students' group.

## **6. Scope and limitation of the study**

The research is limited in time and refers to data collected from students/graduates of degrees of a similar area (Cultural Heritage and Tourism). Further work is needed to undertake longitudinal studies, to assess the influence of change in policies, economy and social development of specific contexts over time in relation to employability issues. In addition, comparison with different types of degrees, ideally both more closely linked with specific professions (such as i.e. architecture or engineering) and more linked to liberal arts (e.g. Humanities) to verify which are convergent and divergent results and their link with place and type of economy.

## **7. Organization of the study**

The study is organised in two parts, composed by nine main chapters (Part I includes 5 chapters; Part II includes 4 chapters). Conclusions represent the tenth chapter.

Following this introduction, the first part starts by outlining the policy, social and economic background in which the employability discourse is exploited; the second and the third chapters focus on meso level of employability, namely on higher education institutions and business; the fourth focuses on micro level of employability, the level of individual, focussing on higher education students. The fifth chapter introduces to the concept of rural and describe implications for employment issues.

In the second part, the first chapter presents exploratory case studies on three European Universities; the second provides a general introduction on the territorial context in which the field research with students and graduates has been carried out, then Italy and the Marche region, where the University of Macerata is located; the third and the fourth address how employability is played out in context, by exploring self-perceived employability of students and transitions patterns of graduates in Cultural Heritage and Tourism at the University of Macerata, Italy.

Conclusions provide summary of findings and identify areas for further research.

# PART I

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## **I.0. Introduction to Part I**

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The first part of the study explains the setting in which the work was carried out. The theme of employability involves different domains, including the two levels of education and business, an overarching level related to policies and social development, as well as the individual level, in this case of students and graduates.

The first part therefore aims to provide an overview of these dimensions, starting from the macro-level, by outlining the main social and economic changes that took place after World War II in Western countries, then moving forward to the meso-levels of higher education and business in relation with transitions of graduates from education to work, to conclude with the micro-level of the individual, as student and graduate.

An additional chapter focuses on characteristics of rural economies and employment in rural areas, to provide key elements introducing Part II, which presents the field research work.

Given the extent of these topics, the analysis of levels and that of rural areas focuses only on key elements that should be considered to understand employability in rural areas. A short summary is provided at the end of each chapter.

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## I.1. Graduate employability

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A solid understanding of graduate employability begins with an overall picture of the social and economic changes that have taken place in past decades. In fact, employability moves along several dimensions – from global to individual, and encompasses several domains. This chapter outlines the key socio-economic changes that have modified transition pathways between education and work, and the changed nature of jobs and careers. The concept of employability has been accordingly re-formulated, and the nature of jobs for university graduates has changed toward new professional roles and positions that are not yet fixed.

The chapters introduce therefore the main shift from employment to employability as consequence of new policies implemented in particular in Western countries, then analyses the concept of employability that has resulted from the socio-economic change, including the entrepreneurial components, and concludes with the analysis of ‘graduate jobs’ as conceived today.

The next chapter is introduced by a short summary of key points to be considered to position this study within the macro-level of the theme of employability.

### I.1.1 From employment to employability

Transitions from education to work<sup>1</sup> were relatively stable for most of the past century, as a consequence of established education and training programs, welfare, labour market systems, and family structures across Europe. Even if the patterns of transitions were different across countries (e.g. a *parallel* model in Germany or a *sequential* model in France), similar patterns of transition from education to work were identified in cohorts of young people as ‘cumulative’ experiences (Muller and Gangl, 2003).

The change in cultural, social and economic systems due to globalisation, technological change, and neoliberalist policies in Western countries has deeply affected social life and its values, in a process that has been defined as “detraditionalisation” (Heelas et al., 1996), “individualization” (Beck, 1992), and “disembedding” (Giddens, 1991). The focus on the “self” has been translated into individual experiences of transitions, depending either on “choice biographies” (Du Bois Reymond, 1995) or new patterns of vulnerability and perceptions of uncertainty (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Wyn and White, 1997; Furlong et al., 2006). As Cieslik and Pollock (2002, p. 3) argue: “In place of these collective guides and traditional institutions are much more individualised identities and biographies where individuals have a greater scope beyond traditional markers of class, race, and gender to create complex subjective lifestyles”.

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<sup>1</sup> The International Labour Office defines transition as “the passage of a young person (aged 15 to 29 years) from the end of schooling to the first fixed-term or satisfactory employment”, where “*fixed term* is defined in terms of duration of contract or expected length of tenure” (opposite to temporary job), and *satisfactory*, as subjective element, refers to “a job that the respondent considers to “fit” to his desired employment path at that moment in time” (ILO, 2010, pp. 3-4).



If no new “single model of transition” can be identified, some elements, common among countries, can be identified, as follows (Raffe, 2011):

- The transition process takes much longer (typically from around age 15 to age 25, OECD 2000);
- In all countries the position of young entrants to the labour market differs from that of adults, and in many respects is less favourable;
- Education plays particular roles in preparing young people for the labour market;
- In all countries, transitions are differentiated and unequal, and different categories of young people have different experiences.

To understand the change in transitions from university to the world of work, the dramatic change of the labour market should be considered first. Since the 1970s, the automatization of work and other factors have led to downsizing of the labour market, particularly in manufacturing and construction. Manufacturing in particular was a strong field for Western labour markets, and job loss cumulated during the years of recession (2008-2009). Structural changes affected the market, which has shifted from an industrial society to a knowledge-based economy, driven by technological innovation. This shift involved a radical change in the conception of human resources: mass production and consumption, which required a large number of employees, is no longer central to economic growth, and ‘knowledge-intensive’ companies, based on technological innovation and a highly skilled workforce, have taken the fore (Stewart, 2001). According to Drucker (1993), in the ‘post-capitalist’ society “the basic economic resource [...] is and will be knowledge” (1993, p. 7), intended as knowledge ‘for doing’, or knowledge ‘in action’, after centuries of ‘knowledge for being’<sup>2</sup>. The rise of the ‘knowledge worker’ has dominated the discourse on human capital in recent years. Although a shared definition of this term has not yet been agreed upon, it can generally be said that knowledge workers have as main capital their knowledge, and possess hard and soft skills that allow them to apply knowledge to a task or job. They are able to find, process, handle and use information, within a lifelong process of learning. The impact of the knowledge economy on the labour market, as in other spheres of the individual, has of course been disruptive. As the worker owns the capital, hierarchies and powers are modified (managers vs leaders), centralized organisations become decentralised organisations, sectors become permeable, and companies are not always able to define to which sector they belong (Phillips et al., 2017). The knowledge based economy offers a great promise, that anyone ‘skilled enough’, or smart enough, or committed enough, can achieve the higher positions in professional settings, with incomes more and more polarised between the ‘winners’ (those who achieve the higher positions), and the ‘losers’ (those who do not) (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). The process and its implications became more visible during the years of economic crisis, but the effects on the labour market had already started in the final decades of the 20th century,

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<sup>2</sup> Drucker identifies three phases of shift in the conception of knowledge – the Industrial Revolution, the Productivity Revolution, the Management Revolution, concluding that in all those phases knowledge was generalist, while in the knowledge based society (KBE), knowledge is highly specialised. In fact, if the *techné* or craft was traditionally not included in the concept of knowledge, as learnt by experience, in the KBE craft is “specialised knowledge”, which is called “discipline”. Disciplines structure methodologies; methodologies ‘convert anecdote into information’; information can be converted into skill that can be taught and learnt (Drucker, 1993:41.42).

when finding or keeping a job was a challenge for many individuals (Rothwell and Rothwell, 2017). Also, the nature of jobs has changed from permanent to temporary positions. The ILO report 2019 (World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2019) highlights how in Northern, Southern and Western Europe, although with differences from country to country, there is a general shift toward temporary or part-time contracts, with uncertain welfare conditions and social protection, and with a certain degree of risk of poverty (2017:51).

The labour market has thus shifted from employment to employability, where contracts of loyalty for job security and career progressions (Cappelli, 1999; Brown and Hesketh, 2004)<sup>3</sup> have been replaced by flexible contracts, often leading to precarious job conditions.

Employability as a term shifted from the objective of securing one stable and reliable position or career (Feintuch, 1955) to the capability to find and to remain employed through a series of jobs and careers. This also reflects the view of the companies, which are not able or willing to offer long-term career opportunities (Brown and Hesketh, 2004, p. 27): in other words, while in the past century the dominant culture was steady employment, often with the same corporation for the worker's lifetime, (Magnum, 1976), today's careers have become increasingly less predictable, more "boundaryless" and "protean".

One of the definitions of a boundaryless career is

a career that is not confined to a single occupation or organization but involves movement across traditional boundaries. This will involve changing jobs and employment status and may also include periods outside the conventional labour market, either concentrating on family roles or undertaking a career break (Dictionary of Human Resource Management, 2017).

Other authors look more at the different organisational settings of the companies, which have moved from hierarchical progressions to careers in which occupational, departmental and organisational boundaries are crossed (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996; Gunz, Evans, and Jalland, 2000), where competency based perspectives are crucial to employment and career (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996).

In 1996, Arthur and Rousseau defined six specific meanings for the boundaryless career (Roper et al, 2010, pp. 662-663):

- Movement across the boundaries of separate employers;
- Drawing validation from outside the present employer;
- Sustained by networks or information that are external to the current employer;
- Breaking traditional organisational career boundaries;
- Rejection of traditional career opportunities for personal or family reasons;
- Perceiving a boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints.

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<sup>3</sup> Of note is the concept of the "psychological contract," which organisational studies define as the "The unspoken promise, not present in the small print of the employment contract, of what the employer gives, what employees give in return, and vice versa" (Baruch, 2001:544): this type of tacit agreement has been swept away.

Later, Sullivan and Arthur (2006) generalised it to comprise physical (objective) and psychological (subjective) mobility, which are two interdependent continua in career worlds.

Likewise, a “protean career” is driven by the individual, not by organisations. The concept dates back to 1976, and was further developed by the same Hall, who defined “the protean career as one driven by the needs of the individual rather than the organization and characterized by frequent change, autonomy, and self-direction” (Hall, 2001, p. 4). The protean career is therefore based on two main attitudes: it is values-driven, prizing individual values over organisational values, and it is self-directed, marked by independence in managing vocational behaviour (Briscoe et al, 2006).

The boundaryless and protean concepts have dominated the discourse on careers in recent decades, following economic and political trends toward a pathway of globalised trade and deregulation of markets, including the labour market (Roper et al, 2010; Kuttner, 2018). Greater responsibility lies in the hands of the individuals, who must enact own career journeys showing proactivity, self-awareness, and life design abilities (Inkson and Arthur, 2001; Inkson and Elkin, 2008).

The narrative of the “new careers”, or careers in the new economy, tends to highlight the positive side for the individual – autonomy, freedom of choice, and self-fulfilment. However, the emphasis on “self-direction” in careers places the onus of “being employable” on the individual (Keep and Mayhew, 2010), who is asked to undertake a never-ending process of life design and re-design. In today’s society, unemployment is considered a personal weakness more than a collective responsibility, ignoring in this way the dynamics and the dynamism of the labour markets (Serrano Pascual, 2001). Further, the idea that individuals with the same credentials and skills compete equally for jobs is at best naïve: several studies have investigated the challenges faced by individuals from a disadvantaged background as they compete in the labour market (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Furlong and Cartmel, 2005; Holmes, 2011; Tomlinson, 2007). Social position, which entails codes and languages, but also different personal networks, gender, and location, play a role in the process of recruiting, which claims to use ‘scientific’ (objective and rigorous) tools, but still has strong relational and contextualised features, as pointed out by Brown and Hesketh (2004), who defined the selection process as “the science of gut feeling”.

### **I.1.2 Defining employability**

Although employability and its components are popular in academic and policy discourses, no univocal definition has been agreed upon.

Grazier (2001) identified seven phases in the evolution of the meaning of employability from 1900 to today, from a policy perspective: the latest versions, having their onset on the 1900s, are defined as *initiative employability* and *interactive employability*. The first is linked with the capacity of the individual to gather and activate resources around his/her project, and it is very close to the entrepreneurial model, while the second is focused on “the relative capacity of an individual to achieve meaningful employment given the interaction between personal

characteristics and the labour market” and is linked to the implementation of so-called active measures of labour.

Looking at general definitions applicable to individuals, several can be found in the literature, as for example:

For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and aptitudes 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 and Pollard, 1998, p. 2),

[the employability of individuals will be defined] as the relative chances of getting and maintaining different kinds of employment (Brown and Hesketh, 2004, p. 25),

or, applied to graduates:

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, 2004).

Sin and Neave (2016) argue that the term is a ‘floating signifier’ in Lévi-Strauss’ sense of the term (1950), i.e. “a construct that accommodates different and often contending meanings”; according to Cremin (2001, p. 133) employability is an ‘empty signifier’, that “draws together the fluff or a number of unconnected words, into a relationship with one another”.

The concept and term relate to the labour market overall, not specifically to transitions from education to work: a considerable body of literature discusses employability of employees in order to ensure that workers are able to face the fluctuating requirements of the market (Van Dam, 2004; Fugate et al., 2004; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006). Employability is in fact a life-long process.

Thijssen, Van der Heijden, and Rocco (2008) distinguished between three perspectives from which employability can be viewed, namely (1) *societal or national*, referring to employment rates of a country; (2) *organisational*, the company level, where the focus is on matching supply and demand in a changing organization; and (3) *individual*, where a person seeks to “acquire and to keep an attractive job in the internal or external labour market” (page 168).

Likewise, Tomlinson and Holmes (2017), focusing on the transition from student to graduate, also define three levels, namely (1) *macro-level*, which is the structural system-level related to neo-liberalist policies and to how educational systems are coordinated within the framework; (2) *meso-level*, which refers to how employability and people’s work related activities are mediated by institutional-level processes located within both educational and organisational domains; and (3) *micro-level*, which is constructed at the personal level and encompasses a range of subjective, biographical and psycho-social dynamics, as well as the individual’s cultural profile and background.

### **I.1.2.1 Macro level**

The macro-level analysis, as briefly explained in the previous paragraph, shows governments that “seek to enable rather than provide” (Edwards 2003), or that seek

to promote personal mobility through active policies (Grazier, 2001; Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013). While the responsibility of being employable is primarily on individuals, education systems are asked to support the building of employable citizens..

### **I.1.2.2 Meso level**

At the meso-level, the necessary relation between education and business systems is the centre of attention: in fact, as straightforwardly pointed out by Brown and Hesketh “the acid test of employability is employment” (2004:18). Employability cannot be defined *per se* in terms of individual values, skills and capabilities, because even an excellent candidate can remain unemployed in a very negative labour market. The relative dimension needs to be considered: external and economic factors which may be sector or region-specific (Saxenian, 1994; Harvey, 2000) can affect the actual employment of the individual, regardless of that person’s employability potential (Harvey 2001; Holmes 2013). In the knowledge-based economy, learning is only a pre-requisite for obtaining and retaining a job (Garsten and Jacobsson. 2013; Sin and Neave, 2016); higher education, which was both necessary and sufficient to achieve a stable position in the labour market, particularly when the public sector was stronger, is now necessary, but often insufficient (Sin and Neave, 2016, p. 2; Brown and Hesketh, 2004, p. 30). The “massification” of higher education (Scott, 1995) weakened the power of credentials (Brown and Hesketh, 2004), and the required the workforce to be equipped with different forms of skills, often related to personal qualities (Hassard et al., 2008; Purcell et al., 2002). The influence of the requests from the labour market for fit-for-purpose graduates is still a controversial issue leading to tensions between employers and academics (Barnett, 2000, Rae, 2014), and also in the views and expectations of students (Finch et al., 2016). This tension is unavoidable, because, as Tomlinson and Holmes pointed out, work organisations “mediate the ways in which graduates’ career progression and employability are played out in context” (2017, p. 10).

A significant body of literature is devoted to discussions about skills, ranging from those considered the most significant for employers (Purcell et al., 2002; Slade, 2014; El Mansour and Dean, 2016; Wesley et al, 2017), to the difficulty of teaching and assessing them (Knight and Yorke, 2003; Huber et al, 2007), and the “vagueness” of their definition (Mason et al, 2009). This ongoing debate has led to a great fragmentation of concepts and interpretations. The same terms are unclear: for example, ‘generic skills’ is used interchangeably with ‘core skills’, ‘basic skills’, ‘transferable skills’, and ‘employability skills’ (Caballero et al., 2011).

Similarly, there is a lack of common understanding about the meaning of ‘employability skills’, which of course include hard ‘technical’ skills, also encompass the hazily defined aspects of soft skills, interpersonal skills, and career skills.

Several studies and government initiatives have provided frameworks for employability skills, such as:

*Soft skills clusters* – Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton & Fielitz (2012). The research team at Michigan State University (MSU) conducted a nation-wide survey in 2011, collecting data from 2,669 students, 898 faculty members, 4,262 alumni, and 282 employers to identify what soft skills are important for new graduates. The survey

design was based on literature review and surveys from government and non-government sources. Having identified soft skills important for new graduates, the team then clustered them into 7 groups (Communication skills; Decision making; Self-management skills; Teamwork skills; Professionalism skills; Experiences; Leadership skills).

*The US Employability Skills Framework (2010)*. The Employability Skills Framework was developed as part of an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. Framework development was guided by a group of career and technical education (CTE), adult education, workforce development, and business organizations. Employability skills are defined as "general skills that are necessary for success in the labour market at all employment levels and in all sectors. These skills have a number of names— soft skills, workforce readiness skills, career readiness skills— but they all speak to the same set of core skills that employers want" (source: website of the Employability Skills Framework). The framework is organised into three main competence areas, namely (a) Applied knowledge, composed of applied academic skills and critical thinking skills; (b) Effective relations, composed of interpersonal skills and personal qualities; (c) Workplace skills, composed of resource management, information use, communication skills, systems thinking, and technology use.

*The Australian "Employability Skills for the Future"*. The Australia Department of Education, Science and Training, Australian Chamber of Commerce and the Industry & Business Council of Australia carried out a study in 2002 to identify employability skills, defined as "skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions" (2002, p. 3). Their framework identifies eight main employability skills (Communication; Teamwork; Problem Solving; Initiative and Enterprise; Planning and Organising; Self-Management; Technology; Learning).

Within higher education as well, various and diverse forms of skills sets have been proposed to support graduate employability (e.g. Hager and Holland, 2006; Yorke and Knight, 2006; Harvey, 2000; etc. – see Suleman, 2016 for a complete analysis). The debate, however, has been more focused on the concept of "graduate attributes". Bowden et al.'s (2000) commonly cited definition states that graduate attributes are "the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students would desirably develop during their time at the institution and, consequently, shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and as a citizen". The concept includes the formative value of universities, whose aim is to educate citizens, not merely to train workers (Morley, 2001; Leonard, 2000). Further definitions related to graduates include the concepts of "graduate identity" (Holmes, 2001) and "graduateness" (Steur et al, 2012).

The concept of graduate identity starts from the acknowledgment that assessment of skills and attributes cannot succeed, as no performance indicator can capture a 'skill' or 'attribute' (Holmes, 2001; 2012). Holmes draws upon the notions of a) type of activity, and b) kind of person doing the activity (in context), noting that in the process there is always someone observing and interpreting the situation and the people in the situation – then their identity. The process has a relational nature: when graduates apply for a job, they should be *identified* as a graduate, which does not

mean “merely possessing a degree certificate” (Holmes 2012, p. 7). The relational process of identification is based on the interaction between individuals who claim/disclaim a particular identity, and the affirmation/disaffirmation of such a claim.

Graduateness refers to “something generic that is developed through the university experience and is expected to be achieved by graduates” (Steuer et al, 2016, p. 2). While acknowledging that university equips students with skills, Steuer et al. consider that the student develops high cognitive abilities, which include the value given to knowledge, that enables “depth of skills that otherwise would remain superficial” (2016, p. 5).

### **I.1.2.3 Micro level**

Looking at the micro-level of employability, the focus is on individuals. In past years the dominant discourse has been around skills, on the assumption that graduates possessing the most required skills are more employable. The correlation is obviously not so direct: an individual is more than a sum of skills acquired in formal education. Much research has stressed that graduate employability is a broad and complex concept (Holmes, 2013; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Jackson, 2016).

A more comprehensive approach uses the dimension of “capitals” (Tomlinson, 2010; 2017; Clark et al., 2011; Williams, 2016) to understand what shapes the graduates’ transitional activities and access to the labour market.

Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue that “personal capital” in relation to employability depends “on a combination of hard currencies, including credentials, work experience, sporting or music achievements, etc. and soft currencies, including interpersonal skills, charisma, appearance and accent” (p. 35). These currencies are mediated by the self (family, gender, ethnicity, values) and the narratives of employability, in particularly from the employers’ side.

According to Tomlinson (2010; 2017), we can identify at least three broad “employability capitals”, key resources that favour transitions from education to work:

- Human capital: this relates directly to hard skills and technological knowledge acquired by graduates during the study years;
- Social capital: this is related to social relations and contacts (networks or social ties that support graduates in getting closer to targeted employment);
- Cultural capital: cultural knowledge, behaviours and awareness of the enterprises environment and the work culture of the place.

Two further capitals of relevance to the labour market complement the three key capitals:

- Identity capital: this refers to the investment of the graduates to their future career, and connect their personal identity to targeted employment;
- Psychological capital: this refers particularly to the levels of adaptability and resilience against a challenging labour market.

Tomlinson defines capitals as “key resources, accumulated through graduates’ educational, social and initial employment experiences, and which equip them favourably when transitioning to the labour market” (2017, p. 18).

While formation of capitals is linked with the life of the individual, a greater contribution is provided by higher education. Higher education institutions also are multi-level and multi-faceted organisations, which offer not only courses and teaching, but also cultural, political, and social experiences. Universities are partly a “landscape of practice” (Jackson, 2016, referring to Wenger’s concept) where students have opportunities for personal development. Work based learning, internships, student associations, etc. contribute to the development of networks, acquisition of business knowledge, and formation of professional identity (or, according to Jackson, to pre-professional identity building).

### **I.1.3 Employability as entrepreneurial process**

Another phenomenon that has been explored in the literature in the past decades is entrepreneurship. Once only a theme examined in business schools, it has become a policy topic in education, in efforts to prepare citizens to be ‘entrepreneurial’. Also in this case, the self is emphasized: individuals are expected to be responsible for their own career trajectory, as an entrepreneur is.

The European Union has also made a strong effort in entrepreneurship education (European Commission, 2013; 2014; 2016), but views entrepreneurship not as ‘being an entrepreneur’ but as ‘being an enterprising individual’. Relations between entrepreneurship and employability have been widely debated (Gibb, 2002; Sewell and Dacre Pool, 2010; Rae, 2007; etc.) and there is consensus on the idea that an entrepreneurial mindset is asset in any kind of employment (Moreland, 2006). According to Moreland (2006:5), if employability is defined as “a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations (Yorke, 2004, p. 7)”, then entrepreneurship is “a subset of employability”. Self-employment should be considered as well: self-employment is increasingly an employment choice and shares a number of factors with entrepreneurship, although not in terms of creation of a new company (Kolvereid 1996; 2016). Finally, the concept of “intrepreneurship” (Antoncic and Hirsh, 2002) describes entrepreneurial behaviour within existing companies.

The European Union has also provided a number of resources to support education and training systems, starting with the EntreComp, a framework of reference for entrepreneurship, addressing 5 competences along an 8-level progression model and with a comprehensive list of 442 learning outcomes (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). Other resources include the Guide for Educators (European Commission, 2014), the HEInnovate scheme (EC-OECD), and the EvaluateComp, to assess the impact of entrepreneurship programmes in higher education (under development, 2019 ). HEInnovate supports entrepreneurial training (European Commission, 2009), and funding schemes, in particular under the Erasmus+ programme.

While Europe has a fairly clear definition of entrepreneurship education, internationally its purpose and components are less shared, and often the terms entrepreneurial, entrepreneurship and enterprise education are used interchangeably (Draycott and Rae, 2011; Mwasalwiba, 2010; Morselli, 2019). In North America, entrepreneurship education is more focused on preparing individuals to create a



business, as entrepreneurship is viewed as the key to economic growth. Typical of the clear definition that prevails is that of Neck and Corbett (2018, p. 10): “we define entrepreneurship education as developing the mindset, skill set, and practice necessary for starting new ventures”.

Thus, there are two streams of research about entrepreneurship in relation to learning (Blenker et al., 2008): the first focuses on pedagogy, while the second focuses on universities as educational providers and their role within the business and social context.

The stream of research on pedagogy explores ‘internal’ questions of didactics and pedagogy. According to Wang and Chugh (2014), who carried out a systematic analysis of literature on teaching and learning methods, the most applied theories are experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) , transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) , and situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) . Other authors have indicated expansive learning (Engeström, 2015) as the most suitable learning theory for forming entrepreneurial graduates. Thus in general, the most suitable pedagogical approaches to support acquisition of entrepreneurial behaviour are those included under the umbrella of ‘active pedagogies’. A structured theory of learning for entrepreneurship, however, has not been agreed upon, and some arguments still exists about the possibility of ‘teaching entrepreneurship’ (Henry et al. 2005; Klein and Bullock, 2006), and how to train teachers to do it (Fiet, 2000).

The stream of research on the role of the university is perhaps best represented by studies on the concept of entrepreneurial university, in the overall frame of triple/quadruple helix metaphors (Etzkowitz,2000; Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Etzkowitz, 2003).

In both streams of research, the focus is still on the student and the graduate: learning entrepreneurship (the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills or behaviour) means becoming competent and ready for the market, or in other words, being employable.

#### **I.1.4 What are graduate jobs?**

As we look at graduate employability, we should ask ourselves what can be considered jobs for graduate in our age. Following economic and social changes, the professions defined as jobs for graduates have also changed over time. Purcell and Elias (2014, p. 7) proposed four categories of graduate employment:

- Traditional graduate occupations, which refer to professions like medical practitioners, higher education and secondary education teachers, and other scientific and technical occupations;
- Modern graduate occupations, which includes professionals in IT and vocational areas, primary school teachers, management, and new administrative posts in the public and private sectors;
- Occupations for new graduates, which include sales and marketing managers, health practitioners (e.g. physiotherapists), management accountants, and welfare work;

- Niche graduate occupations, defined as jobs “in areas of employment in which most workers do not have degrees, but within which there are stable or growing specialist niches for which graduates are sought”, which include leisure and sports managers, hotel and accommodation managers, and senior administrators in education establishments.

Further, Purcell and Elias (2013), while acknowledging that “it is not possible to provide a universal definition of what constitutes a graduate job as a general taxonomic category” (2013, p. 10), proposed three categories of job classification based on the skills and experience required to perform the task, and the link with higher education:

- Experts: occupations in knowledge-intensive sectors, such as chemical scientists, engineers, pharmacists, etc.
- Orchestrators: defined as “jobs that require them to draw on and orchestrate their knowledge and the knowledge of others to evaluate information, assess options, plan, make decisions and co-ordinate the contributions of others to achieve objectives”, such as managers
- Communicators: defined as jobs that require “interactive skills that may be based on interpersonal skills, creative skills or high-level technological knowledge, capacity to access and manipulate information and/or an understanding of how to communicate information effectively to achieve objectives”, for example marketing professionals or web design professionals.

This proposal, developed as part of the FutureTrack survey<sup>4</sup>, is one of the few offered to define ‘graduate jobs,’ about which there has been little debate or consensus. Professional positions that until twenty years ago were accessible to candidates with higher secondary education diplomas today require at least a Bachelor’s degree, because of the combination of degree inflation, oversaturation of the labour market, and the digital revolution, which have given rise to professional profiles that did not exist a few years ago (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Tomlinson, 2008). While narratives of employability stress the need for a skilled workforce for the knowledge economy, or new economy, actual employment results often indicate a phenomenon of overeducation and/or underemployment throughout Western countries, especially Spain and Italy. Overeducation is defined as “the extent to which individuals possess a level of education in excess of that which is required for their particular job” (McGuinness, 2006) (Flisi et al., 2002)<sup>5</sup>. Some nations (for example Spain, see Ortiz, 2010; Dolado et al., 2002) experience difficulty in maintaining or increasing investment in human capital to stimulate labour productivity. Overeducated individuals can experience frustration, low levels of job satisfaction, and reduced wellbeing (Artés et al., 2014).

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<sup>4</sup> Futuretrack is the most extensive investigation survey of the relationship between higher education and employment in the UK: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/futuretrack/what-is/>

<sup>5</sup> In Italy (2018), overeducation concerned 42.1% of the employed graduates; it is not strictly linked to access to work but continues over time, affecting 40% of graduates at +6 years from the degree (ISTAT, 2019). In Europe, overeducation ranged from 38% in 2001 to 53% in 2009 (Eurofund, 2014).

### **I.1.5 Conclusive summary**

This chapter has provided the background context for this study. Key aspects can be summarized as follows:

- During past decades there has been a shift from a collective view of the society and the economy toward an individual view, which is focused on the self within the society more than on the community;
- Consequently, transitions from education to work are no longer collective experiences – e.g. the same cohort sharing the same pathway, but have become individual experiences;
- The structural change of the labour market has made jobs generally precarious, and workers less protected from the fluctuations of the economy;
- The focus on self is applied to the job seeker: individuals now bear the onus of responsibility for their own ability to find, retain, and change jobs – thus of ‘being employable’;
- As a consequence, employable individuals need to have an entrepreneurial mind-set to manage their own professional path;
- Attainment and management of employability is the duty of the individual, while the education system is asked to support the acquisition of employability-related skills;
- The massification of higher education, consequent to demands for ‘knowledge workers’, has produced more graduates for the market, has led to oversaturation and thus a weakening of these credentials in the labour market;
- Over one-third of young graduates in Europe are over-educated;
- At present, the definition of ‘graduate jobs’ is unclear; taxonomies of labour based on professional profiles (explained by roles) do not jibe with labour market emphasis on competences-based profiles.

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## I.2. Higher Education and Employability

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This chapter addresses one of the components of the meso-level of graduate employability, namely, the higher education system. In response to demands that education better serve the needs of the economy, the higher education system has undergone very significant structural changes in the past few decades. Efforts have been made to relate better with the business world, take a stronger role in innovation, and contribute to regional development. As a ‘natural’ consequence of its contribution to economic growth, educational institutions have been asked primarily to make graduates ‘employable’.

Higher education institutions have responded to these new requirements in different ways and at different levels: in terms of external relations, universities have deployed strategies of university-business cooperation and have acquired new roles in regional innovation systems. In terms of internal arrangements, curricula and pedagogies have been reviewed, and support services have been created, improved, or diversified to support employability processes.

In this process, universities need to address the issue of their own ‘new role’ and identity within a constantly changing society.

This chapter outlines the key themes of the ‘changing university’, looks at emerging models of institutions and their external and internal relations, and explores the significance of these changes from the point of view of employability.

### I.2.1 The changing role of universities

Higher education policies in past decades have been strongly shaped by the issue of employability, with policies on the “societal” or “regional” role of the university, or “university-business cooperation”. Beginning with the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration<sup>6</sup>, “employability” has been one of the key objectives for the realisation of the European Higher Education Area following the Bologna Declaration (June 1999)<sup>7</sup>. This focus articulated to some extent the already progressing shift of universities from a mission of civic development and liberal education of citizens to a more active role in answering economic needs (Sin and Neave, 2016; Tomusk, 2014).

The relation between university and business has been widely studied within the University-Business Cooperation (UBC) concept, which includes, though does not directly address, employability. Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and before the signing of the Bologna Declaration, in Europe overall there has been a shift toward a more societal role of universities (Goddard, 2009; Zomer and Benneworth, 2011), which includes special attention to links with business. The concept and fundamentals of the “Third Mission” of universities has been widely discussed and questioned,

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<sup>6</sup> “We hereby commit ourselves to encouraging a common frame of reference, aimed at improving external recognition and facilitating student mobility as well as *employability*”, Sorbonne Declaration 1998. This declaration was signed by the ministries of France, Germany, Italy, and United Kingdom.

<sup>7</sup> “Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens *employability* and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system”. The Bologna declaration was signed by 29 Ministries of Education, and to date, 47 countries have joined the Bologna process.

though its definition remains unclear, except as a “residual term, encompassing all university activities not covered by the first two missions of teaching and research” (E3M 2010). Most definitions of the Third Mission include:

- knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments (Molas-Gallart, Salter, Patel et al., 2002), that refer to Third Stream of universities.
- social, enterprising, innovation activities that universities carry out alongside their teaching and research activities whereby additional benefits are created for society (Montesinos et al., 2008).
- activities of the universities that stimulate and direct the application and exploitation of knowledge to the benefit of the social, cultural and economic development of our society (HEFCW, 2004).

Up to the second half of the 20th century, the UBC discourse tended to be centred around the exploitation of research, based on the dominant paradigm of a technology push, undermining the role played in innovation by other disciplines, such as Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (European Commission, 2011). The “triple helix” approach (Etzkowitz, 2008) and its developments (Ranga and Etzkowitz, 2013), which emphasise innovation as the result of the links between university, industry and government, has additionally refined the university position as a key player within a territorial system.

A push forward has been the addition of a strong regional dimension to policies: “countries which wish to mobilise their higher education system or part of it in support of regional development, need to ensure that the higher education policy which embraces teaching, research and third task activities include an explicit regional dimension” (OECD, 2007, p. 17). In 2011, the European Commission adopted the Agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education system, inviting the Member States to promote “the systematic involvement of higher education institutions in the development of integrated local and regional development plans, and target regional support towards higher education-business cooperation particularly for the creation of regional hubs of excellence and specialisation” (European Commission 2011a). The European 2020 Growth Strategy, and in particular the “Smart Specialisation Strategy”, gives a significant role to higher education institutions; its guide, “Connecting Universities to Regional Growth” (European Commission, 2011), “seeks to ensure that universities are not excluded from (or chose not to engage with) the shaping of regional innovation strategies” (Goddard, 2013).

Trippl et al. (2015), and further completed by Kempton (2019), conceptualise at least four models of university within a regional system:

- The entrepreneurial university (Etzkowitz, 1983 and following developments): this model is based on the concept of the triple helix (business, policy makers and academia) jointly working for economic growth and development. The university contribution is mostly entails research innovation, patents and spin-offs. The limit of this approach is the moderate extent to which it affects the regional dimension. It applies very easily to

knowledge-intensive districts, otherwise, it is applied more at national or international levels;

- The regional innovation system approach (Cooke, 2004), which focuses on the role of universities as bridges in the innovation-production process at the regional level, where knowledge transfer is one of the key activities. However, the approach does not consider how much knowledge comes from outside the region and contributes to the same goals;
- Mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons, 2004) points out the emerging type of knowledge produced by universities, that, unlike linear and disciplinary forms, is generated by interactions between disciplines and is applicable to societal challenges. It refers to the concept of co-creation of knowledge (Trencher et al, 2014; Rinaldi et al., 2018). This approach has been criticised for neglecting “institutions, systems, natural eco-systems and the environment” (Trippel et al., 2015, p. 1726);
- The engaged university (Gunasekara, 2006; Uyarra, 2010). This model refers to the capability of the university to provide answers to regional needs, such as providing skills to students according to needs expressed by the territory, managing regional innovation networks, etc. This approach, which is very region-based, tends to downplay the fact that universities are usually nationally established and obey national laws (for example, laws that define programs of study), and thus are not well poised to respond quickly to multiple regional needs;
- The civic university (Goddard, 2009; Goddard et al., 2013), pays more attention to internal management and leadership that lead or hinder engagement with the outside world. This approach, however, has little explicit focus on the regional dimension, having principles that are mostly “spatially blind”, with “limited evidence of success in practice” (Kempton, 2019, p. 4).

In the debate and discourse on the ‘new’ role of universities, the issue of employability remains in the background, although the implications are quite obvious. Regional development is clearly linked with economic production and job creation, and this implicitly involves domains like “curriculum development” or “student mobility” (Pavlin, 2013). Thus it appears clear that if the university is to play an economic role in its area, the idea of a university education must be reinterpreted. This has been a concern for many authors and scholars: arguments about the third mission and/or regional role of the universities include several aspects, from the very nature of the university (Dunne, 2002; Collini, 2012; McCowan 2015), to proposals of new models for universities (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2008; Gibb 2002; Goddard 2009; Lebeau and Cochrane, 2015), and to the implications of the new role of higher education for the employability of students (Nedeva, 2007; Boden and Nedeva, 2010; McCowan 2015).

## **I.2.2 Higher Education and Employability**

### **I.2.2.1 “The change” in practice**

Higher education institutions have reacted to these new demands in different ways, working toward their regional role with the goal of optimizing student employability,

according to their own systems, geographical location, and capacity to embrace input.

Student career development at the university includes (Tomlinson, 2013):

- Forms of knowledge;
- Credentials of the degree (“legitimation”);
- Supplementary learning (e.g. through career office workshops and activities).

With reference to forms of knowledge, the university provides curricula to transmit, transform, and create new knowledge in a specific field.

Universities have freedom in proposing “legitimate” degrees: the university degree is a credential. Curricula can include direct relations with the labour market, by formulating degrees answering new learning needs (e.g. Chyung et al., 2006), or can focus on the liberal arts, which are not directly linked with specific professions (e.g. Fallows and Stevens, 2000). In some cases, though, new curricula are developed more to attract students than to respond to labour market requests (Rae, 2007).

In addition to providing a range of hard skills, universities also develop to some degree transversal skills such as critical thinking and research methodologies, at least to a greater extent than do lower levels of education, and offer settings for the acquisition of communication, teamwork and other soft skills, usually through active pedagogies and internship opportunities.

Supplementary learning, as separate learning offered to enhance employability skills, for example that offered by university centres for career services, is generally poorly embedded in the overall strategy of the institution and is likely to be perceived by students as ‘unconnected’ to the degree.

All these dimensions have been considered by several studies that provided different frameworks for higher education institutions. In 2003, Yorke proposed the following ways to assess employability integration in the curriculum, acknowledging that the distinctions among them are not clear-cut:

- Employability through the whole curriculum<sup>8</sup>;
- Employability in the core curriculum, for example by applying the USEM model (see below), embedding employability in core modules of the curriculum;
- Work-based or work-related learning, such as internships;
- Employability-related modules within the curriculum;
- Work-based or work-related learning in parallel with the curriculum, for example, part time jobs.

Yorke’s work was carried out in the first focused policy action on employability, the United Kingdom’s Higher Education Academy Framework, which focuses on “embedding employability as providing the opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, experiences, behaviours, attributes, achievements and attitudes to enable graduates to make successful transitions and contributions, benefitting them, the

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<sup>8</sup> The reference model here is the Alverno College in the US, which requires students to develop eight broad “abilities” through the curriculum, namely communication, problem solving, social interaction, effective citizenship, analysis, valuing, developing a global perspective, and aesthetic engagement (<https://www.alverno.edu/academics/ouruniquecurriculum/the8coreabilities/>)

economy and their communities”<sup>9</sup>. Based on three overarching principles – inclusivity, collaboration and engagement - the framework was implemented in four stages:

1. Defining employability: this stage was aimed at creating shared knowledge within the institution (or department, or other level of action) and its stakeholders, in order to create a working model for employability and assign activities and responsibilities;
2. Auditing and mapping: in this stage review and mapping of the resources needed to apply the model are carried out. It includes courses, students’ perceptions, internal sharing, revision of curricula, etc., and identifies gaps between the working model and the actual situation;
3. Prioritising actions: this is the stage for planning the actions needed to achieve the goals defined in stage one, and includes staff, students and stakeholders;
4. Measuring impact: the final stage refers to mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation to assess progresses and achievements.

The Higher Education Academy provides tools and resources for undertaking the four steps, consultancy in case of request, and a meeting point for a community of practice.

The framework therefore ideally integrates personal, institutional, and external aspects in one strategy to increase the employability of students, providing an overall pathway that each organisation should contextualise and adapt to real needs. All UK universities implement employability strategies, some through the development and use of specific tools, for example, Personal Development Planning, used in many universities in England and Wales<sup>10</sup>.

The process as proposed, although linear in its development, is hindered by a number of factors in the structure and culture of higher education institutions. In fact, according to Rae (2007), universities are still “disaggregated systems” in which educational offer, support services and departments are not always connected. Employability is the result of a “holistic learning experience” (2007, p. 608) that is not limited to a specific program of study. Activities that can promote ‘the employable graduate’, such as work-based learning, classroom learning, participation in career services workshops, may be perceived by students as unconnected, also considering that they are managed by different people ‘who in a large university may rarely meet’ (2007, p. 608). Instead, students need to understand that those activities are part of the core curriculum, and to do so, there is a need to “re-evaluate employability and the way it is managed within the relation between students, university and employers”. Rae sees employability development as an integral part of enterprise education.

Thus in order to integrate employability enhancement into the learning offer, there must be a process of cultural change, before that of organizational change. The contribution of the European Commission to this goal has been the provision of a self-assessment tool for exploring the innovation potential of institutions. The

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<sup>9</sup> Website of the HEA: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals/strategic-priorities/employability>

<sup>10</sup> See i.e. the Personal Development Planning at the university of Leicester: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/personal-development-planning-pdp>



HEInnovate scheme is not directly addressed to employability, even if recent developments (HEInnovate concept, June 2018) clarify that enhancing graduate employability and educating enterprising individuals is the responsibility of universities. The tool considers eight dimensions:

1. Leadership and Governance
2. Organisational capacity
3. Entrepreneurial teaching and learning
4. Preparing and supporting entrepreneurs
5. Digital transformation and capability
6. Knowledge exchange and collaboration
7. The internationalised institution
8. Measuring impact

All these aspects include elements that concur to foster an entrepreneurial mindset, which is an asset in any kind of employment (Moreland, 2006).

### **I.2.2.2 Employability models**

Researchers have also put considerable effort into trying to develop reliable approaches, or models, to support acquisition of skills for employability. The most known and used in higher education are the following:

#### ***The DOTS model***

Developed by Laws and Watts (1977), it is based on career development principles that should be applied in higher education. It includes:

- **D**ecision-making (being able to weigh up personal factors to make a sound plan);
- **O**pportunity awareness (knowledge of opportunities and the ability to research these);
- **T**ransition learning (understanding of how to seek and secure opportunities);
- **S**elf-awareness (the ability to identify and articulate motivations, skills and personality as they affect career plans).

The four areas are mostly a reference for career and support services in higher education (e.g. QAA, 2011), but some attempt have also been made to integrate them into the curriculum (Rae, 2007) or to use them for policy analysis (Hillage and Pollard, 1998).

#### ***The USEM model***

USEM (Yorke & Knight, 2004, Knight & Yorke, 2002) is an acronym for the following employability components:

- **U**nderstanding
- **S**kills (subject-specific and generic)
- **E**fficacy (beliefs and self-theories generally)
- **M**etacognition (including reflection)

Understanding, skills, and metacognition are mutually supportive and developmental. The efficacy component encompasses personal qualities such as the ability to face and solve a problem, or the willingness to learn, which are assets that “pervade employability” in any situation (2002, p. 226).

The adoption of the USEM model implies a switch in the way of teaching, more than in what is taught. The employability elements must be communicated to students, for example, by explaining how and why certain pedagogical approaches or activities, such as field work, enhance employability. The acronym for the following employability components:

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### ***The Career Edge model***

This model was developed by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007).

#### **Career Development Learning**

- **E**xperience (Work & Life)
- **D**egree Subject Knowledge, Understanding & Skills
- **G**eneric Skills
- **E**motional Intelligence

Those components should be completed with “reflection and evaluation” activities to enhance:

- Self-reflection
- Self-confidence
- Self-esteem

The most significant novelty of this model is the insertion of ‘emotional intelligence’, which in the USEM model is included in ‘personal qualities’, defined according to Mayer et al. (2004, p. 167) as “the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.”

These models, however, appear to be reference frameworks with little advice on how to implement activities leading to the employability objectives. In particular, for areas such as ‘personal qualities’, or ‘generic skills’ it is hard to apply focused learning provisions, as there is little scientific evidence on how to effectively assess them.

Evaluating the impact of employability strategies within institutions is thus a difficult task. In 2016, the Warwick Institute of Employment Research (UK) undertook a study to evaluate the efficacy of employability provisions by consulting employers

(31), education providers (83 universities, 52 FE colleges providing HE and 17 alternative providers) and students (51), and analysing their input. The study analysed the following aspects offered by education providers:

- Information services (announcements of job vacancies);
- Assistance with CVs, application form completion, and so on;
- Skill development (e.g. support for developing presentation skills);
- Work experience (e.g. internships/placements);
- Recording achievement (in the UK the Higher Education Achievement Report, which is a portfolio);
- Services aimed specifically at postgraduates.

The researchers found that there was high or very high provision of these services. However, employers stressed that graduate competences do not match their needs, and noted a lack of presentation skills, for example, mistakes and inaccuracies in applications. Students are resistant to engagement – those who already have career plans believe that career services are not relevant to them, while those whose plans are yet undefined prefer to focus on their academic work. The authors of the study noted that “an assessment is difficult to undertake given the lack of data that links employability provision to student employment outcomes”.

### **I.2.3 The role of career and support services**

As noted above, offices providing career-related services have a clear role in employability provisions within the higher education system.

According to Dey and Cruzvergara (2014), career services evolved in six phases from 1900 to date (2014:2-8):

- 1900-1920 Vocational Guidance
- 1920-1940 Teachers Guidance
- 1940-1970 Job Placement
- 1970-1990 Career Counselling
- 1990-2010 Professional Networking
- 2010-... Connected Communities

During the first two periods there was no such thing as a career centre: non-university entities provided vocational guidance, and university faculties assisted graduating teachers<sup>11</sup>. In the next period, career services became part of the universities’ offer (Kretovicks et al., 1999). The boom of the post-war economy required a larger workforce, and job placement became the first mission of career services. From the 1940s to about 1970, the *in loco parentis* approach to placement was the most dominant, while in the 1970s and 1980s the developmental model came to the fore, changing the focus from parenting students to developing them (Kretovicks et al, 1999, p. 80). Career counselling was the approach of these decades, but placement was more a consequence than an objective of student development. After 1990, as the role of the university changed, so did that of career

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<sup>11</sup> In 1908 the Civic Service House of Boston opened the unit Vocation Bureau, which was aimed at providing educational guidance to train them for work. The Vocation Bureau is acknowledged as the first ‘career centre’ in history (Kretovicks et al., 1999; Wilson, 2013).

centres, and they consequently modified their approaches and activities to foster links with employers, organising networking events, job fairs and other recruiting activities (Dey and Real, 2009). In response to the recession that began in 2008, career services increased their work to support development of a civic, engaged, and entrepreneurial university (Dey and Cruzvergara, 2014), promoting new connections with different sectors as well as networks and partnerships among enterprises, students and alumni.

All along, of course, career centres have continue to offer career counselling, workshops and assistance for curriculum writing, and also career fairs and placement opportunities. Career centres support students and new graduates in developing skills precisely related to career development and job seeking, and in most cases are directly in charge of placements.

Relations between career support services and pedagogies for employability have not been widely studied: a recent project funded by the Ministry of Education in Italy (PRIN EMP&CO - Employability and Competences<sup>12</sup>) concluded that employability is reached through a process that encompasses the higher education experience; all forms of learning, be they through formal, non-formal or informal settings, in the classroom or through internships and placements, contribute to the same goal (Boffo, 2018, pp. 124-125). Career advice and support are also a significant part of the overall process (Federighi, 2018, p. 142).

#### **I.2.4 Pedagogies for employability**

Changes in the role of universities have understandably impacted teaching and learning. As noted above, changes in demands resulted in modifications to curriculum and methods. Similarly, student expectations influence education (Penttinen et al., 2013). One of the most comprehensive guides to practical pedagogies for employability was issued by the Higher Education Academy in 2006 (updated in 2012), which proposes suitable pedagogical approaches to embed employability through the curriculum. Advice and good practices cover areas such as (Pegg et al., 2012, pp. 30-44):

- Learning and teaching practice: students are active players in their own learning. The guide points out the need to clearly articulate the learning outcome related to employability as a part of the curriculum learning outcomes. It also gives great importance to learner self-reflection in relation with those skills. Lecture-based teaching methods, useful for developing theoretical and abstract contextual knowledge, should be paired with action learning and experiential methods based on facilitation and coaching;
- Assessment: several types of assessment (tests, project work, portfolios, to name a few) should coexist in higher education, to ensure that employability (transversal) skills are assessed;
- Work-based and work-related learning: a variety of forms of work based learning (company projects, apprenticeship schemes, etc.) should be pursued to bring students closer to work, and companies closer to future graduates;

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<sup>12</sup> <https://empecoprin.it/>

- Staff engagement: the guide notes that academics often are more focused on research than on teaching, and resist a “utilitarian” mission of the university. They are sometimes poorly aware of the meaning and implications of employability skills. However, it is through quality of teaching, and commitment of staff, that the university can really provide employable graduates;
- Pedagogical skills: teaching employability requires a type of pedagogical skills not possessed by all professors. The guide recognises that “the fact that the context is so important in the pedagogical approach to delivery has meant that generic guidance on successful methods is rare” (2012, p. 43);
- Strategies: this refers to the difficulties of assessing employability provision in higher education, which requires an institution-wide commitment in pedagogical strategies.

These themes have been debated for years, from different or similar points of observation. Evidently, authors agree on the fact that employability has never been a teaching topic as such, but needs to be embedded throughout the curriculum, within an overall institutional effort, and promoted by using active pedagogies, including work-based learning.

Many researchers have addressed the issue of generic skills development, with special focus on soft skills, drawing upon the input of employers and policy makers. As stressed in the previous chapter, there is no one definition of transversal skills, generic skills or even soft skills, and the assessment of those skills is also uncertain. In general, the literature agrees that pedagogies based on experiential learning are most suitable for developing generic skills in higher education students: project based learning (David, 2008) and problem based learning (Boud e Feletti, 1997; Bell, 2010; Mergendoller et al, 2006) allow opportunities to apply theoretical concepts in real situations. Projects should “be crafted in order to make a connection between activities and the underlying conceptual knowledge that one might hope to foster” (Barron et al., 1998:274). The approach promotes acquisition of such transversal skills as problem solving (Gallagher et al., 1992), critical thinking (Shepherd, 1998), teamwork (Pfaff and Huddleston, 2003), and management skills (Kloppenborg and Baucus, 2004).

Further, researchers agree and the literature proves that work related learning in all its deployment supports development of employability skills. As pointed out by Fedeli et al. (2015), work-based learning (WBL), known as work integrated learning (WIL) in Australia, refers to spending a period in a work environment outside university settings, as well as to being involved in work related activities not carried out in work settings. The advantages of work based learning are not limited to learning and skills development, as it enhances links between university and business as well. It benefits:

- the university, as it supports links between the traditional missions of the universities, by relating teaching, research, and regional activity (Healey, 2005; Cyert and Goodman, 1997);
- the enterprise, which can establish links with research and updated methods and methodologies, as well as meet potential future employees (Tovey, 2001); and

- the student (beyond curricular education), who can build networks both in terms of community of practice (as legitimate peripheral participation, Lave and Wenger, 1991), and as professional networks useful for job seeking (Wright Brown and Konrad, 2001; Tovey, 2001).

It should be noted that the literature on pedagogy for employability, either directly or indirectly, suggests the application of forms of knowledge in action, then situations where knowledge can be enacted. As Hodgson (1999:185) pointed out:

Action always takes place in a material and natural integument but it deals more and more with intersubjective discourses concerning the interpretations, meanings and uses of information.

In this sense, it is particularly important that pedagogies thus support in students the development of reflective practices: in his work on reflection in higher education, Rogers (2001) argued that authors who have theorised reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985; Langer, 1989; Loughran, 1996; Mezirow, 1991; and Seibert and Daudelin, 1999) share some key components in the definition of the concept, referring to a cognitive and affective process that:

(1) requires active engagement on the part of the individual; (2) is triggered by an unusual or perplexing situation or experience; (3) involves examining one's responses, beliefs, and premises in light of the situation at hand; and (4) results in integration of the new understanding into one's experience (2001, pp. 41-42)

The mediation process between the individual and the world/situation, defined by Schön 'reflection-in-action' (1993), and in Eraut's discourse 'metacognition' (1994), is crucial to the development of high cognitive skills, which are, or should be, the fundamental achievement of graduates. Hinchliffe (2006) believes that employability should focus not so much on 'attributes' as on 'skilful behaviour', then on the ability to interpret the situation and perform accordingly (2006, p. 96). Recalling Heidegger's terms, he argues that the situated self is the condition of being-with, and the world is where the individual shares with others, where "individuality is not a static given but something which is negotiated, constructed and fashioned: and then re-negotiated and re-fashioned again" (2006, p. 98). Application of this concept to the issue of employability changes our notion of the term: starting from the recognition that any recent graduate can have already developed all the attributes and skills required by the labour market, it is important to focus more on the awareness of the "shared nature of these attributes" (2006, p. 100). This means the acknowledgement of limits more than achievements, and recognition of the value of the ability to share knowledge and understanding, based on the aware dependency with the Other (the situation, the world). This would lead to an employable person, in Hinchliffe's words, who "understands that learning is a critical and co-operative pursuit and who can use this understanding in practical domains of some complexity" (2006, p. 102).

Experiential, situated learning, then, promotes acquisition of so-called generic skills as well as high cognitive skills. Pedagogical approaches need to be designed in such a way as to promote reflection (which in the Higher Education Academy's model is included in Assessment). One of the most widely adopted frameworks for designing processes and tools for reflection is the Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988), composed of six steps:

- Description – what happened?
- Feelings – what were you thinking and feeling?
- Evaluation – what was good/bad about the situation?
- Analysis – what sense can you make of situation?
- Conclusion – what else could have you done?
- Action Plan – if situation arose again, what would you do?

A second model is the three stage reflection process formulated by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985):

- Returning to experience, so recollecting experience and telling it to others
- Paying attention to the feelings, then utilizing positive feelings, and removing obstructing feelings;
- Re-evaluating the experience, then association, integration, validation, and appropriation of new knowledge.

Application of these processes, which are similar in content, although differently formulated in stages, led to production of several learning tools to support reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1993) during and after the learning experience. Many tools rely on reflective writing: journals or blogs can be a valuable support to the learning journey (Toros and Medar, 2015; Herrington and Boase-Jelinek, 2014), as can portfolios or e-portfolios (Fernsten and Fernsten, 2005; Parkes et al., 2013), and boards (Testa and Egan, 2015). Written feedback from teachers and tutors is also meant to stimulate reflection (Quinton and Smallbone, 2010).

### **I.2.5 Conclusive summary**

This chapter has explored the pursuit of graduate employability in higher education institutions, and its implications. Key aspects can be summarized as follows:

- Higher education has been asked to contribute to economic growth more actively than by just providing basic research and educated human capital, which has been its main mission for centuries;
- Universities have increased their commitment to contribute to regional economies and their relations to business, also through re-structuring of their traditional organisation, which has led to different models;
- Since the Bologna Declaration (1999), employability of graduates has become one of the key missions of universities;
- Through dialogue with business and regional players, universities have reviewed curricula and provided new learning paths more in line with the requirements of the labour market;
- Internally, support services have also been reviewed in order to answer new needs, such as career counselling, internship management, etc.;
- On the pedagogical level, many studies and investigations have explored ways to support the formation of employable individuals, but consensus on methods and tools has yet to emerge;
- Several aspects of new policies and new arrangements have been questioned, as has the so-called ‘new role’ of the university and its new identity within the social system. Arrangements, methods and instruments for effectively

implementing the new functions of higher learning are varied and continue to be subject to discussion.



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### I.3. The employers

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This chapter addresses the second main component of the meso-level of graduate employability, that of the business world, represented by employers, the key players in the labour market.

Challenged by global economic changes and increased competition, companies have made structural changes in recent times in terms of production, organisation, and sales. To some extent, they have become more flexible in order to be competitive in the market, and have consequently required a more flexible workforce, which involves functional, numerical and financial aspects, as well as welfare, contractual aspects, and employee competences.

These new needs have required new recruiting systems to ensure that the workforce is able to play the required role(s) within the organisation, and not compromise the business process or the competitiveness of the company. This has greatly impacted the labour market, and affected the features of the ‘employable graduate’.

Further, the size of enterprises has an important impact on recruiting systems and employment of graduates.

This chapter outlines recent changes in the labour market from a business perspective.

#### I.3.1 The changing labour market: employers perspective

As outlined in Chapter 1, the labour market has experienced a dramatic change in past decades: high competition, global challenges and increased automation affect companies, who ask for a flexible and mobile workforce, and consequent deregulation of labour contracts.

Flexibility, according to the best known model (Atkinson, 1984, p. 3), can be seen from three points of view:

1. Functional flexibility, such that the employees “can be redeployed quickly and smoothly between activities and tasks”;
2. Numerical flexibility, allowing hiring and firing to be quick and easy;
3. Financial flexibility, which has two aspects: the first is related to possible variations in employment costs in relation to the external market; the second is related to the first two types of flexibility, which means that the pay system should allow new forms of pay calculations, for example, an assessment-based one.

To achieve **functional flexibility**, businesses seek employees who possess a wider range of competences in order to fulfil not only their own job, but if needed, that of others. It means changing rapidly to adapt to shifts in the labour market (Valverde et al, 2000), and thus requires workers to be more responsible and autonomous, to possess the ability to learn to learn, and to engage in lifelong learning to stay competitive.

As regards **numerical flexibility**, in the 1980s, several European countries attempted to deregulate labour markets, as “law, regulation and institutions were considered

barriers to sound economic development and growth” (Wilthagen and Tros, 2004, p. 7)<sup>13</sup>. Deregulation of the labour market, however, has meant less social protection in most cases, and thus while competition is needed at the international level, social security needs to be taken into account to preserve the European social model<sup>14</sup>. To this end, the European Union has worked toward policies to improve *flexibility* provisions across countries (Philips and Eamets, 2007; Tangian, 2008). ‘Flexicurity’ can be defined as “a policy strategy that attempts, synchronically and in a deliberate way, to enhance the flexibility of the labour market and to enhance security – employment security and social security - notably for weaker groups inside and outside the labour market” (Wilthagen and Tros, 2004, p. 5). The concept includes more than just labour agreements or contracts: it implies a system able to align welfare provisions such as unemployment benefits, active labour policies to support job insertion and lifelong learning opportunities, and sound industrial relations with enterprises. *Flexicurity* provisions have good outcomes in Scandinavian countries and in those with liberal traditions like the Netherlands. In other countries, particularly the Mediterranean group, deregulation of the labour market has not been embedded in a system-wide provision, or at least not to a sufficient extent, and the outcome has been the emergence of a dual labour market (see Philips and Eamets, 2007, pp. 29-30 for countries groups related to *flexicurity*)<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, with reference to **financial flexibility**, the most common efforts to achieve it have tied worker benefits to the performance of the firm, a method also accepted by trade unions. Instead, variable pay is less applied, first because it requires performance appraisal systems which would be hard to design and implement, and second, because of the resistance of trade unions and worker representatives, who see in those schemes a risk for the minimum wage (Valverde et al., 2000).

### **I.3.2 The employers’ expectations on graduates**

Functional flexibility, as above, refers to attitudes and skills: besides personal characteristics, it is clear that relevant skills should be acquired during the educational pathway. Understanding the expectations of employers in order to better design curricula and prepare graduates for smooth transitions to work has been subject to many studies, some at the national level and promoted by governments or other public bodies, for example, the National Skills Survey in the UK<sup>16</sup>, and others at business level, promoted by international or national bodies and associations, such

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<sup>13</sup> Deregulation started in these years in a few countries, such as the United Kingdom, while ten years later, in the 1990s, Italy and other countries began applying deregulation laws, or ‘flexibilisation of contracts’.

<sup>14</sup> The European social model is envisions a society that combines economic growth with high living standards and good working conditions. It is often contrasted to the U.S. liberal model.

<sup>15</sup> Dual labour market is a wider concept that considers social issues, like gender or race, which cause a segmentation of labour. Here, the concept is used in the meaning introduced in 1971 by Doeringer and Piore: it suggests that the labour market is divided into two segments, in which the first is characterized by ‘high wages, good working conditions, employment stability, chances of advancement, equity and due process in the administration of work rules (p. 165), and the second by low job security, poor working conditions and low wages.

<sup>16</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/746493/ESS\\_2017\\_UK\\_Report\\_Controlled\\_v06.00.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746493/ESS_2017_UK_Report_Controlled_v06.00.pdf)

as the World Economic Forum<sup>17</sup> or the Excelsior system<sup>18</sup> in Italy, which, however, focuses more on the workforce than on skills).

Surveys and analyses can be roughly divided into two areas:

- Sector-based, which look at specific skills needs of a working area;
- Skills-based, which look at the market overall, and often are related to soft and other transversal skills.

Both perspectives try to anticipate labour market needs in the future, in order to avoid as much as possible skills mismatches and skills shortages. In addition, data obtained in these studies allow for a better understanding of how to increase the employability potential of graduates through the curriculum.

Sector-based surveys are common in technical and scientific degrees, such as engineering and construction (e.g. Kranov and Khalaf, 2016; Davies, 1999), IT (e.g. Hamilton et al, 2015), and science, including bioscience and biotechnology (e.g. Sunders and Zuzel, 2010). As regards the liberal arts, data are included in general surveys on graduates, since there is no direct link with specific professions.

Many skills-based surveys have relied on large numbers of respondents:

- The Gallup Organisation (2010)<sup>19</sup> surveyed 7,036 companies in Europe-28, as well as Turkey, Norway and Iceland, upon the request of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture (European Commission). Of the companies, 76% were medium sized (50-249 employees), and the rest were large (250 or more employees), with the largest share active in industry (36%), non-public services (23%) and public services (17%). Findings highlighted the following key results (selected from a wider range of topics): the skill considered important by the highest percentage of respondents was “teamworking (67%), while 58% to 62% of respondents indicated sector-specific skills, communication skills, computer literacy, being able to adapt to new situations, first-class ability in reading/writing, and analytical and problem-solving skills.” A lower percentage indicated skills in foreign languages to be significant (33-36% rated them very important or important). Fully 87% of the sample rated work experience as important. Regarding university involvement, only 6-8% of respondents indicated that they interacted with higher education institutions frequently or rather frequently, an indication that curriculum design put little emphasis on university cooperation with businesses. Instead, 52% of respondents viewed recruitment participation in internship programmes to be one of the best ways of cooperating with higher education institutions.
- Archer and Davidson (2008) surveyed 233 employers, of whom 43% were small companies with fewer than 100 employees, 27% were medium companies with 101-1000 employees, and 30% were large companies with over 1000 employees. The study summary concludes that: “86% of employers consider good communication skills to be important, yet many employers expressed dissatisfaction because graduates cannot express

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2018>

<sup>18</sup> <https://excelsior.unioncamere.net/>

<sup>19</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl\\_304\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_304_en.pdf)

themselves effectively.” ‘Soft’ skills such as team working are also vital and even more important than most ‘hard’ skills, although numeracy and literacy skills were considered essential by 70% of employers. 65% of international employers indicate that having overseas professional work experience makes graduates more employable. Online recruitment is the most frequently used and most effective method of graduate recruitment (2008, p. 6).

These two surveys are examples of a larger number carried out in Europe (CEDEFOP, 2013) or some OECD countries (Mourshed et al. 2012), or at a national level (the Employers Skills Survey in the UK<sup>20</sup>). In general, it could be said that employers tend to value transversal skills, and above all soft skills, as well as the various kinds of literacy skills (Literacy, Numeracy, Scientific literacy, ICT literacy, Financial literacy, Cultural and civic literacy). This general, although not specific, agreement on skills needed for the labour market is evident in the following table highlighting similarities among the results of three major surveys:

*Table 1. Comparison of survey results for most important skills for work*

<b>World Economic Forum (Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century)</b>	<b>National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)</b>	<b>Employers skills survey (2017) – list by detected skills needs</b>
Literacy	Ability to work in a team structure	Specialist skills or knowledge needed to perform the role
Numeracy	Ability to make decisions and solve problems	Ability to manage own time and prioritise own tasks
Scientific literacy	Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work	Customer handling skills
ICT literacy	Ability to obtain and process information	Solving complex problems requiring a solution specific to the situation
Financial literacy	Ability to analyse quantitative data	Knowledge of products and services offered by your organisation and organisations like yours
Cultural and civic literacy	Technical knowledge related to the job	Team working
Critical thinking/problem solving	Proficiency with computer software programs	Managing their own feelings, or handling the feelings of others
Creativity	Ability to create and/or edit written reports	Managing or motivating other staff
Communication		Knowledge of how your organisation works
Collaboration		Persuading or influencing others
Curiosity		Reading and understanding instructions, guidelines, manuals or reports
Initiative		Sales skills
Persistence/grit		Writing instructions, guidelines, manuals or reports
Adaptability		Basic numerical skills and understanding
Leadership		More complex numerical or
Social and cultural awareness		

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/746493/ESS\\_2017\\_UK\\_Report\\_Controlled\\_v06.00.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746493/ESS_2017_UK_Report_Controlled_v06.00.pdf)

World Economic Forum (Skills for the 21 <sup>st</sup> century)	National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)	Employers skills survey (2017) – list by detected skills needs
		statistical skills and understanding Setting objectives for others and planning human, financial and other resources Instructing, teaching or training people Adapting to new equipment or materials Computer literacy / basic IT skills Advanced or specialist IT skills Manual dexterity Making speeches or presentations Communicating in a foreign language

It should be noted that there are reliable tools for assessing hard skills and literacy skills, but this is not the case for soft and personal skills.

### **I.3.4 Recruitment strategies and the concept of work readiness**

Having identified many of the needs of employers, we turn to an examination of how employers make recruiting and selection decisions, and in particular, how companies attract graduates and why a graduate is selected among others.

In general, human capital theory (Schultz, 1971; Becker, 1994) or job market signalling theory (Spence, 1973) regarding credentials (educational attainment) and work are applied.

The human capital theory is based on the idea that education increases job performance, therefore individuals with higher educational attainments are more successful in the labour market, with more opportunities and higher income. Thus, from the point of view of the individual, education is an investment for a better position in the market, while for employers, it provides a tool for quantifying credentials. However, as pointed out by Lvahari and Weiss (1974), employers often do not automatically recognise credentials as the key asset for the job, considering that they are hiring human resources in a state of uncertainty, with uncertain inputs such as individual characteristics or quality of schooling, and uncertain outputs such as future demand and supply conditions.

The job market signalling theory focuses instead on the relation between the graduate and the employer, for whom hiring a new employee always implies a certain level of risk. Spence distinguishes between indices, which the job candidate cannot change, and signals, which are mutable:

[I shall refer to] observable, unalterable attributes as indices, reserving the term signals for those observable characteristics attached to the individual that are

subject to manipulation by him. Some attributes, like age, do change, but not at the discretion of the individual. In my terms, these are indices. (1973, p. 357)

Credentials are signals: in presenting credentials, applicants reveal a part of the information about themselves that implicitly claims strong ability as workers. The employer, on the basis of previous hiring experience and on the employee characteristics, interpret the signal(s) through what Spence calls “conditional probabilistic beliefs with respect to productivity”.

Beliefs are also central to the model of Bailly (2006), who, starting from Spence’s considerations, argues that employers’ “beliefs and representations, particularly about the origin of the qualities individuals require in the workplace, can be an explanation for the sector organization and for the importance attached or not to formal qualifications” (2006, p. 966).

Therefore, a large and mostly undefined range of beliefs and feelings – dependent on the context, the culture, the sector, and the employers’ values and experiences – affects the recruiting process, and an equally large and undefined range affects ‘employability building’ of the candidate.

Graduate recruitment and selection is based, in theory, upon “scientific” methods and techniques, in the effort to be as objective as possible. In spite of this, in practice most recruiters do not apply procedures and techniques as defined by methods (Knights and Raffo, 1990).

Recruitment channels most popular in 1990 in the UK were annual ‘milk rounds’ when recruiters interviewed candidates at universities,<sup>21</sup> recruitment brochures, recruitment fairs, direct directories, newspaper and magazine advertising, sponsorship, and recruitment agencies (Schofield, 1991<sup>22</sup>). Afterwards, the internet started to be used as the preferred recruitment channel (Cappelli, 2001), particularly in the U.S., but also in Europe (Sackett and Lievens, 2008; Lievens et al., 2002; Gravili, 2003 for Italy).

As regards selection, it seems acknowledged that ‘traditional’ forms of selection based on psychometric techniques are not reliable anymore (Lievens et al., 2002), as traditional selection based on rather static professional profiles gave way to selection emphasising job analysis, criteria for assessing job performance, and prediction of work outcomes. Today, jobs have become ill-defined in a process that can be summarised as a “decline of jobs and emergence of work roles” and thus employees should be flexible in taking on different tasks and roles (Anderson and Herriot, 1997). While there is no one universal selection process for winnowing the pool of candidates engaged through recruitment, the table below offers a list of the common steps, how they were carried out traditionally, and how they are taken today<sup>23</sup>:

*Table 2. Trends in selection process*

<b>Steps of selection</b>	<b>Traditional selection</b>	<b>Today’s selection</b>
Application	Collecting responses to job ads	In addition: - Qualifying questions in the

<sup>21</sup> Recruitment programme by which companies meet new graduates in universities.

<sup>22</sup> The ranking is based on 153 interviews of graduate recruiters in the UK.

<sup>23</sup> Sources: specialised websites, such as Workable; CareerBuilder; TrueCareers, BalanceCareers and books/guidelines, e.g. Arthur (2006).

<b>Steps of selection</b>	<b>Traditional selection</b>	<b>Today's selection</b>
		application form - Gamification
CVs screening	Screening mostly based on background, it means on work experience	In addition: - Checking resumes' layout (e.g. creative; organised; catching; etc.) - Cover letter (convincing; engaging; precise; etc.) - Intangibles check (e.g. hobbies) - Managing recruiter unconscious bias (related e.g. to gender, race, etc.)
Screening call	Not common; more a call to schedule job interview	Short call to (try to) understand if the candidate is suitable and interested to the position, it is the first contact between the company and the applicant, and entails the following recruiter's steps: - Scheduling call; - Preparing basic and functional questions; - Exploring interests and expectations.
Assessment test	Assessment test, not always used; usually administered at the company (or recruiting agency) premises	Assessment test, not always used, can be administered: - At the company/recruiting agency premises; - Online test to explore personality, attitude etc.; - Skills tests (e.g. speediness of typing)
In-person interviewing	Always face to face; questions are mostly related to educational credentials, previous work experiences, and expectations	Can be face to face, individual or in groups, or through audio-conferences. Questions usually include: - Job-related questions (role-specific; soft-skills; situational; behavioural); - Cultural fit questions (career goals, collaboration, adaptability)
Background checks	Related to administration mostly (criminal records; verification reports – e.g. credentials)	In addition: checks can include drug tests, if applicable by national laws
Reference checks	Checking references provided by candidates	Same as for traditional selection process
Decision and job offer	Job offer should be formulated first in person (or by phone), then in written form	Not very different from traditional selection process, some differences in channels

Steps of selection	Traditional selection	Today's selection
		(e.g. the internet is mostly used to send the written proposal)

The process between educational achievement and the recruitment and selection process is directly linked to employability: being employable means being able to successfully navigate the recruitment processes and persuade the employer of one's 'readiness' for work, a key concept.

As for employability and employability skills, graduate work readiness is a relatively new concept and not yet clearly articulated. Some definitions include:

- "the extent to which graduates are perceived to possess the attitudes and attributes that make them prepared or ready for success in the work environment" (Caballero and Walker, 2010);
- "A "work ready" individual possesses the foundational skills needed to be minimally qualified for a specific occupation as determined through a job analysis or occupational profile (Clark et al., 2013);
- "a complex of generic attributes that allow graduates to apply their technical knowledge to problem-identification and problem-solving once they join the workforce (Jollands et al., 2012);
- "enhanced capacity to ensure employment" (Glover et al., 2002);
- "component of the 'graduate-ness' (the effect on knowledge, skills and attitudes of having undertaken an undergraduate/graduate degree) of a student who has a sense of 'self-directedness,' or an ability to recognise one's 'personal agency' in obtaining and keeping employment" (Coetzee, 2012).

These definitions of work readiness overlap and replace to some extent the concept of employability, and provide no consensus about the components of work readiness, or the ways to measure it (Priksht et al., 2019).

Although by now work readiness is part of higher education in the overall frame of an increased link between education and the labour market (Daniel and Broker, 2014; Tynjälä, Välimaa, and Sarja, 2003), it is based on the business perspective, and in fact emerged as a selection criterion for predicting graduate potential (Caballero et al, 2011). Traditionally, selection of job candidates was based on academic (or technical) achievements, but today, results from surveys and consultations indicate that more importance is given to the possession of a range of generic skills and attributes required across all jobs (Caballero et al, 2011). The measurement of the work-readiness of graduates is usually carried out in business settings. Several studies interviewed employers to identify the skills and preparation they deem to be components of work readiness (Casner-Lotto et al, 2006; Gardner & Liu, 1997; Hart, 2008; Stewart and Knowles, 2000; Atlay and Harris, 2000; and others).

Caballero et al (2013), developed the Work Readiness Scale (WRS) through qualitative research conducted with 30 HR professionals with experience in the recruitment and/or assessment of graduate job applicants. Based on their input, they developed the scale, then tested it with 251 graduates seeking employment. The qualitative data identified ten broad categories indicative of work readiness:

1. motivation



2. maturity
3. personal growth/development
4. organisational awareness
5. technical focus
6. interpersonal orientation
7. attitudes to work
8. problem-solving
9. adaptability
10. resilience

The ten broad categories informed the development of an initial 167 items, reduced to 64 items that were then piloted. Psychometric analysis indicated high reliability of four factors, namely labelled personal characteristics, organisational acumen, work competence and social intelligence.

Prikshat et al. (2019) modified the scale into the Work-Readiness Integrated Competence Model (WRICM), which consists of four main factors, namely intellectual, personality, meta-skill and job-specific resources, ten sub-dimensions, and 53 items covering work readiness skills. The scale was developed according to the inputs of 362 HR professionals and managers from seven Asia-Pacific countries. The authors define the GWR “as an integrated dynamic competence that requires the reconfiguration, synthesis and integration of four resources/dimensions – namely, intellectual, personality, meta-skill and job specific – that need to be channelled by graduates into a holistic, compelling and personal narrative that appeals to potential employers” (Prikshat et al., 2019).

According to the authors, as a diagnostic tool, the WRICM can serve both educational and recruitment purposes; however, they acknowledge the limitation that the scale is based “largely on the perspectives of industry/employers” (Prikshat et al, 2019).

In their efforts to ensure that the candidate is fit for the job and will be an added value for the company, recruiters use this and other tools that may differ in organisation and channels (e.g. group interviews vs individual interviews, or face to face interviews vs Skype interviews) and methods (e.g. behavioural interviews<sup>24</sup> or stress interviews<sup>25</sup>). In the ‘new economy’ era, the idea that the graduate is the key to successful economic outcomes of organisations was summarised in the concept of ‘war for talent’ (Michaels et al., 2001),<sup>26</sup> which refers to the increased competition in recruiting and retaining talented employees, who are the ones making the difference in knowledge-intensive businesses. In the first decade of the 2000s the ‘war for talent’ was very popular in discussions of recruiting practices<sup>27</sup>, even if the concept of ‘talent’ had not been clearly defined, neither in the Michaels et al. book, nor in following publications. After the recent recession, the ‘war for talents’ approach was

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<sup>24</sup> Unlike traditional interviews, which are mostly focused on further exploring the information on the curriculum, behavioural interviews are aimed at understanding the candidates’ reaction to specific cases they might have faced in past work experiences.

<sup>25</sup> In stress interviews the recruiter tries to challenge the candidate (e.g. by being sarcastic or not empathetic) to see how the person reacts to stressful situations.

<sup>26</sup> The term appeared the first time in a publication by McKinsey and Company in 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Part of the ‘war of talent’ discourse included discussions of ‘employer branding’, the actions taken by a company to attract the best candidates (Barrow and Mosley, 2005).

to some extent abandoned, as considered unfit for economic downturns<sup>28</sup>. Still, at least for managerial positions, which are seen as the most appropriate jobs for university graduates, the aim is to choose the candidate who can bring real added value to the company, because in a knowledge-based economy the individual is the key source of success. Do recruiters apply scientific methods in their assessment to identify the best candidate for this purpose? While recognising that assessment centres have brought a certain increase in objectivity to the recruitment processes, many scholars tend to doubt the scientific foundations of the process in practice. Many employers or recruiters use personality assessment tests to formulate interview questions (Branine, 2008). In addition, Brown and Hesketh (2004) point out that recruiters have their own constructs in observing the data or in interviewing the candidate, so they interpret the data and reactions differently. Also, well-prepared candidates, the ‘Players,’ as Brown and Hesketh (2004) define them, know ‘the game’ and can present themselves in such a way as to appear to be the best candidates.

### **I.3.3 Different sizes and different needs? Large and small companies and graduate recruitment**

Traditionally, employment opportunities for graduates have been provided by large enterprises (Branine, 2008), but in recent years candidates have also been interested in SMEs, which are fully 99% of the businesses in Europe, providing around two-thirds of total employment (Eurostat, 2019<sup>29</sup>). Studies of the graduate labour market in SMEs have explored only a few countries, in particular the United Kingdom (Ahmadi and Helms, 1997; Holden and Jameson, 2002; Holden et al., 2007; Hart and Barratt, 2009; etc.). European studies form a smaller part of the literature on the topic, and are often limited to comparisons among countries (Manninen and Hobrought, 2000; De Faoite et al, 2003).

Some characteristics of the topic of graduate employment in SMEs are common. On the one hand, “most SMEs do not perceive new graduates as a natural source of recruitment” (Westhead and Matlay, 2005, p. 354), as they are too academic and lack basic business skills, or are too mobile, ready to leave for other opportunities (Roffe, 1996; Westhead, 1998; Szamosi, 2006). On the other hand, graduates often consider SMEs to be a “second option” (Moy and Lee, 2002), as medium and large sized companies with more than 100 employees offer better salaries and career development opportunities (Ahmadi and Helms, 1997; Moy and Lee, 2002).

SMEs have different recruiting channels than those of large companies. While a large company tends to apply the full process of recruitment and selection through internal or external recruiters, medium and particularly small companies tend to apply more traditional recruiting processes, and look first at their networks.

Differences between large and SME management of recruiting, hiring and managing the workforce could be summarised as follows:

*Table 3. Recruiting, hiring and managing workforce in large firms and SMEs*

<sup>28</sup> See i.e. *The War for Talent is First Casualty of the Crisis*, Financial Times, April 13, 2009

<sup>29</sup> Retrieved online July 2019: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics\\_on\\_small\\_and\\_medium-sized\\_enterprises#General\\_overview](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_small_and_medium-sized_enterprises#General_overview)

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Large firms</b>	<b>SMEs</b>
Recruitment and selection	Application of complete recruitment and selection process, either carried out internally (HR unit) or externally (recruitment agency) (de Kok et al., 2011)	Tend to apply more traditional processes of recruiting and selection (in particular small enterprises <100 employees); smaller enterprises rely more on online job post publications and networking for recruiting purposes (de Kok et al., 2011; LinkedIn, 2014); often apply informal channels (Barrett et al., 2007).
Earnings	Higher wages for the same role	Lower wages for the same role (Belfield, 1998:252; de Kok et al., 2011)
Work bargaining and fringe benefits	Common; performance payments and incentives are also common (de Kok et al., 2011)	Not common (Belfield, 1998:253)
Training	Formal training and training plans are common	Informal training more common than formal training
Internal labour market	Higher possibility of career within the company	Lower possibility of career within the company (Atkinson and Meager, 1994)
Job quality (work environment)	Indeterminate results: worsened as the size increase (Bryson et al., 2017)	Indeterminate results: worse work environment than larger firms (Wenger, 1997), better than in larger firms (Bryson et al., 2017).
Participation and representation	Very high (88% according to the Kok, 2011, referring to EU data)	Rather low (34% according to the Kok, 2011, referring to EU data)
Time flexibility	Common (de Kok et al., 2001)	Less common (it varies among countries, de Kok et al, 2011)
Job security	Stronger if compared to the risk of company death, but weaker for the extensive use of temporary agencies or fixed time contracts (de Kok et al., 2011)	Weaker if compared to the risk of company death, but stronger for the little use of temporary agencies, or fixed time contracts (de Kok et al., 2011)

Even though SMEs are generally reluctant to hire graduates, several studies have demonstrated the added value they bring to organisations in terms of performance (Sear et al, 2012), at least as increased productivity (Galindo-Rueda and Haskel, 2005), innovation and growth (Lowden and al., 2011; O'Brien and Clark, 1997), skill levels (O'Brien and Clark, 1997), management, leadership and strategy (Holden et al., 2007).

### **I.3.4 Conclusive summary**

This chapter has looked at graduate employability from the point of view of employers. Key aspects can be summarized as follows:

- Major changes globally have challenged companies, prompting them to restructure their processes in order to be competitive in the market, with consequent demands for increased flexibility of the workforce;

- Flexibility refers to different aspects that directly impact contractual arrangements, the welfare system, and competences possessed by the employee;
- In order to hire suitable employees, recruiting processes have changed. Now it is seen as fundamental that workers possess personal qualities and transversal/soft skills enabling them to be swiftly integrated into enterprises and adaptable to change their role and functions;
- However, recruiting processes can widely vary, and differ significantly in relation to the size of the companies.

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## I.4. Students and graduates

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This chapter addresses the micro-level of graduate employability: the individual. Clearly, generations who have grown up during the changes and disruptions of the past fifty years, with as technological advances have permeated daily life, present distinctive features that possibly not even their parents have. Even the access to work of so-called Generation Y and the Generation Z has just started, and the impact of recent changes can be only be estimated, something is certain: these are the most educated generations in history. The massification of higher education and consequent oversaturation of the market, together with the re-structuring of the labour market, as previously delineated, have created conditions in which young people today must take full responsibility for their employability in an unstable, poorly protected, and constantly changing labour market.

This chapter tackles the subject of employability from the perspective of the individual, outlining the constructs of employability in higher education students, and looking at elements that should be considered in studying the access of new graduates to work.

### I.4.1 The most educated generations in history?

The generation of graduates accessing the labour market today, or those in the early stages of their professional careers, or finishing higher education, is commonly known as the Millennial generation<sup>30</sup> (but also Generation Y, Generation Next, or Generation Net): some define Millennials as those born between 1981 and the mid-1990s, while others refer to the period 1980 to early 2000. In general, it can be said that Millennials are those reaching young adulthood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Most of literature on Millennials refers to data from the U.S., where 22% of the population belongs to this generation, and one of the main references is the work of Strauss and Howe (2000), who were the first to identify common traits of the generation, listing seven main points (special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured and achieving). Subsequent studies confirmed or refuted these initial assumptions, for example, insisting that Millennials are not team-oriented but individualistic (Twenge, 2013), or condemning them as the ‘dumbest generation’ (Bauerlein, 2008), but all in all, at least in the U.S. context, Millennials seem to be viewed as a generation with great potential. According to a PEW research elaboration (2018)<sup>31</sup>, U.S. Millennials are the most educated generation to date, as 21% of these men and 27% of these women have a college degree, while 18% and 20% respectively of the previous generation are college graduates.

In Europe, fewer studies and statistics have been conducted about Millennials, but some common qualities can be observed. In Europe, Millennials are the most educated generation so far, and women are more educated than their counterparts; they have grown up in a digital age and a globalised world. In Europe, they form

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<sup>30</sup> The term is accredited to Strauss and Howe (2000).

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/16/how-millennials-compare-with-their-grandparents/ft\\_millennials-education\\_031715/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/16/how-millennials-compare-with-their-grandparents/ft_millennials-education_031715/)

20% of the population (Eurostat 2014), albeit with differences between countries, for example, Italy, where they are 15%, and Spain, where they are 18.7%.

The demographic cohort following the Millennials is known as Generation Z, ‘the GenZ’, the first ‘digital native’ generation, the “Facebook Generation”, and the “iGeneration” (Bencsik et al., 2016): these young people born from the mid-1990s to the early-2000s<sup>32</sup> are the present and near future generation in higher education. The first comprehensive analysis of this cohort in the U.S. dates back to 2016, when Seemiller and Grace published their famous book “Generation Z goes to College”, which described members of this generation as 24/7 connected people, loyal, compassionate, thoughtful, open minded, responsible, determined, committed to world’s problems, socially liberal and politically conservative, but mostly disengaged from political debate. They value education and believe that they need a university degree to access the labour market.

The university graduates of Generation Z in Europe are just beginning to enter the workforce and have not been studied in depth, but some interesting findings are available. According to a survey of Generation Z members carried out by Universum<sup>33</sup> in 2015 (about 50,000 respondents across 46 countries), 67% of the sample (79% in Western Europe) felt that education choices should be based on interest in the subject. Asked about career goals, about 40% (rising to 50% in Eastern and Central Europe) indicated ‘a good work-life balance’ and ‘being secure and stable in my job’<sup>34</sup>. Features they looked for in a job were the opportunity to make an impact, to express creativity, and to be autonomous. Entrepreneurship was also indicated as a viable option. The respondents were not very optimistic about achieving a higher standard of living than their parents: while 71% of Millennials indicated some optimism about this, only 56% of the Generation Z sample did. An additional and important feature was the relationship with parents, who, according to 60% of the sample, influenced their decisions about education and career.

Both the Millennials and Generation Z shared a childhood marked by enormous and rapid changes in society and the economy that have lengthened the transition period from adolescence to adulthood, at least in comparison with previous generations. Young people in their twenties today do not perceive themselves as teens anymore, but neither do they regard themselves as adults. This phase, which takes place roughly between 18 and 25, was defined by Arnett in 2000 as ‘emerging adulthood’, referring to the identity formation which emerges in adolescence, but it is mostly developed later on, at least in industrialized societies. Work and career are clearly part of identity formation: as pointed out by Konstam (2007), “emerging and young adults are potentially well positioned to make informed career and personal decisions”, since they have a “lengthened period of time to reach such key milestones as career, marriage, and parenthood in comparison to previous generations” (2007, p. 43). In this ‘good position’ however, they deal with an

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<sup>32</sup> According to PewResearch generation Z is from 1997 to 2012 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>); following Seemiller and Grace (2016), the same gathers born between 1995 and 2010.

<sup>33</sup> <https://universumglobal.com/product/generation-z-grows/>

<sup>34</sup> Also Seemiller and Grace (2016) point out this characteristic, which might depend on the fact that this generation saw their parents struggling for jobs during the economic crisis.

unstable and unpredictable labour market, and weakened labour protection. As well, as noted by Schulenberg et al. (2004):

In comparing the transition into adolescence with the transition into adulthood, it becomes evident that there is far less institutionally and culturally imposed structure on young people as they make the latter transition than as they make the former transition. On the positive side, this relative lack of structure can allow for greater self-selection of paths and activities. [...] However, for some young people, the relatively sudden drop in institutional structure can be debilitating, creating a mismatch between individual needs and contextual affordances. (2004, p. 801)

During this phase of leaving behind adolescence and entering into young adulthood, young people choose their degree programs in tertiary education, shape their identity as professionals, build up their employability potential, and face the world of work.

#### **I.4.2 Students' perceptions on employability**

When referred to students, the concept of work readiness is usually worded as “self-perceived employability”. The two concepts share the same objective, that of defining the extent to which the graduate and the world of work perceives, or tries to measure, that person’s readiness for work.

In the past few years, there has been an increase in research on student perceptions about their employability (Jollands et al., 2014; Daniel and Broker, 2014; Smith et al., 2014; Tomlinson, 2007; Taylor, 2005) as a consequence of the overall pressure on universities to bring graduates closer to work.

Sociological research has also advanced understanding of how the labour market, as a construct of individuals, has a subjective value and plays a significant role in perceptions. In fact, while paid work can be seen as an institutional fact (Searle, 1995), it is also something that is constructed in context and depends on individual experiences.

The way individuals perceive the labour market shapes how they perceive their own employability. Researchers have explored how a person’s orientation to the labour market and the value of the work organisations shapes the person’s values regarding career and career development (du Gay, 1996; Sosteric, 1996; Whittle, 2005). This work gives evidence that individuals “engage with the world of work in different ways which relate to their subjective frames of reference” (Tomlinson, 2007). Subjectivity can be defined as “the conscious and non-conscious conceptions, dispositions and procedures that constitute individual cognitive experience” (Billet 2010, referring to Valsiner and Van de Veer, 2000), though the word is used differently, and sometimes with different meanings, in various disciplines. Subjectivity entails the interrelation and interdependence between the individual as agent and the social world, and the sense-making of the individual in relation to lived experience. Therefore, construct of how work is conceived, depends on the person’s relation with the social world. Different theories have investigated this topic. Billet (2010:11) summarises the concept of subjectivity according to different theoretical approaches, identifying four accounts of self:

1. Autonomous self, referring to the individual exercising autonomy and freedom in pursuing goals (*separated*); according to the Humanist tradition, the concept of subjectivity results as “Free and spontaneous expression of self”;
2. Subjugated self, where the individual is a “placeholder within the system” (*enmeshed*); expressed by the Structuralism (post-Foucault) theories, the concept of subjectivity is linked and placed into social structures;
3. Enterprising self, referring to the entrepreneurial individual who maintains identity while transforming the social system (*entangled*); articulated by the (Late) Modernity theories, the concept of subjectivity is related to the presentation of self;
4. Agentic self, referring to individuals who negotiate with the social system while maintaining their identity (*entwined*); expressed by the Post-Structural theories, the concept of subjectivity is “Open, reflexive, embodied quality of human agency”.

Table 1 summarises the implications of these four accounts of self for learning and work, and notes the key scholars of each approach:

*Table 4. Accounts of self: implications and authors supporting theories (elaborated on the basis of Billett’s work)*

	<b>Implications for learning and work</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<i>SEPARATED</i>	Individuals attempt to “be themselves” autonomously from social dependences	--
<i>ENMESHED</i>	Individuals depend from social systems	Cole, 1998; Scribner, 1985
<i>ENTANGLED</i>	Individuals regulating themselves to fit personal/enterprise (and social) goals	Du Gay, 1996
<i>ENTWINED</i>	Individuals attempt to “be themselves” (enact ‘sense of selves’) in negotiation between work and life outside of work	Billett 2006; 2010; Weedon, 1997; Engeström and Middleton, 1996; Lave, 1993; Rogoff, 1995

The construct of work is therefore a psychological need that incorporates subjectivities (influences and cultural practices over time), immediate social experiences (situations), and post-mediate experiences (how experiences are constituted) (Billett, 1998).

Students may or may not have had work experiences, but in any case they have experienced work as part of the social world, and possess their own perception of work – and of themselves within the picture. The concept of self-perceived employability, explored only in recent times, can be defined as the perceptions and beliefs about possibilities of obtaining full time employment; different nuances emerge according to the different subjects considered, for example, students, the unemployed, or those who are employed but may wish to move to another job. Self-perception should be considered as different from self-efficacy, which is concerned with people’s beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their own functioning and over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994).



Much research, especially in the field of psychology, has explored the role of self-perceived employability of employees (Forrier et al., 2009; van Dam, 2005; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006; Berntson and Marklund, 2007; Rothwell and Arnold, 2007; De Vos et al., 2011). Also, some research has investigated the match between the perceptions of students and businesses: Wye and Lim (2009), who surveyed 600 undergraduates and 30 employers to investigate differences in perceptions of employability, noted that the two categories had mismatched perceptions about work readiness.

Berntson et al (2006) proposed a study to identify predictors of employability developed around three areas of investigation – human capital (as education, competence development and job tenure in relation to employability), the dual labour market<sup>35</sup> (as belonging to the ‘first segment’ of the labour market is positively perceived in relation to employability), and the economic situation (during economic prosperity employability is perceived more positively than during economic recession). Perceived employability was measured through one item “How easy would it be for you to acquire new and comparable employment without moving?” rated on a 1-5 Likert scale, while other dimensions were obtained through examination of educational level and contract agreements. The analysis work was carried out on a subsample of statistical data from two Swedish national surveys: the Labour Force Surveys and Work Environment Survey. Their results highlighted that more education and competence development were positively associated with perceived employability, but not so much with tenure, and that employment status did not affect the perception of employability as much as the authors had expected.

Perceived employability is seen as strictly linked to career development, which, as explained in Chapter 2, has become more and more “boundaryless” (Van Buren, 2003) and/or “protean” (Hall, 2004).

Vanhercke et al. (2013), adapting from Berntson and Marklund (2007), define self-employability as “the individual’s perception of his or her possibilities of obtaining and maintaining employment” (2013, p. 594). The authors point out that five aspects are important to the definition, namely: 1) perceived employability is a subjective evaluation; 2) it concerns ‘possibilities’ of employment and accounts for contextual factors; 3) it is significant for different groups in the labour market and throughout the career; 4) it refers to ‘employment’ possibilities, either in the organisation of the employee, or outside it; 5) the term employment concerns both quantitative and qualitative elements (pp. 595-596). Graduate students are a specific target, as they access the labour market for the first time, therefore they are concerned by ‘obtaining’ more than by ‘maintaining’ a job. However, the authors specify that self-perceived employability can be used to “raise awareness about the need to invest in employability beyond academic achievement”.

Other research focuses on graduate students: Rothwell and Arnold (2007) developed an 11-item scale that could support understanding of individual employability within and outside the person’s current organisation, and serve for career development purposes. Further, Rothwell et al. (2008) developed a scale for university students, developed around four quadrants:

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<sup>35</sup> Doeringer and Piore (1971:165).

- self-belief: graduates' engagement with their studies and academic performance (internal employability)
- my university: students perception of the strengths of the university in terms of reputation (external employability)
- my field of studies: status of credibility of the graduates' field of study (external employability)
- external labour market: perception of the state of external labour market (external employability)

The scale includes 16 items, and five subscales (Self-perceived employability; Employability/ambition; External employability; Internal employability/ambition; University commitment). The authors administered the questionnaire to 315 university students, and found that students valued most external employability than internal employability items. The scale was further tested by other researchers, directly as measurement (Vargas et al., 2018; Maiolo et al., 2013) or to add further elements (as career adaptability, Monteiro et al, 2018).

Qenani et al. (2014), on the basis of the work of Berntson et al (2006) and Rothwell and Arnold (2007), and by adding other variables, designed a self-employability survey and administered it in two California colleges, where 978 questionnaires were collected. Survey questions included human capital variables, satisfaction with how college provided students with the attributes needed for work, personality questions, perceptions of the state of the economy, and confidence about employability. Further explanation of the questionnaire can be found in Chapter 7 of the present work, which describes its use as the basis for field research at the University of Macerata. The Qenani et al. study found that gender plays a role in perceived employability, as male students were 50% more confident in their employability skillset than female students. They observed a significant relationship between employment prospects and self-managing behaviour, noted that internships and projects with firms can increase perceived employability, and reported that college reputation is important to students.

Further studies have analysed the awareness of graduate students in relation to employability. Qualitative methodologies have been applied to investigate this issue. Tomlinson (2007) interviewed 55 undergraduates in their final year of studies, and found that students view their employability as a “crucial issue which has to be negotiated and worked at”, and low expectations about the value of the degree to access the labour market (Tomlinson, 2008). Cavanagh et al. (2015), based on information gleaned in focus groups and semi-structured interviews, concluded that there is a “gap in knowledge about what will be critical in the workforce”, with little capacity to link academic study with work activities. This was also echoed to some extent by the work of Tymon (2013), who collected data through focus groups on a sample of over 400 students, from the first to the final year of their studies. One of the most significant findings that undergraduates failed to understand the value of developing transversal skills through their academic work, while, according to literature, employers recognised these skills as highly important. An additional mismatch between student perceptions and the requirements of the world of work is related to the concept of employability itself, which seems to be considered by undergraduates as instrumental to get a job, while the literature sees it as a lifelong process that includes the overall professional career cycle.

### **I.4.3. Graduates' transitions: facing the labour market**

The transition from education to work can be quite challenging: after years within a protected and linear system, young people face the increasing complexity of the adult world, including the world of work, and sometimes they get become 'lost in transition' (Sisson and Jones, 2012; Smith et al., 2011).

The first real concern is to find a job, which traditionally has been done using formal tools such as newspapers, offline or online job boards, and public and private employment services<sup>36</sup> and informal ones, such as social ties, social networks, and direct contact with employers (Wielgosz and Carpenter, 1987; Try, 2005). Several studies, mostly in the fields of economics and sociology, have investigated the efficacy and efficiency of those channels, in particular for public employment services, often in relation with national markets (Addison and Portugal, 2001 in Portugal; Pagani, 2003 in Italy). Reports in the literature suggest that informal job search methods are becoming increasingly effective, while other methods such as public employment services are used by job hunters "who cannot rely on social contacts" (Weber and Mahringer, 2006). A survey from Right Management (Manpower Group, 2010<sup>37</sup>) analysed data from 59,133 clients over three years, and found that in 2010, 41% of respondents landed a job through networking, 25% by following postings on internet job boards, and 11% through the services of agencies and search firms.

Since the 1960s, studies on paths to employment have stressed the role of personal networks or social ties in finding jobs (Rees, 1966), and over the years this has been confirmed by other researchers (Wegener 1991; Holzer, 1987; Wahba and Zenou, 2005). With the advent of social networks, researchers have also studied the use of these tools for job hunting (Marin, 2007; Cappellari and Tatsiramos, 2015; Trimble, 2011, 2015).

Analysing social capital and its importance in finding and retaining work is therefore important for understanding access to work. The concept of networks relates to that of social capital. Bourdieu (1986) provided the first definition of social capital, as

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition — or in other words, to membership in a group — which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (1986, p. 21).

On the value of this capital, either economic, social, or cultural, Coleman (1988) argued that

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<sup>36</sup> Job search theories have been popular since the 1970s, replacing the neoclassical labour supply theory, which was based on the assumption that there was no way for anyone actively looking for a job to remain jobless, therefore the individual could be employed or inactive – unemployment was not included. Job search models are based on the assumption that "looking for a job is a dynamic sequential process and that individuals have to decide when to stop this process under conditions of uncertainty and imperfect information. Frictional unemployment is a natural outcome of this process" (Faggian, 2014, p. 60).

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.right.com/wps/wcm/connect/right-us-en/home/thoughtwire/topics/all>

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors - whether persons or corporate actors - within the structure (1988, p. S98),

and

If physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form, and human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, social capital is less tangible yet, for it exists in the *relations* among persons. Just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well (1988, p. S101, italic in the original text).

According to Portes (1998), there are “three basic functions of social capital: (a) as a source of social control; (b) as a source of family support; (c) as a source of benefits through extra-familial networks” (p. 10). Adler and Kwon (2002) argue in addition that networks have positive outcomes such as (a) information; (b) influence, control, and power, and (c) solidarity, but also can entail negative aspects, such as the demands on one’s time, and the risk of being closed and self-referential.

Applied to employment and career, three main theoretical approaches should be considered:

- The theory of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973);
- The structural hole theory (Burt, 1992);
- The social resources theory (Lin, 1990).

Granovetter (1973) held that “weak ties” with a social circle are more likely to connect job seekers to a job than “strong ties” with family and close friends, as the former provide broader access to information that can lead to increased opportunities. This theory is one of the most recognised and widely used ones in analysing access to work and career development.

Burt's (1992) structural holes approach focuses on the pattern of relations among the alters in an ego's social network, built on the main idea that lack of ties among alters (defined as “structural holes) may benefit ego.

Lin et al. (1981) focus on resources, viewing them as embedded in one’s social network and social ties, which the individual can directly or indirectly access to fulfil the ego’s instrumental objectives. Lin identifies three ways in which social networks enhance outcomes of action: the network facilitates the flow of information, influences the agents (e.g. recruiters), and certifies the individual’s social credentials (Lin, 1992).

Seibert et al (2001) argued that differences between these conceptualisations are related to the distinction between structural properties of networks (the form, as weak ties and structural hole theories), and nature of social resources embedded in the same networks (as in social resources theory). They then proposed a model for a social capital theory of career success, where two measures of social network structures are related to two forms of social resources (number of contacts in other functions – weak ties – and number of contacts at higher educational level – structural holes), and an additional measure refers to social resources, classified through three types of network benefits (access to information, access to resources,

and career sponsorship). Their model was tested in a sample of 448 employees in various occupations and organisations, resulting in a confirmation that “the number of weak ties and the level of structural holes in an actor's network each has independent effects on the level of social resources” (page 15). Among the three types of network benefits, career sponsorship proved to be the most important in terms of career success.

Many other studies in a variety of academic fields focus on the value of social capital for the labour market, either for an organization or an entrepreneur, or for the individual worker or jobseeker,. Taking the individual perspective, we can broadly define three career stages in which social capital plays a role, although in different ways over time and in varying conditions:

- a) Access to the labour market;
- b) Staying within the labour market;
- c) Moving, voluntarily or not, from a job to another.

The second stage requires different actions in relation to social capital, while the first and the third have in common the action of job seeking.

There is a considerable body of literature devoted to job hunting and its relation to social ties. Ioannides and Datcher Loury (2004), applied sociological theories in their economic perspective, and summarise seven “stylized facts” about job information networks, as follows (pp. 1057-1061):

- 1) there is widespread use of friends, relatives, and acquaintances to search for jobs and this has increased over time;
- 2) the use of friends and relatives to search for jobs often varies by location and by demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, education, etc.);
- 3) job search through friends and relatives is generally productive;
- 4) part of the variation in the productivity of job search by demographic group simply reflects differences in usage;
- 5) many differences in productivity of job search by age, gender, race, and ethnic group cannot be completely accounted for by differences in usage;
- 6) the internet is being used increasingly for the purpose of job hunting;
- 7) there appear to be important differences across countries in the use of personal contacts by both firms and workers.

The authors approach the topic from the point of view of economics, and provide an excellent review of available research on these “facts”, considering mostly sources that rely on empirical quantitative data and economic modelling. As pointed out by Wright Brown and Konrad (2001), studies examining the use of personal contacts in the job search process were based on data sets collected between 15 and 30 years ago, when the labour market had remarkable differences from the present one. However, qualitative research confirms the listed “stylized facts”.

The conscious use of networks for job hunting has increased over time (stylized fact 1, as in the list above), and is included in career development programmes. Grey literature, particularly the channels devoted to job hunting and recruitment through the internet (stylized fact 6), confirm that the use of networks for job seeking purposes is considered valuable and relevant for success.

While social ties, networking, and other channels are used almost equally across Western countries by graduates to access their first job, the time needed to find it varies notably not only between the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean, and Australia, but also within the countries of Europe. No EU-wide surveys have been conducted to study transition pathways of graduates, but some works have compared available national data. Among these, the CHEER project<sup>38</sup> in the late 1990s examined the relationships between higher education and the world of work in eleven European countries, highlighting similarities and differences among the nations studied. On the basis of this dataset, Salas-Velasco (2007), analysed the entry into employment of young European graduates, concluding that:

- there is a gap between the North and the South of Europe, and graduates from Spain and Italy, for example, face longer transition periods from university to obtain first job, compared to those from Nordic countries;
- job search intensity plays a role, where “graduates who search for a job more intensely increase the probability of finding a job sooner” (2007, p. 351);
- there is an important gender difference that favours males;
- there is an age difference that favours younger graduates over mature graduates;
- parental education is a factor, as graduates from better educated families are favoured in the process;
- the type of degree is an important variable: for example, healthcare or computer science graduates are more likely to find a job in a shorter time than those with degrees in the humanities.

National studies in Spain (Lassibille et al, 2001), Italy (Almalaurea, 2018), Finland and Portugal (Alves and Korhonen, 2016) have reached similar conclusions.

Finding a job, however, is only the first step. Then there is the process of integration into work settings. According to Graham and McKenzie (1995:5), at least four critical issues should be considered when exploring transitions from education to work:

1. Culture change
2. Preparation of the graduates for the world of work
3. Expectations (of both graduates and employers)
4. Levels of commitment and satisfaction.

The first major change is due to what has been called ‘reality shock’ in nursing education (Kramer, 1974) and ‘occupational reality shock’ in accountancy (Lawler et al., 1975): every company has its own organisational culture, and when graduates begin work, they find they must not only learn about the firm’s organisational arrangements and preferred communication styles, but also adopt beliefs and values perceived “as necessary for success” (Phillips, 1987).

Preparation for the workplace is another issue. During work placements or internships, students experience the world of work, but from a ‘protected’ position. Instead, as employees (or any other profile within the labour market) the hard and

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.qtafi.de/cheers-european-graduate-survey.html>. The study included surveys in Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

soft skills acquired during their education are put to the test. Do graduates feel prepared? Most qualitative studies related to self-perception of preparedness in graduates focus on specific professions, such as physicians or nurses, and delineate some role-specific difficulties as well as more general ones, such as the need to improve their communication skills (Robertson and Griffiths, 2009) or a general feeling of unpreparedness for the role (Cave et al, 2009). Also in engineering, the need for curricula improvements that help students develop generic or soft skills such as communication has been pointed out by some studies (Martin et al, 2005). General surveys in the grey literature confirm this perception of weak preparation for work, such as the totaljobs.com (2010)<sup>39</sup> survey in the UK, in which 44% of the 448 respondents said that university had not prepared them for the world of work.

The expectations of graduates and employers are generally divergent. Many studies in the literature have reported that the high expectations of graduates often end in disappointment with reality, in terms of salary (Hills, 2002; Brunello and Lucifora, 2001; Chevalier, 2006 for gender differences), the feeling of being underutilised and burdened by heavy workloads (Holden and Jameson, 1999), difficulties with organisational behaviour and culture (O'Really et al., 1991), or impediments to career progression (O'Leary and Deegan, 2005; Ericson, 2009; Pooley, 2005). As outlined in the previous chapter, employers expect their new hires to be ready for the job, able "to start making a contribution from 'Day 2'" (Graham and McKenzie, 1995, p. 7).

Finally, two critical and related elements of the transition from studies to work are commitment and job satisfaction. These factors have been widely studied. Graham and McKenzie (1995) examined the level of satisfaction of about 2,000 graduates in more than 15 UK organisations one-three years after beginning their job, and identified five patterns among the sample:

- *Success*: graduates happy in their role
- *The W*: graduates alternating between periods of high satisfaction and high dissatisfaction
- *Acceptance and underutilisation*: graduates accepting that they will not utilise their talents, with a resigned attitude
- *Steady decline*: graduates acknowledging and expecting to leave the company after a time (this was the most represented pattern)
- *Shock and recovery*: graduates feeling very insecure at the beginning of their work, who then became strongly committed to the organisation.

Research has shown how commitment and satisfaction depend on many aspects in addition to company management and organisation, and these also impact on the patterns above explained. The study by Mora et al. (2007), again based on the CHEER<sup>40</sup> database, explored job satisfaction across 11 European countries, finding that

- job satisfaction among very different European countries is relatively homogeneous, and national results do not differ substantially from overall results;

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.totaljobs.com/>

<sup>40</sup> See note 9

- men tend to be more satisfied than women, also considering that women have poorer jobs and struggle more to reconcile work and family;
- graduates who had practical experiences during their educational journey tend to be more satisfied;
- positions gained generally do not correspond to expectations, in terms of earnings;
- overqualification is the first reason for dissatisfaction;
- more job satisfaction is encountered in the public sector, particularly in education, and in small firms;
- job satisfaction is higher in a permanent and full time job;
- a good salary is a key factor for increased job satisfaction.

Finally, in order to better understand the transition to the labour market and placement in a (hopefully satisfactory) job, it is useful to consider the time needed to get the first significant job<sup>41</sup>, and the terms of the contract.

The time needed to find a first job varies among European countries (see note 12). The following table indicates the average number of months between leaving formal education and starting the first job (within the previous 3 or 5 years, last data available 2009, 27 countries):

Table 5. Average months for the first job<sup>42</sup>

GEO/ISCED97	All ISCED 1997 levels	Levels 5 and 6					
		All	No response	Male	No resp.	Female	No resp.
EU27 - 27 (2007-2013)	6.5	5.1	:	4.9	:	5.3	:
Belgium	5.6	5.3	:	5.5	:	5.2	:
Bulgaria	8.9	4.1	:	4.1	:	4.2	:
Czech Republic	4.1	3.1	:	2.9	:	3.3	:
Denmark	4.6	3.7	:	3.4	:	3.9	:
Estonia	4.3	2.8	:	1.4	:	3.7	:
Ireland	4.3	3.9	4.7	3.7	4.3	4.0	5.4
Greece	13.1	12.2	:	13.4	:	11.4	:
Spain	8.2	7.0	:	6.3	:	7.6	:
France	5.8	4.6	:	4.8	:	4.4	:
Italy	10.5	9.8	:	9.4	:	10.1	:
Cyprus	8.1	4.8	:	3.7	:	5.4	:
Latvia	5.7	3.7	:	3.2	:	4.0	:
Lithuania	4.2	3.0	:	2.8	:	3.1	:
Luxembourg	5.1	4.2	:	3.9	:	4.4	:
Hungary	5.6	4.0	:	4.3	:	3.8	:
Malta	5.5	2.6	:	1.7	:	3.1	:
Netherlands	3.5	3.0	:	2.6	:	3.3	:

<sup>41</sup> 'Significant job' refers to a work contract for at least three months (Eurostat, 2013), the previous definition was based on a contract of at least six months (European Union Labour Force Survey, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Eurostat table edat\_lfso\_09t2 - adapted



GEO/ISCED97	All ISCED 1997 levels	Levels 5 and 6					
		All	No response	Male	No resp.	Female	No resp.
Austria	4.9	3.7	:	2.8	:	4.6	:
Poland	6.2	3.6	:	3.1	:	4.0	:
Portugal	5.7	4.7	:	2.8	:	5.8	:
Romania	10.0	7.3	:	8.1	:	6.7	:
Slovenia	7.6	4.6	:	5.4	:	4.1	:
Slovakia	5.6	3.5	:	4.3	:	2.8	:
Finland	5.4	3.5	:	2.7	:	4.0	:
Sweden	4.4	3.5	:	3.4	:	3.6	:
United Kingdom	3.5	3.0	:	3.2	:	2.8	:

Transition times in European countries therefore vary from the 2.6 months needed for a graduate in Malta to the 12.2 months in Greece. This depends on several factors, including the employment rate of the country. In fact, in the same year (2009), the figures for youth unemployment were as follows:

Table 6. Employment rates<sup>43</sup> by age, sex, educational attainment level (5 years of less after leaving formal education [edat\_lfso\_09t3])

GEO/ISCED97	All ISCED 1997 levels	Levels 5 and 6					
		All	No response	Male	No resp.	Female	No resp.
EU27 - 27 (2007-2013)	72.9	84.2	70.3	86.2	72.6	82.7	67.1
Belgium	79.4	91.8	:	91.6	:	91.9	:
Bulgaria	64.5	84.4	:	92.7	:	79.3	:
Czech Republic	79.1	88.7	:	94.8	:	83.7	:
Denmark	81.3	88.5	40.0	88.1	:	88.8	:
Estonia	80.2	90.6	:	92.2	:	89.0	:
Ireland	63.4	79.8	:	90.8	:	72.8	:
Greece	70.2	83.9	70.7	83.0	72.3	84.6	68.7
Spain	67.3	74.0	:	75.9	:	72.9	:
France	59.8	73.4	:	77.0	:	70.5	:
Italy	70.2	83.3	:	83.2	:	83.3	:
Cyprus	59.2	69.3	:	74.7	:	65.8	:
Latvia	81.2	83.0	:	87.0	:	81.2	:
Lithuania	66.1	81.3	:	84.3	:	79.8	:
Luxembourg	69.7	86.4	:	89.6	:	84.6	:

<sup>43</sup> According to Eurostat, “employed persons are all persons who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference week or were temporarily absent from such work. Unemployed persons are all persons who were not employed during the reference week and had actively sought work during the past four weeks and were ready to begin working immediately or within two weeks. The inactive population consists of all persons who are classified neither as employed nor as unemployed”, and it can include for example pre-school children, school children, students, pensioners, disabled, and individuals with family/care responsibilities, provided that they are not working at all and not available or looking for work either; some of these may be of working-age.

GEO/ISCED97	All ISCED 1997 levels	Levels 5 and 6					
		All	No response	Male	No resp.	Female	No resp.
Hungary	82.0	87.8	71.9	92.6	85.7	83.7	:
Malta	70.1	83.4	:	92.3	:	77.0	:
Netherlands	78.0	93.7	:	91.4	:	95.0	:
Austria	87.9	94.7	87.8	95.0	83.3	94.5	91.2
Poland	84.0	91.6	:	96.3	:	86.8	:
Portugal	77.6	88.9	:	91.7	:	87.0	:
Romania	78.6	88.0	:	88.6	:	87.6	:
Slovenia	66.4	85.7	:	85.1	:	86.2	:
Slovakia	80.6	87.9	:	93.9	:	84.2	:
Finland	71.3	81.9	:	92.6	:	73.8	:
Sweden	74.8	85.9	:	93.7	:	81.6	:
United Kingdom	75.9	90.8	:	91.6	:	90.1	:

Clearly, economic performance of the single countries is not the only reason, as Salas-Velasco (2007) pointed out on the basis of the CHEERS data (see here above page 10). The OECD study on transitions (2000) points out six “key ingredients of successful transition systems”: “a healthy economy; well organised pathways that connect initial education with work and further study; widespread opportunities for workplace experience to be combined with education; tightly knit safety nets for those at risk; good information and guidance; and effective institutions and processes” (2000, p. 13). Raffe (2011) argues that different types and lengths of transition depend on internal ‘logics’ within countries, influenced by different welfare regimes, family support structures, the existence of extensive work based learning practices during educational pathways, and other factors. Raffe concluded that there is no one overarching transition model, and no convergence among countries that could lead to one in a short time.

Another element that both the OECD study and Raffe underline is the increased disadvantage of young people in relation to older workers, as the “losers in the globalization process” (Buchholz et al., 2009, p. 67). Young people face greater instability in the labour market and decreased labour protection, and their employment is largely temporary (when not precarious, in some countries). Statistical data highlight a high percentage of temporary contracts:

*Table 7. Young temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees, by country of birth [yth\_empl\_050], age class: 15-29*

GEO/TIME	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
EU 28	30.8	31.4	31.2	31.5	32.1	32.4	32.5	32.5	31.9
EU 15	31.9	32.6	32.2	32.4	32.7	33.0	33.1	33.6	33.5
Euro Area	36.4	37.2	36.8	37.2	37.9	38.6	38.5	39.2	39.1
Belgium	19.7	21.3	20.3	20.2	21.1	23.3	23.5	29.1	29.3
Bulgaria	6.9	5.6	7.3	9.7	9.1	7.6	8.0	7.8	6.6
Czech Republic	14.9	15.0	17.2	19.1	21.2	21.8	21.6	20.7	18.2

GEO/TIME	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Denmark	18.9	20.1	19.1	19.7	19.8	20.5	30.1	31.6	27.9
Estonia	41.7	41.6	39.3	39.1	38.7	38.7	38.0	37.3	36.7
Ireland	7.4	8.6	7.4	7.7	6.9	8.0	7.8	6.9	7.8
Greece	22.0	24.9	24.7	24.3	25.1	24.1	22.0	22.5	25.3
Spain	21.7	19.5	18.8	19.8	23.8	23.5	22.3	20.6	20.4
France	44.7	47.1	46.6	49.3	52.2	55.1	57.4	57.9	56.1
Italy	36.5	37.3	37.7	37.9	37.4	39.2	39.4	39.3	39.5
Cyprus	28.7	32.6	34.2	35.6	40.7	47.1	51.4	48.1	46.8
Latvia	34.1	36.6	39.4	39.8	42.6	43.0	42.5	47.2	50.6
Lithuania	14.3	12.3	12.7	18.2	21.6	21.9	24.8	22.9	17.9
Luxembourg	8.9	8.0	6.6	6.3	5.2	6.0	5.4	4.3	3.4
Hungary	4.3	5.6	5.3	5.0	5.0	3.7	4.4	3.9	4.0
Malta	22.5	22.5	23.5	22.4	25.3	29.6	24.9	23.8	24.7
Netherlands	17.6	15.5	15.8	17.8	18.0	17.9	15.4	12.9	10.9
Austria	9.3	12.2	12.1	12.8	12.9	11.8	12.0	9.6	11.2
Poland	38.8	38.7	41.3	43.7	45.9	43.3	44.8	46.2	44.4
Portugal	25.4	25.8	24.7	24.4	24.7	24.9	23.8	24.6	23.9
Romania	48.0	48.8	49.6	50.6	53.5	54.3	53.3	50.5	46.0
Slovenia	44.9	45.8	44.7	48.0	48.7	52.2	53.2	51.5	51.6
Slovakia	2.5	3.1	3.2	3.5	3.8	3.2	3.1	2.5	2.7
Finland	48.9	49.2	48.7	48.7	49.8	53.5	51.8	51.3	46.1
Sweden	10.0	11.8	11.9	13.0	17.6	19.5	16.6	15.3	14.0
UK	34.4	34.6	34.3	34.3	35.1	34.3	35.2	35.4	36.2

An average of 30% of young people in the European Union have “involuntary part-time”<sup>44</sup> contracts, but this average is based on strong discrepancies: 8.4% of young workers in the Netherlands have such contracts, compared to fully 80% in Italy<sup>45</sup>. Involuntary part-time jobs are part of an overall precariousness of the labour market, particularly in some countries like Italy or Spain, where labour contracts proposed to young people are often atypical<sup>46</sup>. The result of precarious job conditions on individuals have been widely studied in terms of society as a whole and the individual. In fact, a ‘new class’, the Precariat (Standing, 2011), lives a precarious existence of persistent job insecurity. Such job insecurity can cause increased stress

<sup>44</sup> Involuntary part-time employment refers to those who work part-time because they could not find full-time work (Eurofund, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Eurostat table [yth\_empl\_080]: Involuntary part-time employment as percentage of the total part-time employment for young people by sex and age [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=yth\\_empl\\_080&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=yth_empl_080&lang=en)

<sup>46</sup> “Atypical work refers to employment relationships that do not conform to the standard or ‘typical’ model of full-time, regular, open-ended employment with a single employer over a long time span. [...] Atypical work includes part-time work, temporary work, fixed-term work, casual and seasonal work, self-employed people, independent workers and home workers. Although the number of workers in non-standard employment has grown significantly over the past two decades, these workers continue to be regarded as being in ‘atypical’ employment.” [Eurofund, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/atypical-work>)]

levels (Büssing, 1999), depression (Melzer et al., 2010), and poor health in general (László et al., 2010).

In addition, the first years in professional settings in precarious job conditions often lead to the ‘scarring effect’, defined as “effects of youth unemployment over working life, as more spells of unemployment, lower earnings prospects and lower chances of obtaining a decent job in the longer term”<sup>47</sup> (Gregg and Tominey, 2005; Mroz and Savage, 2006).

#### **I.4.4 Conclusive summary**

This chapter has outlined the implications of graduate employability discourse for individuals, namely higher education students and graduates. Key elements can be summarized as follows:

- The generations that have just accessed the market and the generation presently enrolled in tertiary education are among the most educated ones in history; they are the first generations to have grown up in a ‘connected world’ brought about by changes in technology;
- The relation between the individual and the labour market, as well the value of work, is influenced by external insights, but remains a subjective construct that affects one’s perception of employability and the development of employability skills;
- However, access to the labour market is also heavily influenced by other elements that are beyond the control of the individual, such as a country’s economic wealth and typical labour contracts, which determine job access and retention.

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/youth-employment/59265>

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## I.5. Rural territories and graduate employment

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Chapters 1-4 briefly sketched aspects of employability on the macro, meso, and micro dimensions. Clearly, though, employability should be assessed in terms of the features of labour markets, which are largely dependent on place-based economies. As already pointed out, the labour market works differently in wealthy countries than in countries struggling with low production and poor economies, or in a State-based economy such as China's, compared with a liberal economy such as that of the U.S. Within the same countries, or even at smaller administrative levels, such as the regions, differences can be very significant.

This chapter outlines differences in the labour markets of rural and urban settings, and provides background for the presentation of the field research described in Part II.

### I.5.1 Defining rural

The term 'rural' has never found a precise definition. According to Whitaker (1982), it was used the first time by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 1874 to define the population living outside of cities and towns with 8,000 or more inhabitants. In general, the meaning of 'rural' is defined by determining what it is not.

The most precise definition of rural comes from statistical sources. In 1991 the European Commission proposed adopting the 'degree of urbanisation' as a basis for statistics, distinguishing three types of area -- densely populated, intermediate and thinly populated (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2014)<sup>48</sup> -- based on population size, density, and contiguity to municipalities (administrative levels defined in the LAU2 document)<sup>49</sup>. In 2014, classification based on 1 km<sup>2</sup> grid-cells was introduced to better define density in contiguous sets of local areas, leading to the following definition (Eurostat glossary): "a rural area is an area where more than 50 % of its population lives in rural grid cells<sup>50</sup>". Today, 57% of the European territory and 24% of its population is classified as rural (Eurostat, 2017).

The definition is important not only for statistics about demographics: policies and investments are based on the distinction between rural and urban territories, as for

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<sup>48</sup> Densely populated: "contiguous set of local areas, each of which has a density superior to 500 inhabitants per square kilometre, where the total population for the set is at least 50,000 inhabitants"; Intermediate area: "contiguous set of local areas, not belonging to a densely-populated area, each of which has a density superior to 100 inhabitants per square kilometre, and either with a total population for the set of at least 50,000 inhabitants or adjacent to a densely-populated area"; Thinly populated: "set of local areas belonging neither to a densely-populated nor to an intermediate area" (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2014:17).

<sup>49</sup> Local Administrative Units Level 2 are municipalities (Eurostat, 2017. See: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/local-administrative-units>)

<sup>50</sup> Grid cells that are not identified as urban centres or as urban clusters, where urban centres are "cluster of contiguous grid cells of 1 km<sup>2</sup> (excluding diagonals) with a population density of at least 1,500 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and collectively a minimum population of 50,000 inhabitants after gap-filling" and urban clusters are "a cluster of contiguous grid cells of 1 km<sup>2</sup> (including diagonals) with a population density of at least 300 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and a minimum population of 5,000 inhabitants" (Eurostat Glossary, retrieved online October 2019).

example the Rural Development Policy of the European Commission<sup>51</sup>, and corresponding national rural development programmes.

The distinction between urban and rural has been criticised because it does not take into consideration the increased links and market exchanges between the two enabled by technology (Garrett, 2005), or recognise the existence of in-between areas (Wandl et al., 2014). In 2018, the OECD published the “Rural 3.0” framework for rural development, which still refers to a clear distinction between urban and rural<sup>52</sup>. In short, the proposal suggests (OECD, 2018):

- To shift from subsidising poorly productive activities to making strategic investments in more productive activities;
- To focus on local specificities to generate competitive advantages (e.g. local products);
- To address framework conditions (e.g. semi-public goods) which support enterprises indirectly;
- To improve coordination of policies from local to national and beyond;
- To decentralise policy administration;
- To increase use of partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors to implement regional policies.

This set of proposals reflects the profound changes in rural territories after World War II. Policy makers initially sought to foster the process of modernisation of rural areas, which were considered as simple place of production (Guinjoan et al, 2016), but later began to focus on the competitiveness of rural areas within the concept of ‘economic growth’ and the wider process of globalisation, particularly in Europe (Marsden, 2006). As noted by Wiskerke, food production, which has always been the main asset of rural territories, has undergone a transformation marked by three interconnected processes, namely (2009, pp. 370-371):

- *Disconnecting*, as distance and links between the producer and the consumer have increased;
- *Disembedding*, as the place of production has often lost its specificity and the local/regional character of foods is disappearing;
- *Disentwining*, as specialisation of supply chains has led to separated spheres of activities of goods and services.

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, European policy makers have undertaken a different path, to promote ‘re-connection’ (Winter, 2003) and ‘re-territorialisation’ (Horlings and Marsten, 2012), processes that have given preference to place-based approaches; agriculture is increasingly seen in its role of maintaining “multifunctional green space and landscape quality” (Horlings and Marsten, 2012, pp. 2), while rural territories shift from “a homogeneous agricultural commodity market to a more segmented market” (Winter, 2003, pp. 506).

## **I.5.2 Characteristics of rural economies**

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<sup>51</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020_en)

<sup>52</sup> The previous framework proposed by OECD was the “New rural development paradigm” (2006), and it was characterised by a policy planning based on competitiveness.

Thus the concepts of “rural regions” (a spatial category) and “rural economies” do not necessarily, or almost never, refer to agriculture (a sector of economic activity): for example, as reported by Saraceno (1994), since the 1980s, there has been an increase in the number of non-farming jobs in defined rural areas of Italy (fewer than 3,000 inhabitants as classified at that time). The commodification of rural areas is a quite recent phenomenon. The rapid urbanisation that took place between the 1950s and the 1990s in Europe (BBVA, 2014) was followed by a counter-movement of people and capital toward peripheries in search of lower costs and better quality of life, a trend assisted by improved infrastructures and technologies, and by the globalisation process, which has reduced cultural differences. Consequently, the urban-rural dichotomy has been somewhat softened, particularly in relation to ideas of the modern and the traditional: Marini and Mooney define this new economy “as a ‘patchwork’ of diverse, local economies” (2006, p. 96), within which three ideal types of regional economies have arisen, namely

1. *Rent-seeking economies*, relying mostly on agriculture and extractive industries, therefore based on natural resources that do not require investments for diversified development. These economies are characterised by cultural resistance to change, sometimes geographical isolation, and low income. The shift to consumer-driven agriculture also penalises growth.
2. *Dependent economies*, which base their income on external resources. Dependence can be either from the public sector or private companies. Dependency causes a fragile economy: if the dependency is on the public sector, the economy suffers when the country’s performance and ability to subsidize is compromised, while if it is on private companies, which usually produce in the area because of the availability of cheap labour, it is vulnerable to investments or disinvestments in the area decided by a few.
3. *Entrepreneurial economies*, which produce wealth by valorising local traditional resources through modern or post-modern marketing structures (Brunori and Rossi, 2000). In this type of economy, labour is not cheap and high standards of living often attract new residents from urban centres.

Rural development can then lead to various outcomes, and, even when external and internal pressures are strong, change never happens in mechanistic ways. Social systems and local cultures react differently to strengths and opportunities provided by policies and regulatory regimes (Perkins, 2006).

With reference to policies, the OECD (2018) identified the following ‘mega-trends’ likely to influence rural development in upcoming years:

- *Population ageing and migration*: the ageing phenomenon affects rural areas more than urban ones; in addition, migration tends to flow toward urban centres more than to rural areas, and thus rural regions should seek to enhance their attractiveness to a new population;
- *Urbanisation*: although in past decades this process has stabilised, it could be further diminished by strengthening the links between urban and rural areas;
- *Global shifts in production*: rural regions need to invest in their own specificities, increase the skills of their residents, and establish local-global links;

- *Rise of emerging economies*: emerging economies are expected to contribute to two-thirds of global growth by 2030. Their living standards will rise, and they will ask for new ways of sustainable production: rural areas will be asked to provide expertise to new markets. Also, more visitors and investors are expected to come to rural regions, which will need to strengthen relations with them;
- *Climate change and environmental pressures*: rural regions can take advantage of new technological shifts associated with green energy and circular economy;
- *Technological breakthroughs*: digital transformation will probably cause the loss of some kinds of jobs, but will foster demand for others in agriculture and services, such as the transportation of goods. Also, technology will open new ways of accessing services, diminishing the impact of geographical distance.

The OECD suggests that these mega-trends be addressed by policies to foster well-being in the economy, society and the environment, seeking to downplay competition as an economic driver (as it was in the 2006’s paradigm, see note 17). In addition, previous policies favouring investments in qualified firms and communities will be replaced by an integrated rural development approach, which considers “i) public sector – multi-level governance, ii) private sector – for-profit firms and social enterprise, and iii) the third sector – non-governmental organisations and civil society” (OECD, 2018, p. 22). This new approach will most probably have a strong impact on the shape of regional economies in upcoming years.

### **I.5.3 Employment in rural economies**

To better understanding how access to the labour market takes place via different pathways in various contexts, it is useful to introduce the concept of the local labour market. “Labour markets may be local or national (even international) in their scope and are made up of smaller, interacting labour markets for different qualifications, skills, and geographical locations. They depend on exchange of information between employers and job seekers about wage rates, conditions of employment, level of competition, and job location (Business dictionary)”.

Even if the gap between urban and rural is slowly narrowing, distinctive features of rural labour markets still persist. According to Green (2016), and including findings from de Hoyos and Green (2011), the following factors characterise rural labour market:

*Table 8. Demand and supply of workers in rural labour markets*

<b>Demand side</b>	<b>Supply side</b>
Weak service sector	Ageing population, with new population composed more by retired persons who have migrated from the cities
Low availability of highly skilled workers compared to an over-supply of intermediary and low skilled workers	Qualified young workforce migrate elsewhere, looking for better work prospects and higher wages
Preponderance of SMEs and family	Seasonal and ‘cheap’ job offers,



businesses	increasingly taken by migrants
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Furthermore, geographical and infrastructural features create difficulty in matching demand and supply, and most qualified young workers tend to leave to pursue better opportunities, because of:

- Limited transport and mobility (Hodge et al., 2002; Rugg and Jones, 1999);
- Limited services, such as child and elder care, schools, and training opportunities (Green and Hardill, 2003; Rugg and Jons, 1999);
- Poor internet infrastructure (OECD, 2014).

Rural areas are also marked by increasing numbers of self-employed resident. However, research has shown differences in self-employment and entrepreneurship in rural and urban areas. Faggio and Silva (2014) demonstrated that urban self-employment strongly correlates with business creation and innovation. Others suggest that rural areas are marked by ‘survival self-employment’ (MacDonald, 1996) motivated by lack of opportunities and alternatives, rather than by entrepreneurial drive (Green, 2016; Tervo, 2004; Hodge et al., 2002).

#### **I.5.4 Job seeking in rural settings**

According to the literature, informal processes are the most effective way to access the labour market in rural areas: personal recommendations, word of mouth, and direct knowledge are the most common forms of recruitment (Hodge et al., 2002; Monk et al., 1999). According to Matthews et al (2009, p. 326), who compared paths to employment in urban and rural regions of Canada, rural labour markets are “much more constrained and limited than those found in cities”, and “strong and weak ties are used more frequently as paths to employment in rural regions”. Additional candidate characteristics valued by employers are proximity (Monk et al., 1999), work experience gained on the job and not in formal education (Lindsay et al, 2003), and membership in a family that has been established in the area for a long time (Hodge et al. 2002).

However, Cartmel and Furlong (2000), on the basis of forty interviews of employers carried out in four rural areas of the United Kingdom, argued that recruitment is also based on the professional profile needed, and identified three broad categories:

- Recruiting for low skilled jobs, which required low education and training levels, was performed mostly at the local level;
- Recruiting for semi-skilled jobs was performed at the local level in the pool of more educated or trained persons, who then were trained in-house;
- Recruiting for professional and managerial positions (a smaller number) was carried out on the national level, and hired staff had no connection with local community.

Cartmel and Furlong (2000) also carried out 80 in-depth interviews with young people ages 15 to 24 in the same four UK rural areas. Their results confirmed the same barriers identified as values for employers (work experience, family reputation and proximity to the job place) and the need to rely on social networks for finding information about jobs. They found that effective networking included both strong (family) and weak (friends, neighbours) ties. Other research confirms that the most

effective channel for job hunting is networking (Matthews et al., 2009; Shucksmith, 2004; Gerry et al, 2004; Lindsay et al, 2003), as it is very important for finding information about jobs. An additional barrier to work in rural areas is that wages are lower on average, and workers find that the costs of transportation and housing (Culliney, 2017) can be unsustainable.

Yet another barrier to job seeking and employment in general is gender: women in rural areas still suffer of higher unemployment and lower wages of women compared to men women living in urban areas (European Parliament, 2019).

Graduates in rural areas are clearly challenged by the mismatch between aspirations and availability of high-skill jobs (Dax et al., 2002), and the phenomenon of out-migration is significant (Corbett, 2007). However, some factors contribute to enabling the return of graduates to rural regions. Drawing on the works of Rérat (2014), Niedomysl and Amcoff (2011) and Looker and Naylor (2009), it can be argued that those ‘who return’ to rural places after graduation do so for social reasons. Identity is constructed in place and through experience of the lived world, and so the space, as co-constitutive dimension (Farrugia, 2014), and the strength of rural identity can figure significantly in the decisions of graduates to live where they grew up, so as to allow their children a life in this environment to which they belong. Also, ties with parents, relatives and friends play a significant role in this respect. As Niedomysl and Amcoff (2011:656) pointed out: “although there are indications that employment factors may facilitate return migration, return migration is largely driven by social considerations”.

### **I.5.5 Conclusive summary**

In this chapter rural areas have been defined, and aspects of employment in these areas have been delineated in order to provide background information for the field research described in the second part of the study.

Key elements of the topic can be summarised as follows:

- The concept of rural has not yet found a precise and shared definition, even if different authors have addressed the topic, and its shape is still determined by statistical meanings;
- Nevertheless, the areas defined as rural have recognisable characteristics, also in terms of development: after WWII, rural areas of Europe experienced deep changes, passing from an agricultural-based to a multi-functional economy;
- Although the phenomenon of urbanisation has depopulated rural areas, in recent times there is evidence of a slow re-population phenomenon;
- However, rural areas are still challenged by an economy which does not favour young people, in particular those with higher education;
- Employment in rural areas, in general, is characterised by weak service sector jobs, lower wages than in urban areas, and preponderance of SMEs and family businesses; the population is ageing and the majority of workers are low skilled;
- Graduates in rural areas are challenged by mismatch between aspirations and availability of high-skill jobs: this often lead to out-migration of the younger and more skilled segment of the population;

- However, some young graduates return to their rural areas because they prize the social aspects of hometown life over factors related to work and income.

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# **PART II**

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## II.0. Introduction to Part II

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The second part of the study is addressed at answering the research questions through interrelated collection and analysis of data from different sources, having the following research objectives:

- To understand how in practice universities from urban or not-urban settings deal with employability issues, and identify differences, if any;
- To assess which is the perception of higher education students in relation to the labour market – how much they know about the market, how much they consider themselves employable;
- To understand how transitions actually took place for a sample of graduates, and identify common or divergent elements, both within the sample group and in comparison with the students' group.

The following chapters are therefore organised around the research objectives as follows: the first presents data and outcomes of three case studies in which employability provisions in three European universities having three very different reference local markets. Comparison among universities' profiles allow a better understanding of dimensions concerned by the issue of employability and direct or indirect relations with the reference territories, in socio-economic terms.

The second chapter is addressed at introducing more in depth the national and regional situation of the following two collections of data, which took place at the University of Macerata, Region Marche, Italy. This introductory chapter allows to understand the context which employability is played out, both as potential (with students) and as employment outcomes (with graduates).

The third chapter refers about two surveys carried out with bachelor and master students enrolled in the degrees of Cultural Heritage and Tourism in the academic year 2018-2019. The questionnaires have been collected during the beginning and the end of the first semester of the last year of study (third for the bachelor students, second for the master students). Investigated topics refer to the understanding of the labour market and the self-perceived employability.

The fourth chapter analyse data from graduates, collected through one survey and following in-depth interviews. Questions of both collection tools were addressed at understanding how the transition has happened, the perception of the labour market, and the implications of the graduate capitals, as described by Tomlinson (2017).



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## **II.1. Case Studies: exploring employability provisions in higher education institutions**

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In this chapter, results from three exploratory case studies are presented: the aim of this work was to understand if different universities react in different ways in relation with their geographical location. For this, the three analysed institutions represent three different types of areas and reference labour markets, as follows:

- The University of Gothenburg in Sweden is an urban university located in a wealthy area of a wealthy country;
- The University of La Laguna in Spain has the specificity to being located in Canary islands, which are an outermost territory of Europe: it represents then a special condition where the reference territory is both urban, as the university itself is based in La Laguna, very close to the biggest Tenerife's city (Santa Cruz), and rural, as it serves and acts also in the so-called 'green' Canary islands (*islas verdes*, namely La Gomera, La Palma, and El Hierro);
- The University of Macerata, which is located in a rural area of a mostly rural region, in a country with high rates of youth unemployment.

Following this introduction, the chapter presents the adopted methodology, the case studies description, and concludes with a summary of main conclusions where the outcome of the research exercises is analysed and compared.

### **II.1.1 Methodology**

#### **Overall approach**

The study is based on the development of exploratory multiple case studies, which “means to define the necessary questions and hypotheses for developing consecutive studies” (Yin, 2003). Study questions are defined on the basis of initial hypotheses, that will be refined thanks to the results of single cases, and through comparison among cases.

#### **Case studies questions**

RQ1. How universities embed employability in their activities?

RQ2. How universities relate with their reference regions or territories for employability purposes?

#### **Proposition**

To identify which dimensions of universities impact on students' employability, and to identify the articulation and possible extent of this impact, in order to formulate specific research hypotheses on the integration of employability within universities' territorial strategies.

#### **Unit of analysis**

Unit of analysis is the University as institution.

#### **Logic linking data to proposition**

As described in Chapter I.1.3, entrepreneurship in wider sense is a sub-set of employability. For this reason, the HEInnovate scheme has been adopted as reference

to develop dimensions of the case study and related collection tools. HEInnovate is a self-assessment tool for Higher Education Institutions who aims to explore their innovative potential, and covers 8 dimensions of universities', namely:

1. Leadership and Governance
2. Organisational capacity
3. Entrepreneurial teaching and learning
4. Preparing and supporting entrepreneurs
5. Digital transformation and capability
6. Knowledge exchange and collaboration
7. The internationalised institution
8. Measuring impact

Descriptions of those dimensions are provided in the section Resources of the website. Further explanations are provided with examples of what represent a good practice in universities with respect to entrepreneurship and innovation: descriptions given for each dimension have been considered, except for dimension 5 (not defined in the website section Resources), for which in the publication OECD Skills Studies "Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in the Netherlands"<sup>53</sup> (2018), and the publication of HEInnovate "The HEI fosters a digital culture as a mean for innovation and entrepreneurship", it has been adopted. Full descriptions of dimensions and good practices are here provided as Appendix 1.

Once defined the areas under analysis, content analysis has been performed to identify implications for employability/entrepreneurship of students and graduates.

Employability is linked to capitals' development of individuals, however, there are no unified and shared frameworks neither for employability skills nor for approaches to develop those skills. Therefore, as reference to identify the areas of direct impact on students' employability and to provide a tentative list of areas of impact between the university as provider and the student as recipient, the following have been used as main references:

- Pegg et al (2012), *Pedagogy for Employability* (case studies of universities', from page 10)
- Bacigalupo et al (2016), *The ENTRECOMP framework* (reference skills to the three areas Ideas and Opportunities; Resources; Into Action).

Further references have been used to cluster areas in specific topics to carry out data collection, and resulted in the following analysed dimensions:

- Transversal skills development
- Interdisciplinarity
- Entrepreneurial capacities development
- Regional and local embeddedness, professional networks
- International exposure – professional networks
- Follow up (e.g. capacity of the institution to include students' point of views in assessment)

For details on clustering, please see Appendix 1.

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<sup>53</sup> [https://heinnovate.eu/sites/default/files/oecdeu\\_2018\\_heinnovate\\_report\\_netherlands.pdf](https://heinnovate.eu/sites/default/files/oecdeu_2018_heinnovate_report_netherlands.pdf)

### **Criteria of interpreting findings**

Analysis of final findings are based on Yin (2003):

- Explanation building
- Cross-case synthesis
- Pattern matching logic

Full description of the tool and the steps for dimensions definitions are provided as Annex 1.

### **Data collection**

The work is based mainly on desk research. Field research has been carried out through interviews during mobility periods, and during daily work and interviews in the case of the University of Macerata, in the following months:

- University of Gothenburg, Sweden – October 2018 (1 month); January 2019 (two weeks);
- University of La Laguna, Spain – February-March 2019 (2 months);
- University of Macerata, Italy – during the PhD programme (Nov 2016-Oct 2019).

## II.1.2 Employability at the University of Gothenburg (Sweden)

### Higher Education in Sweden

Sweden is one of the 50 countries adhering to the Bologna process, and the legislation for a three-cycle structure of higher education has been adopted and applied since 2007. According to Eurydice, Higher education and research in Sweden take place at 14 state universities (*universitet*) and 17 state university colleges (*högskolor*).

Higher Education in Sweden is governed by the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance. The first, enacted by the Parliament, regulates the HEIs' operations (basic regulations about studies offered; governance, duties of teachers, etc.); the second, issued by the Government, contains regulations on entrance qualifications and selection for courses and programmes, as well as the appointment of teachers and doctoral students. It also includes regulations on course and programme syllabuses, grades and qualifications. It also states that students must be given the opportunity to influence their studies (UVÄ Status Report, 2018). The Ordinance also stipulates the qualifications that may be awarded in first, second and third cycle education and their requirements (Eurydice, 2018).

According to the Higher Education Ordinance (*högskoleförordningen*), students must have access to course counselling and career guidance.

The higher education institutions are also obliged to plan and dimension the education according to the demands of the labour market. There is no state-regulated link between higher education institutions and employers, however links are well established and once a year almost every HEI organises career days (Eurydice, 2018).

Many courses include a compulsory period of practical experience at a relevant workplace, e.g. engineering, teaching, public administration and health science programmes.

An academic year comprises 40 weeks of full-time study and corresponds to 60 HE credits, comparable with the ECTS system.

Courses can lead to qualifications as in Figure 1, however also stand-alone courses can be provided by universities, leading or not to a degree.

<b>First-cycle qualifications</b>
<b>General qualifications</b>
Higher Education Diploma (120 HE credits)
Degree of Bachelor (180 HE credits)
<b>Qualifications in the fine, applied and performing arts</b>
Higher Education Diploma (120 HE credits)
Degree of Bachelor in Fine Arts (180 HE credits)
<b>Professional qualifications</b>
There are 32 different first-cycle professional qualifications, for example Bachelor of Science in Nursing (180 HE credits), Bachelor of Science in Engineering (180 HE credits) and Higher Education Diploma in Dental Hygiene (120 HE credits).
<b>Second-cycle qualifications</b>
<b>General qualifications</b>
Degree of Master (60 HE credits)
Degree of Master (120 HE credits)
<b>Qualifications in the fine, applied and performing arts</b>
Degree of Master in Fine Arts (60 HE credits)
Degree of Master in Fine Arts (120 HE credits)
<b>Professional qualifications</b>
There are 22 different second-cycle professional qualifications, for example Master of Architecture (300 HE credits), Postgraduate Diploma in Midwifery (90 HE credits) and Master of Science in Medicine (330 HE credits).
<b>Third-cycle qualifications</b>
<b>General qualifications</b>
Degree of Licentiate (120 HE credits)
Degree of Doctor (240 HE credits)
<b>Qualifications in the fine, applied and performing arts</b>
Degree of Licentiate in Fine Arts (120 HE credits)
Degree of Doctor in Fine Arts (240 HE credits)

Figure 1. Structure of Swedish HE qualifications (UVÄ Status Report 2018)

The institutions decide courses organisation: courses can have both disciplinary and inter-disciplinary nature, be based on lecturing or through problem-based learning, group learning, etc. A number of HEIs have close co-operation with companies and industries in the region; periods of work-based learning are common.

The language of instruction is usually Swedish, particularly for first cycle, while the second cycle is usually taught in English. Large part of course literature is anyway in English, and “a good knowledge of both Swedish and English is essential, and a basic requirement for eligibility to higher education” (Eurydice, 2018).

### **Labour market in Sweden and Gothenburg**

In 2018, the unemployment rate amongst 15-74 year-olds was in average 6,3%, decreasing from the previous year with +1,8% of people in employment. Youth unemployment was 16,8% (Eurostat, 2018), with considerable differences between the rate of employment in relation to educational attainment (decreasing while increasing educational level; recent graduates reach employment rate of 88,5%). According to EURES portal<sup>54</sup>, “knowledge requirements are high on the Swedish labour market [...]. There is a strong, long-term upward trend in employment in occupations at tertiary education level”. Services account the 80,1% of the Swedish labour force.

Welfare provision is particularly high in Sweden, and almost all workers have access to social security, with little differences between employers and independent (freelance) workers.

The region of Gothenburg is among the richer and wealthy within the country. Unemployment rate in Gothenburg Region was 5,5% in October 2018 (Swedish Public Employment Service and Statistics, 2018).

### **Graduate employment in Sweden**

Employability rates in Sweden are rather high on average: most recent data available, published on the Status Report 2018 by the UKÄ - Swedish Higher Education Authority, points out that three years after graduation, 82 per cent of first and second-cycle graduates had a stable job position. Two years after, the rate had increased to 84 per cent, and increased to 87 per cent after another three years.

### **The University of Gothenburg at a glance**

The University of Gothenburg, funded in 1891, is one of the largest universities in Northern countries, with 38.426 enrolled students (2017). Regular staff of the university counts on 6.220 employees, of which 2.730 belong to academic staff, 848 are PhDs, and 2.069 are support staff.

The university is organised into eight academic faculties:

- The Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts (*Konstnärliga fakulteten*) offers courses in the fields of design and crafts, film studies, photography, scene, music and fine arts.

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<sup>54</sup> EURES Living and working in Sweden:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?countryId=SE&acro=1w&lang=en&parentId=0&catId=0&regionIdForAdvisor=&regionIdForSE=&regionString=SE0%7C%20%3A>

- The Faculty of Education (*Utbildningsvetenskapliga fakulteten*) is responsible for teacher training in various subjects.
- The Faculty of Arts (*Humanistiska fakulteten*) comprises the humanities, for instance cultural studies, history, literature, history of ideas, religion, modern languages, philosophy, linguistics, theory of science and Swedish language and literature
- The IT Faculty (*IT fakulteten*) offers programmes in applied information technology, computer science and engineering.
- The Faculty of Science (*Naturvetenskapliga fakulteten*) covers a number of science disciplines such as botany, cell and molecular biology, physics, earth sciences, chemistry, conservation, marine ecology, mathematics, environmental science, and zoology.
- The Sahlgrenska Academy (*Sahlgrenska Akademin*) is part of the University of Gothenburg and functions as a separate academy with the Sahlgrenska University Hospital.
- The School of Business, Economics and Law (*Handelshögskolan vid Göteborgs universitet*) is a business school and a law school.
- The Faculty of Social Sciences (*Samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten*) offers courses in peace and development studies, public administration, journalism, psychology, social anthropology, social work, sociology, political science, and European studies.

Within the faculties, there are a total of 39 departments.

The organisational chart of the university (source: website of the university of Gothenburg<sup>55</sup>) includes the University Board, to which is linked the University management unit (Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University Director, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor), and which is concerned with Internal Audit Unit. Four further units/services work at university level, namely the Central University Administration, the University Library, the National Units, and the GU Ventures. Then there are the 8 Faculties/Schools, for a total of 36 departments.

Among the faculties, there are also national and international excellences, such as for example the Faculty, or School of Business, Law and Economics, which is among the 90 business schools in the world accredited by the "Triple Crown"<sup>56</sup>.

### **Methodological note**

Data collection has been performed at two levels, the first related to the overall university, the second looking more in depth at Faculty level, in the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law. One key respondent has also been consulted at the Faculty of Arts, with which the Faculty of Business share an interdisciplinary course degree.

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<sup>55</sup> [https://www.gu.se/english/about\\_the\\_university/organisation](https://www.gu.se/english/about_the_university/organisation)

<sup>56</sup> The Triple Crown is the accreditation of the AACSB - The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (United States); AMBA - The Association of MBAs (United Kingdom); and the EQUIS - EFMD Quality Improvement System (European Union). Only the 1% of the world universities of Business has been granted with this label (source: <https://www.mba.today/guide/triple-accreditation-business-schools>).

According to the protocol, collection included desk and field research. Desk research included scientific articles on topics related to entrepreneurship and employability in Sweden, evaluation reports from the National Agency of Higher Education evaluation (UVÄ), consultation of international (OECD), European (Eurostat) and national statistics, strategy documents of the university of Gothenburg, as well as of the Faculties/Schools, consultation of the websites of the university, in particular in relation to students services.

Field research included a total of 4 interviews, including two professors, one researcher, and one dean. Further suggestions have been collected during internal seminars, informal discussions with colleagues during the mobility period.

## **Findings**

Findings are here below described according to the dimensions under investigation.

### ***1. Transversal skills development***

As introduction, it should be stressed that to teach at the university, researchers need to undertake a pedagogical programme: this required qualification is composed by three courses (Basic course, Subject Field Pedagogy, and Applied Analysis), adopting a student-centred perspective. Information retrieved through field research shown an extensive use of project based learning, and thesis' work with enterprises is favoured. It should be pointed out that, according to professors, many students already work while studying and that the part-time is rather common. It is therefore likely that students develop transversal skills during the university years in a combination of formal and informal learning. In addition, the Student Unions are very strong at the university, and traditionally supported by the University, in the frame of which students are active organisers of events: for example, the HHGS (Union of students in Business, Economics and Law) organises three job fairs over the year, of which one, the GADDEN, is the largest career fair within the Nordic countries for business, economics, law, logistics and environmental science studies.

### ***2. Interdisciplinarity/Transdisciplinarity***

While it was not possible to assess the entire range of educational offer, it was possible to talk with professors from two different fields (Tourism and Archaeology) who have designed together a joint course to answer one territorial/national learning need (provision of a professional profile related to cultural tourism), and the process as described sounded very smooth. The university also provides interdisciplinary programmes in its regular learning offer such as the Master in Sea and Society, which "includes four interdisciplinary courses with teachers from five different faculties and from marine and maritime industries, authorities, and agencies in Sweden" (source: UGOT website).

### ***3. Entrepreneurial capacities development***

Desk research leads to an uncertain outcome on this component: masters degrees on entrepreneurship and business creation exist, at least in two faculties (Business and Sahlgrenska Academy, in biomedicine). There are no retrievable services related to business creation, but it should be stressed that for the structure of the Swedish service, this type of support is probably provided outside educational institutions, even if previous research considers UGOT as provider of entrepreneurial

programmes (Zarig et al, 2016). Also, the Alumni association is active, and could provide some mentoring to business creation. It should be also noted that, differently from many countries of Europe, the phenomenon of self-employment is not remarkable in Sweden, and those workers have access to the same universal welfare of employees (Eurofund, 2017). It should be also considered that entrepreneurial education is a backbone of compulsory education in Sweden since 2011 (following the curricula reform), included as cross-curricular education (Eurydice, 2012).

#### ***4. Regional and local embeddedness, professional networks***

The university is well linked with enterprises and professional networks: the exposure of students to networks and support to creation of links with the labour market is pursued through project works with enterprises; internships and placements; mentoring and sponsorship arrangements (the Alumni association is rather active on this); students' consulting (to enterprises). The university particularly supports Unions to take care most of the extra-curricular organisation of work, which also represents an added value to the process. It should be noted that in Gothenburg there are the headquarters also of large companies, such as i.e. Volvo Cars and Ericsson, with which the university has strong and long-lasting relations, on all levels (from research to students' projects). The UGOT has also a strong cooperation with the Chalmers University of Technology, which is also established in Gothenburg. In the case of the School of Business, the career service also plays a role in establishing links or finding a job, and serve also companies to find the needed employees (e.g. to organise recruiting sessions). Other faculties and schools rely on the university career centre. Interviewed/consulted professors, however, point out that often key information on work ad job positions are shared in the frame of study courses, it means in classroom or other educational settings (e.g. information boards of the degree course). Even if a counsellor is available in each faculty/School, respondents pointed out that this professional is rarely consulted for job search, and more for general information, or doubts, related to the study course in relation to the labour market, (e.g. type of jobs enabled by the study course), or for personal issues.

#### ***5. International exposure – professional networks***

The University as such has an extensive network, particularly strong in Scandinavian area, but also well beyond Europe. As regards students, today the University has 1.100 exchange agreements and welcomes over 2.200 international students of approximately 70 nationalities (source: UGOT website). There are numerical data retrievable on Swedish students going abroad: the mobility is managed directly by Faculties/Schools, which have agreements with European and international universities, both for Bachelor and Master courses.

#### ***6. Follow up (e.g. capacity of the institution to include students' point of views in assessment)***

Quality assurance policy and quality development of education at the University of Gothenburg (Dnr V 2016/378) describes the starting points and processes for quality assurance and quality development of the education at the University of Gothenburg.

The work of the evaluations focuses on the following criteria, which includes a strong student component:



- that the actual study results correspond to learning objectives and the university's degree objectives
- that the teaching puts the students'/doctoral students' learning at the heart of the teaching - the content and form of teaching rests on scientific and/or artistic basis as well as proven experience
- that the teachers have current and adequate subject-related, university-pedagogical and subject-didactic skills, and that the number of teachers is proportional to the extent and content of the education
- that the education is relevant to the needs of students/doctoral students and society
- that the students/doctoral students have influence in planning, implementation and follow-up of the education
- that there is available and appropriate study and learning environment for all students/doctoral students
- that continuous follow-up and development of the education is carried out.

### **Conclusive summary**

The University of Gothenburg is a reputed university located in urban settings in a developed and growing area of Sweden, which already is among one of the wealthy countries of Europe. In this favourable condition, the university of Gothenburg actually seems to embed employability provisions in its education, as pedagogy and curriculum (internships and placements), building on a strong and long lasting network of business players, public authorities, and research centres. According to desk and field research, employability is not considered neither a priority nor a problem, or a theme for devoted policies: it should be however noted that transitions from education to work seem to be already smooth.

## II.1.3 Employability at the University of La Laguna (Spain)

### Higher Education in Spain

According to Eurydice<sup>57</sup>, University education is organised into Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes. From the 2015/16 academic year, universities are free to decide whether to implement a model offering Bachelor and Master degrees of 3 and 2 years' duration respectively, which may facilitate the mobility of both Spanish and foreign students, or to keep the previous 4-years model.

Under the principle of autonomy of universities, the university system is granted with the development of a public service of higher education through research, teaching and study.



Figure 2. Structure of Spanish HE qualifications (Eurydice website, 2018)

Each university designs the organisation of the academic year and includes it in their statutes. As a general rule, the university school year has 220 school days, and is divided into two semesters. University education is provided by universities, which may be public or private.

### Labour market in Spain and in Canarias

In 2018, the unemployment rate in Spain amongst 15-74 years olds was in average 6,4%. Youth unemployment was 34,3%. Characteristic of the Spanish economy is the large number of micro-enterprises (1-9 employees), which account for the 39,9% of the total Spanish companies (Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2018). The so-called *autónomos*<sup>58</sup>, who are independent workers without employees, are considered enterprises in Spanish statistics, and account for the 53,9% of the total companies. With respect to the workforce, micro enterprise and independent workers represent the 32,5% of the labour force (large companies with 250 employees or more, which represent the 0,2 of companies, employ the 33,4% of the workforce). As regards sectors, the 74,6% of workforce is employed in Services, the 15,1% in Industry. Spain was among those countries that, following the deregulation of the labour market, reached high levels of job (and life) precariousness after the great recession of recent years, according to the study of European Parliament in 2016.

The Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands has also a business structure where over half the companies had no salaried employees, 35,17% of the companies employed five or fewer workers and 8,66% employed more than five. The unemployment rate in the province of Santa Cruz was 19,52% and in Las Palmas it was 19,75%. The unemployment rate for women (20,20%) is one percentage point

<sup>57</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/higher-education-79\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/higher-education-79_en)

<sup>58</sup> CifrasPyME (2018) definition: those who generate their own employment (“*se considera que cada uno de ellos genera un empleo por cuenta propia*”, page 3).

higher than for men (19,16%). The activity rate reached 60,76%, more than one percentage point higher than the national average (58,73 %) (EURES, referring to National statistics, January 2018). The majority of the workforce is employed in Services (75,65%), with Tourism as main subsector. According to the Public Employment Services data, the highest request for workers is in fact in hospitality and tourism-related activities, and other jobs in shops (sales and shelf fillers).

### **Graduate employment in Spain**

In 2018, the National Agency for Higher Education provided the “Barómetro de empleabilidad y empleo universitarios. Edición Master<sup>59</sup>” (Michavila et al, 2018), based on 6.738 informants (and admin information on 47.182 persons, who finished the university within the academic year 2013-2014). In summary:

- only 6,73% achieves graduation without working (working and studying is a very common behaviour);
- 50% finds a job within six months after the graduation, 26,71% within three months;
- 49,51% has never experienced unemployment;
- Employment situation at the collection moment (March 2019): 42,45% in a long-term contract; 39,1% in a fixed-term contract; 11,44% traineeship or similar provision;
- 18,62% in part time (of them, 47,87% involuntarily).

As regards channels for job seeking, the most used were job boards, followed by spontaneous application (self-introduction) and personal contacts; the most effective were personal contacts (used by the 54,42% of the sample, successfully for the 83,62%); internal promotion (used by 11,93% of the sample, success rate: 81,09%); spontaneous application (used by 56,63%, success rate 70,07%).

### **The University of La Laguna (ULL) at a glance**

The ULL, founded in 1927, is the oldest university in Canary Islands. Located in San Cristóbal de La Laguna, on the island of Tenerife, it has six campuses: Central, Anchieta, Guajara, Campus del Sur, Ofra and Santa Cruz de Tenerife, hosting 45 undergraduate and 33 graduate programmes, grouped in 5 areas (Arts and Humanities, Engineering and Architecture, Health Sciences, Sciences, Social and Legal Sciences). In Spain, the ULL is considered a middle-size university, with more than 20.000 students.

The university has a strong regional component, and its activity includes learning offers in other islands belonging to the same province, such as the University's environmental La Palma, the Summer University of Lanzarote, the Summer University of La Gomera, the Summer University of Adeje (Tenerife), Classrooms El Hierro Sea, and university extension courses, in some municipalities of Tenerife and other islands.

The Governance Board of the University is composed by the Rector and eight Vicerrectores (vice-chancellors) appointed by area:

- Docencia (Teaching)

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<sup>59</sup> Please see organisation of Spanish higher education in the figure at page 114 – Master correspond to 5 years of studies.

- Ordenación Académica y Profesorado
- Investigación (Research)
- Tecnologías de la Información y Desarrollo Digital (ICTs and digital development)
- Relaciones con la Sociedad (Relations with society)
- Estudiantes (Students)
- Internacionalización (Internationalisation)
- Infraestructuras y Servicios Universitarios (Infrastructures and University services).

### **Employability at the University of La Laguna**

The Fundación General de La Laguna acts as a bridge between the university and the social environment.

Founded on 22 September 1987, and known during the first 25 years as Fundación Empresa Universidad de La Laguna, has been established as consortium among the university itself and its Social Council, the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, the Confederation of Entrepreneurs CEOE of Tenerife, the Caja de Ahorros de Canarias, CajaCanarias and the Círculo Canario de Empresarios.

The Foundation aims to promote the progress of our socio-economic environment, in particular, and society in general, through “university talent”. Its work is articulated in three areas of work, namely

- Employment
- Training
- Innovation

The first two, managed by the Agencia Universitaria de Empleo (University Agency of Employment), are developed in six units as follows: 1) career guidance; 2) practical training; 3) entrepreneurship; 4) international mobility; 5) lifelong learning; 6) analysis and dissemination of information on results. The mission of the Agency is to support employability and entrepreneurship of students and graduates (Zapata and Brito, 2018).

The third is managed by the Agencia Universitaria de Innovación (University Agency of Innovation), which is “conceived as a meeting point and shared action between the University and society, with the challenge of transferring knowledge and research results, and optimizing the scientific activity that takes place in the university context”. (Zapata and Brito, 2018). It is organised into several units such as: a) promotion and management of transfer, b) business innovation, international projects, scientific and innovation culture, c) social innovation.

For the only career guidance service (Servicio de Orientación y Acompañamiento Laboral), in 2018 there have been 2.153 individual meetings and 48 group meetings (773 persons attending)<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> <http://eldigitalsur.com/tenerife/39-las-personas-recibio-orientacion-laboral-la-fundacion-ull-accedio-empleo-2018/>

In cooperation with the Canarian Institute of Statistics, the Foundation also implements a structured collection of data in relation to job insertion: the tool allows to follow graduates of the two Canarian universities up to two years after graduation, and check their work outcomes<sup>61</sup>. As well, the University and the Foundation participate the Cataliza III programme, funded through the ESF, for graduates' job insertion<sup>62</sup>. According to the last available data (2014-2015), at two years from graduation:

- 49,9% was working;
- 42,9% was in a graduate job;
- 31,9% had a long-term contract;
- The average time to the first job was 7,74 months.

## Findings

### Methodological note

Data collection has been performed at university level, but with a major representation of field research in Education. Consulted students belonged to Pedagogy (4), Chemistry (1), and Law (1).

According to the protocol, collection included desk and field research. Desk research included scientific articles on topics related to entrepreneurship and employability in Spain and at the ULL, evaluation reports from National Agency of Higher Education evaluation, consultation of international (OECD), European (Eurostat) and national statistics, strategy documents of the University of La Laguna, consultation of the websites of the university, in particular in relation to students services.

Field research included a total of 9 interviews as follows, 3 with professors, 1 with *Vicerrector*, 6 with students. Further information have been collected through exchange with colleagues, in formal and informal settings.

### 1. *Transversal skills development*

The Foundation organises several short-courses and workshops addressed to the development of soft skills: at least 16 courses in the annual programme recognizing ECTS are addressed to this aim. In addition, a specific area of the catalogue addresses 9 foreign languages, plus Spanish as second language and sign language. Courses in general are open to students and overall public: in some cases, a small payment is required, with discounts for students (as i.e. in the case of the language courses). Consulted students have however noted that although the service is known, a small proportion of the students body actually takes advantage of it.

Educational approaches also are aimed at providing students with transversal competences acquired in process: all courses include a practical part. For example, at the faculty of Education, it is norm to use *prácticas* (which means practical work, applied work) within regular courses, and this is both declared in the curriculum description, and are integral part of the final assessment (up to the 50%). This supports acquisition of transversal skills, such as communication and teamwork. Interviewed students also reported about the need of working with outside environment to accomplish projects for *prácticas*, in autonomy and not necessarily

<sup>61</sup> <https://fg.ull.es/empleo/resultados/> It is possible to choose filters for level and topic of graduation.

<sup>62</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LqiCiD\\_xEVx92M9ZU7SpDr7xCWjzH3B\\_/preview](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LqiCiD_xEVx92M9ZU7SpDr7xCWjzH3B_/preview)

with the support of the teacher in establishing relationships with civil society/business worlds.

*Prácticas* are considered by consulted students the stronger mean to access the labour market.

## **2. Inter/Trans-disciplinarity**

This has been the most difficult area to assess as there are no clear indications on the availability of inter/trans-disciplinary courses at the ULL. Some indications have been found on the general website referring to the *cursos de extensión universitaria* (university extension courses), which however do not represent curricular learning offer. Informants did not provide suggestions about the existence of curricular degrees having a strong inter- or trans-disciplinary component.

Instead, inter-university courses are common at Master level (one year, 60 ECTSs after the achievement of the four-years degree), in which cooperation with other Spanish universities seems to be deep.

## **3. Entrepreneurial capacities development**

The ULL puts a rather strong effort in supporting development of entrepreneurial capacities: several initiatives (and research) are carried out at the Faculty of Economics, and a devoted programme alongside specific courses are offered by the Foundation. In fact, the Agencia Universitaria de Empleo offers the *Emprende.ull*<sup>63</sup> programme, which is a mentoring and support programme to develop entrepreneurial ideas (such as the STAR Business course<sup>64</sup> as a part of the programme). The service is free of charge, and in 2018 has trained about 200 students, of which 88 started a business<sup>65</sup>.

## **4. Regional and local embeddedness, professional networks**

The regional and local embeddedness of the university is very strong, both in terms of learning offer (for audience external to the university), and contribution to local development (joint projects, joint events, etc.). This is established at island level, but played out also in close islands. Many of these initiatives are managed, or involve, the Foundation. A particularly interesting format to this aim are the *cursos de extensión universitaria*: these are common in all Spanish universities, and can be defined as structural cooperation with regional players, as they are carried out jointly with institutions, municipalities, private and public bodies of the territory. In 2019, the Foundation programme included 35 courses involving 22 municipalities only in Tenerife Island. Further courses are planned in the three islands of La Palma, La Gomera and El Hierro. It is not however easy to estimate how many students take advantage of this opportunity: some of these courses, however, also provide university credits. The ULL has also an active Alumni network, whose members act as mentors for graduates within specific programmes (i.e. *Embajadores Alumni ULL*<sup>66</sup>).

## **5. International exposure – professional networks**

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<sup>63</sup> <https://fg.ull.es/empleo/emprende-ull/>

<sup>64</sup> <https://fg.ull.es/empleo/star-business-empredimiento/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.ull.es/portal/noticias/2018/200-personas-emprende-ull/>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.embajadoresalumniull.com/>

The University participates the Erasmus programme and holds more than 500 bilateral agreements across the 26 countries of Europe. As well, university cooperation programmes are well developed. The ULL is also characterised by relations with African and Latin America countries, most probably according to its geographical position, and an history of relations linked to the boats' routes. Therefore, and not surprisingly, interviewees refer to relations with Cuba and Venezuela, and cooperation projects with African countries. Besides the Erasmus programme, however, it is unclear on how students are benefitting from these relations, which seems to be more focused on research. Whilst PhD students participate research projects, this is not always the case of bachelor and master students – the extent of this participation has not been verified.

The stronger link that is provided to students to enlarge their professional networks, thus, is probably the compulsory *prácticas* into curricular activities.

**6. Follow up (e.g. capacity of the institution to include students' point of views in assessment)**

Students participate the governing body of the university (*Consejo de Gobierno*) with four representatives, and in general they are involved in all relevant boards involved in governance. Students assess courses and quality of teaching and services, as all Spanish universities (this is a compulsory activity managed by the national body for evaluation of higher education institutions). However, it is unclear how they are involved in analysis of data and actions undertaken following the analysis. As there is no Committee devoted to Quality, and activities seems to be managed by the *Vicerrectorado* for quality, it could be that potential actions are taken within general governing bodies, in which students are involved.

**Conclusive summary**

The ULL represents a precise model for the management of employability offer, in which the core activities of career development and entrepreneurship support are carried out by a devoted body, the Foundation, which is participated by but still autonomous from the university. To the other hand, if support from professional career counsellors is available but could be not very used, students develop employability skills through curricular internships and/or project based learning, that, at least in Education degrees, is very common. An additional specific feature of the university is the strong regional dimension: this can be either consequence of the peculiar situation depending on the geographical position, and/or by strategic decision of governing bodies.

## II.1.4 Employability at the University of Macerata (Italy)

### Higher Education in Italy

Italy has been full member of the Bologna process since 1999. Tertiary level education is provided by universities, High level Arts and Music Education institutions, Higher schools for language mediators, Higher Technical Institutes. University offer is divided in Bachelor (3 years; 180 ECTSs) and Master (2 years; 120 ECTSs). A few degrees have fixed duration that can be of four years (e.g. Primary Education), five years (e.g. Pharmacy), or six years (e.g. Medicine). Also, they can provide post-graduate degrees. Doctoral programs have been established in 1980.

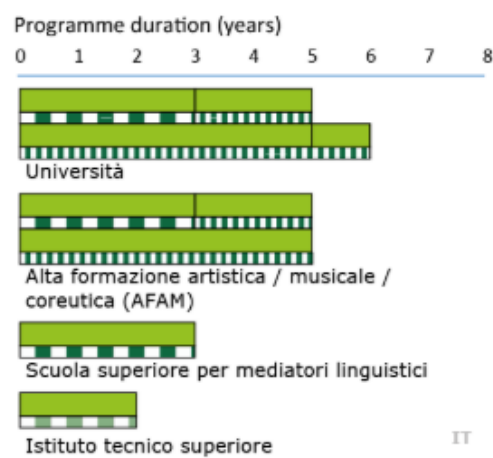


Figure 3. Structure of Italian HE qualifications (Eurydice website, 2018)<sup>67</sup>

Universities may be public or private, if recognised and authorised by the Ministry of Education. Universities are autonomous institutions (Laws 9 May 1989, No. 168 and 19 November 1990, No. 341), having freedom

- to define the name and educational objectives of the courses of study;
- to define criteria for access to the courses of study (free access, access to a programmed number, verification of initial skills binding or indicative) respecting anyway the right to study in Italy as defined by Constitution;
- the type of learning activities and the corresponding number of university credits;
- the identification of alternative forms of teaching, such as distance learning;
- the way in which professionalising curricular activities are carried out (such as laboratory activities, internal internships, internships);
- the modalities of the final test to obtain the qualification.

The plan for youth employability published in 2010 (“Italia 2020”) mentions career guidance and placement as services that should be improved by universities. However, the decision about which way and to which extent provide those services is delegated to university capacities and autonomy.

### Labour market in Italy and in Marche Region

The Italian unemployment rate in June 2019 was 9,5%, decreasing from the yearly average 2018 (10,6%). Youth unemployment rate was 28,5% (15-24 years) and 21,8% (18-29 years). Annual rate highlights wide differences between regions, from the 9,2%-5,9% for the Bolzano Province to up to 53% in the regions of the South (Sicily and Campania both showed the 53,6% for years 15-24).

Also the labour market widely differs between regions, with higher concentration of industries and services at the North, and low density of companies, many based on agriculture and manufacturing at the South.

<sup>67</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/italy\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/italy_en)



According to the Excelsior data<sup>68</sup>, which provides employment trends in the country, office clerks and low-skilled workers were the profiles currently sought by enterprises in second quarter of 2019.

In Marche Region, unemployment rate in the composition of the business fabric by economic activity shows a greater incidence of the primary sector than in Italy as a whole and of industry. Marche retains its position as a manufacturing region, with one of the highest numbers of craft businesses in Italy<sup>69</sup>. In 2018, youth unemployment accounted for the 22,1% of youths aged 15-24, and 17,4% of youths aged 18-29). The same year, general unemployment rate was 8,1% (ISTAT database 2019).

### **Graduates employment in Italy**

Italy is lagging behind in the overall number of graduates in the population aged 30-34 who achieved a tertiary degree: in fact, while Europe overall has reached the target of 40% of graduates as stated by the Europe 2020 strategy, it reaches the 27,8%, the second lower rate among European countries before Romania (Eurostat, 2019)<sup>70</sup>. It should be however stressed that the national target for Italy has been achieved (26-27%): the national target was established considering that Italy in 2002 had only the 13,1% of graduates in the targeted age segment.

According to Almalaurea<sup>71</sup>, in 2018 “the employment rate one year after graduation, which also includes those engaged in paid training, was equal to 72,1% among first-level graduates and 69,4% among second-level graduates in 2017. Among two-year graduates the employment rate rose to 73.7% while for single-cycle masters it is 59,8%” (Almalaurea, 2019:2).

Among those, type of contracts include:

- non-standard contracts (in particular fixed term): 39,9% of first-level and 35,8% of second-level graduates;
- permanent contracts: 24,5% of first-level and 24,6% of second-level graduates;
- self-employment: 13,7% first-level and 10,9% second-level graduates (it raises to 23,6% for single-cycle masters);
- training contract: 11,3% of first-level graduates and 15,4% of second-level graduates;
- other forms of self-employment (mainly occasional contracts): 4,1% of first-level graduates and 5,5% of second-level graduates;
- semi-subordinate work: 2,1% of first-level graduates and 2,9% of second-level graduates;

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<sup>68</sup> <https://excelsior.unioncamere.net/>

<sup>69</sup> Main information in relation to Marche’s profile are retrieved by EURES; <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?catId=399&lmi=Y&acro=lmi&lang=en&recordLang=en&parentId=&countryId=IT&regionId=IT0&nuts2Code=%20&nuts3Code=null&mode=shortages&regionName=Marche> Detailed information are available in Chapter II.2.

<sup>70</sup> Data have been checked at the end of the first trimester 2019.

<sup>71</sup> AlmaLaurea is the Inter-University Consortium that collects data on graduates employability on yearly basis. Data are available for BA undergraduates at +1 year from the end of the degree, for MA graduates for +1, +3 and +5 years: <https://www.almalaurea.it/>

- unregulated work: 3,9% of first-level employed graduates and 4,4% of second-level employed graduates.

In spite of regulatory efforts<sup>72</sup>, as noted again by the Almalaurea report (2019), in comparison to the 2008 survey “there was a marked increase in non-standard work, up 16,0 percentage points among first-level graduates and 14,5 points among second-level graduates”. In addition to that, the over-education (or underemployment) phenomenon is rather high among graduates: according to ISTAT (2019), overeducated graduates account for the 34,1% of the labour force. As regards gender, men are in average less affected by the phenomenon than women (32,0% versus 35,8%).

### The University Macerata at a glance

The University of Macerata (UNIMC) is one of the oldest universities in Italy and its foundation dates back to 1290. It is the only Italian university focusing exclusively in humanities and social sciences. Following the reform of the university system in the country<sup>73</sup>, the university was organised in five Departments, namely:

- Department of Economics and Law
- Department of Law
- Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism
- Department of Political Science, Communication and International Relations
- Department of Humanities – Languages, Language Liaison, History, Arts, Philosophy.

The university counts on a PhD School and offers also three post-grad specialisation courses. The Giacomo Leopardi School of Advanced Studies organises high specialised seminars and learning pathways for talented students, and the Confucio Institute is addressed at strengthening relations with Chinese culture and languages, particularly within the university system.

UNIMC enrolls about 11.000 students yearly, and employs about 600 persons, between academic and administrative/technical staff.

### Employability at the University of Macerata

According to Almalaurea data (2019, referring to 2018 data), the UNIMC’s graduates have the following occupational outcomes:

*Table 9. Employment outcomes UNIMC, dataset 2018*

Years from graduation	Average (*)	First-level graduates (**)	Single-cycle masters	Second-level graduates	Degree in Primary Education (pre-reform cycle)
+1 year	43,9	38,4	41,7	54,6	100,0
+3 years	72,3	N/A	58,0	73,5	93,8
+5 years	84,1	N/A	84,2	79,0	98,3

(\*) referring to rates for the item “Working” (“Lavorano”)

(\*\*) available only for +1 year from graduation

<sup>72</sup> E.g. the Jobs Act Legislative Decrees (2014-2015) which eliminated some of the most precarious contracts toward a more regulated and protected labour market.

<sup>73</sup> Law 30 December 2010 No. 240, known as “riforma Gelmini”.

## **Findings**

### **Methodological note**

Data collection has been performed at university level.

According to the protocol, collection included desk and field research. Desk research included scientific articles on topics related to entrepreneurship and employability in Italy and at the UNIMC, Almalaurea database, consultation of international (OECD), European (Eurostat) and national statistics, strategic documents of the university as made freely available online, consultation of the websites of the university, in particular in relation to students services.

Field research included a total of six interviews, including three professors, one responsible for guidance services, and one responsible for international mobility. Further information have been collected through exchange with colleagues, in formal and informal settings.

#### ***1. Transversal skills development***

Mostly, transversal skills development is considered embedded in curricula and pursued through teaching practices and curricular internships, for which the university has a devoted service (both for curricular and extra-curricular activities). The centre ADOSS (Area for Didactics, Orientation, and Students Services) offers both career guidance and placement services. Workshops for developing career skills are organised, although not on the basis of an yearly programme. A career day is organised once per year, however additional job fairs can be organised by the Departments (the Department of Education for example has a field-based job fair). Other activities can be organised at Department level (e.g. the seminars on work opportunities for graduates in Philosophy).

#### ***2. Interdisciplinarity/Transdisciplinarity***

Programmes with specific mention of interdisciplinary degrees were not retrieved: however, the Degree in Law offers an interdisciplinary programme transversal to degrees and composed by seminars and lessons (with recognised credits).

#### ***3. Entrepreneurial capacities development***

The *Laboratorio LUCI* (Humanistic Laboratory for Creativity and Innovation) is a training pathway addressed to UNIMC students of any degree aimed at supporting entrepreneurship. The pathway is organised in lessons and other formats (such as Innovation Café with entrepreneurs) and mentoring to support the drafting of students' business project that is presented through a pitch at the end of the year. Participation is based on open competition, and available places are 50 in total, 30 for MA and newly graduates, and 20 for graduates and PhD students.

Additionally, the university participates to regional initiatives for entrepreneurship, such as Aula Emprende, a contest among the Marche's universities managed by the Marche Region, which is focused on the design of an entrepreneurial idea.

Some of the degrees have specific courses in entrepreneurship (e.g. in the Tourism curriculum), or seminars (e.g. organised by the department of Economics).

#### ***4. Regional and local embeddedness, professional networks***

Relations with the territory are particularly strong at UNIMC, both traditionally and following the new policies on regional universities. Most of the activities are embedded in the Third Mission action, which is coordinated at central level, but several initiatives and sectorial networks are also active within departments – in particular Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Education, and Law. Students are generally put in contact to enterprises and companies, as well as other public and private institutions, through problem based learning activities, internships, joint projects carried out with municipalities, internships and traineeships. PhDs as well usually work in projects related to the territory, and Industrial PhDs are common.

For instance, the International Student Competition on Place Branding and Mediterranean Diet has been recognised as good practice for university- business cooperation by the European Commission<sup>74</sup> (Edwards and Marinelli, 2018).

### ***5. International exposure – professional networks***

Considering its size and location, the UNIMC is impressively active at international level. For Erasmus mobility only, it has more than 350 agreements with institutions, and manages about 550 bourses yearly. To these, traineeship bourses should be added. Cooperation outside Europe, which is traditionally focused on Eastern countries (Ukraine and Russia), Mediterranean countries and China, accounts for 20 bilateral agreements. The university funds on its own budget 10 bourses for Master thesis carried out abroad.

The university has also 9 double degrees, covering master degrees in Law, Finance, Tourism, Languages, History and Philosophy taught in English, French and Spanish.

### ***6. Follow up (e.g. capacity of the institution to include students' point of views in assessment)***

The Quality Board of the university includes students' representatives as full members, as well as in the Evaluation Board. By Statute, students participate in fact all governing bodies of the university, including the Academic Senate and the Financial Board.

At Departmental level, the most important participation is to the Joint Committee Teachers-Students, which is in charge of monitoring of the learning offer and of the quality of the teaching, as well as of the student service; of identifying indicators for the evaluation of the achieved results; of formulating opinions on the activation, the modification and suppression of study programmes (art. 20 of the University Statute).

### **Conclusive summary**

The University of Macerata seeks to embed employability provisions more into learning than as a separate subject: as located in a rural and partially peri-urban region, links and cooperation with the territory seem to be strong, and students seem to be active in the process. It is unclear however, how territorial and classroom activities are monitored, particularly in relation to the use of active pedagogies, and which is the link between support services and the teachers body.

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<sup>74</sup> <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/-/higher-education-for-smart-specialisation-a-handbook> , p.34

## II.1.5 Data comparison and discussion

The three exploratory case studies had the aim of understanding how and if employability provisions are differently implemented in relation with local labour markets.

All three analysed institutions offer support for the development of employability skills, as summarised in Table 10.

Table 10. Employability provisions across the case studies

Service	UGOT	ULL	UNIMC
Career centre (central level)	x	x	x
Career counselling (department/faculty level)	x	-	-
Workshop/courses on employability skills	-	x	x
Job fairs	x	x	x
Specific training for university teachers on active pedagogies	x	-	-
Curricular internships	x	x	x
Alumni network	x	x	-
Entrepreneurship programmes	-	x	x
Interdisciplinary-transdisciplinary learning opportunities	x	Not verified	Not verified
University-business cooperation activities in which the students are involved	x	x	x
International exposure	x	x	x
Students involvement in quality assessment	x	x	x

However, in spite of a quite similar offer, deployment of services is rather different across the institutions as follows:

Table 11. Retrieved differences in main services (per type)

Service	UGOT	ULL	UNIMC
Career services (includes counselling, workshops, job fairs, etc.)	Support available at central and department level; students manage their own fairs, by developing transversal competences and establishing direct links with business.	Support available through the Foundation.	Support available at central level. Job fairs and other activities organised both at central and departments level.
Pedagogies (includes active pedagogies, institutional strategies in teaching methods, etc.)	Compulsory training for university teachers.	Decision on pedagogical methods falls into the academic freedom.	Decision on pedagogical methods falls into the academic freedom.
Curriculum (includes relations with business for specific courses, interdisciplinary courses, internships, traineeships, etc.)	Direct links with business (large companies, sectorial associations) and public bodies (government),	Links between curriculum provisions and business needs not retrieved (but possible). Clear link with society in terms	Links between curriculum provisions and business needs not retrieved (but possible). Internship programmes

Service	UGOT	ULL	UNIMC
	managed mostly by Schools and Faculties. Project based learning in companies is very common.	of extra-curricular learning offer. Internship programmes, or project based learning provisions, embedded in courses.	embedded in curricula.
Entrepreneurship programmes and modules	Unclear if these available or not; the Alumni association is active in the process.	Established programmes, active Alumni network at central level.	Established programmes.
International exposure	Good international exposure.	Good international exposure.	Very good international exposure and opportunity of double degrees and other opportunities beyond the regular Erasmus students mobility.
Regional networks	Strong with local businesses.	Very strong with local players (associations, public bodies and in general civil society).	Strong with players at regional level (associations, public bodies and civil society). Relations with companies are managed by teachers (sector-based).
Students involvement in governance	High students involvement in governance.	Good students involvement in governance.	Good students involvement in governance.

Considering geographical locations and local labour markets of reference, it can be argued that the following drivers impact on employability provisions:

- The economic situation of the region
- The entrepreneurial potential
- The culture of the country
- The business culture of the region/country

Economic situation and specific economic and business features of the region largely impact on all dimensions but one (Governance): the UGOT is located in a wealthy region, characterised by the presence of large companies. Since the business counterpart is defined and limited in number, relations can be deeper and more accurate. As well, cooperation also in terms of employability, therefore including students at different levels, is carried out on the basis of long-lasting and established practices, which allow a more efficient and effective action. As well, large companies tend to hire graduates. Differently, for example the University of Macerata deals with a fragmented local market, composed by micro and small companies, not represented by one single association. In this case, establishing practices of cooperation is less easy and more linked to disciplinary fields. For the same reason, the graduates labour market is weaker, as small companies usually hire workers for low skilled or technical jobs, and also positions in the frame of internships can have parts of low skilled activities.

The entrepreneurial potential also is differently nurtured across universities in relation with socio-economic conditions: for example, the University of La Laguna deals with a territory classified as modest innovator by the European Regional Innovation Monitor<sup>75</sup>, but having as main professional outcome a position as self-employed. In such a condition, it is understandable that the university decision is to promote both dimensions, one serving regional development (innovation) and the other increasing employability potential (entrepreneurship) through entrepreneurship programmes. To the opposite side, the UGOT is located in a territory classified as “Innovation Leader” by the European Regional Innovation Monitor<sup>76</sup> and its citizens deal with a protected labour market (self-employed and employed individuals are equally considered in terms of access to welfare). This does not mean that Sweden educational system is not promoting entrepreneurial spirit, which is instead a backbone of education since primary school: in fact, teachers have compulsory training to teach in higher education in which active learning pedagogies are promoted.

The culture of the country overall and in particular its deployment in Education also represents a remarkable element: for example, the Swedish cultural model is based on an alliance between the State and the individual, who is socially committed on the basis of communalism - it means that it is a collective culture. Even if taking into account Hofstede's dimensions<sup>77</sup> Sweden can be considered as highly individual country, as the welfare and the overall system is focused on the single citizen, still the type of individualism is not based on competition, as for example in the USA (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998). The Swedish National Union of Students was founded in 1921, on the basis of a long tradition that some sources date back on 1600 in Lund and Uppsala. It is not surprising therefore that a Swedish university counts on strong associations of students and Alumni, that take over some direct relations with business (as for example the organisation of the job fair), which is not a common practice in other countries. As well, combination of working while studying is common in Sweden (which has not apprenticeship schemes, but a varied possibility to combine education, training, and employment) (Smyth et al., 2011). As comparison, Italy is an individualistic culture, where the key element of society, also in welfare terms, is the family, and, outside that, ties are weaker. The National Association of Students have been established by Decree in 1997<sup>78</sup>, previous tradition includes associative forms with strong peer support dimension, but weak representative function<sup>79</sup>. Schooling and education are based on a traditional sequential model (‘first you study, then you work’), and the profile of working students is not common. This is likely to impact on dimensions like regional networking, or career development, since employment is still considered something that ‘comes later’.

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<sup>75</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regional-innovation-monitor/base-profile/canary-islands>

<sup>76</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regional-innovation-monitor/base-profile/west-sweden>

<sup>77</sup> Hofstede cultural dimensions theory postulates five dimensions of national cultures: power distance (PDI); Individualism vs. collectivism (IDV); Masculinity vs. femininity (MAS); Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI); Long Term Orientation (LTO) (Hofstede, 1980). Further, a sixth dimension has been added to the model (Restraint vs Indulgence) (Hofstede et al. 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic, 2 December 1997, No. 491.

<sup>79</sup> This type of associations were already active in Middle Age and are known as ‘goliardia’.

The business culture of the region is also a relevant aspect that impacts on university-business relations and on employability provisions. Also this, as said above, is related mostly with the size of the companies, as large companies and SMEs have different workforce needs, but also a different attitude toward e.g. internships, which require a long-term vision of investment in human capital. Another trait related to this point is also a different work ethics: this applies both to corporate social responsibility strategies (which are almost inexistent in micro and small businesses), and a different employment relations with employees. SMEs have more close spatial and social proximity, and increased informal relations (Mallet and Wapshott, 2017).

### **II.1.6 Conclusive summary**

In this chapter, the results from three exploratory case studies carried out in three European universities have been described. The aim of the field research was to verify in context, taking into account models and schemes proposed by literature, how universities embed employability in their activities and how they relate these activities to their reference territories.

Key results can be summarised as follows:

- All universities embed employability in their provisions;
- Differences are retrieved in methods and instruments: these differences seem to be related to historical/cultural reasons more than in aware reactions to specific policies;
- Relations with the territories are evident – different local economies reflect different universities' provisions;
- As well, relations with the economic specificities of countries play a role – i.e. provisions for entrepreneurship promotion is higher where the markets are less wealthy and labour contracts are less protected;
- Universities exploit their role as institutions linking global to local, however direct links with students' employability in this dimension cannot be identified, and would require a more deep research on how international exposure turns into increased employment;
- Also, more research is needed to understand relations between higher education and other levels of education, and how employability and entrepreneurship provisions are deployed across the entire educational cycle.



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## II.2. Italy and the Marche Region

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This chapter introduces the socio-economic situation in the country and region where the field research with students and graduates has been carried out, by providing a more detailed overview of the country and the region already outlined in the third case study above.

The chapter is organised in order to highlight

- The socio-economic features and trends of the country and the region and their relations to graduates employment;
- Policies and laws in higher education addressing graduates employment;
- Specificities of the Marche Region, where the University of Macerata is located.

### II.2.1 The economic profile of Italy

Italy is the third largest economy of the Eurozone, the second largest manufacturer, and a strong exporter. Its economy is characterised by a higher presence of SMEs' in non-financial business economy than in the rest of Europe (generated value added of 67,1% against the EU average of 56,8%), generating the 78,5% of employment against the 66,4% of the rest of Europe (European Commission, 2008).

Italy has been heavily hit by the 2008-2009 crisis and the manufacturing sector is not yet fully recovered. Some other sectors, such as accommodation and food sectors have increased, but the trend of the SMEs economy has still a negative forecast, with an expected decline of employment (European Commission, 2008).

To understand today's Italian economy, a short overview of the country's history is required as introduction. Until the WWII, Italy was a country of emigration; from the war to the Seventies, the so-called "economic-miracle" happened, and the country passed from a rural-based economy to an industrial economy: this included a strong urbanisation, families moving within the country, particularly from the South to the North, and changing of the social culture, from rural society to consumer society. The Fifties and the Sixties have been the decades where the *Made in Italy* was created, with the growing of industries like food, textile, clothing and footwear (Maddaloni, 2016). This took place in particular in Northern and Central Italy, where instead Southern regions were more dependent from public companies.

Italian entrepreneurship was developed in the framework of family capitalism (Harold, 2006): large enterprises born following a political action favouring a regime of accumulation, with a large State participation to public-private companies, protected or subsidized. Alongside with this, there have been a proliferation of small and medium companies in services (Maddaloni, 2016). In the public sector, a wave of massive hiring in the first decades after the war was carried out in order to tackle unemployment, particularly in more fragile regional economies, like the Southern ones.

To financially manage the imbalances, the State largely used currency devaluation and inflation, which allowed to keep the country competitive on the market: the fact

that employment passed from agriculture to industry, craft and services compensated the devaluation effect, and the ‘economic miracle’ was for this also part of an increased internal market demand (Maddaloni, 2016).

From the Nineties, Italy started the process to the Economic Monetary Union (EMU): the devaluation/inflation game could no longer be used to fix imbalances and weak competitiveness<sup>80</sup>, and in addition public-private holdings started to being privatized. Alongside with this necessity, the globalisation process invested Italian small businesses, which were challenged by competition with emerging economies (Gallino, 2003), and the disruptive process of technological change started (Bassanetti et al., 2014). The increased employment rate of the country during the Nineties, in fact, was due to the creation of ‘atypical’ contracts, that provided a higher share of employment at the expense of employers’ labour rights (Bassanini and Cingano, 2017; Lotti and Viviano, 2012).

From the Nineties henceforth, Italy has never meet the European average of growth: between 1998 and 2007, Italian GDP averaged 1,5% per year, against 2,3% in the euro area, and economic productivity constantly decreased (Bassanetti et al., 2014). The need of keeping under control finances to meet EMU requirements, coupled with a loss of competitiveness due to global competition, put Italy in a weak situation when the financial crisis exploded. For that, the country was amongst the more hit by the crisis in Europe: in 2008-2009, Italy’s GDP contracted cumulatively by about 7%, partially recovered in 2010 by 1,7%.

In years 1997-2008, in fact, major reforms were missing in key areas, such as (Bassanetti et al. 2014):

- Education: in 2013, still Italy was among the countries with the lower rates of graduates, high drop-out rates both in upper secondary education and in university, and large differences in students’ achievements across the country;
- Labour market: the first attempt of mitigate the dual labour market was with the Law 92/2012<sup>81</sup>, as the flexibility of the labour contracts did not correspond to a differentiated welfare provision, leaving therefore atypical workers without any form of protection or support from the market fluctuations;
- Business environment: Italian bureaucracy as well as the constant changing laws and fiscal requirements slow or hinder the creation of new enterprises;
- Civil justice system: the length of proceedings is an obstacle to smooth disputes resolutions, and this also impacts on business creation and management.

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<sup>80</sup> The Maastricht criteria to join the EMU included “an inflation rate no more than 1.5 percentage points above the average of the three countries with the lowest inflation rates” ([https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europa.eu/files/docs/body/treaty\\_on\\_european\\_union\\_en.pdf](https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europa.eu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf))

<sup>81</sup> Known as “Riforma del lavoro Fornero”, which introduced unemployment benefits for atypical workers.

Italy was among the countries that suffered a double-dip recession in Europe, since, after the partial recover of 2010, went into recession again in 2011-2013<sup>82</sup>, alongside with the crisis of the sovereign debt, which in Italy reached 129% of the GDP.

Since the end of 2011 and until today, several structural reforms have been undertaken to reduce imbalances of the labour market (after the already mentioned Fornero labour reform, in 2014 the Jobs Act<sup>83</sup> entered into force); pensions reform (Pensions Reform Law Fornero<sup>84</sup>); school reforms (as for example the “Buona scuola” reform<sup>85</sup>); etc., which the OECD (2015) estimates will impact on employment and growth in about ten years.

## II.2.2 The Italian labour market

In addition to reforms of contracts and welfare provisions, the Italian labour market is obviously influenced by the type of economy and the demographics of the country, as well as by the work culture.

Main characteristics of Italian labour market are:

- Remarkable disparities between the North and the South of the country, with the South lagging behind in employment and growth;
- A low participation of women, and a still high gap in opportunities and wages based on gender (according to Eurostat, in 2018 female employment in Italy was 53,1% versus a European average of 67,4%);
- A disadvantaged access and retention to/in the labour market for youths, who are more likely to being hired under temporary or precarious contracts;
- Lower share of graduates jobs compared to other European (and OECD) countries.

According to the OECD Future of work 2019 report, Italy:

- Is just above the OECD average for jobs at high risk automation (15,2%), but the 35,5% of jobs can face significant changes;
- Has a higher share of temporary contracts (15,2%, OECD average 11,2%);
- Many not-standard workers are vulnerable in terms of access to welfare provisions, such as unemployment benefits: in 2014-2015, the 10% of self-employed could access some form of protection versus the 50% of standard employees;
- The share of self-employed is below the OECD average (15,2% vs 15,6%);
- Adult education is weak, the 20,1% of adult learners accessed a course in 12 months (half of the OECD average);
- Only the 60% of SMEs with less than 10 employees provides training to employees (OECD average 75,2%).

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<sup>82</sup> A double-dip recession happens when to a recession followed by a short-lived recovery, follows another recession. This was also the case of Portugal, Spain, Greece and Cyprus.

<sup>83</sup> Law 10 December 2014, No. 183 and following Ministerial Decrees.

<sup>84</sup> Law 6 December 2011, No. 201.

<sup>85</sup> Translated: the Good School. Law 13 July 2015, No. 107

The National Institute of Statistics of Italy (ISTAT) observes that underutilization<sup>86</sup> of the human capital is one of the main weaknesses of the country (ISTAT, 2019): in absolute terms, in 2017 the untapped workforce that could potentially be employed amounts to about six million individuals. In the same period, over-education (or under-employment) accounted for the 24,2% of employees (35,0% of graduates), higher in tourism and household services sectors and among migrant employees. The over-education rate however decreases with age, passing from the 47,0% of 25-34 years old to the 21,4% of the 55-64 year old employees.

One of the consequences is increased emigration of skilled individuals, particularly in the younger segment of population: from 2013, the rate of individuals leaving the country increased for the 32,9% of those having at least an upper secondary school diploma, and 41,0% of graduates (ISTAT, 2019).

Underutilization and underemployment is linked with a rather strong phenomenon of skills mismatch: by analysing enterprises above 10 employees (which represent 2/3 of the Italian labour market), the ISTAT noticed that skills mismatch affected more than half of the hiring (53,4%) in the period 2014-2016, with a spread of over-education accounting for the 31,6% and under-education for the 21,8%. Considering new hiring of the period, over-education is higher among youths (31,8%), under-education is higher among employees over 49 (21,8%).

Skills mismatch can depend from different and interrelated reasons, such as:

- Low knowledge-intensity of the economy<sup>87</sup> (38,1% vs 52,2% European average), due also to the size of the companies: this leads to a low request for more educated profiles;
- Low skilled managers, who do not apply work practices requiring workers with high skills (OECD, 2017); in addition, entrepreneurs without degree have a lower propensity to hire graduates (Schivardi and Torrini, 2011);
- Low proportion of people with tertiary education and insufficient orientation of the education system towards STEM disciplines (EC, 2014);
- Low public-private partnership, with little investment of the State in R&D for business enterprises (EC, 2014)

As pointed out by the OECD (2017), Italy “is trapped in a ‘low-skill equilibrium’ a situation in which weak supply of skills is matched by weak demand for skills by employers, who concentrate on low value-added products at low-productivity levels and offer low quality jobs to workers” (2017, p. 75).

### **II.2.3 Italian key policies in Higher Education**

The Italian higher education system is composed by three types of institutions:

- Universities, which in Italy are 96, of which 11 are online universities; they provide a first cycle degree, corresponding to level VI of EQF; second cycle

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<sup>86</sup> The definition of the ILO applies: “Labour underutilization refers to mismatches between labour supply and demand, which translate into an unmet need for employment among the population”. ILO Statistical Glossary <https://www.ilo.org/ilostat-files/Documents/Statistical%20Glossary.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> “Composite indicator that includes R&D, skills, sectoral specialization, international specialization and internationalization sub-indicators” (EC, 2014).

- degrees corresponding to level VII; doctoral degrees, corresponding to level VIII; and other types of post-graduate schools (levels VII/VIII);
- The AFAMs (*Alta Formazione Artistica, Musicale e Coreutica* - Music Conservatories and Academies of Performing Arts). They provide a ‘diploma’ at level VI of the EQF;
  - The ITSs (*Istituti Tecnici Superiori* – Higher Technical Institutions), which are 106, divided in six technical areas corresponding to the Italian Smart Specialization Strategy, and are managed by Regions in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The ITSs provide a ‘diploma’ at level V of the EQF.

This paragraph however addresses the only institutions providing at least level VII credentials, then universities.

As many other countries in continental Europe, Italian universities have been longer based on traditional oligarchy governance. Differently from other Western countries that during the Sixties made radical reforms to their university systems, Italy did not manage to fully apply the Reform designed following to a study on educational system (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 1963<sup>88</sup>): the system, which in following years would have seen massification and an increased academic staff hiring, still remained based on a governance designed during the Fascist period<sup>89</sup> (Capano et al., 2016). In the Seventies, the only reform to the university system was related to academic staff recruiting<sup>90</sup>. Finally, in 1980 a more comprehensive reform<sup>91</sup> was implemented, and included re-organisation of academic staff levels, rules for recruiting, number of teaching hours, the establishment of PhD programmes, and the voluntary possibility to create Departments. The first consequence was a massive recruiting as civil servants of temporary academic staff, which *de facto* froze the possibility of recruiting new academics for the following 10 years (Capano et al., 2016). From the beginning on the Nineties, Italy underwent through a process of modernisation of public administration. The university system was involved with the Law No. 168 of 1989, published by the new Ministry of Universities and Scientific and Technical Research<sup>92</sup>, which among other provisions, provided reorganisation of funding system, for universities and students. The autonomy of the university, although planned, was not implemented until 1994, when within the general budget law of the State, funding system was revised and university had the possibility to define staff levels, and human resources needs, within the given budget. In 1999 Italy joined the Bologna process and restructured its educational offer by dividing first and second cycle programmes (Bachelor and Masters): this was also the moment in which the employability issue raised and was directly linked with the university system. However, in Italy, this element was not immediately introduced within programmes and support provisions: even if the reform introduced compulsory

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<sup>88</sup> The Commissione Ermini (Ermini committee) after having analysed the overall educational system, proposed a series of structural reforms, that inspired several laws, among which the liberalisation of curricula and the free access to university with all types of upper secondary school diploma.

<sup>89</sup> The university reform in Fascist time dates back to 1922-23 and is known as “Riforma Gentile”: the reform centralised curricula and eliminated academic autonomy, and made universities totally dependent from the central State in terms of finances.

<sup>90</sup> The Malfatti Decree in 1973 was aimed at reorganising contracts and profiles of staff, whose numbers increased very fast given the increased number of students.

<sup>91</sup> Presidential Decree no. 382/80

<sup>92</sup> Until this time, the university system was managed by the Ministry of Education.

consultation of business stakeholders for new study programmes, and curricular internships, degrees programmes remained characterised “by theoretical courses inherited from the time when the universities aimed to shape the nation’s elites rather than, as the numbers would require, preparing students for a changing socio-economic environment” (Capano et al., 2016:90). In 2010, the Law 240<sup>93</sup> restructured the university governance, specifically in terms of management, even if according to some authors, the distribution of powers did not change very much (Donina et al., 2015).

In addition to reforms of higher education, other legislative acts have provided the universities with instruments to favour access of graduates to the labour market: in particular, Law 276/2003 addressed to favour access to work for youths, defined the requirements for placements services in universities. This service, even if not formally established, always existed in university even in unstructured way. The Law lists compulsory requirements for the service, that range from the communication to the Ministry of Labour to the compulsory insertion on national databases of the graduates’ CVs. It is true, however, that the Law offers the possibility to have universities’ placements services, and does not list it as a compulsory requirement for higher education institutions.

Finally, it should be noted that at today, universities are not evaluated on the basis of employability of their students: collection of data on students employability is carried out yearly by the AlmaLaurea consortium, but results do not impact on the State funding<sup>94</sup>. Also the choice of the university by students depends more on other characteristics of the institution, e.g. more close to home (still in 2011 more than 85% of students did not leave their region of origin<sup>95</sup>, also for budget constraints), and competition among institutions is low, also considering that degrees have legal value, and universities are legally limited in proposing new degrees programmes or have an higher number of students (as it is in the case of Primary Education, which have annual quotas defined by the Ministry).

#### **II.2.4 The Marche region: socio-economic profile, labour market and graduate employment**

The Marche is an Region in Central Italy, with about 1.5 million inhabitants<sup>96</sup> living across 9,401.38 square kilometres, from the Adriatic sea to the Apennine mountains.

Its economy is characterised by a high number of small and medium enterprises, which after the WWII allowed the region to pass from an agricultural economy to an economy based mostly on manufacturing: one of the key features was the presence of 28 industrial districts, based on traditional craft products (e.g. the shoes district). According to regional statistics 2018<sup>97</sup>, there were 148,858 active companies in the

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<sup>93</sup> Known as Riforma Gelmini.

<sup>94</sup> *Fondo per il finanziamento ordinario delle università* (Fund for the ordinary funding of universities), allocated on the basis of a yearly evaluation based on precise indicators (none of which relates to graduates employability).

<sup>95</sup> Comitato nazionale per la valutazione del sistema universitario (2011) *Undicesimo Rapporto sullo Stato del Sistema Universitario*, Roma: MIUR.

<sup>96</sup> 1.522.608 (ISTAT, 31/03/2019)

<sup>97</sup> [https://www.sistan.it/index.php?id=319&no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=7942](https://www.sistan.it/index.php?id=319&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=7942)

region, and the 94,35% of them employed less than 10 persons. The entrepreneurial density of the region (97.5 active companies on 1000 inhabitants) is well above the national average (85.3).

Type of companies are mostly sole proprietor businesses (61%, for manufacturing 44%); 20% are capital companies; and 17% are limited liability companies. The most represented sectors are retail and wholesale trade (24%), agriculture, forestry and fishing (18%), construction (13.6%) and manufacturing (12.7%).

Unemployment rate was 8.1% in 2018, increased to 9.3% in the second trimester of 2019. Youth unemployment in 2018 was 22.1% (age 15-24) and 11,1% (age 25-34). Female unemployment in 2018 was higher than male employment (11.6%).

The Region was hit by severe earthquakes in 2016, which caused the loss of about 500 companies and about 1500 jobs.

The Region counts on a university system including four universities, one of them a polytechnic institution. Graduates share is increasing (+4,0% between 2006-2016), in line with the national average. According to ISTAT data<sup>98</sup>, regional universities attract students from outside during the study programmes more than other regions of the country, but retention after graduation is lower. Regional enterprises require less graduates than the national average: between 2012 and 2016, hiring of graduate staff represented the 11.6% out of the total hiring, versus a national average of 15,7% (Banca d'Italia, 2018). In 2018, planned hiring accounted for the 8,2% of graduates (national average 12.1%), 35.5% of employees possessing a secondary school level, 33,1% professional qualification, and 23.2% of low skilled/without qualifications (Unioncamere-ANPAL, 2019).

## **II.2.5 Conclusive summary**

This chapter has outlined the economy of Italy and of the Marche region, where the University of Macerata is located, highlighting the following points in relation to graduates employment:

- Italian economy is the third of the Eurozone, but it is based on a declining manufacturing sector and the forecast for upcoming years is not positive;
- Characteristics of the country's economy include high presence of medium and small enterprises, with low knowledge-intensive and low productivity, requiring mostly medium and low skills employees;
- Share of graduates with tertiary education is among the lowest in Europe;
- Universities, following several reforms, have been equipped with legal provisions to deal with enterprises and the labour market, such as consultation of representatives of enterprises in curriculum design, and possibility to manage work placements;
- The Marche Region is generally in line with the general features of the country's economy, but has a lower absorption of graduates in the labour market with respect to national average.

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<sup>98</sup> ISTAT dataset: last available data: graduates in 2011

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## **II.3. Students' perceptions: the case of Cultural Heritage and Tourism degrees at the University of Macerata (2018-2019)**

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This chapter reports field research work carried out at the University of Macerata during the Academic Year 2018-2019. The scope of research was to understand the extent to which both Bachelor and Master students enrolled at the course of Cultural Heritage and Tourism perceive the skills required by the labour market, the skills possessed by them, their view on the labour market, and their values in relation to work. The work was included in a wider research aimed at investigating further issues related to the course expectations and preferred methods of teaching.

### **II.3.1 Methodology**

#### **Research questions**

Research design has been based to answer the following questions:

- RQ1. How students perceive the world of work in terms of competence needed for access and maintain a job?
- RQ2. How do they assess their possessed competences in relation to the labour market requirement?
- RQ3. How they do estimate their possibility to get a job?
- RQ4. How they perceive the preparation provided by the university?
- RQ5. How the labour market is perceived in general terms?
- RQ6. How do they perceive themselves in relation to work (identity capital)?
- RQ7. How do they perceive available support and channels to access the labour market?

#### **Sample**

Research has been carried out in the frame of the following degrees courses:

Bachelor level: degree “Cultural Heritage and Tourism” (national classification L1-L15), course “Agri-food economics and marketing”, third/final year;

Master level: degree “International Tourism and Destination Management – ItourDeM” (national classification LM-49), course “Place branding and rural development”, second/final year.

The actual data on employability of graduates (Almalaurea, 2018, referring to datasets 2017) show the following outcomes:

#### **Cultural Heritage and Tourism**

The inter-disciplinary Bachelor degree course includes two profiles, L-15 (Tourism) and L-1 (Cultural Heritage).

As regards national classification L-15 (Tourism), data are based on 32 interviews (graduates for year 2017: 44). The 31.3% of the sample was enrolled as MA student. Employment rate at +1 year from graduation was 46.7%, with part-time contracts representing the 45.5% of the sample, and the 18.1% in stable positions (permanent contracts). The 90.2% of the sample was employed in private companies. Average salary was 1,376 EUR for males, 665 EUR for females, with a remarkable gender



gap. The 18.2% of the sample defined as necessary the degree to carry out the job (graduate jobs); the 72.6% stated that the degree was not necessary, but useful; the 9.2% considered the degree not necessary and not useful for the job in which they were employed. Geographical distribution recorded the 63.6% of the sample working in Central Italy; 18.2% in Southern Italy; 18.2% abroad. Time from graduation to first employment: 4.8 months.

As regards national classification L-1 (Cultural Heritage), data are based on 13 interviews (graduates for year 2017: 15). The 61.5% of the sample was enrolled as MA student. Employment rate at +1 year from graduation was 30.8%, with part-time contracts representing the 75% of the sample, and the 25% in stable positions (permanent contracts). The 100% of the sample was employed in private companies. Average salary was 2,188 EUR for males, 1,001 EUR for females, again with a remarkable gender gap. The 25% of the sample defined as necessary the degree to carry out the job (graduate jobs); the 50% stated that the degree was not necessary, but useful; the 25% considered the degree not necessary and not useful for the job in which they were employed. Geographical distribution recorded the 50% of the sample working in Central Italy; 25% in Southern Italy; 25% abroad. Average time from graduation to first employment: 2.3 months.

### **International Tourism and Destination Management**

ITourDem is a Master degree in English: enrolled students include then a higher number of students from abroad in comparison with regular degrees in Italian. Data collected at +1 year from graduation are based on 15 interviews (graduates for year 2017: 27). Employment rate was 87.6%, with part-time contracts representing the 33.3% of the sample, and the 11.1% of the sample in stable positions (permanent contracts). The 77.8% of the sample was employed in private companies. Average salary was 1,376 EUR for males, 779 EUR for females, again with a remarkable gender gap. The 11.1% of the sample defined as necessary the degree to carry out the job (graduate jobs); the 88.9% stated that the degree was not necessary, but useful. Geographical distribution recorded the 55.5% of the sample working in Central Italy; 11.2% in North-Western Italy; 22.2% in Southern Italy; 11.1% abroad. Average time from graduation to first employment: 2.7 months.

The national survey for MA graduate students include also data at +3 and +5 years from graduation, which are not available for Bachelor's degrees: in this case, the trends show an increased stabilisation of contracts, however with a little reward in salaries.

*Table 12. Occupational outcomes of graduates ITourDem MA degree (Almalaurea, 2018)*

Timing	Employment rate (%)	Permanent position (%)	Part-time rate (%)	Average salary (EUR)		Degree not required but necessary (%)*
				Male	Female	
+1 year	87.6	11.1	33.3	1,376	779	11.1
+3 years	70.0	14.3	28.6	1,251	1,076	57.1
+5 years	.,3	60.0	20.0	N/A	1,326	0

(\*) none of respondents for the three surveys stated that the degree was required by Law to carry out the job

### **Collection tools development**

The collection of data included the development of questionnaires, administered at the beginning and the end of the semester.

The initial profiling section included the following items

- Age
- Gender
- Level of education of parents and close relatives (sisters/brothers; aunts/uncles; close friends)
- Parents' work
- Student work experience, if any
- Type of experience (permanent position, definite time, intermittent work, etc.)
- Desired work (Professional profiles addressed by the degree courses and Other)

### **(RQ1/RQ2) Competences, the labour market and self-assessment**

To collect data for RQ1 and RQ2, the list of skills from the World Economic Forum – The skills needed in the 21st century (WEF, 2015) has been used. It comprises 16 items divided as follows:

Foundational Literacies - How students apply core skills to everyday tasks (6 items):

- Literacy (the ability to read and write)
- Numeracy (the ability to understand and work with numbers)
- Scientific literacy (the ability to engage with science-related issues, and with the ideas of science, as a reflective citizen)
- ICT literacy ( the ability to use digital technology, communication tools, and/or networks to define an information need, access, manage, integrate and evaluate information, create new information or knowledge and be able to communicate this information to others)
- Financial literacy (set of skills and knowledge that allows an individual to make informed and effective decisions with all of their financial resources)
- Cultural and civic literacy (the ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture)

Competencies - How students approach complex challenges (4 items)

- Critical thinking/problem solving (the ability to use knowledge, facts, and data to effectively solve problems)
- Creativity (the ability to use imagination or original ideas to create something; inventiveness)
- Communication (the ability to convey information to another effectively and efficiently)
- Collaboration (the ability of working with someone else in order to create something or produce something)

Character Qualities - How students approach their changing environment (6 items)

- Curiosity (the ability of being curious, in regard to the desire to gain knowledge or information)

- Initiative (the ability to turn ideas into action)
- Persistence/grit (the ability to stick with something, perseverance and passion for long-term goals )
- Adaptability (the ability of a person to change his actions, course or approach to doing things in order to suit a new situation)
- Leadership (the ability to delegate, inspire and communicate effectively)
- Social and cultural awareness (the ability of understanding of the differences between themselves and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values; the ability to be aware of the social problems and difficulties faced by social groups and communities; the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports)

The respondent was asked to assess on a Likert scale 1-5 (1 = not at all relevant; 5 = very relevant) the same list of skills according to the following questions:

- Which are in your opinion the most important competences and skills to access the labour market?
- Which are in your opinion the most valued skills by the employers?
- Reflect about you, and rate the level of skills that you possess today

The first two answers sections were aimed at collecting perception of skills needed to access the labour market and to retain a job; the third at assessing own preparation for work.

### **(RQ3) Potential of employment perception**

As regards potential of employment perception (RQ3) the questionnaire section has been formulated on the basis of Qenani et al. (2013), and adapted to the needs of a smaller group addressed, and the purpose of the research. The questions of this sections were:

[Self-perception of employability]

How confident are you that you will be employed right after graduation? *Scale 1-5 where 1 = not confident at all / 5 = very confident*

[State of economy]

Do you feel the state of the economy today is:

- a) Worse as in 2008
- b) Better as in 2008

[personal traits]

As variables, also personal traits have been considered, by asking to rate on a 1-5 scale (1 = a little; 5 = very much) own perception of the following aspects (“I am...”):

- More curious than cautious
- More organized than easy-going
- More outgoing than reserved

- More trusting than suspicious
- More sensitive than secure

#### **(RQ4) Preparation provided by the university**

This section was composed by three questions, the first two from Quenani et al.

To which extent do you think the University has supported you in acquiring the following skills? Scale 1-5 where 1 = a little; 5 = very much

- Critical thinking
- Communication
- Cooperation/teamwork
- Field-specific skills

[Academic experience and career integration – self-managing behaviour]

- How extensively have you sought information on career opportunities in your major, such as choosing specific courses, consulting faculty, attending career fairs, and so on to help you achieve your career goals? *Scale 1-5 where 1 = a little; 5 = to a good extent*

The final question was the open-ended question: “Do you think that the university is supporting you in acquiring the right competences to access the labour market?”.

#### **(RQ5) The labour market**

This section was intended to explore the perception of the labour market in more general terms: for this, the scale developed by Avallone et al. (2007) has been applied. Respondents are asked to position their perception on the labour market between two antonym adjectives, as follows:

- Fast/Slow
- Dynamic/Static
- Modern/Traditional
- Certain/Uncertain
- Stable/Unstable
- Secure/Insecure
- Understandable/Unintelligible
- Clear/Confuse
- Rich in information/Poor in information
- Rewarding/Frustrating
- Motivating/Demotivating
- Relaxing/Stressful
- Moral/Immoral
- Equal/Discriminatory
- Fair/Unfair
- Simple/Complicated
- Easy/Difficult
- Uniform/Diversified

Data elaboration reported about perceptions in 6 dimensions: dynamism; clarity; equity; complexity; uncertainty; stress.

### **(RQ6) Relation with work**

In this section, respondents have been asked to rate, again on a scale 1-5, from not important at all to very important, the relevance of the following items for them:

- Job security
- High income
- Lots of leisure time
- Interesting job
- Contributing to society (through work)
- Time for family
- Job helping others

Source for this tool was the Annual Population Survey of the UK (Young people's perceptions of the labour market).

### **(RQ7) Tools and channels to access the labour market**

The final section referred to support services and tools, and channels perceived as most useful to access the labour market, by means of two list of items to be rated in a scale 1 (not relevant at all) to 5 (very relevant).

- a) University's services/activities/initiative more relevant to acquire employability skills/to support future access to the labour market
  - Career counsellors at the career centres
  - Workshops on career skills, CV building, job search, etc.
  - Stage/internship opportunities
  - Business centres and clubs with local entrepreneurs
  - Student consulting projects
  - Courses for entrepreneurship/other start-ups support
  - University commercial companies (e.g. spin offs)
- b) Most important channels to get a job
  - Job boards and career websites
  - Social media (LinkedIn, Google+, Facebook etc.)
  - Job agencies (private)
  - Public Employment Services
  - Personal network
  - Professional network
  - Unsolicited applications

The list of items has been elaborated by taking into account suggestions from Smykal (2016) Try (2005), and TheMuse website, section "Job Search".

Further qualitative data were planned to be carried out during semi-structured interviews, aimed at collecting more detailed data and correct interpretation of the above described dimensions.

### **Data collection**

Data were collected on October 2018 (beginning of the academic year), and December 2018 (end of courses).

*Table 13. Collected questionnaires*

Degree	Valid questionnaires	Valid	Correspondences between first
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	October 2018	questionnaires December 2018	and second questionnaire (same respondent)
BA	45	41	30
MA	15	13	12

Analysis considers data where the data from the same respondent is available for both questionnaires, to allow comparison – 30 for BA, corresponding to 60 questionnaires; 12 for MA, corresponding to 24 questionnaires.

Individual reports were delivered to each student during the exams registration, and each of them was invited for an interview. A mail has been sent to schedule meetings: only 2 students from BA and 6 from MA (of which 5 not national students) booked an interview to discuss their own results.

### II.3.2 Bachelor students: findings

#### Sample profiling

The sample was composed by 30 students, of which 25 (83.33%) were female, and 5 (16.67%) male. Average age was 21.53 years. Of them, 19 (63.3%) were enrolled as Cultural Heritage students, 11 (37.7%) as Tourism students. All respondents had Italian nationality.

Parents work included professional profiles related to the following levels (with reference to ISCO-8 and ISCO-88):

Table 14. Parents professional occupation (BA)

	FATHER	%	MOTHER	%
SKILLS LEVEL 2	20	68.97	13	44.83
SKILLS LEVEL 3	4	13.79	5	17.24
NOT CLASSIFIED (HOUSEWIFE)	0	0.00	8	27.59
ENTREPRENEUR	5	17.24	3	10.34
	29	100,00	29	100,00
N/A (not the same respondent)	1		1	

Parents, relatives and friends level of higher education

Table 15. Parents/siblings/relatives/friends and the university (BA)

	Applicable	Went to the university	Did not go to the university
Mother	30	2	24
Father	30	2	28
Brother/sister (older)	9	5	4
Brother/sister (younger)	11	6	5
Relatives	30	20	10
Close friends	29	27	2

All respondents are full-time students; the 70% (21) had a previous work experience. The 66.6% (20) live in the parents' house.

#### Competences, the labour market and self-assessment

The first collection of data shown a good correspondence between the sections related to the labour market (access and retention/employers), while self-assessment shows lower levels of perceived preparation in all items but one (Curiosity):

Table 16. Questionnaire results on skills

	ACCESS		EMPLOYERS		SELF-ASSESSMENT	
	average	SD	average	SD	average	SD
Literacy	<b>4.83</b>	0.53	4.70	0.60	<b>4.43</b>	0.82
Numeracy	4.03	0.93	4.00	0.95	2.87	0.97
Scientific literacy	3.53	0.68	3.50	0.90	2.83	0.59
ICT literacy	4.50	0.63	4.53	0.73	3.37	0.85
Financial literacy	3.77	0.77	3.83	0.95	2.43	0.77
Cultural and civic literacy	4.20	0.92	3.90	0.84	3.70	0.75
Critical thinking/problem solving	4.67	0.55	4.83	0.38	3.50	0.68
Creativity	4.53	0.68	4.63	0.56	3.53	0.90
Communication	4.73	0.45	<b>4.83</b>	0.46	3.30	0.99
Collaboration	4.53	0.68	4.70	0.53	3.80	1.10
Curiosity	4.43	0.82	4.17	<b>1.05</b>	<b>4.43</b>	0.57
Initiative	4.33	<b>0.92</b>	4.60	0.62	3.33	1.03
Persistence/grit	4.53	0.63	4.43	0.68	3.77	1.04
Adaptability	4.47	0.63	4.40	0.77	3.83	<b>1.15</b>
Leadership	4.03	0.61	4.53	0.68	3.00	1.05
Social and cultural awareness	4.53	0.68	4.03	1.03	3.97	0.89

By taking the average of the sections access and employers, which can be broadly intended as the labour market perception in terms of access and retention, the following table highlights the gaps between the perceived requirements and the actual perceived level of skills:

Table 17. Comparison between rating of labour market items (in average) and self-assessment

	Labour market	Self-assessment
Literacy	4.77	-0.33
Numeracy	4.02	-1.15
Scientific literacy	3.52	-0.68
ICT literacy	4.52	-1.15
Financial literacy	3.80	-1.37
Cultural and civic literacy	4.05	-0.35
Critical thinking/problem solving	4.75	-1.25
Creativity	4.58	-1.05
Communication	4.78	-1.48
Collaboration	4.62	-0.82
Curiosity	4.30	<b>0.13</b>
Initiative	4.47	-1.13
Persistence/grit	4.48	-0.72
Adaptability	4.43	-0.60

Leadership	4.28	-1.28
Social and cultural awareness	4.28	-0.32

The same self-assessment exercise has been administered at the end of the teaching semester, with the following results:

*Table 18. Comparison between self-assessment at the beginning and the end of the teaching semester in comparison with the labour market needs, as perceived*

	Labour market	Beginning of semester self-assessment	End of semester self-assessment	Perceived improvement (+)
Literacy	4.77	-0.33	-0.13	0.20
Numeracy	4.02	-1.15	-0.75	0.40
Scientific literacy	3.52	-0.68	-0.15	0.53
ICT literacy	4.52	-1.15	-0.65	0.50
Financial literacy	3.80	-1.37	-0.77	0.60
Cultural and civic literacy	4.05	-0.35	<b>0.18</b>	0.53
Critical thinking/problem solving	4.75	-1.25	-0.82	0.43
Creativity	4.58	-1.05	-0.48	0.57
Communication	4.78	-1.48	-0.82	0.66
Collaboration	4.62	-0.82	-0.25	0.57
Curiosity	4.30	0.13	<b>0.27</b>	0.14
Initiative	4.47	-1.13	-0.50	0.63
Persistence/grit	4.48	-0.72	-0.28	0.44
Adaptability	4.43	-0.60	-0.13	0.47
Leadership	4.28	-1.28	-0.55	<b>0.73</b>
Social and cultural awareness	4.28	-0.32	<b>0.12</b>	0.44

Further, respondents were asked to define their perceived improvement in possessed skills at the end of the teaching semester, by rating the items on three levels: less prepared (-); same (=); more prepared (+), with the following results:

*Table 19. Respondents declaring perceived improvement in acquired skills*

	No. of respondents declaring improvement in possessed skills (+)	% of respondents declaring improvement in possessed skills
Literacy	8	26.67
Numeracy	2	6.67
Scientific literacy	8	26.67
ICT literacy	19	63.33
Financial literacy	14	46.67
Cultural and civic literacy	19	63.33
Critical thinking/problem solving	23	76.67
Creativity	25	<b>83.33</b>
Communication	22	73.33
Collaboration	25	<b>83.33</b>
Curiosity	22	73.33



Initiative	17	56.67
Persistence/grit	15	50.00
Adaptability	16	53.33
Leadership	8	26.67
Social and cultural awareness	17	56.67

By linking data, even considering perceived improvement, it is clear that students do not feel prepared for the labour market, as perceived by them, in terms of skills: skills in which at the end of semester and therefore one semester to graduation were:

- Cultural and civic literacy;
- Curiosity (the only skill which was already assessed as sufficient for the labour market);
- Social and cultural awareness.

### **Potential employment perception**

Confidence in finding a job just after graduation is quite low among respondents, with an average rating of 2.60/5, with a higher distribution on rate 3 (16 respondents) and 2 (7 respondents). 4 respondents rated 1, as “not sure at all to be employed right after graduation”, and only 3 showed a good confidence, but rating 4. None answered 5 (very confident).

To avoid cells with low frequency, as in Qenani et al. (2014, p. 205), categories 1 and 2 were combined into one Category (1) *Low Self-Perceived Employability*, Categories 4 and 5 were combined into the Category (3) *High Perceived Self-Employability*, while Category (2) *Medium Self-Perceived Employability* remained unchanged.

Results show the following distribution

1. Low Self-Perceived Employability: 11 (37%)
2. Medium Self-Perceived Employability: 16 (53%)
3. High Self-Perceived Employability: 3 (10%)

Correlation between employability perceptions and personal traits is not significant (0.12-0.26).

Given the small representation of male respondents, a clear comparison across genders is not possible – however no remarkable differences have been found in the two groups.

Little differences appear also considering previous work experience: those who had work experience show an average rate of 2.67 and 3.05 respectively, while those without work experience show an average rate of 2.44 and 3.00. Correlation is absent (0.07).

As regards the state of the economy, the 63,33% believe that the situation is better as in 2008.

### **Preparation provided by the university**

As regards preparation provided by university, students seem to be confident that the university is providing them with the skills under investigation, as follows:

*Table 20. Preparation provided by the university (BA)*

Skill	Average	St.D.
Cooperation	4.40	0.77
Critical thinking	4.23	0.82
Communication	4.20	0.66
Field-specific skills	4.17	0.79

It is particularly interesting to notice that the listed transversal skills (cooperation; critical thinking, communication) are positively assessed in relation to the university preparation, but, if compared to the previous self-assessment, results seem to be insufficient for the labour market.

As regards career development, with an average of 3.03, 13 respondents rated 3 (enough); 9 rated 2; the rest of respondents declared a good extent (6 rating 4, and 2 rating 5). To avoid cells with low frequency, also in this case the answers were aggregated on 3 levels (category 1: rating 1-2, low career development effort; category 2 = 3, average; category 3 = 4-5, high career development effort):

1. Low career development effort: 9 (30%)
2. Average career development effort: 13 (43%)
3. High career development effort: 8 (27%).

Correlation between self-perceived employability and perception of investment in career development is not significant (0.55).

22 out of 30 answered yes to the question “Do you think that the university is supporting you in acquiring the right competences to access the labour market?”, 5 no, and 3 I don’t know.

*Table 21. Answers to open question*

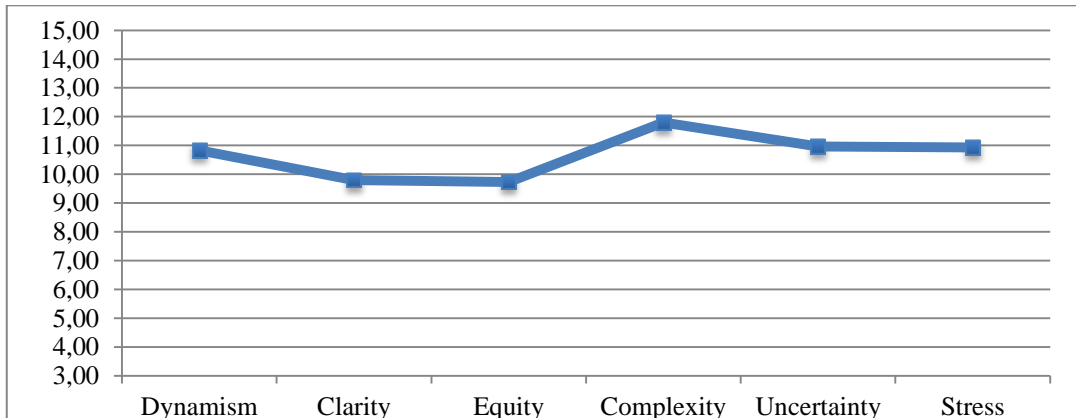
Reason	No.	%
Hard skills, sector specific skills	5	16.67
Critical thinking	1	3.33
Cooperation and collaboration	1	3.33
Territorial knowledge/world knowledge (labour market)	8	26.67
Self-awareness	4	13.33
Basic knowledge (to be specialised afterward)	1	3.33
Interdisciplinarity	1	3.33
I don't know	4	13.33
<b>Negative: too theoretical</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>16.67</b>
<b>Negative: not organised, little information</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3.33</b>

More than the 25% of the sample states that the university provides competences relate to the world knowledge, seen as very important to access le labour market.

### **The labour market perception**

Elaboration of data revealed a quite neutral perception of the labour market on average.

Figure 4. Perception of the labour market (BA)



It is interesting to notice the average level of perceived uncertainty: it is a fact that the labour market became more uncertain in past decades (Beck, 2000; Standing, 2011), but this seems not to particularly affect the sample of respondents.

### Relation with work

Job should be ideally be interesting as a first instance, then secure (stable).

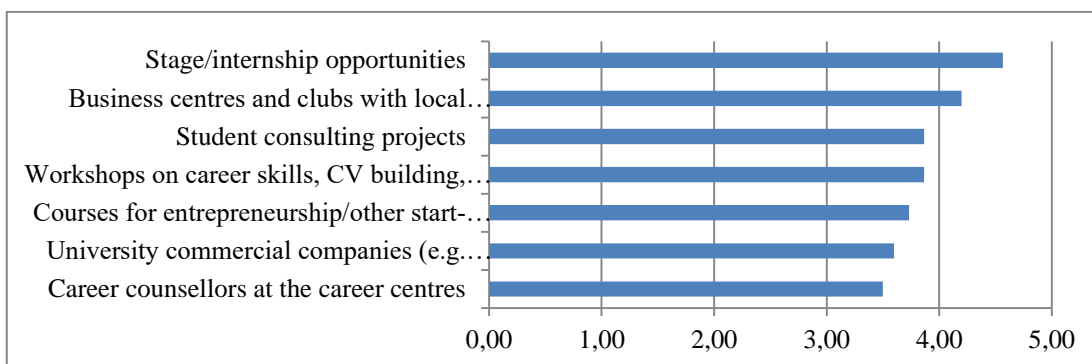
Table 22. Identity capital – more relevant aspects in work (BA)

Aspect	Av.	St.D.
Interesting job	4.63	0.62
Job security	4.40	0.57
Contributing to society (through work)	4.17	0.85
Job helping others	3.97	0.56
Time for family	3.80	1.05
High income	3.47	1.00
Lots of leisure time	2.97	1.00

### Getting a job

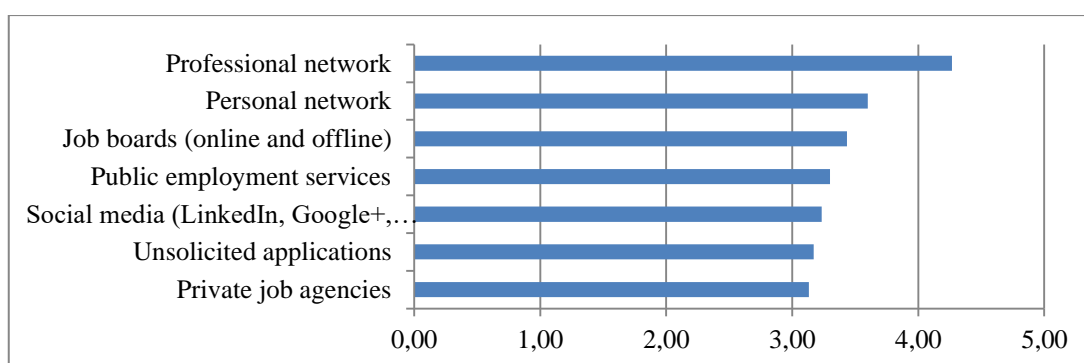
As perceived, most important tools and support services to prepare for accessing the labour market are internship opportunities: it is interesting to stress that career counsellors and career centres are instead considered the weaker item within the list. This is also the only item which has been differently rated by the sub-groups of the sample in terms of professional experience: those who never worked, consider career centres/counsellors more effective (+0,40).

Figure 5. Most important tools and services to access the labour market (BA)



Respondents are clear in recognising professional networks as the stronger channel to access the labour market, followed by personal networks.

Figure 6. Most effective channels to access the labour market (BA)



One significant difference has been retrieved between the two subgroups in the item “Personal network”, rated respectively 3.90 by those having professional experience, and 2.89 by those who have never worked.

### II.3.3 Master students: findings

#### Sample profiling

The sample was composed by 12 students, of which 8 (66.67%) were female, and 4 (33.33%) male. Average age was 24.83 years. Of them, 5 were Italians.

Parents work included professional profiles related to the following levels (with reference to ISCO-8 and ISCO-88):

Table 23. Parents professional occupation (MA)

	FATHER	%	MOTHER	%
SKILLS LEVEL 2	3	27.27	4	33.33
SKILLS LEVEL 3	7	63.64	6	50.00
NOT CLASSIFIED (HOUSEWIFE)	0	0	2	16.67
ENTRAPRENEUR	1	9.09	0	0
	11	100,00	12	100,00
N/A	1		0	

Parents, relatives and friends level of higher education

Table 24. Parents/siblings/relatives/friends and the university (MA)

	Applicable	Went to the university	Did not go to the university
Mother	12	2	10
Father	12	1	11
Brother/sister (older)	7	5	2
Brother/sister (younger)	5	1	4
Relatives	12	8	4
Close friends	12	12	0

All respondents are full-time students and had a previous work experience. The 41.7% (5) live in the parents' house.

### Competences, the labour market and self-assessment

Table 25. Questionnaire results on skills (MA)

	ACCESS		EMPLOYERS		SELF-ASSESSMENT	
	average	SD	average	SD	average	SD
Literacy	4.73	0.46	4.33	0.98	<b>4.40</b>	0.74
Numeracy	4.07	0.80	4.13	0.74	3.87	0.99
Scientific literacy	3.07	0.59	2.93	0.96	3.13	0.64
ICT literacy	4.47	0.52	4.20	0.86	3.87	0.64
Financial literacy	3.73	0.70	3.93	0.88	3.60	0.83
Cultural and civic literacy	4.13	0.64	3.80	0.77	3.93	0.70
Critical thinking/problem solving	<b>4.93</b>	0.26	<b>4.47</b>	0.74	3.93	0.96
Creativity	4.60	<b>0.83</b>	3.87	<b>1.19</b>	3.87	0.74
Communication	4.73	0.59	4.53	0.64	4.13	0.92
Collaboration	4.33	0.62	4.40	0.74	4.13	0.83
Curiosity	4.20	0.68	3.80	0.94	4.13	0.74
Initiative	4.33	0.72	4.27	0.80	3.47	0.92
Persistence/grit	4.20	0.77	4.20	0.68	3.47	1.06
Adaptability	4.47	0.52	4.47	0.52	3.93	0.70
Leadership	4.27	0.70	4.40	0.74	3.53	<b>1.19</b>
Social and cultural awareness	4.33	0.82	4.07	0.96	4.07	0.59

Again, by taking the average of the sections access and employers, which can be broadly intended as the labour market perception in terms of access and retention, the following table highlights the gaps between the perceived requirements and the actual perceived level of skills:

Table 26. Comparison between rating of labour market items (in average) and self-assessment (MA)

	Labour market	Self-assessment
Literacy	4.53	-0.13
Numeracy	4.10	-0.23
Scientific literacy	3.00	0.13

	Labour market	Self-assessment
ICT literacy	4.33	-0.47
Financial literacy	3.83	-0.23
Cultural and civic literacy	3.97	-0.03
Critical thinking/problem solving	4.70	-0.77
Creativity	4.23	-0.37
Communication	4.63	-0.50
Collaboration	4.37	-0.23
Curiosity	4.00	0.13
Initiative	4.30	-0.83
Persistence/grit	4.20	-0.73
Adaptability	4.47	-0.53
Leadership	4.33	-0.80
Social and cultural awareness	4.20	-0.13

The same self-assessment exercise has been administered at the end of the teaching semester, with the following results:

*Table 27. Comparison between self-assessment at the beginning and the end of the teaching semester in comparison with the labour market needs, as perceived (MA)*

	Labour market	Beginning of semester self-assessment	End of semester self-assessment	Perceived improvement (+)
Literacy	4.53	-0.13	0.01	0.14
Numeracy	4.10	-0.23	0.05	0.29
Scientific literacy	3.00	0.13	0.54	0.41
ICT literacy	4.33	-0.47	-0.33	0.13
Financial literacy	3.83	-0.23	-0.53	-0.29
Cultural and civic literacy	3.97	-0.03	0.42	0.45
Critical thinking/problem solving	4.70	-0.77	-0.70	<b>0.07</b>
Creativity	4.23	-0.37	-0.23	0.13
Communication	4.63	-0.50	-0.63	-0.13
Collaboration	4.37	-0.23	-0.06	0.17
Curiosity	4.00	0.13	0.46	0.33
Initiative	4.30	-0.83	-0.53	0,30
Persistence/grit	4.20	-0.73	-0.05	0.69
Adaptability	4.47	-0.53	-0.08	0.45
Leadership	4.33	-0.80	-0.56	0.24
Social and cultural awareness	4.20	-0.13	0.34	0.47

Further, respondents were asked to define their perceived improvement in possessed skills at the end of the teaching semester, by rating the items on three levels: less prepared (-); same (=); more prepared (+), with the following results:

Table 28. Respondents declaring perceived improvement in acquired skills (MA)

	No. of respondents declaring improvement in possessed skills (+)	% of respondents declaring improvement in possessed skills
Literacy	7	58.33
Numeracy	2	16.67
Scientific literacy	8	66.67
ICT literacy	11	<b>91.67</b>
Financial literacy	5	41.67
Cultural and civic literacy	9	75.00
Critical thinking/problem solving	10	83.33
Creativity	10	83.33
Communication	10	83.33
Collaboration	8	66.67
Curiosity	10	83.33
Initiative	10	83.33
Persistence/grit	6	50.00
Adaptability	8	66.67
Leadership	4	33.33
Social and cultural awareness	9	75.00

At the end of the semester, students seems to be more confident to be fit for the labour market. The ICT item is probably higher in perceptions of improvement as the project work implied video production and visual presentation, so students have worked more than usual with computers and software.

### Potential employment perception

Confidence in finding a job just after graduation is quite good among respondents, with an average rating of 3.66/5, with 9 respondents rating between 3 and 4.

Results show the following distribution

1. Low Self-Perceived Employability: 1 (8.33%)
2. Medium Self-Perceived Employability: 4 (33.33%)
3. High Self-Perceived Employability: 7 (58.33%)

Some differences in confidence to find a job is retrievable among national/not national students, with the national students rating 3.2 in average, while the not national students 4.0.

Correlation between perceived self-employability and personal traits are not significant (from -0.13 to 0.27).

As regards the state of the economy, all students but one believes that the situation is better as in 2008.

### Preparation provided by the university

As regards preparation provided by university, students seems to be confident that the university is providing them with the skills under investigation, as follows:

Table 29. Preparation provided by the university

Skill	Average	St.D.
-------	---------	-------

Cooperation	3.83	0.94
Critical thinking	4.33	0.65
Communication	4.67	0.65
Field-specific skills	<b>3.75</b>	0.75

As regards career development, with an average of 3.5, the higher distribution is between 3 and 4 again (10 respondents). To avoid cells with low frequency, also in this case the answers were aggregated on 3 levels (category 1: rating 1-2, low career development effort; category 2 = 3, average; category 3 = 4-5, high career development effort):

1. Low career development effort: 1 (8.33%)
2. Average career development effort: 5 (47.67%)
3. High career development effort: 6 (50%).

Small difference is retrievable for career development between national and not national students (3.2 versus 3.71 in average rating).

Correlation between self-perceived employability and perception of investment in career development is slightly negative (-0.30).

All respondents believe that the university is supporting them in acquiring competences for the labour market, for the following reasons (explicitly mentioned at least one time in the answer):

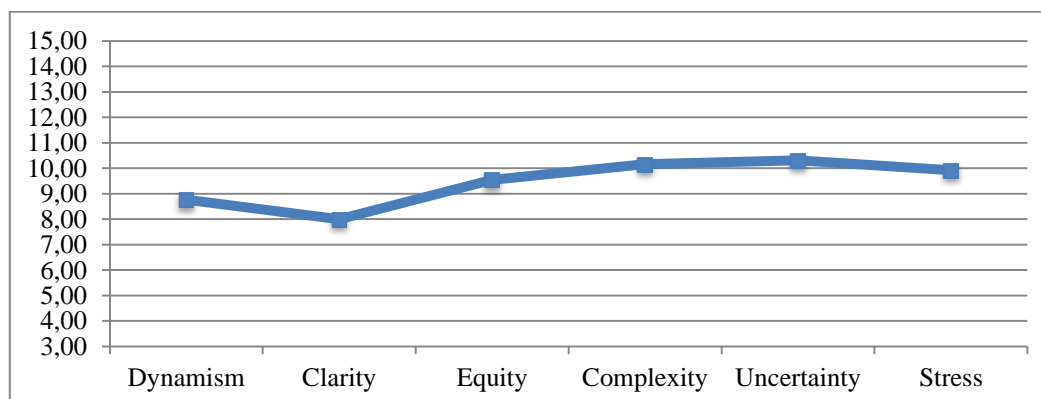
Table 30. Answers to open question (MA)

Reason	No.	%
Critical thinking and open-mind attitude	5	41.67
Transversal and soft skills	4	33.33
Hard skills, sector specific skills	2	16.67
Social links (useful for job seeking)	2	16.67
Internships	2	16.67
<b>[remarks] A bit too theoretical/ the labour market seeks abilities</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16.67</b>

### The labour market perception

Elaboration of data revealed a quite neutral perception of the labour market on average.

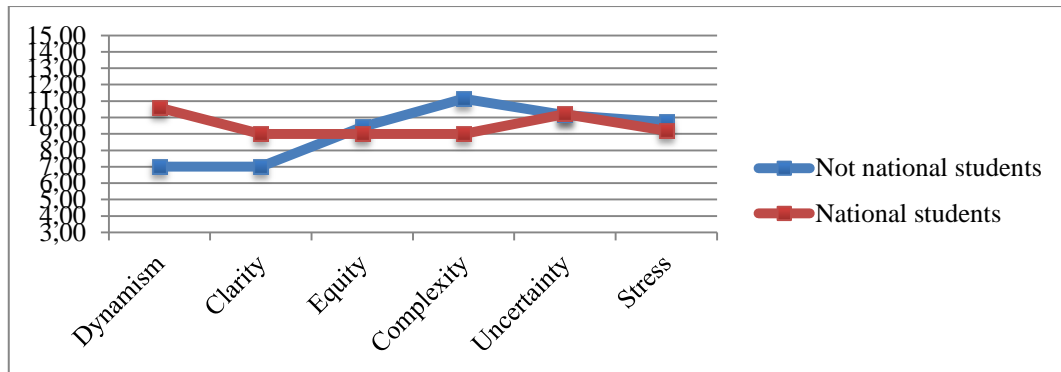
Figure 7. Perception of the labour market (MA)



Comparison between national and not national students highlights some differences:



Figure 8. Perception of the labour market – comparison between national and not national students (MA)



### Relation with work

Job should be ideally be interesting and secure (stable), while high income or lots of leisure time appears to be not so relevant:

Table 31. Identity capital – more relevant aspects in work (MA)

Aspect	Av.	St.D.
Interesting job	4.67	<b>0.97</b>
Job helping others	4.67	0.65
Time for family	4.42	0.83
Job security	4.25	0.49
Contributing to society (through work)	4.17	0.83
Lots of leisure time	3.83	0.67
High income	3.67	0.49

Small differences can be noted in the two groups (not national/national students):

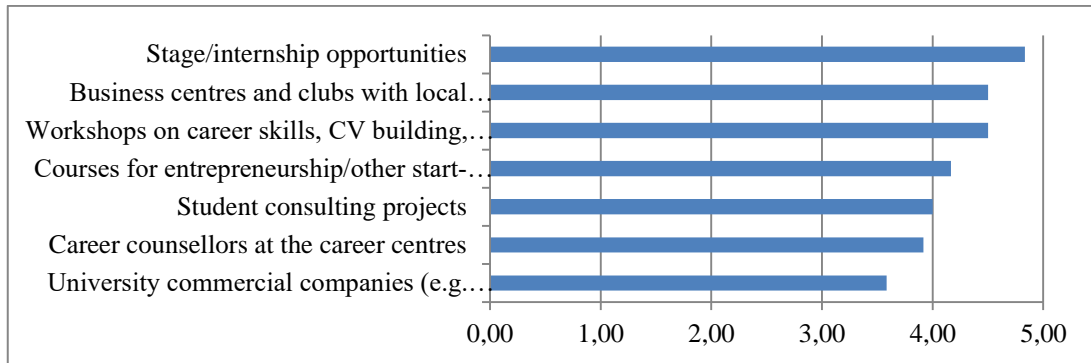
Table 32. Identity capital – more relevant aspects in work not national-national students (MA)

Aspect	Not national students (Average)	National students (Average)
Job security	4.29	4.20
High income	3.71	3.60
Lots of leisure time	3.71	4.00
Interesting job	<b>4.86</b>	4.40
Contributing to society (through work)	4.14	4.20
Time for family	4.57	4.20
Job helping others	4.71	<b>4.60</b>

### Getting a job

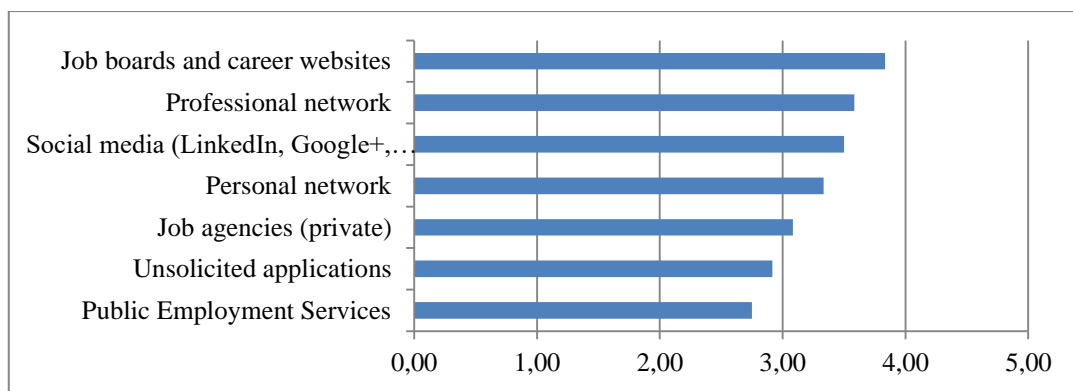
As regards the most effective tools and support services to access the labour market, respondents believe that internships are the most powerful tool available to increase job opportunities.

Figure 9. Most important tools and services to access the labour market (MA)



Most effective channels are job boards, followed by professional networks. Instead, Public Employment services are considered a weak channel to enter the market.

Figure 10. Most effective channels to access the labour market (MA)



Some differences in rating between national/not national students can be found in the items “Professional network” (3.29 not nationals; 4.00 nationals), and “Public Employment Services” (3.00 and 2.40 respectively). PES in fact have different performance across countries: one Master student from an Asian country among the interviewees declared a great trust in PES, saying that in her country it is the first step to get a job. The performance of PES in Europe in general, and in Italy in particular, is less promising<sup>99</sup>.

### II.3.4 Discussion and comparison of data

*How students perceive the world of work in terms of competence needed for access and maintain a job? How do they assess their possessed competences in relation to the labour market requirement?*

Both BA’s and MA’s students seem to have a clear idea on competences required by the labour market, either to access the position and to retain a job: average rating of all items is consistent between the most important skills for accessing and those most important for employers. As well, no relevant differences are retrievable between the two samples. It is interesting to stress instead that “Financial literacy” is not considered very relevant (BA=3.83; MA=3.80), as well as “Scientific literacy” (BA=3.50; MA=3.00). Financial literacy, which is relevant generally as career

<sup>99</sup> The ratio job-seekers to PES is quite low in Italy and the system is considered quite weak, also in comparison with other European countries (OECD, 2017)

management skills for employees, has been also confirmed as useful skills for employability purposes (Coben et al., 2005), as included mostly in “business skills”, and very important for entrepreneurs (Wise, 2013; Xu and Zia, 2012). Scientific literacy is recognised being important as skills for life in a knowledge society (Aikenhead, 2011), and to some extent for the world of work in general, particularly in association with technology and mathematics (Holbrook and Rannikmae, 2009).

Both groups of respondents also share similar results in the first self-assessment, but with some significant differences: first, the average of the MA students are higher than the BA students in general, thus they feel more prepared; second, some items show higher gaps than others.

Literature has not yet defined the extent to which the study year is relevant in perceived employability: previous work, not however limited to competences perceptions, have found either that the study year affects employability perception, which is less strong for final year students (Quenani et al., 2014), or on the contrary that the time of collection during the study career can affect or not the employability perception (Jackson and Wilton, 2017). Given the small sample of this study, a clear interpretation cannot be provided on this point.

Higher differences in specific items are observable: in all of them, Master students assess themselves are more prepared than Bachelor students, particularly in the first self-assessment, while the gap is definitely lower in the final self-assessment, as follows:

- Numeracy: difference in initial self-assessment -0.92; in final self-assessment -0,80
- ICT literacy: -0.81; - 0.69
- Financial literacy: -1.14; -0.24
- Communication: -0.98; -0.19
- Leadership: -0.48; -0.01.

Also interpretation of these differences is unclear: among the hypothesis, the fact that the BA students worked in group through project based learning with enterprises during the semester under analysis, and were also required to present their work to entrepreneurs can have contributed to the result. However, a semester is composed by several courses, and each individual is exposed to personal, professional and academic experiences that can have contributed to the same result.

#### ***How do they estimate their possibility to get a job?***

The positive perception in being prepared for the labour market of the Master students in comparison with the Bachelor students is confirmed in their confidence in finding a job just after graduation, with more than 1 point in difference on average (3.66 against 2.60). In percentage, the sample of BA students shows a concentration in the average category (53.33%), while the sample of MA students show more concentration on the higher category (58.33%). Clearly, the different size and composition of the sample cannot express statistically relevant results.

A similar situation refers in relation to investment in career development activities (MA: 3.5; BA: 3.05); the BA students in percentage have worked less for career development (higher concentration in average category, 43%, with quite high

percentage in low category, 30%), while the MA students believe that have invested more (50% in higher category, 41.67% in the average category).

All Master students but one believe that the economic situation is better as in 2008, while BA 11 BA students out of 30 believe that the situation is worst.

Gender differences and different nationality are not significant.

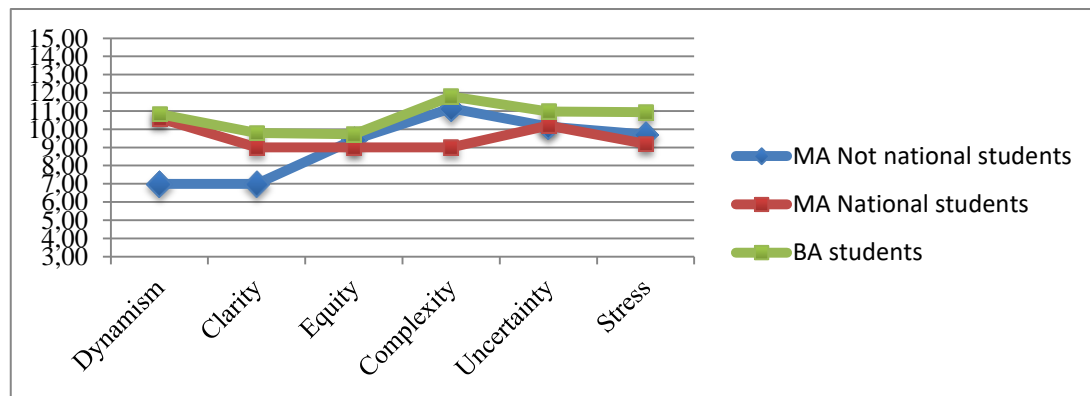
***How they perceive the preparation provided by the university?***

Overall and for both groups, the perception is positive, and rating of the four proposed skills in relation to the support provided by the university do not show relevant differences. Qualitative answers to open questions highlight a higher self-awareness in MA students' group, in particular by means of clear references to the labour market (e.g. 'links to get a job', where BA students refer to 'territorial knowledge, regional labour market'), a more appropriate choice of words (e.g. 'leadership'; 'critical thinking'; 'teamwork' etc., where the younger group refer about i.e. "the university supported me to understand what I want to be"; "group work to apply in practice what I have learnt in theory").

***How the labour market is perceived in general terms?***

The following graphic highlights the two groups under investigation, where the differences between national and not national students is provided for MA students. It is interesting to notice in particular the similar perception on dimensions 'dynamism' and 'clarity', different from the not-national colleagues: to national students the market appears more static, and not completely clear. Instead, MA national students perceive more complexity than their not national colleagues, and also than their BA colleagues.

Figure 11. Comparison between national and not national students (BA/MA)



Dynamism/static nature and clarity/lack of clarity are the most interesting elements to stress: differences with not national students can in fact be related with the fact that basically students (either enrolled in Bachelor or Master courses) have a construct of the labour market formulated in a precise geographical context, confirming literature review (e.g. Billett, 1998).

***How do they perceive themselves in relation to work (identity capital)?***

As important part of expression of self, the identity capital in the meaning proposed by Tomlinson ("investment of the graduates to their future career, and connect their

personal identity to targeted employment”, 2017), both groups, with slightly different rating, present similar results, having as more important aspect “Interesting job” in average. Even if some differences (+/- 0.20) can be retrieved between not national and national students as above shown, these are not significant, particularly considering the small size of the sample.

In both groups, also in disaggregated data (national and not national students) less rated aspects are “lots of leisure time” and “high outcome”. The most relevant difference probably refers to the aspect “Job security”, which is considered the second more important for BA students (average 4.40), while it comes to fourth place to MA students, however with small difference in rating (average 4.25; not national students: 4.29 and national students: 4.20 respectively).

### ***How do students perceive most effective support services and tools and channels to get a job?***

Knowledge and awareness on tools/services and channels highlight in particular which should be taken into account: in both groups, career counsellors and career centres are considered not very relevant to support to access the labour market (3,50 and 3.92 respectively). Instead, workshops, which are usually provided by the same career centres, are better rated (3.87 by BA and 4.50 by MA samples). This element should be further investigated, particularly with reference to the knowledge of the students about the functions and the services provided by the career services, that is often low (Strada-Gallup, 2017).

As regards the effectiveness of channels to access the labour market, the higher difference between the two samples can be found on the item “Personal networks” (4.29 BA; 3.58 MA), which is however less evident when considering only national students in the MA sample (4.00). This can refer to the relevance of the labour market and its relations in the reference territory of the University, which affects the national students, but not the not national students, whose constructs refer to other labour markets.

As well, Public Employment Services item show differences: both groups consider PES not very effective to support job insertion, MA group rating lower (2.75 in average, with the national respondents rating 2.40) than the BA group (3.29). Also in this case, further work should be undertaken to understand if respondents had or not have direct experience of the service.

### **II.3.5 Conclusive summary**

In this chapter, findings of two surveys carried out with students of Cultural Heritage and Tourism (BA) and Tourism (MA) have been presented and discussed.

According to data, perception of preparation for the labour market and self-perceived employability is low both in surveyed Bachelor students and Master students, with a higher confidence on self-perceived employability by the latter group.

Most interesting elements for the purpose of this study are:

- A high assessment of the perceived preparation provided by the university on three selected transversal skills and hard skills that do not find correspondence with the self-perceived preparation for the same skills: the

hypothesis can be that skills learnt at the university are not directly related to the labour market in students' perception;

- Career development seems to be an issue, particularly for BA students: one third of the sample declared that the investment on career development activities was from low to very low. Different appears to be the situation of the MA students, who seem to be more aware about the formulation of career plans and activities of career development;
- A rather correspondent perception of the labour market in the given dimensions (but for 'complexity', which appears more pronounced for MA students) in the definition of the labour market: disaggregated data between national and not national students shows different perceptions. The sample of the students is too small to state conclusive statements, but the hypothesis that construction of the labour market depend very much from the context within the individual experience, as also confirmed by literature, can be formulated;
- Particularly interesting is the analysis of the relation of respondents with work: both samples rated very important to have an 'interesting job', definitely less important to have leisure time or time for family. The most relevant divergence between the two groups is represented by the item 'job security', which seems to be more relevant for BA students – this can be however correlated to a shorter life and study experience, and a less clear confidence in their own preparation to the labour market, which implies also uncertainty about own competitive potential;
- Most relevant channels for getting a job, even if personal experience have not be recorded, in general show a preference for online channels and professional networks, which is in line with statistics related to job search (but not necessarily applicable to not urban labour markets). Internships are considered the most important tools to increase possibilities of accessing the labour market; career counsellors' support is instead largely underestimated. As it was not possible to collect details about students' knowledge and experiences with the university's services, this can be either a grounded answer, or an answer depending from the scarce knowledge of the available services and their functions;
- Above all, the missed opportunity of having interviews to discuss individual results, should be considered itself a result: out of the seven not national students, six scheduled a meeting (then one declined the day before the meeting, following an unpredictable personal event); instead, on 35 national students, only three were available for a meeting, two from the Bachelor programme and one from the Master programme. Further possibilities to discuss about their career prospects proposed afterwards during the following semester were not considered. Among the hypothesis for the lack of interest there is a low awareness about the importance of career development skills during the study years, which has been confirmed informally during the delivery of the individual reports, when a student plainly admitted that he was not interested, because he was 'interested to the exams'.

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## **II.4. Transitions from Education to work: the case of Cultural Heritage and Tourism degrees at the University of Macerata, Italy**

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This chapter reports on the qualitative research carried out by consulting graduates with the Bachelor's or Master's degrees of Cultural Heritage and Tourism at the University of Macerata, Italy. It explores how transitions from education to work took place in practice, and identifies factors that favour or hinder successful access to work.

### **II.4.1 Methodology**

#### **Method**

Collection was carried out using two techniques:

- A online survey, aimed at collecting the main data and recruiting respondents for interviews;
- Interviews, aimed at identifying factors that favour or hinder transitions.

#### ***Survey***

The survey design was based on three main criteria

- length (as short as possible);
- directness: straight to the key question (access channel to work and role of the university);
- efficacy in recruiting graduates for interviews.

Validation of the sample was carried out through cognitive interview, by triangulating reactions from two graduates and one researcher.

#### ***Interviews***

Interviews were carried out using the life story interview technique (Bertaux, 1991; Atkinson, 2002), a storytelling-based method for drawing out biographic information. As suggested by Thompson et al (2002), this interviewing technique can capture key issues in the otherwise fragmented transitions that characterise the lives of today's young adults. It applies to all critical moments (as defined by Thompson et al.), including the transition from education to work.

It is particularly relevant for regional economies, since

From one person we can recover social processes and social structure, networks, social change and so forth, for people are located in a social and cultural environment which constitutes and shapes not only what we see, but also how we see (Liz Stanley (1993, p.45, quoted in Thompson et al.)

The results were analysed by applying the realist approach, as in the description given by Miller (2002, pp. 11-12).

The core of the realist approach is induction. [...] An important principle of the inductive process is that of 'saturation' – multiple cases should be collected and should reveal the same patterns if they are to be accepted as a solution for generalisation.

This means that subjective data can lead to construction of general principles of social phenomena.

### ***Interview protocol***

Life story interviews are largely unstructured. However, some key topics to orientate storytelling were provided to interviewees. These covered

- Perception of their own work readiness when they left the university
- Perception of the labour market (as students, as graduates, as workers)
- Transition pathway (what happened)
- Perception of the support to transition provided by the university
- Identity as graduates and professionals

Key topics thus covered Tomlinson's Graduate Capital Model<sup>100</sup>. The graduate capital model, briefly described already in Chapter 2, looks at the individual in relation to employability by adopting a comprehensive perspective.

Tomlinson (2017) argued that five capitals of individuals favour transitions from education into the labour market:

- Human Capital refers to knowledge and skills acquired during the university journey, including academic and career skills.
- Social Capital refers to networks and relationships, both personal and professional, between individuals or organisations, that can be activated to gain closer access to the targeted employment.
- Cultural capital refers to the understanding of the work values and socio-cultural meanings of a field, organisation, or working area, and the ability to deal with them.
- Identity capital refers to the work values of the individual, therefore the level of investment and commitment that the graduate has toward work, as well as the ability to present one's personal identity to employers.
- Psychological capital refers to capacities to adapt to situations, manage stress, and respond to career challenges.

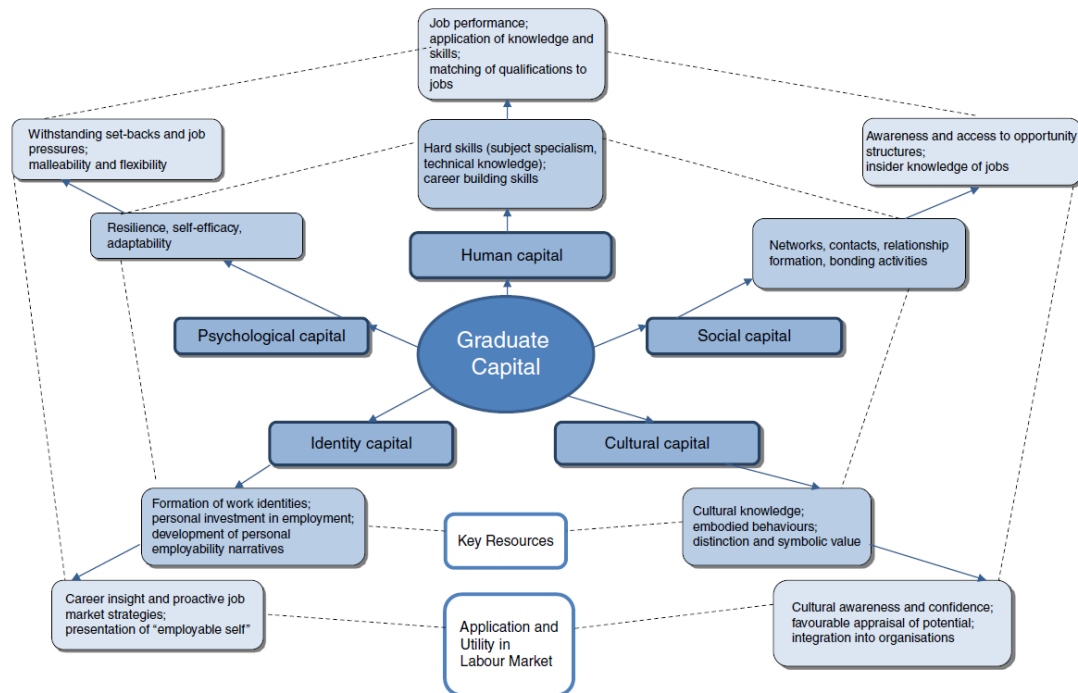
The graduate capital model is represented in Figure 12.

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<sup>100</sup> I am deeply grateful to Professor Michael Tomlinson from the University of Southampton (UK) for having reviewed this protocol and for having provided valuable insights.



Figure 12. Graduate Capital Model (Tomlinson, 2017)<sup>101</sup>



The interviews were not conducted with a structured list of questions, but rather, within the communication exchange, interviewees were stimulated with questions such as:

#### Human Capital

- Think about your student time, or just after graduation: to what extent did you feel prepared for the labour market? (both hard skills and soft skills should be addressed during the interview)
- During your study years, did you work on your career development, for example, on your curriculum and motivation letters, interview skills, job search techniques etc.? In what way?
- What about your online activities for professional purposes? Even if you have not used professional social networks such as LinkedIn, have you ever considered your online profiles in relation to your future job, in particular your online reputation?

#### Social Capital

- When you were a recent graduate, did you have a clear idea about the labour market in your sector? Have these ideas been confirmed or not?
- During your university years, do you think that you worked on professional network building? Did the university play a role in this?

#### Cultural Capital

<sup>101</sup> Permission for reproduction obtained by the author and the copyright holder (Emerald Publishing Limited).

- Did you take part in extra-curricular activities during your years of study? If yes, what were your reasons for doing so?
- Thinking about your sector, were the expectations of employers clear to you? And now, has anything changed in your perceptions?
- Identity Capital
- As a student, or recent graduate, were you able to identify and assess your competences? If not, when did you start this process of self-reflection? And now?
- What is work for you and in your life? Has anything changed from when you were a student or recent graduate?"

#### Psychological Capital

- Would you say that you have a good degree of adaptability?
- How do you think you have managed stress, or change, during the job search and in the context of the work?
- What was the most difficult thing from a psychological point of view while you were searching for a job?

Respondents were asked for permission to record and transcribe the interview.

Anonymity was preserved by assigning a code to each of the respondents and by eliminating all references to places, company names, and other elements that could reveal their identity.

Respondents were asked if they could provide names of other graduates who could be interviewed for this study (snowball sampling).

#### ***Analysis***

Collected data were analysed in order to identify common patterns among the respondents.

#### **Sample**

Research was carried between May and September 2019.

Subjects possessed a Bachelor's or Master's degree in the Cultural Heritage and Tourism programme of the University of Macerata, Italy.

To understand the composition of the sample, the evolution of the study programmes should be considered. At present (2019), the University offers one inter-disciplinary Bachelor's Degree (which includes Tourism and Cultural Heritage, national classification L-1/L-15) and two Master's degrees, the first focused on Tourism (International Tourism and Destination Management, LM-49), the second focused on Cultural Heritage (Management of Cultural Heritage LM-89).

Occupational outcomes, according to the national data are (AlmaLaurea, 2019, data 2018):

#### ***Bachelor's (only +1 year from graduation collected)***

Sample based on 23 respondents (out of 32 graduates in 2018), of whom 16 are enrolled in a Master's degree, and 7 have left education.

*Table 33. Employment outcomes for Bachelor's degree in Cultural Heritage and Tourism (2018)*

Year of degree	Employment rate (%)	Permanent position (%) <sup>102</sup>	Part-time(%)	Months from graduation to the first job (No.)	Degree not required but necessary (%) <sup>103</sup>
2017	21.7	40.0	60.0	N/A	20.0

### *Master's in International Tourism and Destination Management*

Sample based on:

- + 1 year from graduation: 10 respondents out of 15 graduates
- + 3 years from graduation: 18 respondents out of 30 graduates
- + 5 years from graduation: 11 respondents out of 17 graduates

Table 34. ITourDeM employment outcomes

Year of degree	Employment rate (%)	Permanent position (%)	Part-time (%)	Months from graduation to the first job (No.)	Degree not required but necessary (%)
2017	60.0	20.0	40.0	7.0	20.0
2015	72.2	30.8	46.2	9.3	23.1
2013	63.6	14.3	28.6	10.0	0.0

### *Master's in Management of Cultural Heritage*

Sample based on:

- + 1 year from graduation: 15 respondents out of 22 graduates
- + 3 years from graduation: 18 respondents out of 31 graduates
- + 5 years from graduation: 19 respondents out of 27 graduates

Table 35. Management of Cultural Heritage employment outcomes

Year of degree	Employment rate (%)	Permanent position (%)	Part-time (%)	Months from graduation to the first job (No.)	Degree not required but necessary (%)
2017	60.0	0.0	57.1	8.8	0.0
2015	66.7	25.0	25.0	6.3	16.7
2013	73.7	30.8	38.5	11.8	30.8

## II.4.2 Survey results

Collection took place between May and July 2019.

### Sample

<sup>102</sup> Permanent position refers to open-ended contracts

<sup>103</sup> Other options are: “degree necessary to the position”, “degree not required by useful”, “degree not necessary and not useful”. The item chosen seek to estimate the level of overeducation, where degree is not formally necessary, then it is not a graduate position, but it is necessary to carry out the job.

46 completed questionnaires were collected, of which 45 were valid. Respondents were mostly females (82.2%; 37), and the average age of the sample was 28.3 years.

The year of graduation ranged from 2007 to 2019, with a higher response for the years 2015-2016, as follows:

*Table 36. Year of graduation of the respondents*

<b>Year of graduation</b>	<b>Respondents (No.)</b>
2007	1
2009	1
2011	1
2012	1
2013	2
2014	4
2015	6
2016	13
2017	4
2018	6
2019	2
N/A	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

The highest level of education achieved was a Bachelor's for 8 respondents (17.8%), and Master's for 38 of them (82.2%). As regards type of Master's degree, 23 respondents had the degree in Cultural Heritage, 14 in Tourism.

### **Findings**

For the majority of respondents, the first job began either in the first three months after graduation, or one year after.

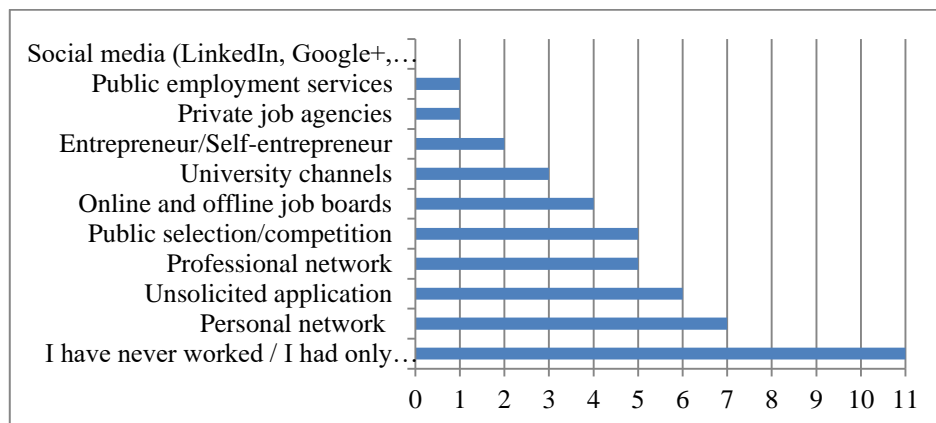
*Table 37. Work insertion time*

<b>Timing</b>	<b>Resp.</b>
Within 3 months	11
Within 6 months	2
Within 9 months	3
Within one year after graduation	3
More than one year after graduation	10
I have never worked so far / I have had only short-term contracts	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

It should be noted that 16 respondents, who represent fully 35.5% of the sample, said they have never worked or have had only short-term contracts (under three months). This is not confirmed in other points of the questionnaire, as the same respondents said they worked, or had worked. Although the questionnaire clearly defined the meaning of 'job' ("any type of contract for more than 3 months"), it is likely that in the other items the respondents defined a job as any type of paid activity, regardless of contract time, or a post-grad traineeship, as it is also a paid position.

Channels to access the first job varied, with a slight predominance of direct relationships (such as personal or professional networks and unsolicited applications):

Figure 13. Channels to access the first job



Only 5 (11.1%) respondents were in a permanent position, three from Cultural Heritage and two from Tourism, of whom one possessed the Bachelor's degree as the highest credential. Out of these 5, two worked in the field of their degree (one with a Master's degree in Cultural Heritage, and one with a Bachelor's degree in Tourism), while the rest worked in other fields.

All 5 respondents working in government organisations were graduates in Cultural Heritage, which is not surprising, as this sector is almost completely managed by government agencies, with little outsourcing to private companies.

The field of activity of the first job was consistent with the studies for 68.42% of the sample, who said they had (or had had) a job, as summarized in the following table:

Table 38. Field of activities and consistency with the study path

	In the field, position consistent with my studies	In the field, but in a different position	Different field, use of competences acquired during studies	Different field, little use of competences acquired during studies	Never worked	Total
BA Tourism and Cultural Heritage	3	2	0	1	2	8
MA Cultural Heritage	10	2	1	7	3	23
MA Tourism	7	2	2	2	1	14
<i>Total</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>45</i>

As regards place of work and type of contracts, respondents indicated the following:

Table 39. Place of first job

	Marche Region	Region of origin (in Marche to study)	Another Italian Region	Abroad	Never worked	Total
BA Tourism and	6	0	0	0	2	8

Cultural Heritage						
MA Cultural Heritage	12	3	5	1	2	23
MA Tourism	7	2	3	1	1	14
<i>Total</i>	25	5	8	2	5	45

Table 40. Type of contract

	Permanent	Fixed term	Self-employed	Other atypical	Never worked or only traineeships	Total
BA Tourism and Cultural Heritage	1	3	0	1	3	8
MA Cultural Heritage	3(*)	8	2	4	6	23
MA Tourism	1(**)	12	1	0	0	14
<i>Total</i>	5	23	3	5	9	45

(\*) Out of 3, 1 found the first job abroad, 1 in the private sector, 1 in the government sector through open competition (the latter is working in Cultural Heritage). None in the Marche Region.

(\*\*) Different Region and different sector, little use of acquired competences.

Finally, in relation to support provided by the university, more than the half of respondents who had work experience (41) reported that the university did not support them in finding work (56.0%); 17.0% received direct support (e.g. contacts with employers); 26.8% received indirect support (e.g. CV writing):

Table 41. University support

	No support	Direct support	Indirect support	Total
BA Tourism and Cultural Heritage	4	1	2	7
MA Cultural Heritage	15	3	4	22
MA Tourism	4	3	5	12
<i>Total</i>	23	7	11	41

The final item of the questionnaire explored the availability for an interview: 14 respondents said they were willing and provided contact details (3 of them had the Bachelor's degree as the maximum level obtained).

## Discussion

Even if the survey was mostly meant to establish links with graduates in order to carry out interviews, some interesting generalisations can be drawn from data.

First, transitions appear fragmented and mostly based on precarious work conditions: only 5 out of 45 respondents hold a permanent position, and of these, only 2 work in their field of studies (4.4%).

Second, transition time is polarised between the first three months after graduation (24.4%) and over one year after graduation (22.2%): perhaps those who found work within the first three months were already working during their studies, or had begun their job search before graduation. However, this interpretation is based on very little

quantitative data, and cannot express the complexity of individual pathways. Out of 16 graduates who said they had never worked, 4 had just graduated, 5 graduated in 2018, 1 in 2017, 4 in 2016, and 2 in 2015. Interpretation of this information is not possible, especially since some of these respondents indicated in other points of the questionnaire that they had had atypical or short term contracts (probably referring to temporary contracts or traineeships).

Third, half of the respondents declared that the university did not provide any kind of support to access the world of work, while one out of four said they had received indirect support (e.g. career services workshops).

### II.4.3 Interviews

Interviews took place between June and October 2019, beginning with 8 respondents to the survey who provided their contacts. All of these respondents had a Master’s Degree, 6 in Cultural Heritage and 2 in Tourism. These interviewees provided names of other graduates who could be contacted for interviews (snowballing sampling technique), and thus the total number of interviewees reached 31.

According to the protocol, life history techniques were principally used to conduct the interviews. Also, interviewers sought to ascertain the point of view of respondents regarding the five capitals of the Graduate Capital Model (Tomlinson, 2017), as well as a comprehensive overview of how a recent graduate found work, and the issues that came up during that process.

All interviews were recorded with permission, and transcribed.

Analysis followed a process of initial coding, trying to identify common pathways in the personal stories of the transition from education to work. Next, data were clustered according to the five capitals, and this focused coding provided identification of thematic categories under each dimension, which afterwards were theoretically conceptualised.

### Sample profiling

The sample included 21 respondents from Cultural Heritage graduates and 10 from Tourism. Of them, three completed only the Bachelor’s degree.

Others completed at least the Master’s. The majority of respondents were females (71.0% of the overall group; 62,0% in the Cultural Heritage group; 90% in the Tourism group). Average age was 30.9 years, slightly higher in the Cultural Heritage group (31.9 versus 28.9).

Year of graduation ranged from 2007 to 2019, with the highest number in the years 2015-2016:

Table 42. Graduation year

20-	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
CH	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	4	1	5	1	2	1
TOU	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	5	1	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>

Almost a third (10 out of 31) came to the Marche for their university studies, and only one of them decided to stay in the Region after graduation (others returned to

their hometown, or moved to another Italian region or abroad). More than half (21 respondents) lived in the Marche at the moment of the interview, 7 in another Italian region, and 3 abroad.

At the interview time, they were in the following professional situations (unemployed, traineeship and PhD students are not considered):

*Table 43. Professional situation of interviewees*

Degree	Permanent	Fixed term	Self-employed	Other atypical	Paid training or PhD
BA (*)	2 (CH)	1 (TOU)	0	0	0
MA Cultural Heritage	4	6	1	1	5
MA Tourism	1	3	3	0	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>5</i>

(\*) the first cycle was divided into Cultural Heritage and Tourism Sciences until 2013

The average time to access the first job was 6 months for Cultural Heritage and 5.3 months for Tourism, not considering paid traineeships and PhDs, but considering unemployed when applicable. However, perhaps these averages are not useful in portraying the reality of their experiences, considering the range in the number of months among the same groups, as seen in Table 44.

*Table 44. Number of months to obtain a first job with a contract for more than 3 months*

Degree	0 months (*)	3 months	6 months	9 months	12 months or more
BA	0	0	0	0	1
MA Cultural Heritage	6	4	0	0	4
MA Tourism	1	5	0	0	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>7</i>

(\*) already working while completing university studies

It should be pointed out that graduates (excluding those in paid traineeships) usually have intermittent or short-term contracts: classification was done considering as a first job a position with a contract for more than 3 months, at least part-time.

Again, not considering those with paid traineeships or PhDs an unemployed, at the interview time the working sector was as indicated in Table 45.

*Table 45. Working interviewees by sector*

Degree	In the sector	In Marche	Different sector	In Marche
BA	2 (CH+TOU)	1	1 (CH)	1
MA Cultural Heritage	4 (*)	3	6	6
MA Tourism	6	3	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>

(\*) at least part time or as a second job

Jobs in the Cultural Heritage sector included:

- Museum employee, with a wide range of appointments, from merely selling entrance tickets to managing the bookshop, up to design and organisation of



exhibitions: three MA graduates worked in this professional position, full time with fixed contracts; one of the BA graduates worked with a permanent part-time contract;

- Librarian: one of graduates worked part time with an atypical contract (second job), having another job not in the sector as main source income;
- Consultant and designer of cultural projects: one of the graduates was self-employed.

Jobs in sector different than the field of degree included:

- Teacher: two graduates worked in this field, one in primary level, taking advantage of a previous upper secondary school diploma that allowed access to teaching, the other in high school, also taking advantage of a previous Bachelor's degree in another field;
- Sales/commercial: two graduates worked in shops, another in an international retail company in a middle management position;
- Transport and delivery: one was an employee in a national delivery company.

Jobs in tourism (all in the sector) included:

- Historical sites (touristic offer): one of the graduates worked in this type of company, with a fixed-term position;
- Consultant/self-employed in tourism destination design and management, including fundraising and bidding: two worked in this position;
- Entrepreneur, having an enterprise: one worked in this position, having a family agri-tourism business;
- Hospitality: one of the Bachelor's degree graduates worked as a receptionist in a five star hotel;
- Touristic agencies or agencies for destination management: the only graduate with a permanent job in Tourism worked in this position, at a middle management level (working and living abroad);
- Cruises: one worked on ships, at a middle management level.

As regards the unemployed, except one that had never worked for more than three months consecutively, one has worked several years in the Cultural Heritage field (museum), others have worked in different sectors, including the social field (support to asylum seekers); low skilled jobs (worker in a factory); delivery companies, low skilled position (the only one with the degree in Tourism among the unemployed group); IT companies, middle management position. Out of five, three received unemployment benefits.

It should also be noted that most of them had previous work experience, both before enrolling in university, and during their studies with student jobs. Paid traineeship schemes were rather common (6 of the graduates in Cultural Heritage took advantage of them + 1 as Erasmus Traineeship; 1 from Tourism, as Erasmus Traineeship) and also civil services (2 from Cultural Heritage; 1 from Tourism).

Table 46 summarises the main characteristics of interviewees by individual profile.

Table 46. Profile of interviewees

CODE	Gen-der	Age	Year	MA/BA	Hometown		Residence			Employed	Contract					Sector first job Consistent	Months to first paid job
					Marche	Oth.	Marche	Italy	Abroad		Perma-nent	Fixed-term	Atypical	Self-empl.	Tr./PhD		
BC01	F	31	2018	MA	x		x			TR.					x	N/A	N/A
BC02	M	29	2014	MA	x				x	NO	-	-	-			N	6
BC03	M	32	2012	MA	x		x			YES		x				Y	3
BC04	F	28	2012	MA	x		x			YES		x				Y	12
BC05	F	28	2007	MA	x		x			YES		x				N	12
BC06	F	37	2009	MA		x	x			YES	x					N	0
BC07	F	28	2016	MA		x		x		NO						N	N/A
BC08	F	35	2016	MA	x		x		x	YES				x		Y	3
BC09	F	28	2017	MA		x			x	YES		x				N	12
BC10	F	36	2015	MA	x		x			YES		x				N	0
BC11	F	30	2016	MA	x		x			YES	x					N	0
BC12	F	31	2013	MA	x		x			PHD				x		N/A	N/A
BC13	F	30	2016	MA		x	x			PHD				x		N/A	N/A
BC14	F	27	2018	MA	x		x			PHD				x		N/A	3
BC15	M	32	2014	MA	x		x			NO						N	3
BC16	M	27	2019	MA		x		x		YES		x				Y	0
BC17	F	33	2011	BA	x		x			YES	x					Y	12
BC18	M	34	2016	MA	x			x		NO						N	12
BC19	M	32	2014	MA	x		x			YES		x				N	0
BC20	M	44	2014	BA	x		x			YES	x					N	0
BC21	M	38	2009	MA	x		x			NO						Y	12
TU01	F	31	2015	MA		x		x		NO						N	12
TU02	F	32	2011	MA		x			x	YES	x					Y	3
TU03	F	25	2017	MA	x		x			YES				x		Y	12
TU04	F	33	2015	MA		x		x		YES		x				Y	3
TU05	F	31	2013	MA		x		x		YES		x				Y	3
TU06	F	25	2016	BA	x			x		YES		x				Y	1
TU07	F	28	2016	MA		x	x			YES				x		Y	3

<i>CODE</i>	<i>Gen-der</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>MA/BA</i>	<i>Hometown</i>		<i>Residence</i>			<i>Employed</i>	<i>Contract</i>					<i>Sector first job Consistent</i>	<i>Months to first paid job</i>
					<i>Marche</i>	<i>Oth.</i>	<i>Marche</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Abroad</i>		<i>Perma-nent</i>	<i>Fixed-term</i>	<i>Atypical</i>	<i>Self-empl.</i>	<i>Tr./PhD</i>		
TU08	F	27	2016	MA	x		x			<i>PHD</i>					x	N/A	N/A
TU09	M	29	2016	MA	x		x			YES				x		Y	0
TU10	F	28	2016	MA	x		x			<i>PHD</i>					x	N/A	N/A

## **Findings**

### *General considerations*

Data confirm that there were no common pathways of transition among the respondents. Even if graduates shared some common experiences, such as volunteering, unpaid work, short-term and poorly protected contracts, to name a few, their experiences of getting their first paid job were unique.

Some distinctive elements, however, can be identified across the group of respondents:

- Access to a permanent position is a long path for graduates from both disciplinary areas: out of 31 interviewees, only 5 had a permanent position. Of them, one was working abroad, another worked in the field but with a part-time contract, others worked in different fields than that of their field of studies, two in the government sector (schools), one in large-scale retailing;
- Lifelong learning is common across graduates: 3 of them possessed the Specialisation School Diploma for Cultural Heritage (VIII level of EQF) or were concluding their studies in this programme. Among the Cultural Heritage graduates, several possessed the additional credits to teach art history in secondary education, and more than half did at least one training course after graduation (e.g. languages, ICTs);
- Mobility within the country and study or working periods abroad are very common: half of the graduates had experiences abroad during their study path through Erasmus mobility or Erasmus Traineeship schemes. Others left the country (3), or are planning to leave (2), while 5 moved within the country for reasons of work;
- No regrets on the university choice, regardless of professional outcomes: only one graduate out of the 31 said that it would have been better to study something different to find a job, but just after added that she loved very much what she studied;
- All interviewees, without hesitation, stressed the value of university studies for personal growth.

### *Human capital*

Human capital refers to knowledge and skills allowing access to the labour market as professionals and subsequent job retention.

Key findings related to this dimension are described below.

#### *The unknown world of career development*

Most interviewees (excluding those who enrolled in the university while working, those who came for a second degree, or to increase competences for their profession) admitted that they had invested little or no effort in career development while studying, mostly because they felt their duty was to study and pass exams:

When you study, you only want to finish. [BC7]

When I was student, I only thought about studying... believing that afterwards, after one month or two, I would have found a job. Then it didn't work out that way. [TU05]

At that time I only thought about finishing university, passing my exams. [TU06]

Blame is laid at the feet of the institution as well:

Many university students have a mentality of high school students. [BC10]

The university is like going to school, the pathway is given, you have to manage your time, but you have clearly in mind what you have to do, you have a clear idea of the objective. [BC04]

Also because the university does not prepare you for this, does not give you tools to address the passage (*the transition*)... you have to do it by yourself. [BC04]

### *The perceived gap between theory and practice*

The majority of interviewees stated directly or indirectly, that the university is too “theoretical” and felt unfit for the labour market in terms of practical skills:

I didn’t feel prepared, because I lacked practical knowledge of the real world. [TU07]

[Just graduated] I felt prepared regarding content, as a student. I had the knowledge, but I was not competent [...]. I lacked competences to make myself ‘attractive’ for the market. [BC05]

[*speaking about events organisation*] The university didn’t contribute to this type of preparation. Perhaps it contributed by providing me contacts, but not in terms of competences and skills. [TU08]

We had classroom lessons. [...], but then when you are out, you need to “have a knife between your teeth”, (you have to be really aggressive and combative) and you need skills that the university doesn’t provide you [...]. After my first work experience, I said to myself, ‘they taught me how to conquer the moon, but I don’t know how to use a bike’.. [BC03]

I have a lot of knowledge that I have no clue how to use in practice. At the end this knowledge is useless. [BC08]

You leave university being able to do practically nothing. [TU01]

It was not the content, it was the approach. You can do the course of Public Law, but applied in a situation that I can encounter in the field of tourism. [TU08]

Others, however, pointed out the need to work first to understand how to do things, and said students also should be responsible for developing transversal skills:

I would make [*summer jobs, student jobs*] compulsory, as it is something that trains you, it supports you in becoming a person ready to undertake your future job, to be an organised person, a person who respects others, as these are all things that you learn on the job [BC02]

If you live the university experience like a high school, it doesn’t give you a step ahead, it gives you a ‘step back’, [...] because you are less adaptable, you have high expectations, and in reality you are not able to work. [BC10]

The university cannot teach you everything. It can give you the basis, but then you are the one who should find the suitable place for yourself. [TU02]

### *The (not always) added value of curricular internship*

In Italy, curricular internships are rather short for both the Bachelor's and the Master's degrees (between 150-200 hours). A Master's graduate usually has had two internship periods, one for the Bachelor's, another for the Master's programme. In some universities, the internship can be replaced with other activities, such as language courses. At UNIMC, internships are a compulsory part of the curriculum. Most Master's students did the internship in external organisations, private or government. Some of them found the internship through the university network, while others preferred to find it themselves.

Internships can be very significant for developing career skills, but only if interns are self-aware and manage the experience wisely. About half of the respondents considered at least one of their internships as an opportunity to understand professional environments and to establish contacts; the other half did it merely as 'something that you have to do to achieve the degree'. This clearly makes a difference in the way the experience was evaluated.

I did my internship in a hospitality company on the Adriatic coast. It was great. I understood during the internship that my field of work would be hospitality. [TU06]

It was like something that I had to do, and it was not very formative. [...] I found it by myself, but honestly I chose that organisation because I could do the internship period very quickly, as they allowed me to work many hours a day [BC14]

Those who did the Erasmus mobility or the Erasmus traineeship valued the experience abroad as very formative and felt it had a positive impact on their studies and life afterwards:

I lived the Erasmus mobility as an opportunity for personal and professional development. When I returned to Italy, I also studied in a different way. [TU10]

The Erasmus traineeship is a great experience, it was among the first real formative experiences that I had. [TU02]

I always think that without the Erasmus experiences I wouldn't be who I am now, I would be another person. [TU04]

Three of those who did not take advantage of the Erasmus schemes openly acknowledged that now they regret having missed the opportunity.

### *The career services*

Only four of the interviewees took advantage of career services at the university:

I followed workshops to learn how to write a CV [TU7]

I did the workshops of the university career centre on how to write a curriculum when I was student, they were very useful, I use the same structure learnt at that time, and the decisions on how to write and even now what I write comes from that learning opportunity [BC11]

What is missing is an office, a unit, someone taking over the issue of transitions. I met with the labour psychologist at the support services of the university, she was good, okay, but she told me general things about what to

do, which channels I could use to find a job... but at the end of the day, it's your business. And you feel lost. [BC01]

Excluding distance students, other respondents, asked about reasons for not having accessed a free service, generally answered that it seemed of little importance at the time (and several acknowledged that afterwards they had problems in writing a curriculum or preparing for an interview).

#### *Personal growth as the main value of the university*

As previously mentioned, all interviewees, without exception, evaluated the university experience as an added value in their lives; using different expressions, they referred to what can be defined as personal growth and acquisition of high cognitive skills:

It opened my eyes, I mean that the university education allowed me to see things in a different way, to appreciate them in a better way. [BC15]

The university gave me a lot. It opened my mind. [TU04]

It supports your growth, you have the chance to meet people, to deal with people who otherwise you would not have met. [TU05]

I grew so much as person, that ... even if you don't reach the position you wished in the field: you have always to try. Even if you don't succeed in the market as a graduate, it is a process worth undertaking. [BC05]

If you do the university properly [*it means not like a high school*], and you do it by yourself, it gives you autonomy, critical thinking, you are able at least to read and understand a text... which is not so trivial as we think. [BC10]

I use the acquired competences in my job [*even if I don't work in the field of studies*], particularly soft skills, but especially as *forma mentis*. If I compare myself to colleagues having my same position, I am one step ahead. [BC11]

#### *Competence assessment*

Respondents indicated that during their university studies they did little reflection on what competences they possessed, which is not surprising, given how little attention they paid to preparing for a career, as noted above. However, they observed that reflection happens regularly on the job, and plays a very important role in 'preparing for the future':

I constantly assess my competences, because the market changes. [BC06]

I assess my competences as a regular process in my daily work. Also because you consider: now it works as such, then in five years what is going to happen? [BC03]

I am working toward a professional goal now, also by structuring my curriculum [BC11]

#### *Social capital*

Social capital refers to the ability to build networks effectively to get closer to the target employment.

### *Networking as a key to getting a job*

Most graduates, even if it is hard to make a clear distinction between paid traineeships, first job, subsequent work positions, and direct links to the positions (e.g. through information; direct introduction; internship etc.), have used both personal and professional networks:

Network is the key, but the accessing time is long, very long. [BC17]

[To find a job] you have to shake hands. But at the university, they didn't tell me this. [BC03]

You definitely need networks. And you need to understand the territory: if you know the mentality of the place, if you know what happens in the place, you have an advantage over those who don't, professionally speaking. I think this happens everywhere, not only in this region. [TU07]

Now that I am 'on the other side' I understand that the tourism sector is based on networks – if you need anyone, you ask your colleagues or someone who you consider reliable in order to have names and curricula. [TU03]

[Talking about the risk of being jobless after the traineeship] I have no strong professional networks, peers and colleagues yes, but I have no strong connections with directors, or human resources managers, or I don't know [BC01]

[I suggest students] build a network, do training courses, participate in seminars and events,... over the years, I made contacts with hundreds, and, who knows, perhaps one day if they need a particular professional profile, they will think about me. [BC04]

I was at the church and this woman told me 'I know that they are looking for this profile, if you are interested you can apply'. Unless it is a government competition, you know about available jobs in this way, through networks, people you know. [BC16]

The best way I have found for finding a job at the end is word of mouth, direct contact with local companies, this kind of behaviour. In small areas like the one where I live, they can look at your face, they can understand that you are a reliable person. [BC04]

### ***Cultural capital***

Cultural capital refers to the capacity to understand and deal with the cultural environments of sectors, organisations and the labour market.

#### *Unfamiliar labour markets*

Little or no awareness of the need to work on one's employability during the university years, therefore little understanding of the labour market, often leads to a period of disorientation when facing the labour market, and, for a few, a kind of initial shock:

When you finish, you are in the abyss. The day after the graduation you ask yourself: what should I do now? [BC4]

I think I was not prepared to face the labour market. [BC14]



[Just after graduation] many have for a while this *horror vacui*, ‘oh goodness, and now what I should do?’ [BC15]

Before graduation, I had guessed something [*about the labour market*], but then.. no, I was not prepared for it. I thought vaguely that perhaps I would not have found a job immediately, but a traineeship, something... it is also hard to find a traineeship. [BC07]

Most students have no clue about how the labour market works. If you have no professional experience, you are influenced by the university environment, and you perhaps dream of working at the university not even knowing how academic careers work. [BC21]

I understood what the labour market was when I was already in the market. [TU06]

### *The regional labour market*

As described in the literature review, local labour markets can be very different from the ideal market described by media or constructed through secondary sources of information such as family and friends, and thus it is important to understand how graduates perceive the “real” labour market.

In general, perceptions aligned with the characteristics of rural markets described in the literature, with some specific elements:

The Marche Region has a peculiarity that is the value of work. Of sacrifice on the job. I think that many entrepreneurs count a bit on this. [...] I have always worked in places where credentials were not valued [...]: often, entrepreneurs are not educated, I am speaking about small and micro-enterprises. [BC10]

You have to deal with a closed mentality, which impacts on the job. Many graduates who have specific competences do not fit into the area labour market because they are... too “advanced”. [TU07]

There would be need of graduates, but companies do not have a real propensity to hire graduates. I had an interview just after I graduated [*he was enrolled in the Cultural Heritage Bachelor’s degree program while working*] in one of the largest companies here in the Region, and they told me clearly that they had only employees with high school diplomas, and they were fine with that [*the interviewee holds a technical-scientific Bachelor’s*]. [BC20]

My general impression is that in the Marche there are a few big companies, so fewer opportunities to have a career. If you want this kind of job, you need to leave the Region. [BC11]

Entrepreneurship is sometimes considered a compulsory choice for those who do not want to leave the region:

I cannot say that there are no opportunities... [...] You need to become an entrepreneur, self-employed. I realise that this is ridiculous, because as a new graduate you don’t have the experience to become entrepreneur. But experience... even to find an internship is not easy, there are few places... it is a kind of overall nonsense. [TU07]

In this Region [...] you can find opportunities, but not following the ‘traditional way’. I mean, if you want to be an employee in a company, and work there on permanent basis, it is not easy, also because entrepreneurs try

all ways possible to avoid hiring you on permanent basis. [...] You can work as freelancer or a consultant. [TU10]

However, some commented about easy access to low skilled jobs:

Well, if you want to work, in some way you work. But not as a professional. It is easy to find low skilled positions, waiters, things like that. For professional positions, it is more difficult and the way is longer. If you can afford it... [BC15]

Obviously if you are looking for a precise position, it can be that you don't find it. But if you search for "a job", you can find a job. [TU09]

In any case, there is some value to working outside cities:

In the capital city it would have taken 15 years to be known on the market, but here after 3-4 years of work I already have my professional network, here my CV stands out, in cities like Rome or Milan there is more competition. The small size helps in terms of easy contacts and makes you stand out. [BC08]

### *Specificities of the sectors*

Even if Italy is a country with an impressive cultural heritage, professional profiles in this field are not yet regulated by law. In addition, historical sites, museums, historical libraries and such places belong to the Italian government or are managed by other intermediate government bodies. Most of the time, management of sites and city-run places of cultural heritage is outsourced to private companies, but the main recruitment channel is still through government competitions, the only recruiting channel available for permanent positions in the government sector. Another consideration is that private organisations, usually cultural cooperatives, do not always have precise requirements for staff in terms of credentials or work experience. Thus for all these reasons, the sector has a quite difficult labour market, characterised by traineeships and short-term contracts, corresponding to the terms of government tenders, more often than not for part-time positions.

Since professional formation is not recognised as a job requirement, or even an asset in the field of cultural heritage, the use of volunteers is widespread.

[[As a student] I didn't know how the sector works, I didn't know the market of cultural cooperatives, which dominate the market. Well, the main concept of the sector of cultural heritage is "I don't want to pay you", because there are numbers of old people and teenagers from volunteer associations who are available for free. [BC03]

It is a sector that lives a hand-to-mouth existence, based on European funds, projects, always fixed-term job offers. [BC12]

You should consider Cultural Heritage to be a flagship, a prestigious sector. [...] It is a very peculiar sector. It is not like an engineer - if you are not able to do your job they fire you, and that's all. No, you are "an intellectual"! [BC10]

The tourism labour market in Italy is different, even if it is related to cultural heritage. The tourism sector is almost entirely private, characterised by low-skilled jobs, particularly in hospitality. It is highly seasonal, with more businesses in the coastal areas, but also in mountains and rural areas.

One [*hotel*] told me ‘with this degree you are going to cost too much, so I prefer to hire a girl who has just finished high school. [TU03]

I tried in Italy first, but no one would give me an opportunity, because I was too young. I was 24, in the interviews they told me ‘you are too young for this step’. [TU02]

At the beginning I managed to find a summer job in a resort in this area. [...] Then nothing, the season was over and there was no job available. [...] I went everywhere, no way. I went to job agencies, to hotels directly, to companies... nothing. Not even an interview. [TU05]

### *Recruiting processes*

Only in large companies is recruiting based on established methods and procedures: SMEs rely more on informal channels. In addition, some other entrance barriers can be encountered, such as:

(Companies) want people with ten-years’ experience, but then to have experience, you should have the opportunity to work, and if you cannot work because you don’t have experience... it is a weird situation. [BC02]

I have sent around many curricula, but everyone is looking for people with experience, and I don’t have enough experience. And then, you know, when you apply for a job... there are 300 candidates, and logically, someone with experience is among them... [BC07]

I’ve been asked many times about this, “are you engaged?” “do you wish to have a family?” It destroys you. Leaving aside the legal issues, it is a question that hurts in 2019. And 90% of the time, female recruiters are the ones asking you this question, and this is another thing that I cannot accept. From a man, it is not acceptable either, but it could be that he doesn’t realise in full what he is asking, but a woman? A woman knows what this means. [TU03]

### *Working contracts and other arrangements*

Another important point is related to labour contracts, at least in the private market. The two sectors share a similar level of short-term contracts: quite often, however, there is a use (and abuse) of instruments designed for other purposes, such as temporary positions that require a few hours per month, or only one month full time. Generally, offers of traineeships are considered ‘job offers’, even if they are co-funded by the Region or other bodies. As well, permanent positions are mostly part-time, but in actual practice, working hours usually exceed contractual agreements. Thus the scarcity of job openings coupled with a plentiful supply of high-skill candidates often allows employers to behave in an unacceptable manner.

I worked two weeks in a small publishing company, but after two weeks (without contract) I realised that they didn’t want to offer a contract at all, not even for a traineeship. Later, I discovered that I was the tenth girl working there for two weeks... [BC07]

It happened to my sister, she worked as salesperson in a shop for € 400 a month [*the lowest salary in the sector is that of an apprentice, and should be paid € 800 a month, with training periods included*] ... it is not sustainable [TU02]

They offered me a position, but it was 15 hours a week in a place 25 km from my house, and the salary was € 400 a month. It was not possible. [BC01]

A short time ago a Municipality opened a competition for the museum director on a voluntary basis, I mean, s/he was expected to take over the position for free. Not even reimbursing the costs of commuting. [BC08]

I started a selection process in an airport. It would have been a three-month contract, renewable, as a check-in operator, 5 steps of selection – group interview, individual interview, English interview, interview with the company, and I don't remember the fifth – however, just before the fourth step they told us that there were no additional places for the check-in profile, but still there were for another position at baggage check. Only, if the first position had one week training course without threshold before the employment contract, the second position had one month of training course, without any reimbursement of costs - parking costs, meal costs in airport, 8 hours a day – and at the end of the month you had to pass the national exam at the ENAC [*National Civil Aviation Authority*], and only after passing that exam could you be hired. [TU01]

I did one year replacing someone on maternity leave [...] After two months, they called me back because the woman I had replaced during her maternity leave decided to quit the job [...] They offered me the same position, but at fixed-term again, six months, renewable for another six months, and starting from the entry position, so less money (€ 300-400 less per month). When I said that an entry level after one year in the same position was not acceptable [...], the human resources manager told me that I didn't show 'passion'. Astonishing. [TU6]

I went to an interview where they offered me a job, but I had to pay the training course out of pocket before. [BC04]

It drives me crazy when people say: young people today don't want to work, they are not committed. I take it as personal insult. Okay perhaps you will not find a job in line with your studies, you will do something different, but you cannot reach the point of "to have a job, I will do anything", because then you fall into situations of mistreatment, of 'slavery'. [BC04]

### *Resisting myths to face the uncertain future: the 'posto fisso'<sup>104</sup>*

According to interviewees, several graduates from Cultural Heritage work in schools. Many others do other jobs while studying for government competitions, which are few and with high participation (for example, in 2018 the Ministry of Cultural Heritage organised a competition for 500 positions, and there were 19,479 candidates<sup>105</sup>). Government competition is the only way to achieve a permanent and secure job, as the government sector has the most protected contracts of the Italian labour market.

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<sup>104</sup> "Posto fisso" means literally "open-ended position, permanent job"; in Italian, however it usually refers to positions in a government organisation, with the nuance "a secure place from which you will never be fired".

<sup>105</sup> [https://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sito-MiBAC/Contenuti/MibacUnif/Comunicati/visualizza\\_asset.html\\_1394961043.html](https://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sito-MiBAC/Contenuti/MibacUnif/Comunicati/visualizza_asset.html_1394961043.html)

Many of my former mates or colleagues are now in school: it is not because they wanted to become teachers, it is because schools give you a salary. [BC21]

You know, the ‘posto fisso’ [*laugh*], everyone I know tries to succeed in a government competition. [BC14]

Whatever happens, you have a secure income 27th of every month [*government bodies pay on the 27<sup>th</sup> of each month*]. If your house collapses, you are fine, because you can pay for a room in a hotel. [TU01]

There are so many candidates, and many are very experienced. At the last competition, I met a candidate who was born in 1964 and had always done this job with ‘precarious’ [*short-term*] contracts. I understand that he is more prepared than me, of course he is! [BC07]

For smaller competitions, such as those organised by municipalities, some respondents commented about questionable transparency of the processes, even if laughing while saying so:

The winner was always someone who had relations with someone, I don’t know, the director, the president... [BC20]

You know, also to have the famous ‘posto fisso’ you need to ‘know someone’. [BC09]

These ironic comments probably refer to a plague of the government sector in Italy, particularly between the 1960s and 1970s, when government job positions were used for electoral reasons, or reasons of power/influence. Alongside the 27th-of-the-month, also this cultural trait is a part of the understanding and construct of the labour market.

### *The broken promise*

Some graduates, regardless of their age or professional position, pointed out how the narratives about work, and what they thought the labour market to be like, were far from the reality they encountered:

[*Before graduation*] I had understood that the sector was hard, but I believed in meritocracy, “if I am good enough, then...”... well... it doesn’t work like this. [BC09]

I was a graduate, in a specific sector, a sector ‘sold’ like the goose that lays the golden eggs... and I couldn’t find a job! [TU03]

Our degree was just established at that time, we were among the first graduates in Management of Cultural Heritage in Italy [...] What was not being considered is that Italy is a country behind the times, we still have a twentieth century vision of the world. [BC02]

This country has such a patrimony, it is literally sitting on a gold mine. The potential is enormous, and we are not able to exploit it, not even to recognise the professionalism of the sector. [BC08]

Also the perception of the country is not positive:

I am disappointed, but not so much about the university, [...] it is the country which is running down. [TU01]

[...] and the area manager told me: “don’t study, or you will be forced to go abroad”. [...] I reflected on this point, and yes, it is probably so. If you have credentials, you have few opportunities here in Italy. [BC15]

Well, you know that if you study art history you are going to do nothing, because the Italian situation is as such, or you work as a waiter or you do nothing, in any case nothing related with your studies. [BC18]

Perhaps if you manage to pass one of the three government competitions opened every twenty years, you can earn your 1100 euros per month, working 24 hours a day! Sorry if I am ironic, but when I think about the situation there... anger explodes... really, we are lagging very, very far behind. [BC02]

### *Identity capital*

Identity capital refers to the ability to identify and understand our values and design employability strategies according to our goals.

#### *The family legacy*

Family still plays a role in educational choices and in supporting professional development (or in lowering the level of stress due to job search, as many young people in Italy continue to live rent-free with their families, until they establish their own):

My parents, particularly my mother, wanted me to go to the university, to gain experience, to know other people... [TU09]

My parents told me “you enrol to Humanities to do what? Enrol in Cultural Heritage, which is something new, and has a management profile, and some good opportunity can arise from it...”, so, they looked at the prospective possibility, they thought that there would be some professional outlet, and I followed their advice. [BC02]

My parents, but even my grandma, understand that this is not the labour market of their times. [TU07]

I was blaming myself for being unable to find a job, and my parents supported me saying ‘Come on, your peers are also in the same situation’. [TU03]

Also, financial issues affect choices during studies and after graduation, considering that access to an adequately paid position is rather long; in some cases the respondents mentioned the financial situation of their families:

Those ‘regular people’ like me, those without a wealthy family, also need to work during the university years. [BC02]

Someone like me who thought the university would provide an opportunity to upgrade her career, and does not have a family running a business, at the end has the same credential, but empty hands. [TU01]

Also others stressed the need of financial investments, but not in direct relation to the family of origin:

I couldn’t do the Erasmus mobility, I couldn’t afford it. [BC09; BC10]

Yes, there is the Specialisation School, but it has a cost, and I cannot afford it. [BC01]

*Who I am (and what I do to make a living)*

Identity is probably the most critical capital for graduates dealing with difficult labour markets, since the mediation between personal values and career goals is already limited by a low degree of choice. In addition, choices made in the twenties do not always correspond to one's life needs in the thirties. The respondents expressed different approaches to this point:

- a first, smaller group aimed at financial autonomy as a top priority value, therefore almost immediately after graduation searched and found a permanent or fixed-term position (but applying national labour agreements) regardless of the sector:

So it started like a fall-back in this supermarket, I needed an income because I wanted to buy a house, but then it worked well. [BC11]

I tried for a while to work in Cultural Heritage while I was working part time in a library ... but I realised soon that there were no opportunities. [...] So I went back to my hometown and I found a job in a shop. I have worked there three years, with fixed-term contracts, then by law they should have hired me on permanent basis, and they weren't willing to do open-ended contracts. Now I am unemployed. [BC19]

I worked as a laborer for two years, I was at the sorting centre, I worked on sorting machines, three shifts, morning-afternoon-night. [TU01]

- a second group pointed on a process of professionalism within the sector, by accepting diverse contractual arrangements, but then left and changed path to have an income:

I was already in my thirties, you cannot plan a life with € 500-600 a month. [BC20]

At a certain point I acknowledged the fact that I couldn't manage to access the sector professionally, particularly in my area. [...] I went to the government employment service and I found a job in an ice-cream parlour. [BC05]

I have reached the point that I must work. I need to make a living, I need money. [...] So the supermarket is okay, that's okay, I have an income. [BC09]

- a third (very small) group pointed to entrepreneurship, for personal goals or in response to requests from the market:

You need to start from some point, even if it is not the point that you dream of. You need to be flexible, entrepreneurs around me, in my job, tell me about this, they need flexible staff. [...] I am self-employed, and I work for these companies. [TU07]

I had two routes: I could try to find an employee position, or I could try as an entrepreneur. My dream was the second, so I have chosen the second. [TU03]

Processes are sometimes hard to manage in terms of identity:

In fact this choice to enter the world of school... at a personal level I have to some extent betrayed myself. But I am sure that it has not ended here. [BC06]

The first day at the company I went back home crying, asking myself 'why have I studied? to be a workman?'. I was so sad and so angry. [...] Then you overcome the feeling, you cannot live that way, so in the end it was okay. [...] It was a daily effort, to work on myself to live with that situation, which is not humiliating, in work nothing is a humiliation, but it was so undermining. [TU01]

### *To leave or not to leave*

Given the situation of the sector and of the regional and Italian labour market, many graduates have to decide whether to leave the Region or country to have a job worthy of their degree, or to stay and find a lower skilled job or change field.

The group of interviewees included only three respondents who are living abroad, and two of them had also personal reasons for the choice; another four left their hometowns for another Italian city (two of them are from the Marche Region: one of these two went back to Italy after two years abroad, but lives in a city in northern Italy). Among those who remained, eighteen originate from the Marche, three come from other Regions but live in the Marche (one of the three is a PhD student), and three were in the Marche to study but then returned to their hometown after graduation.

Graduates living in their hometowns belong to three groups: the first, and biggest, does not consider moving, or has a strong preference for staying; the second has already extended the job search abroad; and the third keeps open the possibility of searching abroad or far from home, but is not yet acting on that option.

A clear position on the importance of 'staying' was expressed by graduates belonging to the first profile:

For me, leaving would be a failure, to leave my land, also because I think that if youth leave the countryside, the social fabric dies,... if we all go to cities, rural areas are depopulated, there is no social life anymore... [BC04]

I had temporary jobs with a company in Northern Italy, but to have a longer work contract, they asked me to move there. I didn't want to move and I refused. But if you want to work with our degree, you need to move. [BC10]

Some say to me: look around, look abroad. But I don't want to live abroad. Why should I leave my country? [TU01]

I think I missed the opportunity to go outside the Region, to another region or abroad. But then also those who go away then come back... and they have nothing in their hands. Those who remain are hitched up to whatever small opportunity they have found, but those who go away and return find no opportunity at all, regardless of competences and experience. They have no networks. [BC17]

In the second profile, there is not a determination to move, but the idea is considered in practical terms:



I am also looking abroad, as I would like to have an experience in another country. I loved my Erasmus mobility experience; also, I want to see if other labour markets can offer me a position in cultural heritage, to have more work experience in my sector. [BC01]

Finally, some are not yet taking action to move, as they would prefer to remain, but still consider the possibility, if the opportunity arises:

I was aware that in this Region there were few opportunities for graduates... you know, there is the shoe-makers district, less strong now, that also is having difficulties... perhaps if you are in cities like Milan, or Bologna, you can find a job for a university graduate and in a permanent position, but here... you know, my area is composed of small villages, where parochialism rules [*laughs*]... but, I was born here... I am the first defender of my area! [...] But yes, I am considering a move ... I am still searching for a position in cultural heritage. [BC19]

Languages in particular stop me. I would like to go, I am studying German. So far I have always been a bit scared. [BC18]

Among those who are already abroad, the messages are quite similar – leaving is usually a necessity for those who want to have a career worthy of a university graduate:

I am not saying that you must leave home, it is not easy, you are always sorry when you leave a place where you have lived [...] It is not easy, and I understand those who don't. Nevertheless the Italian situation now requires this. [TU02]

Graduates go. There are a few who remain, those who have a wealthy family or already have a job – like a family business. Out of my ten closest friends, only one remained. [BC09]

But, for some of them:

Oh yes, I would be back now, if I had the possibility of finding a job. [BC09]

I cannot deny that, if I had a job offer in Italy at certain conditions, I would be back. [BC02]

### ***Psychological capital***

Psychological capital refers to the ability to deal with a complex labour market and adapt to situations, managing stress and pressures.

#### *Adaptability and resilience as assets*

All interviewees said they were adaptable persons – and their life stories bear them out:

You need to accept different arrangements, to be adaptable... some of my friends don't want to adapt themselves to situations. They try to do what they want immediately: they aim high. [TU07]

I think that I am an adaptable person, because I believe that it is a duty to take advantage of opportunities. If I would have many lives to live, it could be that I would not be so active and adaptable, but I have one life and I want to take advantage of opportunities, so I adapt myself to situations. [BC13]

Resilience is another characteristic that emerges from their interviews:

Pessimism leads you to nothing, you need to be able to see opportunities and to have the courage to face them [BC16]

My generation is used to this, to suffer from this point of view. [BC19]

I did two years of civil service. Meanwhile I've earned the credits I needed for teaching, and I've created the teaching farm on my family's farm. Now in I am studying for the IT certification to gain more points in government rankings. Never give up. [BC04]

### *Managing stress*

Job hunting can be a very stressful activity even when the market is full of opportunities, and in difficult labour markets it is even more challenging. Interviewees, while acknowledging the difficulty of some periods, gave evidence of a quite strong capability of managing stress by continuing, anyway, to 'go ahead':

Psychologically, searching for a job is draining. Sending curricula and waiting for the telephone to ring, and none answering or calling. It is like this. You start thinking: how can it be possible that all the events around here have enough staff already? It is the moment when your friends 'get lost', they go to work in a photography shop or in a supermarket, that is the moment. [BC03]

Being jobless is tough. [...] You feel useless, without an objective, 'no one calls me, so it means that I haven't done enough, I am not qualified enough for professional profiles needed'. It is a huge discouragement. [BC04]

Frankly, I am sad and angry because I can't find a position in the job market. I fear being jobless, I am terrified by this idea. I feel alone. [BC01]

### *Impact of social pressures*

Social pressure is also part of the game, and should be psychologically managed:

I think this was a social pressure, I was not autonomous, where others in my age have a job, relatives have a job, ... so yes, there was a pressure [BC05]

When you meet people, particularly in small places... 'what do you do? Are you at home'? My family has never said a word, but then... you feel the pressure. You are compared to those your age who work, who already have a family... who have a place in society, and you are still wandering in the labyrinth of your future... yes, at that point you feel totally discouraged. [BC04]

Stress and more stress. And then people ask you: why don't you try with schools, to become a teacher? They don't know that I cannot teach anything, or better I could teach art history, if I added some credits in art history that I'm lacking. [BC07]

To have a permanent position now is a huge fortune, until years ago it was normal. It is a shared situation in our times, so you feel the pressure less. It is never easy, but still... [BC16]

### *What is work for you?*

Even if the interviews were mostly unstructured, the closing question was always the same: what is work for you? The question was aimed at investigating the meaning of work, for individuals and society.

Some of the mentioned topics were recurrent, and several meanings could be identified for each definition. The first reaction was assigned the most weight. Usually respondents said something after a while, then articulated the concept. None answered immediately: some laughed, others said, ‘that’s a tough question’, some sighed. All participants stressed something like ‘at this point of my life’, probably aware that their definition has changed since they were younger, and/or will continue to change over time. Results of this analysis are summarised in table 47:

Table 47. Definitions of work

<i>First definition used</i>	<i>No.</i>
Fulfilment	12
Passion/pleasure	8
A way to make a living	4
Autonomy/independence	3
Dignity	2
Something good for society	2

#### **II.4.4 Discussion**

The findings of this study confirm most of the distinctive elements identified in the literature regarding youth employability and employment in the present socio-economic context, and in rural areas. This applies at least to:

- the general disadvantage suffered by young people compared to older employees in Western economies, both in terms of job availability and in terms of the type of labour contracts;
- the specificity of the rural labour markets characterised by a high number of small enterprises that are generally reluctant to hire graduates;
- a general request from the market to possess transversal skills (including soft skills and individual attitudes, such as flexibility and adaptability) and practical knowledge (credentials are not particularly valued);
- the degree of urgency in the need to make a living. This regards in particular graduates from less wealthy backgrounds, who cannot afford to invest in further education or training, and need to start earning.

Transitions are highly individualised and patterns can be identified in sectors, but not in generations. Thus, in general, in a given sector, similar experiences are common. However, the makeup of an individual determines competitive advantage and success in the labour market. According to data from the interviewees, the smoothest and most successful transitions were achieved by those who had a clear understanding of the business culture of the workplace, and how the labour market functions. A (small) subgroup of graduates had prepared for life after university by network building, working to acquire transversal skills such as ability in foreign languages, and gaining experience through traineeships or volunteer civil service work. However, the majority of the group was not prepared to face the complexity of the labour market and had a little understanding of most of the dynamics regulating

access to work, both at the sectorial level (who are the employers?), and at the general level (which channels, which tools, which type of contracts?).

It can be useful to look at the situation of these graduates in terms of the various kinds of capital. Considering Human, Social and Cultural capital, the graduates had poor understanding of the labour market before leaving university, and only later realised the requirements for accessing the world of work. During their years of study this lack of understanding had an enormous impact on the decisions they made. In retrospect, many acknowledged they had failed to grasp the importance of career services offered by the university, such as instruction on how to write a CV and cover letter, or the added value of the Erasmus mobility/internship programme, the curricular internships and extra-curricular activities. They also largely underestimated the value of network building for professional purposes during the university years.

Furthermore, this poor understanding of the rules of the labour market plays a role Identity and Psychological capitals. The actual labour market requires high adaptability and clear career objectives: when the supply and demand of jobs is so unbalanced, job hunters must make hard life decisions about whether to stay close to home or search elsewhere, whether to be an employee or to be self-employed, or whether to settle for low skilled jobs or to hold out for a job worthy of a university graduate. The majority of the interviewees, referring to themselves as students and as new graduates, gave the general impression of procrastinating as much as possible in their decisions, hoping that ‘something (good) will happen’. This can lead to a rather dangerous position later on in life. Italian law promotes youth employment through “insertion into work” or “placement” contract types with preferential tax treatment for employers who hire people under the age of 29. After this age, employees can be hired with permanent contracts regulated according to national collective contract law, which entail higher costs for employers. Consequently, the years immediately after graduation are important for accessing positions that are stable or may become stable, in the sense that one is more likely to pass from an “insertion into work” or “placement” contract to a permanent contract, than to find work directly with a permanent contract that offers no financial incentives to the employer.

It is not surprising then that, directly or indirectly (referring to friends or classmates), graduates speak about the ‘shock’ of the initial period of transition. Several continue to work on their thesis research, or are active in university projects, without the specific objective of pursuing an academic career or finding a position in one of the organisations involved in the project. It could be that for them, the university is a comfort zone that diminishes their anxiety about the nebulous, unplanned and challenging ‘next’ step.

The interviewees unanimously considered the university experience to be very positive. On the basis of the reasons they gave, one could say that in their experience, the university achieved its mission to educate citizens, provide high cognitive skills, and contribute to individual personal growth. Those who had also studied at other universities judged the content of the education provided by the University of Macerata to be excellent, and valued its student-centred approach, concretised in the willingness of professors to meet with and help students, and the support provided to meet student needs. However, the interviewees judged the university preparation for

the world of work negatively, or very negatively. The key weakness identified by interviewees is the gap between theory and practice, between considerable knowledge and little competence.

Two aspects related specifically to the context play a remarkable role in professional outcomes, and both, as noted above, are usually underestimated by students: the first is the specificity of the Marche Region labour market, and the second is the sector.

The labour market of the Marche Region has the typical characteristics of rural labour markets – small and medium enterprises, low absorption of high skilled employees, and the use of informal methods for recruiting, and those who hope to work locally should take these factors into consideration in designing employability strategies.

Another factor brought up by the interviewees was specific to the Marche Region culture and thus its labour market: “the value of work *per se*”, and the related idea of “sacrifice”, that is, an attitude of employees, regardless of corresponding salary or the professional role. Though this aspect was not pursued in this study, it seems to play a significant role in employment and therefore in employability. To some extent, it means that ‘doing’ and by extension ‘working’ is a value *per se*. Hierarchies, organisational structures, and working time are softened: a good worker is committed, and commitment is expressed by the number of hours spent at work, acceptance of all proposed activities, agreement with all proposed contract arrangements, and capacity to take over issues and solve problems, regardless of one’s position in the company. In some way, each employee works as an entrepreneur. This has important implications in work negotiations, as well as in one’s presentation to potential employers, and should be carefully managed. The ‘classic’ work negotiation operates on the premise that the employee is paid to perform a job specified in a clear cut agreement. But often in the mindset of the Marche Region, the employee is paid ‘to work’, without details on the type of activity or labour contract, or even regardless of the salary. Thus, rejecting a job offer or refusing to perform an activity when already on the job has greater social and professional weight in the Marche Region than it might elsewhere, and the negotiating power of the candidate or employee is lessened in such a situation, particularly under precarious or fixed-term working arrangements.

The sector also plays a very significant role in professional outcomes of graduates, therefore on the construction of their employability strategy when they are students. While both the Tourism and the Cultural Heritage sectors share difficult labour markets, a specific weakness of Cultural Heritage is that most of the Italian heritage sites or properties are government owned. Government employment depends also, and sometimes mostly, on the financial investments of the country, regardless of perceived or real needs to offer a cultural service. Management of heritage can be direct (by the government body) or indirect (outsourced to private companies). There are two main problems for professionals in this field. The first problem is that particular professional skills are not valued. Officially, there is no law indicating what professional figures should work at these sites, and unofficially, there is a general feeling that ‘anyone can do it’. The second problem concerns outsourcing, as tenders for management are time-limited, usually have low budgets that should cover many services, and include no specifications of minimum requirements for staff

competences or credentials, which means the jobs are fixed-time and badly paid, and yet competition for them is intense, because the specific degree in Cultural Heritage is not considered an added value. In addition, those hoping to work in libraries and archives face a particularly difficult job market, because most sites are managed by municipalities that lack the resources or even interest in keeping these cultural heritage sites open, much less investing in personnel to re-organise or classify the contents. All over Italy, small libraries commonly have short opening times and sometimes are directed by volunteers or municipality staff who are not trained for this work. Given the situation, employability strategy should be even more carefully defined: job hunters should identify the most promising sub-sector and its employers, then build networks, define access methods, constantly revise their plans, as the market can change over time, and, finally, choose a realistic time limit after which they should cease their efforts.

Tourism as well has a difficult labour market, but in a different way: as previously mentioned, the main problems in tourism are low skilled positions and highly seasonal activity. While this study had a limited number of respondents with a degree in Tourism, some aspects clearly emerged. The first, and most obvious, is that high level positions in hospitality usually require moving across the country or abroad. Secondly, in relation mostly to destination management, sustainable tourism or touristic route design, the candidate must have strong local networks, and the position will probably require self-employment or other entrepreneurship profiles. As regards hospitality, the Marche has a good offer mostly in the coastal areas, while businesses in the interior are generally family operations related to rural tourism. Positions for tourism graduates are mostly related to reception, and to a lesser extent to other profiles in cruising or touristic information. Competitors for these positions hold university degrees in languages, considered the main asset for a receptionist, or are graduates of high school specialised in tourism. Hospitality has a very high degree of seasonality, with activity concentrated in the summer. Others profiles, which are the focus of the UNIMC degrees, are related to strong connections with the area, in particular with small producers, accommodation providers, and cultural services providers. These connections need time to be established, particularly in rural areas. For this reason, the failure to devise an employability strategy during the university years can make it hard or almost impossible to obtain work in some professions within a reasonable time after graduation.

#### **II.4.5 Conclusive summary**

This chapter has presented findings from a survey and interviews carried out with thirty one graduates of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism degree programmes of the University of Macerata. Analysis highlighted key points that confirm the literature review in relation to rural employment, the Italian economic and social situation, and the particular nature of the Marche Region. In addition, some elements, which have implications for practitioners, have been identified across the sample:

- graduates in general did not invest in career development during the university years, and thus came to graduation with little awareness of the labour market, the access channels, and their real chances of getting a job;

- they did not build employability strategies before graduation, and self-reflection on possessed competences usually started when were already outside the university;
- graduates recognised the added value of the degree for personal development, but they did not see any for professional success; they felt their studies enriched their *forma mentis*, but did not perceive being a university graduate to mean possession of high skills valued in the market;
- one of the main weaknesses identified in their education pathway was the missing link between theory and practice: they acknowledged that they had a high level of knowledge, but a low level of competence.

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# **CONCLUSIONS**

## **Purpose and findings**

This research addressed graduate employability in rural economies. The aim was to understand how universities deal with reference labour markets and how they can adapt their provisions to support the transition from education to work.

The research design included both desk and field research, and gathered data from universities as well as individual. Students in their last year of the study programme and graduates who already accessed the world of work were interviewed in order to understand the extent to which regional markets impact employment of university graduates.

The results confirm that labour markets in rural economies have distinctive features and lower absorption of graduates than urban areas. Furthermore, recruitment channels are also different: in rural areas enterprises are typically small or micro businesses, and have a particular work culture.

The research hypothesis was that universities should adapt their employability provisions to favour the transition from education to work, taking into consideration the largely rural nature of the local labour market. The results confirmed this hypothesis, even if they are limited to two programmes of study, Tourism and Cultural Heritage. In particular, promotion of students' network building can impact their employment outcomes, as rural economies mostly rely on informal channels of recruiting.

In addition, some key findings that emerged from data analysis suggest that universities would do well to offer students more opportunities for career development during their university years, in particular to promote self-reflection about possessed competences in relation to job requirements, and to increase knowledge about how the labour market functions. While this suggestion applies to all universities regardless of their location, it is particularly important for those located in areas with difficult labour markets where there are few jobs for university graduates and where finding a first position can take up to a year. According to the findings of this study, students do not invest time and effort in career development activities and in designing their own employability strategies; graduates also recognise that they did not think about the transition to the labour market during their university years, but focused exclusively on earning their degree.

Graduates also pointed to the gap between theory and practice, or in other words, between knowledge and competence, that made them unable to express their added value as graduates when looking for a job. This has significant implications for how universities should organise their programmes of study.

Therefore, while Italy's overall economic performance and the Marche Region's particular features play a significant role in the professional outcomes of graduates, universities have room for improvement. Ideally, employability provisions should be embedded within the existing activities of the university, rather than offered through the addition of extra support services. All three missions of the university – pedagogy, research and third mission activities – should be harnessed to help students become more employable. This would support creation of links between theory and practice, development of high cognitive skills, and understanding of the labour market.

## **Relations to previous research**

These findings are in line with desk and field research results confirming that rural economies, mostly composed of small to medium enterprises and micro enterprises (family businesses), apply different recruiting and working methods, share a low propensity to hire graduates, and value practical knowledge over credentials.

These findings confirm that for individuals, employability is a multi-faceted concept that goes beyond competence to include network links and is influenced by personal biographies, ambitions, and values.

The main contribution of this work to the literature is the application of qualitative methods, which are limited in employability research, and the focus on graduates instead of rural youth cohorts.

## **Limitations and further work**

The limitations of this work were already considered in the research design, and identified during the entire data analysis process. More robust data could be obtained by collecting information from graduates over a longer time. In addition, the work could be expanded to explore more than two field of studies.

Therefore, further work is needed to identify how certain aspects affect others. For example, analysis of transitions of STEM graduates in the same region might provide significant insight into the extent to which the field of study plays a role in finding employment.

In addition, results of the field data point to the value of considering other aspects affecting graduate employability in rural economies. First, employability can be affected by a person's perception of what it means to be a graduate. Second, the particular characteristics of the local work culture should be understood by those hoping to find work there. Further work is needed to understand the extent to which those aspects can be managed before a young person comes to the job market, that is, through focused interventions by the universities. While it is clear that universities cannot change the work culture of an area or country, they can, and should, put students in touch with businesses and entrepreneurs to stimulate improvements in their work habits and to correct their preconceptions. This would provide a long term benefit to the employability of their graduates.

# **APPENDIX**

## Appendix 1. HEInnovate dimensions and clustering

Table 1. Dimensions of the institutions under investigation, and related description and good practices statements

Dimension	Description	Good practice statements
1. Leadership and governance	Strong leadership and good governance are crucial to developing an entrepreneurial and innovative culture within a HEI. Many HEIs include the words ‘enterprise’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ in their mission statements, but in entrepreneurial institutions this is more than a reference. This section highlights some of the important factors HEIs may consider in order to strengthen their entrepreneurial agenda.	1.1. Entrepreneurship is a major part of the HEI’s strategy 1.2. There is commitment at a high level to implementing the entrepreneurial agenda 1.3. There is a model in place for <b>co-ordinating and integrating entrepreneurial activities across the HEI</b> 1.4. The HEI encourages and supports faculties and units to act entrepreneurially 1.5. The HEI is a <b>driving force for entrepreneurship and innovation in regional, social and community development</b>
2. Organisational Capacity: Funding, People and Incentives	The organisational capacity of a HEI drives its ability to deliver on its strategy. If a HEI is committed to carrying out entrepreneurial activities to support its strategic objectives, then key resources such as funding and investments, people, expertise and knowledge, and incentive systems need to be in place to sustain and grow its capacity for entrepreneurship	2.1. Entrepreneurial objectives are supported by a wide range of sustainable funding and investment sources 2.2. The HEI has the capacity and culture to build <b>new relationships and synergies across the institution</b> 2.3. The HEI is open to engaging and recruiting individuals with entrepreneurial attitudes, behaviour and experience 2.4. The HEI invests in staff development to support its entrepreneurial agenda



Dimension	Description	Good practice statements
		2.5. Incentives and rewards are given to staff who actively support the entrepreneurial agenda
3. Entrepreneurial Teaching and Learning	Entrepreneurial teaching and learning involve exploring innovative teaching methods and finding ways to stimulate entrepreneurial mind-sets. It is not just learning about entrepreneurship, it is also about being exposed to entrepreneurial experiences and acquiring the skills and competences for developing entrepreneurial mind-sets	<p>3.1. <b>The HEI provides diverse formal learning opportunities to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and skills</b></p> <p>3.2. <b>The HEI provides diverse informal learning opportunities and experiences to stimulate the development of entrepreneurial mindsets and skills</b></p> <p>3.3. <b>The HEI validates entrepreneurial learning outcomes which drives the design and execution of the entrepreneurial curriculum</b></p> <p>3.4. The HEI co-designs and delivers the curriculum with external stakeholders</p> <p>3.5. Results of entrepreneurship research are integrated into the entrepreneurial education offer</p>

Dimension	Description	Good practice statements
4. Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs	<p>HEIs can help students, graduates and staff consider starting a business as a career option. At the outset it is important to help individuals reflect on the commercial, social, environmental or lifestyle objectives related to their entrepreneurial aspirations and intentions. For those who decide to proceed to start a business, or other type of venture, targeted assistance can then be offered in generating, evaluating and acting upon the idea, building the skills necessary for successful entrepreneurship, and importantly finding relevant team members and getting access to appropriate finance and effective networks. In offering such support, an HEI should ideally act as part of a wider business support ecosystem rather than operating in isolation.</p>	<p>4.1. <b>The HEI increases awareness of the value of entrepreneurship and stimulates the entrepreneurial intentions of students, graduates and staff to start up a business or venture</b></p> <p>4.2. <b>The HEI supports its students, graduates and staff to move from idea generation to business creation</b></p> <p>4.3. Training is offered to assist students, graduates and staff in starting, running and growing a business</p> <p>4.4. <b>Mentoring and other forms of personal development are offered by experienced individuals from academia or industry</b></p> <p>4.5. The HEI facilitates access to financing for its entrepreneurs</p> <p>4.6. The HEI offers or facilitates access to business incubation</p>
5. Digital Transformation and Capability	<p>HEIs are already deploying digital technologies, however the uptake and integration varies among and within institutions. HEIs should make the most out of the opportunities presented by digital transformation and consider digital technologies as a key enabler. This section of the self-assessment provides a number of statements to reflect on HEI's digital capability, defined as the ability to</p>	<p>5.1 Digital teaching, learning and assessment</p> <p>5.2 Digital research methods</p> <p>5.3 <b>Digital stakeholder engagement and communication</b></p> <p>5.4 Digital facilities, infrastructure and services</p> <p>(<a href="https://heinnovate.eu/en/resource/heifosters-digital-culture-mean-innovation-">https://heinnovate.eu/en/resource/heifosters-digital-culture-mean-innovation-</a></p>

Dimension	Description	Good practice statements
	integrate, optimise and transform digital technologies to support innovation and entrepreneurship	and-entrepreneurship)
6. Knowledge Exchange and Collaboration	<p>Knowledge exchange is an important catalyst for organisational innovation, the advancement of teaching and research, and local development. It is a continuous process, which includes the ‘third mission’ of an HEI, defined as the stimulation and direct application and exploitation of knowledge for the benefit of the social, cultural and economic development of society. The motivation for increased collaboration and knowledge exchange is to create value for the HEI and society.</p>	<p>6.1. The HEI is committed to collaboration and knowledge exchange with industry, the public sector and society</p> <p><b>6.2. The HEI demonstrates active involvement in partnerships and relationships with a wide range of stakeholders</b></p> <p>6.3. The HEI has strong links with incubators, science parks and other external initiatives</p> <p><b>6.4. The HEI provides opportunities for staff and students to take part in innovative activities with business/the external environment</b></p> <p>6.5. The HEI integrates research, education and industry (wider community) activities to exploit new knowledge</p>

Dimension	Description	Good practice statements
7. The Internationalised Institution	Internationalisation is the process of integrating an international or global dimension into the design and delivery of education, research, and knowledge exchange. Internationalisation is not an end in itself, but a vehicle for change and improvement. It introduces alternative ways of thinking, questions traditional teaching methods, and opens up governance and management to external stakeholders. Therefore, it is linked very strongly to being entrepreneurial. It is not possible for a HEI to be entrepreneurial without being international, but the HEI can be international without being entrepreneurial or innovative	<p>7.1. Internationalisation is an integral part of the HEI's entrepreneurial agenda</p> <p>7.2. <b>The HEI explicitly supports the international mobility of its staff and students</b></p> <p>7.3. The HEI seeks and attracts international and entrepreneurial staff</p> <p>7.4. <b>International perspectives are reflected in the HEI's approach to teaching</b></p> <p>7.5. The international dimension is reflected in the HEI's approach to research</p>
8. Measuring Impact	Entrepreneurial / innovative HEIs need to understand the impact of the changes they bring about in their institution. The concept of an entrepreneurial / innovative HEI combines institutional self-perception, external reflection and an evidence-based approach. However, impact measurement in HEIs remains underdeveloped. The current measurements typically focus on the quantity of spin-offs, the volume and quality of intellectual property generation and research income generation, rather than graduate entrepreneurship, teaching	<p>8.1. The HEI regularly assesses the impact of its entrepreneurial agenda</p> <p>8.2. The HEI regularly assesses how its personnel and resources support its entrepreneurial agenda</p> <p>8.3. <b>The HEI regularly assesses entrepreneurial teaching and learning across the institution</b></p> <p>8.4. The HEI regularly assesses the impact of start-up support</p> <p>8.5. <b>The HEI regularly assesses knowledge exchange and collaboration</b></p> <p>8.6. The HEI regularly assesses the</p>

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Good practice statements</b>
	<p>and learning outcomes, retaining talent, the contribution to local economic development or the impact of the broader entrepreneurial agenda. This section identifies the areas where an institution might measure impact.</p>	<p>institution's international activities in relation to its entrepreneurial agenda</p>

Table 2. Areas on expected impact in students' employability

Dimension	Good practice statements	Impact on students' employability
1. Leadership and governance	1.1. Entrepreneurship is a major part of the HEI's strategy 1.2. There is commitment at a high level to implementing the entrepreneurial agenda 1.3. There is a model in place for <b>co-ordinating and integrating entrepreneurial activities across the HEI</b> 1.4. The HEI encourages and supports faculties and units to act entrepreneurially 1.5. The HEI is a <b>driving force for entrepreneurship and innovation in regional, social and community development</b>	Interdisciplinarity (1.3)  Regional dimension (1.5)  Community embeddedness (1.5)
2. Organisational Capacity: Funding, People and Incentives	2.1. Entrepreneurial objectives are supported by a wide range of sustainable funding and investment sources 2.2. The HEI has the capacity and culture to build <b>new relationships and synergies across the institution</b> 2.3. The HEI is open to engaging and recruiting individuals with entrepreneurial attitudes, behaviour and experience 2.4. The HEI invests in staff development to support its entrepreneurial agenda 2.5. Incentives and rewards are given to staff who actively support the entrepreneurial agenda	Interdisciplinarity (2.2)

Dimension	Good practice statements	Impact on students' employability
3. Entrepreneurial Teaching and Learning	<p>3.1. <b>The HEI provides diverse formal learning opportunities to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and skills</b></p> <p>3.2. <b>The HEI provides diverse informal learning opportunities and experiences to stimulate the development of entrepreneurial mindsets and skills</b></p> <p>3.3. <b>The HEI validates entrepreneurial learning outcomes which drives the design and execution of the entrepreneurial curriculum</b></p> <p>3.4. The HEI co-designs and delivers the curriculum with external stakeholders</p> <p>3.5. Results of entrepreneurship research are integrated into the entrepreneurial education offer</p>	<p>Entrepreneurial skills development (3.1; 3.2)</p> <p>Soft and transversal skills development (3.1; 3.2)</p> <p>Entrepreneurial assessment and recognition (3.3)</p>
4. Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs	<p>4.1. <b>The HEI increases awareness of the value of entrepreneurship and stimulates the entrepreneurial intentions of students, graduates and staff to start up a business or venture</b></p> <p>4.2. <b>The HEI supports its students, graduates and staff to move from idea generation to business creation</b></p> <p>4.3. Training is offered to assist students, graduates and staff in starting, running and growing a business</p> <p>4.4. <b>Mentoring and other forms of personal development are offered by experienced individuals from academia or industry</b></p> <p>4.5. The HEI facilitates access to financing for its entrepreneurs</p> <p>4.6. The HEI offers or facilitates access to business incubation</p>	<p>Entrepreneurship Labs (4.1; 4.2)</p> <p>Transversal skills (4.1; 4.2)</p> <p>Mentoring and networking (4.4)</p>

Dimension	Good practice statements	Impact on students' employability
5. Digital Transformation and Capability	5.1 <b>Digital teaching, learning and assessment</b> 5.2 Digital research methods 5.3 <b>Digital stakeholder engagement and communication</b> 5.4 Digital facilities, infrastructure and services  ( <a href="https://heinnovate.eu/en/resource/hei-fosters-digital-culture-mean-innovation-and-entrepreneurship">https://heinnovate.eu/en/resource/hei-fosters-digital-culture-mean-innovation-and-entrepreneurship</a> )	Digital engagement (community, market, etc.) (5.3)  Transversal skills (5.1)
6. Knowledge Exchange and Collaboration	6.1. The HEI is committed to collaboration and knowledge exchange with industry, the public sector and society 6.2. <b>The HEI demonstrates active involvement in partnerships and relationships with a wide range of stakeholders</b> 6.3. The HEI has strong links with incubators, science parks and other external initiatives 6.4. <b>The HEI provides opportunities for staff and students to take part in innovative activities with business/the external environment</b> 6.5. The HEI integrates research, education and industry (wider community) activities to exploit new knowledge	Exposure to market/business (6.2; 6.3) – professional networking  Links with regional markets (regional stakeholders) (6.2; 6.3)
7. The Internationalised Institution	7.1. Internationalisation is an integral part of the HEI's entrepreneurial agenda 7.2. <b>The HEI explicitly supports the international mobility of its staff and students</b> 7.3. The HEI seeks and attracts international and entrepreneurial staff 7.4. <b>International perspectives are reflected in the HEI's approach to teaching</b> 7.5. The international dimension is reflected in the HEI's	Mobility (7.2)  International learning (7.4)



Dimension	Good practice statements	Impact on students' employability
	<p>approach to research</p>	
8. Measuring Impact	<p>8.1. The HEI regularly assesses the impact of its entrepreneurial agenda  8.2. The HEI regularly assesses how its personnel and resources support its entrepreneurial agenda  8.3. <b>The HEI regularly assesses entrepreneurial teaching and learning across the institution</b>  8.4. The HEI regularly assesses the impact of start-up support  8.5. <b>The HEI regularly assesses knowledge exchange and collaboration</b>  8.6. The HEI regularly assesses the institution's international activities in relation to its entrepreneurial agenda</p>	Students' perceptions and assessment (8.3; 8.5)

In order to plan data collection, identified dimensions on students' employability have been clustered to refer to employability skills as they are reported in Table 3.

*Table 3. Definition of students' dimensions under investigation*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Includes/entails</b>	<b>References</b>
Transversal skills development	Direct/teaching and learning: 3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 4.1; 4.2; 5.1 Indirect/exposure, experiences : 1.5; 4.4; 5.3; 6.2; 6.3; 7.2; 7.3	Soft skills clusters – Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton & Fielitz (2012) WEF (2015) Employability skills for the future (2012) Eurobarometer – the Gallup organisation (2010)
Interdisciplinarity	1.3; 2.2	Mason et al (2009) Dalrymple and Miller (2006) Lyall et al (2015)
Entrepreneurial capacities development	3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 4.1; 4.2; 4.4	Gibb 2002 Sewell and Dacre Pool 2010 Rae 2007
Regional and local embeddedness, professional networks	1.5; 4.4; 5.3; 6.2; 6.3	Granovetter (1973, 1974) Wegener (1991) Holzer (1987) Wahba and Zenou (2005) Leonard and Onyx (2003)
International exposure – professional networks	5.3; 6.2; 6.3; 7.2; 7.4	Crossman and Clark (2010) Wiers-Jensen (2011)
Follow up (e.g. capacity of the institution to include students' point of views in assessment)	8.3; 8.5	Engelland (2000) Harvey (2003)

The final list of dimensions has been linked to potential sources of information, as reported in Table 4.

*Table 4. Dimensions addressed by the study, related topics and sources of information*

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Topics to be addressed</b>	<b>Desk research sources</b>	<b>Field research sources</b>
Transversal skills development	Pedagogy and didactics (provision of teaching guidelines? Teaching Units?)	University strategy for pedagogy, guidelines for teachers, etc.	Professors Head of units (pedagogy) Head of career services

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Topics to be addressed</b>	<b>Desk research sources</b>	<b>Field research sources</b>
	Career centres		Students
Interdisciplinarity	Curricula of study Projects and initiatives	Learning offer Laws and regulations on curriculum development	Professors Head of units (curriculum development) Students
Entrepreneurial capacities development	Entrepreneurship programmes Business/Innovation labs Start-ups support Other projects and initiatives	Existence/description of entrepreneurship programmes Existence/description of business labs, support to business creation	Head of programmes (curriculum development and extra-curricular activities) Head of Labs/other support for entrepreneurship and business creation Alumni, students
Regional and local embeddedness, professional networks	Third mission Strategy of the university Projects and initiatives	Documents on third mission University strategy	Head of research unit Head of Third mission (if available) Professors Students
International exposure – professional networks	Strategy of the university Projects and initiatives Conferences, seminars, other	University strategy documents Websites and other secondary sources	Head of research unit Head of internationalisation unit (if available) Professors Students
Follow up (e.g. capacity of the institution to include students' point of views in assessment)	Assessment methods and sources	Evaluation and assessment documents Quality assurance reports	Responsible for evaluation and quality assurance Students representatives