

EMPLOYMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PROVINCE OF TRENTO

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1. Introduction

It is with deep conviction and satisfaction that we have accepted the invitation to take part in this meeting, an occasion which enables us to reflect together on such a delicate and important question and at the same time to get to know our mutual environments, different geographically and culturally often distant but drawn to face together problems of European dimensions, such as the question of youth employment.

We believe that the key to the new Europe, the Europe of the peoples and their harmonious living together and even the States outside Europe, lies in this mutual getting to know each other and exchanging views.

It is in this sense, that the workshop prepared by the town of S. Sebastian, seems ideally to follow up the idea born just over a year ago in Trento when, during the "Civitatum Concilium", mayors and town officials of many European cities met to discuss the vital process of European unification. There have certainly been many talks on international level about the future of the unification, however, the origina-

lity of the meeting of mayors in Trento lies in the perspective in which the topic has been approached; the perspective of towns seen as places for harmonious living together, places of identity and feeling of belonging, places with opportunities but also with social problems.

At the end of that meeting we said good bye, deeply convinced that if Europe was to become a united entity it could not achieve this solely on the basis of the Maastricht treaty and the agreements among States. It had to find a common ground based on links between cultures, identities and different origins. We are convinced that this common ground will have to draw its force from a close contact between towns, the real playground where the great European ideas of development, harmonious living together and solidarity meet on a daily basis but where also severe social problems - such as unemployment - coexist.

This is the reason for agreeing to join our friends in S. Sebastian to whom, once again, we would like to express our sense of gratitude and appreciation for this important event.

2. Employment of young people in the Province of Trento

The Province of Trento is situated in the North East of Italy. This area has had for many years now the highest rate of economical expansion in the whole country and, except for some minimal differences among regional areas, the lowest rate of unemployment both generally and for young people. While in Italy the unemployment rate at present is stable at around 12%, in the North it has not been more than 6% for some years now.

In the Province of Trento in the years 1994 and 1995 this rate was stable at 5,6% with an increase (from 7,9% to 9,2%) in the field of female unemployment.

As far as the sectors of employment are concerned, during the last 10 years there has been an increase in employment in the service area, at present at 64,9%; a fall in agriculture, 6,5% at the moment; and a substantial stability in the sector of industry.

The global picture, therefore, if compared to the national situation, is quite reassuring specially given the fact that in Italy an unemployment rate of around 5% is considered almost "physiological". There are, however, certain dynamics within the youth labour market which raise some questions and unease. Compared to other regions of Northern Italy, the Trentino has a relatively young population with a constant population drop which has determined a substantial stability of the young

people entering the labour market and old workers leaving the active population band.

At the same time we are witnessing a growth in the number of young people who carry on their studies after leaving school (in Italy there are eight years of compulsory school) and, therefore, an increase of the general cultural level and professional training.

Reassuring, the young sector of the labour force can be split into three categories; teenagers who stop their studies after leaving compulsory school and the drop-outs from high school, young people with short professional training after compulsory school (usually technical training) and young people with higher qualifications and diplomas.

It results from various researches carried out in the course of recent years and from data provided by the provincial observatory on the labour market, that the subjects with the weakest training background are also in the weakest position on the labour market, with less contractual power and minor chances of movement vertically and horizontally. Since both the service sector and industrial enterprises require trained workers, equipped at least with competitive training, the available ground for non-trained workers is thus reduced to seasonal work and in any case to manual labour. These are jobs often rejected by young people or, anyway, considered temporary, certainly not sufficiently motivating for a work experience.

Therefore, this sector is more and more discarded by young people who are seeking a meaningful existence and this fact increases the sense of existential unease, already widely spread among the young generation. Furthermore, the manual labour market with low or un-trained workers is nowadays often flooded by requests from migrants, mainly from East European countries. In 1995 almost 40% of work- places in the agricultural sector was filled by migrants.

The situation of young people with better training seems less problematic. For them there still seem to be sufficient openings in the sectors of service, industry and crafts, even if an increase in the lapse of time between leaving school and starting work can be noticed.

The policies of the public subsidies for youth employment have consequently focused on two main sectors; the continuous up-dating of short professional training courses with specific projects in line with the needs of the world of crafts and industry. These projects often include stages in a company or offer incentives to young drop-outs or teenagers whose scholastic carrier stopped after the last compulsory class to carry on their studies.

This last aim seems particularly pertinent. Socio-economic analyses reveal that these youngsters very often come from medium to low social classes and through a process of “following in the footsteps” recreate the same existential framework as that of the families they come from. In this way that progressive aspiration for something better which for several years characterised the socio-economic ambitions of many classes, is interrupted, in other words: it is as if in these social classes all hope had died. Thus we are witnessing a increasing rigidity within the social framework with a progressively growing gap between different social classes.

In order to slow down this process attempts are being made to try to identify those instruments which could offer all teenagers at compulsory school the same training opportunities with special subsidies for the most needy.

The town council of Trento together with the provincial educational authorities has started a project called “Progetto Città = town project” aimed at those teenagers who run the risk of being expelled from high school. This project foresees the inclusion of socially useful working experiences into the educational programme of the school. This contact with the working world should offer the weaker students new motivation for their scholastic efforts and ward off the drop of self-esteem, often a consequence of scholastic failure.

This project which I have described very briefly and synthetically is certainly not sufficient enough to interrupt the social process I mentioned earlier. We hope, however, that it will at least help the town to become aware of this existing problem and thus starting to mobilise funds and managing creativity for building a “safety net” around the weakest youngsters of our towns.

Of course, the improvement of the educational system and its ability to positively involve teenagers is beyond the competence of the town and province authorities. Perhaps it is the European Community itself which will have to work on the progressive homogenisation of educational programmes in the various countries in order to bring them in step with the new and ever changing needs of the labour market in constant evolution.

And certainly by talking about it among us, among towns, local municipalities, study centres and universities we could create the foundation for this new “European collective intelligence”.

Thanks again, therefore, to the town of S. Sebastian for having organised this workshop and our best wishes to all for the fruitful outcome of your efforts.