

Session 3

Comments to “Forecasting employment prospects for higher education graduates”

presented by
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What have we learned about issues?

The masterful presentation by Chris Warhurst allowed us to learn about issues, trends and long-term forecasts which are crucial not only in understanding our topics, but also in devising our future evaluation and research methodologies. I will constrain myself in stressing only some of them, starting from the issues ...

1. A crucial role of the job destination and the demand side of the labour markets is established vs a still dominant cross-eye bias for a supply side approach
2. Future employment trends and predictions are recognized as relevant for assessment studies and strategic policies (I am referring especially to: Industry 4.0, S3, SCS) in parallel to the surveys of former experiences and studies, like the AlmaLaurea ones

What have we learned about issues?

3. Core issues concerning the future of jobs and the capability of universities in their provision of the right quantity and quality of HE are identified in:

- the availability of jobs;
- the conditions for access to jobs
- the quality of jobs (with respect to employment situation, income situation and social recognition situation)

What have we learned about trends?

1. The structural evolution of jobs across Europe seems to favour three very divergent trends: upgrading (e.g. for Germany); downgrading (e.g. for Italy); polarization (e.g. for UK)
2. Since over the period 2011-2014 most job growth occurred in higher quality jobs, countries lagging behind in their employment structure risk more
3. Irregular, casual and flexible forms of paid employment are widespread together with unpaid and involuntary part-time or temporary work in the transition between education and employment. The latter forms have been scarcely investigated
4. Intermediate skill level cannot be the only main object of HE provision and differentiating the supply of knowledge and skills seems relevant

What have we learned about long-term forecasts?

1. Two main long-term scenarios are in competition for explaining observed trends: robotization vs überization
2. Both scenarios stress the prospect of the “death of the job” traditionally performed by a designated agent (an employee)
3. In the first scenario the traditional job is replaced by the robot, while in the second it is replaced by means of crowdsourcing (outsourcing to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of a sort of open call)
4. In both scenarios the paradox of a knowledge-based economy with low scarcity human capital of and low pay for it is worked out

Questions and comments

1. As we have seen, the structural evolution of jobs across Europe seems to favour three very divergent trends (upgrading; downgrading; polarization). A first question comes in: how can we establish that each of these trends is coherent with the two scenarios?
2. How can the medium-term forecast of an increase in high quality jobs and high qualified workers (Fig. 11th slide) coexist with the two scenarios?
3. A strong assumption seems implied in the überization scenario: redundancy of human capital is a necessary condition for the sustainability of this prediction
4. Will it be the HE system, through its expansion and fragmentation, the only provider of the qualifications required?

Questions and comments

5. By the way, without assumption (3), neither the German project Industria 4.0, neither the European S3 and SCS could be feasible while the network-based development of internationally competitive clusters of firms could suffer

6. Moreover, how can we reconcile the development of human capital, social capital and cultural capital as well as their well-tuned interplay in fostering of graduate employability with the two grim scenarios?

7. More than that, in the überization scenario, the physiological component of “mismatch” could not be anymore addressed to in a systematic way by “work based training” or by the “competence pipeline” which parallel on the side of firms the educational system ... but, what about the “new tight couplings of education and employment” you speak about in conclusion

Questions and comments

8. Furthermore, when speaking about “legal clarification” one can wonder if another strong assumption is that new forms of “social costs of business enterprise” will be transferred to local, national or supranational communities (K. W. Kapp, 1951)

9. Finally the very location of our Conference suggests that part of the educational needs for HE can derive from social demand and strategic requirements (e.g. close to the role of educational bridges of universities and to the issues of migration and institutional building in the Mediterranean basin). How can we accommodate them in your scheme?