

Experiencing Higher Education, Transitions and the Graduate Labour Market: The Non-Traditional Student Perspective

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Abstract

Perceptions and experiences of a sample of nontraditional students in transition from Higher Education to the Labour Market in Western Sicily

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Introduction and aim of the work. In recent years a long economic crisis whipped Europe and, in consequence, it affected the labour market and the occupational opportunities of the young people. Among many negative data registered in Italy, unemployment in the individual 20-34, reached percentage values as high as 40%. The purpose of this work was to investigate perceptions and expectations of a group of nontraditional students to be about to graduate in Western Sicily.

Methodology. A Group of 200 students (112F/88M) attending classes of the last years in four randomly selected University Courses of Study for the three years degree. (Economics of Cultural Heritage, Sciences of Education, Biotechnology, Environmental Sciences) were interviewed using a 25 item questionnaire. Individuals characteristic were: be the first graduate in the family; be from an inland area of Sicily; belong to a family running agricultural activity and having deep roots in the territory; be in course not more than 5 years.

Results. All the students selected was substantially satisfied by the courses chosen. All were concerned with the post graduation period, as well as all complained for the scarcity of opportunity for employment in general in the southern regions of Italy. The most of the sample (86%), affirmed that certainly they will transfer North, either in Italy or, if possible, in Europe for continuing education and job search. Main obstacles they foresaw in the search of employment were: reduction in the offer of the labour market; low experience and consequently limited info in working conditions, wages, policies and facilities of the labour market requirements; a too rigid labor market; lack of practical competencies; requests of the Employers that do not fit with their competencies; difficult to obtain graduate-level work and to break into the works they were aiming at. Other difficulties to be worried, were: being woman; coming from south; the southern accent; living in a different place, environment and mentality; missing the support of the family.

Considerations. The liberal society and the global market did not secure better quality of life and equality in accessing the labour market and opportunity of employment. There remains a distance between Education, the dynamic of market and Employers. New ideas in the world travel faster than the speed for new ideas are internalized, accepted, realized and become individual opportunity. Efficient investment in human resources by Employers and Institutions should be requested. In this respect, the capability to carry out the education of competent graduates becomes crucial. The relationship between higher education and the labour market has been considered a linear relation. In the modern society, however, complexity of the systems predominate. Different factors interfere and relations cannot be simplified. Education, therefore, needs new pathway of approaching complex systems and new way to produce competencies in the youth higher education to have a better insight in understanding the youth labour market. In any country "successful development ...depends mainly on the ability of a Nation to make good use of human resources". (Becker G., Nobel Prize in Economy).