EMOR

SWOT ANALYSIS ITALIAN CONTEXT

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The aim of Swot Context Analysis is to describe the state-of-art of Italian VET system, taking into account the socio-economical and political trends that occurred in Italy in the last years. Results of analysis highlight a situation of VET system that allows describing accurately the key priorities to address and the aims and specific objectives to set in the field of education and training policies. During the assessment process VET system was analyzed under a dual perspective:

- Internal: we analyzed the intrinsic characteristics as VET current regulation, training standards collected by official statistics, current organizational practices, situation of school population

- External: we analyzed the characteristics of socio-economical context as overall economic situation, labor market trends, social composition (also from an interethnic point of view), trends in culture, security and equal opportunities policies etc.

In this perspective it's important to stress the reform called La Buona Scuola (The Good School), Law 107/2015, which introduces significant modifications by fostering the School-Work Alternation. SLA consists of the implementation of specific paths made under the control of schools and in cooperation with businesses, employer associations, chambers of commerce, industry, craftsmanship and agriculture and/or public and private bodies (including third sector) that are available to receive students and to organize learning activities in work situations. Indeed alternation idea is based on the possibility to move from

a period of schooling to a period of work. The concept of a learning way based on the alternation of school and work has the aim to set a flexibile learning way in order to ensure a systematic link between the traditional learning (classroom) and the practical experience and to guide the young in order to enhance personal vocations, interests and learning styles. Furthermore the alternation is meant to link the training delivery with the cultural, social and economic development of the local territory.

The first essential condition for implementing the initiatives is the modular organization of activities, providing alternation between theoretical and practical training. According with this approach, on-going assessment, which accompanies the implementation of each activity, enables both the school (or university) and the world of work to evaluate the abilities and skills really gained by the students, so that it will be possible to integrate not acquired skills in an additional module or to complement the curricula with contents more specifically linked with the business environment. Furthermore students can complete traineeship in Italy or abroad. These activities will be recognized through the issue of certification by schools and training institutes. These institutions can organize curricula providing jointly planned learning paths (by educational system and enterprise system).

This dual perspective allowed to identify systematically the strengths and weaknesses in VET systems (internal dimension) and the opportunities and constraints in the social context (external dimension).

The analysis is based on the need of rediscovering and promoting the cultural and education value of work, in relationship with the school institution. This conviction not only recognizes the value added of an operational and applied-to- concrete-case knowledge, but identifies well-defined training activities as a unique opportunity to gain transversal, individual, social and occupational competences, starting from the right-duty of education and training.

Below the SWOT matrix, which has been divided into four quadrants representing the four

factors that are objects of analysis.

SWOT ANALYSIS	
STRENGHTS	**WEAKNESSES**
• increase in the school attendance rates • constant rise in the number of students who access to high schools and vocational technical schools (14-18 aged) • increase in the number of graduated people in technical vocational schools • low importance of gender differences in the access to VET system • presence of cases of excellence in comparison to the standard competences in some strands of technical vocational schools • increase in the participation of students in educational and training activities – at a rate of 8% per year (data Isfol 2014) • effective territorial distribution of school facilities that propose training paths providing people with professional skills • not significant gender differences in the education system • interrelationship between local enterprises and school institutions	• inadequate school facilities both from the point of view of the training activities and from the point of view of safety standards • lack of efficiency in the distribution of public expenditure on education • permanence of out-of-date organizational and managerial practices in the school environment • unequal spread of school autonomy culture • strong differences (both at territorial level and among the various schools) in the implementation of training and educational policies • overall standards of competences gained by students lower than EU average (data based on survey PISA 2014) • permanence of high rates of early school leaving in the secondary school • disaffection towards scientific and technical subjects • inadequacy of teachers training • lack of participation of adults in training activities linked to the lifelong learning issue • low integration of new technologies in training and teaching processes

SWOT ANALYSIS	
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• legislation consistent with European guidelines • start of decentralization process of School-Work Alternation paths • presence of initial training paths of teachers to make them more capable to teach at secondary level • start of spread process of School-Work Alternation policies • increase in the number of people enrolled at University system • increase in the work opportunities of students after leaving VET system • strengthening of the assessment national system • broadening of competences after leaving the VET system • strengthening of the relationship between enterprises and territorial school networks	• teachers ageing • lack of economic growth and risk of productive stagnation • labor demand aimed at people with low-and-middle educational qualifications (Medium and Small Enterprises) • burden of social background when people choose a VET path • influence of gender component when people choose educational paths (high schools and VET schools) • delay in addressing the issue of the strong presence of migrant people both at teaching level and at organizational level • high level of segregation among schools providing different kinds of education (scientific, VET, humanist etc) • training policies extremely heterogeneous at national level • "brain-drain" of skilled human capital

STRENGHTS

The pointed out positive dynamics are a combined effect of a number of factors. One of these is linked to the spread of educational system: training policies tend to include a growing number of people. However some serious risks for the capacity of system will accompany this increase if there aren't prepared any support interventions such as the increase and the streamlining of the public expenditure for VET. Another factor is the growth of the average prosperity of population and this introduces other two aspects: the improvement of living conditions and the growth of individual and family expectations, in terms of a greater tendency to access to high school and university studies.

WEAKNESSES

One of the most critical aspects affecting the VET system and its development is surely the problem of school buildings. It is both a threaten for the health and safety of people who attend the schools and, from a more general point of view, a brake on developing the VET system, and it would require investing significant amounts of economic resources to be appropriately recovered.

Run-down facilities, or somehow facilities with an intended use different from the training/educational one, can make the school a neither pleasant nor interesting environment and can produce negative spill-over effects for the involvement of students and their performance standards. The Italian shortage in allocating public expenditure on education is particularly evident if we stress the school building management. In the context analysis it was stressed that more than 90% of public expenditure is aimed at the functioning of the system, which includes mainly the salaries of personnel, but educational system suffers from a lack of funds for school building. Another point of weakness is the contrast between the boost to innovate the ICT infrastructures – subject of strong efforts in the last years – and the delay in the innovation of school building.

OPPORTUNITIES

Since the first half of the 1990s in Italy, as many other European countries, there were some important reforms in the field of Public Administration. We can mention the Bassanini reform, the introduction of Management Control, the increasing managerialization of Officials and Supervisors. In the educational field we can mention the reforms made in 1997 and in 1999 aimed at promoting and implementing the development of the principles of school autonomy. We have to consider that also the Moratti reform (Letizia Moratti was the former Minister for

Education from 2001 to 2006), only party implemented, contributed to a strong change of Italian educational system and primary level schooling. Law 440/1997 was strongly criticized for the scarcity of funds to be invested, however it set up a regulatory framework that provides the schools with important means to implement the reform. Regulatory means that schools can enjoy are in line with the main European directives aimed at easing the subsidiarity in the decision-making processes in public administration and, therefore, in the school environment too.

The overall change is fostered by the current decentralization of decision-making, with the transfer of various responsibilities from State's central administration to Regional Administrations (according to the reform of Title V of Italian Constitution) and to schools. Last reform called The Good School (Law 107/2015) fosters the schools to be opened up to local territories, through agreements with public bodies, enterprises and other schools, as in the case of schools networks. School autonomy provides schools with a greater degree of freedom in defining curricula and educational paths and allows implementing a wider and more diversified educational and training offer.

THREATS

One of the most risks of the Italian situation is the tendency to perpetuate dynamics of scholastic segregation. This problem is evenly diffused throughout the country and so it is not influenced by geographical localization. This implies the probability to have schools with students homogeneous in terms of social background and school performance, with the risk of increasing the existence of better and worse schools (using a football metaphor widespread in Italy, we could call them schools of league A and schools of league B), at the expense of having a VET system not heterogeneous and divided into the different respective social classes.

After all, the schools segregation can be caused by the strong influence that still today the social background has on the choice of study plan and risks generating reproduction mechanisms of the

segregation itself in the educational system. These mechanisms might become more acute also because of a higher presence of migrant people. This increasing presence, which broadly involves the field of social policies, may be a critical issue if it is not managed with educational and organizational adequate strategies because it necessarily requires innovations both in the teaching methods and in school curricula.

Furthermore an obstacle for the spread of the issues of VET and innovations may be the constant and progressive ageing of teaching staff that emphasizes the issue of providing training for trainers, taking into account also the need of adapting the professional competencies to the changes produced mainly by the new technologies.