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The Neet. The lost bet

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Abstract

In the present scenario, education plays a very strategic role. It is an investment with a postponed productivity, unfortunately uncertain, but necessary. It is, especially today, an investment both on the personal and on the social level, a necessary bet. Especially in this period when the occupation is linked to the capability of handling your own flexibility, the outcomes of the personal fields depend especially on the quantity and quality of personal, cultural, economic and social means which are already at every person's disposal. With the following risk to start a widespread process of social immobilization and temporary occupation of a larger group of *new poor people*.

The "Neet", an acronym for "Not Educational, Employment or Training" are, potential, some of these new poor. They are less qualified people or however they are not ready to improve their own competences according to a *life long learning* plan in order to respond to the requirements of a market that calls for a competition upwards. Neet risk strongly to face a situation of structural unemployment which will force them to a condition of "irreversibly" weak people, with following expenses as *lack* of working forces both on a personal level but also on a economic and social level.

Within this worrying and dangerous phenomenon, women have a particular weakness, that is a result of traditional gender representation and specific labor market characteristics. This analysis is focused on Apulian female Neet, on their school career and the educational idea, on their strategies of seeking a job, and on their future perspectives. And it aimed to observe different types of female Neet, according to the complexity of this phenomenon.

Keywords: education system, job market, women

1. Betting on education

In the present scenery, where job crisis shows a structural character, education represents not only a means to face the current changed setting, but the only strategy to do it. Even though it is not free from the limits and paradoxes already introduced by Bourdieu and by all the French conflicting school¹, it could allow, on certain conditions, to go beyond social destinies, in an attributable way, by granting spaces or, at least, glimmers of acquisition. Education plays a very strategic role and shows itself, especially today, as an investment both on the personal and on the social level, a necessary *bet*. It is an investment with a postponed productivity, unfortunately uncertain, but necessary. The individual social position is strongly influenced by the education level, «by the amount of information and knowledge that people can create and exchange within a web not, where they are placed» (Ferri 2011, 142). Especially in this period when the occupation is linked to the capability of handling your own flexibility (Ceri 2003), by making it an opportunity of change and professional and personal enrichment rather than a *threat* against the possibility to plan consistent professional careers and existential walks. The *match to play* with this incertitude becomes

¹ Bourdieu (1970) underlines differences between equal access and equal opportunities of success, problematizing the neutral character of school and of all education system. This one, in fact, collect the initial differences in terms of cultural capital and, managing them s natural abilities, ends to amplify them. He denies the meritocratic mechanism focused in Parsons analysis. Also the Parsons concept of «need for achievement» is, in Bourdieu reflections, a part of "class ethos" transmitted by the family. In this way many people of lower and also of medium social status, don't invest in education and exclude themselves from the competition for high social positions.

different according to the *stake* you have got when you start *playing*. It can strongly interfere with personal «chances of life» (Dahrendorf 1981, 38 sgg.). The outcomes of the personal fields depend especially on the quantity and quality of personal, cultural, economic and social means which are already at every person's disposal, with the following risk to start a widespread process of social immobilization and temporary occupation of a larger group of *new poor people*. Inside the society of knowledge and learning, all the possessed competences and abilities become some of the frontiers of the new disparities and they can interfere strongly with, and sometimes determine, people's job career and walk of life.

The theme of competences becomes central in the scenery of strategies in the medium and long term, which are able to help people to manage their job careers in times of flexibility. In order to respond to this challenge however, education has to avoid every technical temptation, «it has to be something more than an introduction to professional activity. It is a life setting which prepares to complexity and to long stages of personal responsibility» (Dahrendorf 2003, 52). Education cannot be considered as characterized by a short instrumental view, focused on the job needs of the same involved people. Nowadays, what is “immediately applicable” in the professional career has deeply changed. The aim is no more offering the knowledge which is directly useful at work, but it is organizing knowledge webs and especially building and cultivating a critical and a reflective attitude in educated people, so that they can prove their skills within the complex present sceneries. In these sceneries the productivity and the competition rate, at an economic and social level, depend widely on the capability of the society and the interrelated social and cultural subsystems to renew and create new knowledge (Ferri 2011). The subject of education is no more only learning but, also and especially, access competences to knowledge and learning competences (Colombo 2010).

2. The Neet. The lost bet

The word “Neet” is an acronym which means “Not Educational, Employment or Training” and has developed after having been used in a report in 1999 by the Social Exclusion Unit. Neet are a heterogeneous group of people between 18 and 29, who are neither registered at school nor at university, they neither work nor attend a vocational course. In Italy, according to the Istat data, they are more than two millions, that is to say two young people out of every ten people among those involved in the same age range (Istat 2012)². They are less qualified people or however they are not ready to improve their own competences according to a *life long learning* plan in order to respond to the requirements of a market that calls for a competition upwards and that, in view of a surplus of job offer, can afford to *choose* its human resources. Neet risk strongly to face a situation of structural unemployment which will force them to a condition of “irreversibly” weak people, with following expenses as *lack* of working forces both on a personal level but also on a economic and social level.³

This complex phenomenon, that is also increasing, has got a lot of causes which together create perverse multiplicative results. As regarding a lot of these young people, it can thought that this heavy condition, as a result, of a negative representation of education and of the common idea that learning is not useful to find out a job. In fact, a lot of Neet have only the leaving certificate awarded by a middle school or, more rarely, the high school leaving certificate, and this situation shows that they scarcely invest on education. A lot of young people are not aware that a solid cultural capital is necessary for a professional career. So these people avoid other investments on their education and become weak resources with a scarce or low level of employment, colliding with many difficulties for every quality access to the job market and compromising, when they gain a job, also the permanence in this one.

² In the last annual report 2012“La situazione del paese” (referred to 2011), Istat write about 2,1 milion of Neet people in Italy, it means 22,1% vs 15,3% in Europe.

³ Communication, education and *Knowledge management* tend to become a very powerful lever to change organizations and society. In a similar way, the *knowledge workers* become the main maker of the value in complex societies.

A lot of these young people are believed to have also a negative opinion of the job market, as regarding the low or less qualified demand. This hypothesis is confirmed by the background of these young people who have often become prematurely inactive, who do not work and do not seek for a job (this last is the most significant datum).⁴ But if these young people have been forced to the inactivity by a process of a more or less fast «discouragement»,⁵ other young people have been influenced by a “preventive” discouragement: they have not even looked for a job, because they are aware that it is useless, so they get stuck with the perverse effects of a «prophecy that comes true».⁶ If we consider how these ideas are already able, one by one, to generate destroying choices and results on the personal and working level (in terms of disinvestment on education and difficulties in terms of job seeking), it is easy to imagine how these ideas together can increase their effects. These people, without a solid cultural capital, face the job market in a disadvantaged position which make them difficult and also improbable finding out a job. So their progressive distrust increase and they distance themselves from job market, so this situation will discourage further investments on education, inside a twisted process.

As regarding the internal structure of this heterogeneous group of people, we find some common characteristics: they have medium-low qualification, they have sometimes not finished the compulsory school, they live especially in the southern regions and, at last, they are women.

Concerning the first element, the low qualification shows a low level of investment on education and causes an higher risk not to be suitable to the market, so the job seeking is longer. But a new and alarming datum is the increasing number of Neet young people with a high qualification. Here we can consider some elements: the mass access to university has created a high number of graduates, so there is now an imbalance between an oversupply of qualified working forces and a demand that, above all in this period, is decreasing. Above all, often this wider access has not created the necessary awareness to develop the competences set, by going beyond the simple possessed qualification. Therefore, a lot of graduates believe that they have already «learnt too much», so they possess a sufficient qualification to enter the job market.

In the South Italy, as regarding the second considered element, this phenomenon is increasing in an alarming way: almost a third of the graduates, who are less than 34 years old, neither works nor studies. The southern students, who are out of the learning system and the job market, are 167.000, with a negative situations especially in Basilicata and Calabria (Svimez 2011).

At last, Neet are moreover women. Here we want to focus on this last aspect. In Italy more than 56% of the total Neet, at a national level, is represented by women. Even though the dramatic situation regards the southern girls, e.g. the 80% in Campania, the structural character of this phenomenon is witnessed by an high number in other regions which are situated in completely different geographical areas, e.g. the 60% in Trentino. Despite their better school performances, compared to boys' performances, girls show their *suffering* from a difficult relationship with job⁷. Women, as men, have difficulties to realize the education value, but women have more problems because they suffer from the lacking coherence between their chosen learning career and their job

⁴ The inactive condition is strongly different from the unemployed condition. Even though unemployed people do not work, they show an “active” interest in the job search. Therefore, they are considered “Working forces” by Istat.

⁵ This is the condition of some women, who after looking for a job at length and in vain, in the end deciding to give up their search, leave the world of the unemployed and the workforce and *end up* as part of the inactive population. Discouraged people display a particular brand of inactivity because they are all *potentially* unemployed and therefore active (Brandolini, Cipollone e Viviano 2006) persons who have “chosen” to stay or place themselves outside the sphere of workforce membership because factors pertaining to their personal sphere or to their wider context are perceived as particularly difficult or even hostile (Carrera 2011b).

⁶ Merton develops the concept of «prophecy that comes true», starting from Thomas' theorem – meant as «a further clarification that men do not respond only to the objective elements of a situation but also, and sometimes firstly, to the meaning they give to this situation. And when they have attributed a situation a particular meaning, this meaning is the crucial reason of their behaviour and of its consequences» (1975, 766). The «prophecy that comes true» is, at the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation, which determines a behaviour that makes true what originally was a *false* conception (ibidem, 768). As the same author says, «the opinion causes the reality» (Ibidem, 771).

⁷ In the report diffused in June 2012, Istat write of 51,8% of women cut off of any professional activities, and Svimez (Associazione per lo Sviluppo dell'Industria nel Mezzogiorno) notes that in South Italy among young women (age 15-34) are engaged in regular job only 23,3%. And about women with university studies, it continues «indeed of become subjects of development policies, they risk to stay at home with children and old people, as consequence of welfare system that make difficult the work-family balance».

ambitions,⁸ and moreover because women make learning choices which are not often appropriate, so a lot of young girls enter *poor* markets, e.g. public or private personal services and social services (job markets already saturated by others female workers and characterized by low productivity), as regarding the wage quality and the permanence and stability opportunities⁹. There is also an additional specific female problem related with traditional gender representation: many women believe that work is not “female affair”! so they don’t invest in education or in training and choose weak strategies job search. Or even do not look for it at all!

When we analyse the young Neet girls by referring to the missed access to the job market, it is appropriate, or better necessary, to consider the analysis regarding the most common relationship between women and job market (Carrera 2011a). Women suffer the market *opposition* concerning the job demand due to the prejudices of their potential employers who find them *untrustworthy* since, sooner or later, they will look after their family. They suffer also from an objective lack of time availability due to the care giving tasks, which today fall, especially if not exclusively, on women. Still today, according a lot of surveys, women have to look after all care tasks linked to the «widen maternity» (ivi, 245) and to babyhood. So they are very often forced to stay at home during the whole period when children are not self-sufficient.¹⁰ All these elements, are results, according to a circular process of causes and effects, of gender representations which still characterize especially Italian culture. In these representations there is always an effect of naturalization¹¹ of the woman role as *care giver*, who is still forced, whether she likes it or not, to be held to the «devotion trap» (De Beauvoir 1967). As consequences, many women consider the motherhood a own exclusive task, sometimes a *mission*, which asks for a complete and exclusive *devotion*, at the risk of high expenses both on the individual and especially on the wider social level.

3. The female Neet. Problems and opportunities

By starting the female over-representation inside this complex phenomenon, we have chosen to inquire, through an empirical survey, the reality of these young women, their attitudes, their reasons, their perspectives. For this reason, we have heard fifty-seven women between 18 and 29 years old, who are in the condition of “neither... nor” (neither students nor workers), and we have addressed them a semi-structured interview about three subjects: the learning career and the educational idea, any itinerary of seeking a job, the future perspectives. The considered geographical area is Apulia¹².

A lot of these young women live with their family, only ten with a partner or alone, and most of them belong to a low or medium social status families, with no high scholarship status¹³, and only few of them are seeking for a job also out of Apulia region.

The result of interviews were analysed by content analysis.

The survey has shown five different “types” of women: along an hypothetical continuum there are a) the *convinced* ones, b) the “*waiting for*” women, c) the *unawares* and d) the *resigned* one, and e) the *qualified* ones.

a) The *convinced* ones are young and very young girls who consider women as naturally inclined for housework tasks. They are all focused on completely traditional gender representations and they

⁸ The increasing importance attributed to this problem is witnessed by the investment on orienteering processes, which are realized at national level in some passages (e.g. the choices towards secondary high school and university).

⁹ Young women continue to choose jobs traditionally designed “for women”, especially because they can allowing work-life balance.

¹⁰ This specific welfare lack is linked to the lack of services for elderly and disabled people. Together they cause similar consequences for women as regarding time and house working, so that they spend all their time at home.

¹¹ The naturalization of the woman role as family *care giver* opens the problem of the ownership of care tasks and their organization, and forces to think again at the whole system of gender representations and of gender relationships.

¹² Apulia is a Southern Italy region whose job market is characterized by a lot of industrial districts (T.A.C., as acronym of textile, manufacturing e footwear). There are a lot of medium (also local branches of multinational economic organizations) and moreover small industries involved in construction and engineering. For a depth analysis of Apulia job market cfr. Persichella (2009).

¹³ As “high scholarship family” we mean mother and father with university studies.

believe that the best satisfaction is having a successful family life. A lot of them have got also an higher qualification, but held without a firm belief and which is often linked to children care. There are also two holders of a linguistic high school diploma. It's no accidental that their "weak" learning careers are linked to a low mental investment on education and to a negative idea about its value. But some of these young girls are probably influenced by processes of *rationalization in retrospect* and of *cognitive consonance* which have changed that domestic life, considered a unavoidable destiny, into a desire, especially in a social micro-context without a strong motivation and in a geographical area without real job opportunities. These women exclude themselves from educational system as from job market, representing a particular Neet type: the inactive "by choice".

«I don't believe I will work. I finished school and now I go out with my boyfriend and we make a lot of things. I wanted to finish the middle school because my father wanted it, but I got bored at school and then I knew that school was useless. I will not work like my mother did, she was always tired, she always complained and then my family had never money (...). I want to get married, have children and handle them (...). However people never find out a job... at least, I can live better in my house and this is my desire (...) I believe that women are inclined to create a family and heal own family» (21 years old);

«I think that women aren't inclined to work. I believed it since I was a child and therefore I have always thought that a lot of school years were useless. However, my parents wanted a diploma so I obtained a diploma as nursery teacher so I satisfied them... at least this diploma will help me with my children (...) I think that this is the real job for a woman: looking after her husband and her children, in short her family. You can't work if you want to have children. You can't be a good mother on these conditions» (24 years old);

«I like going to school and I was sad when I finished it, but I knew that it had to finish so I got used to. I think that the most important thing for girls is having a boyfriend who loves and respects you, and then when girls grow up it's important to have children (...) I don't want to work because I want to be a good mother who looks after her children (...). My sister has started working and then she divorced her husband because she was never at home and her house was horrible! (...) Then she was rarely with her children. My mother says that she made a mistake when she decided to work (...) I will be a good mother» (23 years old).

b) There are also some young women who can be considered, consider themselves and speak about themselves as "*waiting women*". They aren't completely convinced that women are inclined only for housework nor the house is the place where they can find their achievement. On the contrary they attribute job a strong identity value and also an instrumental value, which is sometimes clearly declared. They are also not resigned to the idea of not working. Instead, they show some signs of future planning and they are convinced that "one day" they will have a job, but they do not know precisely what kind of job. Nevertheless, they start no concrete effort. Moreover, they are not aware of the low coherence between their desire to work and their store of knowledge and competences. For this reason, they do not get involved in any learning career and, especially in some cases, they are convinced that this type of investment is totally "useless". This *waiting women* are practically "blocked", while they are waiting that something will happen and they will receive a job offer. Job for which they are sometimes not ready, as some of the interviewees assert. Even any negative experiences of refusal stimulates them to invest on their education in order to be more attractive in the job market. They show to know their aim of looking for a job, but they do not know the strategies to obtain it. So a lot of interviewed show a passive and fatalistic attitude of *waiting for a job*.

One of the interviewed introduces also an element to think about, when she declares to have noticed that some employers pay attention to competences immediately linked to the know-how more than school qualification, which is considered not so important. This is the starting point to underestimate the importance of education and to justify decision not to invest in education or in training system.

«In the South Italy the job situation is complicated. Now, I believe it strongly. (...) I have studied because I wanted to work, I took a vocational diploma because I knew that without a diploma you can't work, so I didn't stop at the end of the middle school. But all has been useless because I'm still waiting for a job. Perhaps, my aunt was right when, as a child, went to help her mother in the shop (...) and I'm certainly not going back to school, after the *satisfying experience* I have had! It's better to gain experience while you're working, because the employers don't take school into consideration. They are interested in what you can do, not in what you know. Knowledge is useless, they told me (...) Now I don't make any more efforts because I have had a lot of disappointments. But if someone offers me a job, I certainly accept it, especially if I like it, of course, even if in this period you can't choose. I wait and I believe that something will arrive because I want to work» (23 years old);

«I hold a commercial diploma but I don't find out a job (...) I've chosen that school because I didn't want to attend the university, I don't like learning so much and then I wanted to make money soon and be self-sufficient. My sister attended the classical high school, then faculty of Arts at the university, however for ten years she has hadn't more than a temporary job in the school and she has been like a beggar who hopes in a temporary teaching job, but it is very difficult to take it (...) I don't believe in a degree. I notice also that the graduates don't find a job. Therefore I think it's better to look for a job soon (...) Here it is difficult but I believe that something will arrive, maybe something little, but it is sufficient because my boyfriend already works in his little firm with his father, and when we'll get married my small salary will be sufficient (...) I think that something will happen at the end, I hold a diploma so I'm sure someone will seek a good accountant one day» (24 years old);

«I believe one day something will change (...) I want to work and certainly I will wait until the job arrives (...) I have no idea, but I'm sure at the end I will find a job» (26 years old).

c) Then, there are the *unawares*, young women who want to work and, unlike the previous ones, are actively looking for a job, but, like the previous ones, they don't invest on education, so they carry on being *weak* resources which are not so *desirable* on the market. They are especially girls who hold a secondary-school diploma, who don't attach a particular strategic importance to university education, that they consider useless in order to look for a job. Therefore, their very active search is not supported by suitable competences, and this situation exposes these girls and young women, like the previous ones, to a risk of discouragement. They risk to resign themselves, after a lot of constant disappointments, to the lack of job opportunities, so at the end they risk to completely stop looking for it and to become definitively inactive. In this way, the *unawares* risk to slide into the next type of the *resigned* ones.

«For more than a year I had waited, sent my curriculum and had job interviews, but at the end my mother spread the rumour that I wanted to work, she made me speak to a man who wanted a secretary. It was a small firm, of course, but in my opinion it was ok, because I want to work, I have always wanted it, I don't want to be an housewife. (...) but one day I went to that firm and he asked me if I could speak English. I answer that I couldn't speak it because I learnt it a long time ago, and then we learnt it not so well. So he told me that he wanted someone speaking English because he sent his products abroad, so English is necessary for the orders. So I lost my job. However, I don't give in easily, and sooner or later I will find a job. I'm going for other job interviews (...) I'm sure I will find a job sooner or later» (27 years old);

«There aren't job opportunities ... Now there is the crisis and all is more difficult! I know that all people say that learning is important but I believe that this is not the problem. I think learning isn't requested. There isn't job and eve if you study, it is not certain you'll find it sooner (...) I believe we should search it better. One of my friends, who holds a diploma like me, has found a job in a little firm, even if she is working illegally. But she is working» (25 years old).

d) There are the *resigned* ones, young women, but there also ten very young girls, who show to be at this point resigned to not find a job or resigned to not find the job they would like. They belong at the classic group of the discouraged ones who, after a long search for a job without a positive result, have given up looking for it. As regarding these girls, the difficulties they found in the search for a job have not produced any impulse to a further investment on education, which is absolutely not considered, despite they hold medium-low qualifications and lack cross-referring competences like a good knowledge of English and computer skills. Some young girls describe this attitude better and they say to be sure they would not find the job they desire even if they increased their competences, because school, and education on the whole, are not *suitable* for the job market and «there you learn only what is useless». These girls show to be the *Neet* par excellence, because, at this point, they are resigned to the idea of being out of the job market, and they are sure to be out of the education system which is considered an absolutely useless investment.

«I have not studied much because my family made me understand that working is totally different from learning. And I wanted to work! (...) I had not a talent for school, my teachers told me, too. At school I got bored a little, I didn't understand what they explained us and they didn't understand how all this knowledge was relevant to my life (...) I wanted to work and still now I want to work, but there is nothing so either you leave or you go to northern Italy or abroad or you will find nothing (...) at this point I'm not looking for a job anymore because I don't believe any more. At the beginning I had a lot of job interviews but then they never recalled me. Furthermore, I always failed because I have only attended the middle school and I can't do anything, I can't speak English or other foreign languages ... so I don't look for a job any more. If only someone offered me a job! If only I found it! But it is impossible. I believe I will marry my boyfriend, I will have children and then I won't be able to work anymore because I will have children and children allow you to do nothing. This is not the life I desired, but...» (23 years old);

«I have not precise ideas about what I want to do. My sister wanted to become a teacher since she was a child so she made all the suitable choices to be a teacher. I observed her while she was learning and she was happy. On the contrary, I don't know and learning has never been my great passion. I took a diploma because my mother and my sister told me that I couldn't stop at the middle school. But I believe that school is not so useful, there you learn only what is useless in your life. I believe my father is right. A lot of my friends hold a diploma like me, but they have never found a good job like me. Here in the Southern Italy you can work illegally, if you find something, because the graduates often get over. They find nothing, too, and throw themselves into minor jobs. I have never believed in school and my personal condition shows that I'm right. (...) By now I don't want to find out a job any more because I have had a lot of disappointments so I think that the situation will be always the same. Even my brother's wife has found nothing and she can also use a computer, but nothing!» (24 years old);

«Now I'm so tired to look for a job, I have got two children and I resigned myself to be only a mother. The truth is that I have a degree. I wanted to become a teacher, so I went to Bari to take a degree. It wasn't easy but at the end I reached my aims. But it has been useless (...) there was nothing for me and I wanted to be a teacher, but nobody had explained me how complicated the situation was, that there weren't jobs and I had only wasted my time. I believed that university would have helped me but I made a mistake. I believe I will suggest my children to find a job soon if they want to work when they will be grown-up. (...) I have sent applications for a job in the private schools, in the school managed by the priest because my aunt's friend works there, but nothing. There was a little post but they wanted a teacher who could speak English and German, so I was not suitable (...) perhaps the degree is still not much, but I believe that here finding a job is not easy (...) then if you have got children, you won't have time to do anything. I can't wait that my children go to the primary school so I will be able to be a teacher for them at least!» (28 years old);

«You can find a job only if you have an "angel" behind you [she talks about "informal recommendation"]. I'll never find job, and I believe that even studying more I'll cannot change my destiny (...) I'll be a mother, I hate being an housewife, but I'll be not more than this» (29 years old).

e) At last, there are the *qualified* ones. Girls with an elevated qualification who however do not manage to find a job. They are not in the educational system because they think, like the previous ones, of having a solid education, even if, unlike the previous ones, they hold it really. Nevertheless, they run into difficulties while they are looking for a job, also because sometimes a job's demand is not yet *educated* to bet on quality and competences¹⁴. This particular group of girls are defined by Istat "intellectual unemployed people" and represents a real waste of personal and social resources.

All the few graduated girls, who have been interviewed and who are ascribable to this group, confirm in a dramatic way, the new direction which seems to characterize the *Neet* phenomenon, that involves increasingly also people with high qualifications and that is recently showing absolutely alarming dimensions. In this group we find women who are seeking for a job also out of Apulia region, remarking in this way the further problem of «brain drain» («fuga di cervelli»), a real loss of human capital, very heavy in terms of economic and social costs.

«I was sure to enter university. I was sure learning and taking a degree would be the only means to find out a job. Now almost all people take a degree and without it you have no possibility of finding a good job. (...) I thought so and then I studied, but now I don't know if I would do it again because I've noticed that even graduates don't find out a job. Especially here in the South Italy the degree is not considered so important, maybe because all people take it, so we appear all similar (...) I've looked for a job via web, too, but nothing, I carry on finding nothing. Even the web word-of-mouth advertising doesn't work. I have not found opportunities and I really believe that learning is useless because you are sometimes told that you are too qualified and perhaps you still find less. (...) I've also considered the new web professions, e.g. the "wwworkers", because maybe you can find a possibility which is not out of the web (...) However, I don't give up, I want to find a job, even if now I don't look any more for what I wanted before, but only, at least, a job» (28 years old).

«When I entered the faculty of computer sciences, I was sure that working wouldn't have been a problem. But then I graduated, the computer sciences' graduates were too many so I've been stopped ... I didn't know what to do and I carried on looking for a job and still now I've not given up, but there are no job opportunities. I have had job interviews and I send curricula via web but now I'm blocked. I live in my parents' house and this is a sufferance because at the age of 29 I'm not self-sufficient, yet. I make some small jobs but all illegal because I don't want to ask for money like a child, but always illegal (...) I believe I will do like other young people, so I should leave, but I'm a bit afraid because I should leave my parents alone, but my boyfriend also tells me that we should leave. He is a graduate in computer sciences, he attended also a master, but he is also in a similar situation, so I think that it isn't useful to spend any money for other master and so on, and then I'll be unemployed too (...) at last, I think I will leave, otherwise I won't have time to get married and have children» (29 years old).

Concluding remarks

The crisis that, in these years, is warring the social and the political contexts, both on an international and on a local level, is focused on the situation concerning working which, in a more and more difficult way, manages to assure people, especially young people, an identity rooting. So they have difficulty in building and foreshadowing long-term life plans¹⁵. Investing on work means building the conditions for a totally participated society, where people can find (or recover, in some

¹⁴ Especially in Southern Italy, employers are not very used to invest in high skills, choosing instead reducing costs, above all human capital's ones.

¹⁵ Is still useful the analysis of De Sandre et al. (1997) on the choices of delay or give up having children, or even having a partner.

case) a new citizenship. From this perspective, the *Neet* represent a moment of high weakness not only on a personal level but also and especially on a systemic level. They are a significant group of young citizens who risk to be out of that social contract which supports the balance of the democratic system. These young people, who are out of the educational system and do not manage to enter the job market, are the weakest part of our system which risk to be trapped in a border-line condition on a working level and on a social level too¹⁶.

Among these ones, women seem to be weaker and in a condition of "additional" risk, starting from the gender representations learned within the socialization processes, by women as by men. Present but also foreshadowed family care problems¹⁷, significant lack of welfare services, educational choices which strongly list towards poor professions and often overstocked markets, persistent naturalization of the woman imagine as wife-mother: all these situations make young women and girls risk a structural cutting out of the job market and sometimes also out of that full citizenship.

For this reason, considering this background, in which working seems to be, more and more, a very desired good, but also scarce ones, it is seemingly paradoxical "raising our sight" and betting on education. An education which, even though it is still linked to the "know-how", it would become wider and allow people to have a systemic and general view, not limited to the mere task, but that could be a means of government and assure people an active role in the management of those processes which could trap them. Educational capital is like a boundary which separates «two worlds» with different opportunities (Baumann 2003): in the first one the "working nomadism" is richness and opportunity of change; in the second one, on the contrary, flexibility is precariousness and inconsistency. So we need to build an educational system which has to transfer a suitable technical knowledge, but this knowledge has to be also functional in order to build an ability of managing consciously that knowledge (Touraine 1998).¹⁸

This ambitious cultural plan needs the support of mature and far-seeing political choices and institutional contexts which can lay the suitable conditions for a full *functioning* of people in working and in a social contexts.¹⁹

Therefore, educational world is called to a challenge: it should represent, for people, not only the occasion of acquiring new information and competences suitable for the new contexts and economic, adequate to social processes, but also an element which can assure people life *chances* and suitable social resources in order to go through the present *liquid* working and life sceneries.

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¹⁶ Moreover, it should be noted that many young women, as many young men, pay costs of a model of family and "familist" economy, based more on network of relationships than on personal skills (Alesina, Ichino 2009).

¹⁷ As emerge by Istat data (2012), at national level, and especially in South Italy, women with children have lower job opportunities, while is the opposite for men.

¹⁸ We consider also another necessary objective inside an educational plan which wants to be far-seeing and complex, the building of a political culture of active citizenship which should have a critical and reflective competence and the *ability of learning* trust and solidarity that are the fundamental pivot to build a *plural and participated society*, by protecting people from an individualistic and individualizing logic, typical of present society contexts, which dries up all the civic virtues, as time goes by, and, as Baumann observes (2002), bars their chance of every solution that cannot be sought in a over-individual dimension with a political character.

¹⁹ In this direction, even if, at least in part, in a different way, we should consider Sen (1993, 2003) and Nussbaum (2001, 2002) surveys about abilities, functioning and political freedom. «Social movements and democratic actions can be created only if we increase or free people's capacity to contract as People» (Touraine 1997, 58); this is the return and the affirmation of a *strong* subjectivity, whose freedom is played and realized in a conscious choice capacity (Bobbio 1995) according to a long-term logic which is able to get over individualistic and partisan interests.

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