Italian VET system could be changed to face inequalities and social exclusion: a few thoughts looking at the Dutch model

II International Conference of the journal “Scuola Democratica” Reinventing Education

Web-Conference, June 2nd, 2021
The study

The macro-trends of change: challenging situations and solutions

The pandemic: how did it go with the distance learning?

The pandemic: effects on pupils and students

Italy and the Next Generation EU: the long-awaited chance to change
This study is a part of a line of research by the "Training Systems" Department of INAPP which aimed at investigating the dynamics and contexts in which the best VET systems of the European Union produce their effectiveness. This in order to understand whether, and to what extent, it is really possible to reinvent education and vocational training in Italy, also looking at the most efficient European experiences.
The Dutch VET system has been chosen as a focus for some reasons:

• The symbiotic relationship with the business world and the perfect combination of IVET and CVET;

• The achievement of the ET 2020 benchmarks in 2018, two years in advance;

• The possibility of accessing sources in Dutch language would have made it possible to deepen the knowledge of the Dutch context in all its aspects in a more realistic way.
Compared with the past:

• Discrimination and marginalisation of non-European students;
• Early school leaving, especially at the lower levels of vocational secondary education;
• Low participation of adults with poor skills in continuing training, with a special reference to non-European foreigners;
• Cultural impoverishment, with a million Dutch natives at risk of social exclusion due to the insufficient knowledge of the mother tongue.
The sector of technical and vocational education is the most affected, among other things, by demographic changes related to the ageing population and migration dynamics.

The Old-age dependency ratio in the Netherlands

Source: Eurostat, 2019
If the number of the VET students decreased considerably, the business world would risk not finding workforce and skills, because of the demographic decline and the difficulty of integrating non-European immigrants. Vocational education and training are the best tools to help immigrants make full use of their professional potential and become active participants in the Dutch society and its productivity.
Immigrants need the Netherlands as much as the Netherlands need them. It could be more clever to transfer the thorny problem of immigration from an ideological plan to an utilitarian one, implementing new measures such as:

- The simplification of the flows within the channels of education and vocational training;
- The enhancement of linguistic competences in Dutch in secondary vocational education and training;
- The inclusion of foreign cultures in the compulsory training.
Emergency ordinances have been implemented in the 25 Safety Regions on the basis of article 39 of the Safety Regions Act and article 176 of the Municipality Act:

- schools and childcare facilities were closed between March and May 2020 with the exception of child care facilities for children with parents performing essential professions;
- 2.5 million Euro have been put on place, so that the distance learning could be available for everyone.
• Additional measures for children who needed support in doing their homework have been implemented, for instance because their parents don’t speak Dutch;
• Municipalities are responsible for the care of children, young people and families in need;
• When the Covid emergency first began, 5,640 pupils had been labelled as “lost” by their schools;
• School attendance officers and special enforcement officers were deployed to trace these children.
• The Minister of Education, Culture and Science is working out a plan for evaluating pupils in their first year of secondary school, to see whether they are in the right place;

• A home school buddy project has been implemented to connect students to volunteers, who would stimulate and guide them as a buddy, to prevent a significant learning delay in secondary education.
During the pandemic all the pupils have grown but their growth has been less than what could be expected under normal circumstances. However, lower growth is not significant enough to be definitively linked to the distance learning. With reference to school performance, both at individual and collective level, there has been no severe decline attributable to the use of the distance learning.
Psychological problems are another matter: gloom, fear and stress are common and, on average, they affect one in three Dutch students. In addition, students may have to contend with procrastination (avoiding tasks that must be done), perfectionism, fear of failure, lack of confidence, sleep problems and excessive awkwardness. However, such psychological problems may be partly explained by the life phase that is called “budding adulthood”.
Italy and the Next Generation EU: the long-awaited chance to change

The flagship area “Reskill & Upskill” of the Next Generation EU represents the long-awaited opportunity to finally change the Italian VET system.

• Implementing the synergic relationship between school and business is certainly necessary.
• Simplifying the flows between the different pathways would be important.
• Lower-level professional qualifications and continuing training cannot do without general subjects.
Innovative teaching tools, models and unconventional dynamics are needed, in order to include topics of general culture for young people and adults of all ages, both in vocational education and training, other than in the compulsory training in public and private institutions.
Thanks for your attention

www.inapp.org