

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE NATIONAL LEVEL

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship education has been considered in the supranational ambit since 2000 by non-binding acts, aimed to propose a common line of action without imposing any legal obligation to the EU Member States. In particular, in the sphere of educational policy, EU countries pursued and identified joint goals using an open method of coordination (OMC). In the first phase, entrepreneurship education was closely connected to economic growth. In the regulatory development, it assumed a broader meaning as a transversal skill. First of all, it is purposeful in the development of individual potential in every sphere of life; secondly, it focuses at the creation of "value for others" in financial, but also social and cultural fields. It also includes active citizenship and social and ethic awareness in processes, profiles that generally in the Italian legislation seem to be recessive. In European Countries the state of the art are rather various: while in some areas, especially in northern Europe, the experiences on entrepreneurship education are consolidated, the situation is quite different where the plans are more recent. In Italy there is a noticeable delay on many fronts, in comparison with the EU Member States' average. There is no national plan, but some episodic legislative interventions and specific actions of the Ministry of Education introduce the subject in the school system. The evidence furnished by scientific research considers that spending in entrepreneurship education is one of the highest return investments that could be made. Nevertheless the 2019 national budget law cut the allocated resources. In the post-pandemic era, we will see an upcoming expansion for this strategic achievement, according to the 30 June 2020 announce from President Von der Leyen.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. The emergence of entrepreneurship education in the European context: a functional tool for economic growth.....	181
2. Entrepreneurship education and European cooperation in the field of education.....	188
3. The change of cultural perspective on entrepreneurship education: from a tool for economic growth to an transversal skill to create "value for others"	190
4. Looking for innovation within the university tradition: a new relevance for social and humanistic disciplines in the high-tech world.....	193
5. From the EU "soft law" to the national level: what's going on in the Italian educational system?.....	195

1.The emergence of entrepreneurship education in the European context: a functional tool for economic growth

Entrepreneurship education has been considered in the supranational ambit since 2000 by non-binding acts, aimed to suggest a common line of action without imposing legal obligation to the EU member States¹. According to the European Treaties,

¹ The non-binding acts have to be intended in the contest of the division of competences between the EU and its member countries. In particular, the principle of conferral imposes that the EU can only act within the limits of the competences that have been conferred upon it by the EU treaties. The principle of subsidiarity aims to ensure that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizens and prescribe to verify that action at EU level is justified in light of the possibilities available at national, regional or local level. The competence here involved is conferred by Article 165 TFUE, which establish that «the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity[...]». Article 166 TFUE establish that «The Union shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organization of vocational training. [...]». The category in which these legal bases can be included is supporting competence (Article 6 TFEU): the EU can only intervene to support, coordinate or complement the action of EU countries.

each EU Country remains responsible for its own education and training systems and EU interventions in this area of competence is designed just to support action at the national level and to help face common challenges. As we can better see below, actually the EU establishes a framework for common cooperation in the fields of education and training. In general, it intends to provide opportunities to exchange best practices, disseminate knowledge and advance educational reforms at the national and local levels. These non-binding acts have a valuable political and cultural impact, raising public opinion, influencing decision-makers and policies, enhancing public debate and modifying national law.

In this introduction, it is appropriate to frame the specific topic of entrepreneurship education in the broader context of EU education cooperation and development policy, which is strongly conditioned by the original matrix of the EU, concentrated in the mercantile perspective. The general context will show some criticalities of a cultural model in which the tool arises. Emphasizing these critical issues could be useful for enhancing the potential of entrepreneurship education, through an interpretation that highlights the not related to business aspects, therefore enhancing its social implications, if it is possible.

With the Single Act of 1986 and then with the Maastricht Treaty, the idea of promoting a common framework for educational policy enters into European community law. The Lisbon European Council expresses the fundamental inspiring ideology. Education has a strategic objective in the internal market: to support the European area so that it can become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world, capable of lasting economic growth.

In its contents EU coordination does not differ from the orientations expressed by the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), which has been an active lobby on this issue since the end of the 1980s². In short terms, the EU focuses on the “acquisition of skills”, oriented to a concrete scope. The conclusions of the Lisbon European Council identify as new basic skills the technological (information and communications

Legally binding EU acts must not require the harmonisation of EU countries' laws or regulations.

² See the official website <https://ert.eu/> (*Education and European Competence – ERT Study on Education and Training in Europe, 1989*).

technology - ICT) and linguistic ones, which have been prioritized for many years in the national educational systems. In other words, knowledge is conceived from the EU perspective as functional to economic growth. The final goal of learning is not to increase individual and collective knowledge, but to acquire know-how to spend in the job market. The aim pursued is to ensure a better adaptation of workers to business developments and its quick dynamics. From this point of view, it is possible to understand the particular emphasis on multidisciplinary or transversal skills, that could be used in different contexts.

These innovations could be read as a change of cultural paradigm: the abstract transmission of knowledge seems to be considered an obsolete perspective to overcome, preferring practical tools. Anyway, this process should be intended in the light of the kind of European competence involved, an aspect which is undervalued: the EU does not aspire to indicate a common line on education systems, but only to support the education policies of the Member States, according to its main objectives. The absolutization of this ideology is rather the result of an unnecessary interpretation, made in the national ambit, of the European intervention, which only intends to go alongside the competence of the States, fully responsible for the content of teaching. This also implies a full political responsibility of the States for the strategies expressed in the last decades in the field of education, which cannot be transferred to the supranational level.

On a concrete level, European education coordination and development policy consists of a few essential pillars connected with the general aim of EU. They have strongly influenced schools, universities and training systems in the European Countries in the last decades, sometimes monopolizing ideological orientation beyond what is required.

First of all, EU confirm that basic education should be qualitative and for everyone, although this part often remains recessive in concrete. This phase has to be followed by basic professional training. Later, long-life learning has to assist the workers throughout their lives, in order to let them adapt to the constant change of the business requests. Coherently, the European Union tries to support autonomy and competition between education systems, in order to increase the ability to adapt to change more quickly, and openness to private partnership. The

link between the educational actors and institutions and the surrounding areas advances, with particular reference to the future employments of learners, whose needs should be oriented towards.

The risk of this approach is the postponing of the human driving attitude to produce evolution and change of current economic models, disadvantaging innovations and captures of new social and human needs. The context could be perceived as a static, unchangeable element to follow in its punctual necessities, renouncing to intervene on its unresolved criticalities and aporias.

The modification of language follows this process, through the replacement of the terms borrowed from the economic context (i.e. educational credits).

Probably the point of greatest convergence between active citizenship and European coordination in education is in the mobility programs, which are part of the harmonization objectives of higher education (e.g. about the duration of university courses and the system of transferable educational credits between Countries). The data show, in fact, that participants in international mobility programs such as Erasmus have in general positive effects in terms of awareness and also of greater participation in electoral consultations.

European educational policy develops along these lines also as a consequence of the peculiar economic and social environment, which has influenced the trend: the historical moment is characterized by ruthless global competition and the pursuit of technological innovation, productive of a tendency towards an increase in traditional inequalities between capital and labor³. We can think in particular to the phenomena of job insecurity, short-term and increasingly low-level employment, in the face of market giants operating in the global dimension, which are often difficult to subject to taxation at a national level. In this context, according to some opinions, teaching is designed on the basis of the competitiveness of businesses and human capital must be adequate for it.

Education and training for entrepreneurship is one of the strategic tool in this framework. It enters the EU lexicon with The

³ See N. Hirtt, *A l'ombre de la Table Ronde des industriels, La politique éducative de la Commission européenne, Les Cahiers d'Europe*, n. 3 (2000).

European Charter for Small Enterprises⁴, proposed by Enterprise DG of the European Commission and approved by the EU leaders at Feira European Council of June 2000: in this document, the Council recognized that small enterprises are the backbone of the European economy. They are not only "a key source of jobs and a breeding ground for business ideas," but also "a main driver for innovation, employment as well as social and local integration in Europe." In these words, we can read a sort of delegation to the business system of functions that traditionally should be public. The goal for the European Union, according to the Lisbon strategy, starts to be identified as becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, thus requiring the creation of the best possible environment for small enterprises.

In this framework, entrepreneurship is recognized as a valuable and productive life skill, at all levels of responsibility. In order to strengthen the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship that enables European economy to face the challenges ahead, European Union and Member States decide to work together along ten lines of action, the first of which is "Education and training for entrepreneurship"; in this ambit, four specific topics were highlighted: 1) to nurture an entrepreneurial spirit and new skills from an earlier age; 2) to include the teaching of general knowledge about business and entrepreneurship at all school levels; 3) to include specific business-related modules as an essential ingredient of education schemes at a secondary education level and in colleges and universities; 4) to develop appropriate training schemes for managers in small enterprises.

In this first step, entrepreneurship education is closely connected to the economic development of EU, an objective that justifies the "soft law" activation of the Union also in the sphere of educational policy. In particular, the goals – jointly identified in the Charter by national and supranational decision-makers – would be pursued using the open method of coordination⁵ of National enterprise policies.

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/european-charter-small-enterprises-0_en

⁵ The open method of coordination (OMC) in the European Union is a form of "soft law": the intergovernmental policy-making does not result in binding EU

In 2003 the Commission led by Romano Prodi goes on launching a public debate by approving the First Action Plan for Entrepreneurship in Europe - Green Book, which includes education as a fundamental factor:⁶ according to the document, education and training should contribute to encouraging entrepreneurship, by fostering the right mind-set, awareness of career opportunities as an entrepreneur and skills. Considering that both personality and management skills are key elements for success, personal skills relevant to entrepreneurship should be taught from an early age and be maintained up to university level, where the focus can concentrate on building management capacity. Within universities, entrepreneurship training should not only be for MBA students; it should also be available for students in other fields. In particular, in technical universities entrepreneurship training may contribute to matching entrepreneurial and technological potential.

According to the final Report, "entrepreneurship education should be a full part of school *curricula*, so that all young people get a chance to learn about entrepreneurship, acquire entrepreneurial and business skills and consider whether it would be an interesting career option for them. In addition, many respondents consider entrepreneurial skills as valuable life skills that are beneficial even when someone decides upon another career"⁷. In particular, entrepreneurship education, in the current opinion, should increase the development of various useful skills and personality traits: curiosity, openness to long-life learning,

legislative measures and it does not require EU member States to amend their laws. Instead, EU Countries, whose national policies can thus be directed towards certain common objectives, will cooperate under an intergovernmental method: their efforts are evaluated by one another, with the Commission's role being limited to surveillance. The European Parliament and the Court of Justice play no part in the OMC process. The OMC takes place in the areas in the competence of EU countries, such as employment, social protection and education.

⁶ See COM(2003)27 del 21/1/2003. In this Paper the Commission promote a coordinated approach to entrepreneurship policy based on learning from the best. The document individuates three pillars for action through which barriers to business development and growth are brought down, the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship are balanced and a society that values entrepreneurship is promoted.

⁷ Summary Report "The public debate following the Green Paper 'Entrepreneurship in Europe'", 19/10/2003.

proactive attitude, self-reliance and creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and inter-personal abilities. From this point of view, this milestone seems to pose a new challenge in the field of educations, that is not sufficiently understood and translated in instruments, also in the EU perspective: similar goals couldn't be obtained just teaching some new topics, but involve new methods. Seriously approaching the themes and without involving the problematic dimension of values, individual freedoms and differences, it asks for new competences of teachers and also for the combination of many different scientific knowledge, included pedagogy and psychology. According to the cited Report, the development of these aptitudes should start at primary school; at secondary school and in the course of higher education and vocational training, students should be exposed to business courses that include marketing, management and leadership skills. Such direct exposure to entrepreneurship would help future graduates to consider entrepreneurship as a valuable career option. It was strongly recommended to include entrepreneurship in all non-commercial educational paths. In higher education, curricula should systematically include entrepreneurship and management courses in non-economic curricula. To encourage this, a yearly ranking could assess EU universities in terms of their performance on education for entrepreneurship and innovation. Another suggestion was to introduce a successful American experience that makes science students work together with business students. Training the teachers, especially at primary level, was identified as a prerequisite to entrepreneurship education.

In February 2005, the Barroso Commission proposed a new start for the Lisbon Strategy, focusing the European Union's efforts on delivering stronger growth and providing more and better jobs⁸. The Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008)⁹ stresses a more entrepreneurial culture in support of SMEs,

⁸ See COM(2005) 24 final, Communication to the spring European Council, "Working together for growth and jobs, A new start for the Lisbon Strategy", Communication from President Barroso in agreement with Vice-President Verheugen, 2/2/2005. The document underlines the importance of promoting a spreading knowledge through high quality education system as the best way of guaranteeing the long-term competitiveness of the Union.

⁹ COM(2005) 141 final, 12/4/2005.

according to the idea that enterprises grow up better in a profitable ecosystem¹⁰: among others measures, Member States should reinforce entrepreneurship education and training (cross reference to the relevant employment guideline). In the European Youth Pact¹¹, the European Council calls on the Union and Member States, each within the limits of its own powers and in particular under the European employment strategy and under social inclusion strategy, to encourage young people to develop entrepreneurship and promoting the emergence of young entrepreneurs, also expanding the scope for students to undertake a period of study in another Member State. In 2006, the so called Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education in Europe was approved: it contains a set of specific proposals that define how to support progress in the field of entrepreneurship education through systematic and effective actions to be implemented at European, national and local levels¹².

2. Entrepreneurship education and European cooperation in the field of education

In the context of the Lisbon Strategy, the 2002 Barcelona European Council of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme (ET 2010) established for the first time a framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training,

¹⁰See, *inter alia*, L. Leydesdorff, H. Etzkowitz, *The Triple Helix as a Model for Innovation Studies, Science and Public Policy*, 25 (3), 195-203 (1998); M. Ranga, H. Etzkowitz, *Triple Helix Systems: an Analytical Framework for Innovation Policy and Practice in the Knowledge Society, Industry and Higher Education*, vol. 27, n. 4, 237-262 (2013).

¹¹ Annex I, Presidency Conclusions, 22 and 23 March 2005.

¹² See COM(2006)33 final, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions "Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning", 13/2/2006. The Agenda is an outcome of the Conference on "Entrepreneurship Education in Europe: Fostering Entrepreneurial Mindsets through Education and Learning" - an initiative of the European Commission jointly organized with the Norwegian government - held in Oslo on 26-27 October 2006, which followed the Communication from Commission. The Agenda intends to promote entrepreneurial mindsets in society, systematically and with effective actions. It is a list of concrete proposals, from which stakeholders can pick actions at the appropriate level and adapt them to the local situation.

based on common objectives and aimed primarily at supporting the improvement of national education and training systems through the development of complementary EU-level tools, mutual learning and the exchange of good practice via the open method of coordination. Cooperation under the aforementioned work programme, including the Copenhagen process and initiatives in the context of the Bologna process, have supported national reforms of lifelong learning, a general “modernization” of higher education and the development of common European instruments promoting quality, transparency and mobility in the sense highlighted before.

In the 2009 Strategic Framework for European cooperation in the education and training sector - ET 2020 - the EU Member States set specific goals to achieve within the decade. They included to promote lifelong learning and mobility, to improve the quality and effectiveness of education, to enhance equity, social cohesion and active citizenship and to encourage creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship.

In the 2010 Europe 2020 strategy¹³, the European Commission sets the goal of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Among the goals assigned to the Member States, aspects concerning education systems are identified. For example, States will need to reduce school dropout, secure public investments and focus school curricula on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

In the context of cohesion policy, EU identifies education and training as tools to reduce the inequalities in development between different geographical areas. From this consideration, the activation of the European Structural Funds (European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund) follows, in order to financially support the modernization of education and training systems, including the investment in infrastructures, the promotion of access to quality education, at all levels and for everyone, the improvement of access to long life learning and the strengthening of professional training systems¹⁴.

¹³ Communication from the Commission “Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, COM(2010) 2020 final, 3.3.2010.

¹⁴ Supranational level indicates aims similar to those emerged within the United Nations. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs - included in the UN 2030 Agenda, Objective 4 is entirely dedicated to education. The UN

Annually, the European Commission publishes a monitoring report to assess progress, results and challenges within the ET 2020 strategic framework. On the main indicators, the European agenda for education has made progress. However, inequalities resist and EU challenges for the future will include more attention to people with disabilities, migrants and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially children from poor background or social excluded context. The results of the monitoring demonstrate the weak point of the measures adopted. Education systems have as one of its essential function the promotion of equal opportunities; but education policy and tackle inequalities are first of all competences of the State in the Constitutional framework.

In the latest reports, the Commission also highlights the need to improve participation in entrepreneurship education, that still remains optional in the most of Member States.

3.The change of cultural perspective on entrepreneurship education: from a tool for economic growth to a transversal skill to create “value for others”

In the European context, entrepreneurship education is not always perceived only as strictly functional to economic growth and the start-up of business activities, as in the first phase of emergence. On the contrary, during its improvement and also thanks to the contribution of scientific economic literature, it is mainly considered a transversal competence, functional, on the first hand, for the development of individual potential in every field of work and life and, on the second hand, for the creation of "value for others" in financial, but also social and cultural fields.

Already through the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning¹⁵(2006), a sense of initiative and

Action Program, signed in 2015 and divided into 169 Targets, poses a global educational challenge by 2030. According to the point 4.7, States have to ensure education to promote sustainable development, including sustainable lifestyle, human rights, gender equality, the promotion of a peaceful and non-violent culture, global citizenship and the enhancement of cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development.

¹⁵(2006/962/EC), Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 18/12/2006.

entrepreneurship is considered one of the eight key competences that everyone needs for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. This act was replaced by a Council Recommendation in 2018¹⁶. According to the most recent definition, *entrepreneurship competence refers to the capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas, and to transform them into values for others*. The new definition is concentrated on the creation of value, which can be *financial, cultural or social*¹⁷. This competence can be applied in any sphere of life and is founded upon creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, taking initiative and perseverance and the ability to work collaboratively in order to plan and manage projects of value. Entrepreneurship competence requires knowing that there are different contexts and opportunities for turning ideas into action in personal, social and professional activities and an understanding of how these arise. Individuals should know and understand approaches to planning and managing projects, which include both processes and resources, understand of economics, should be aware of ethical principles and challenges of sustainable development and have self-awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses. In the view of the Council, entrepreneurial skills include, *inter alia*, to mobilize resources (people and things), the ability to make financial decisions relating to cost and value, to effectively communicate and negotiate with others, and to cope with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk as part of making informed decisions is essential. An entrepreneurial attitude is characterized by a sense of initiative, being forward-looking, courage and perseverance in achieving objectives, a desire to motivate others and value their ideas, empathy and taking care of people and the world, accepting responsibility and taking ethical approaches throughout the process. As we can see, next to the skills a question of values begins to emerge, focusing also on solidarity among people.

¹⁶(2018/C 189/01).

¹⁷ See "EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework", Scientific and Technical Research Reports, Publications Office of the European Union, 2016. The report identifies a common reference tool for any initiative intended to promote entrepreneurship education, to be used in different contexts also as flexible inspiration source. It consists of 3 areas of expertise, 15 skills, an 8-level progression model and a comprehensive list of 442 learning outcomes.

In spite of this enrichment, an extremely technical approach emerges from the instruments, according to the typical character of the European Union policies. This perspective seems to be dissonant with the ambitious objectives that the policy of entrepreneurship education aims to achieve, which should concern the individual as a whole in the social dimension. Such objectives, when taken seriously, seem incompatible with shortcuts and could be achieved only by educational systems that place the person, with his individuality and difference, at the center of the didactic discourse and that focus mostly on the humanistic and social aspects of knowledge. Therefore, a scheme exclusively oriented in an individual width also emerges, leaving collective dimensions in the background. "Creating value for others" requires a favorable cultural and social environment, which must be taken care of. The idea that it is possible to do it only through individual action appears rather simplistic and also illusory. On the contrary, thinking about this as a goal of private and public social organizations could be extremely interesting. Nowadays, even doing business is no longer an individual action, but requires organizational complexity and a multiplicity of team skills that should be considered.

However, the reference to the creation of "value for others" – in its multifaceted dimensionalities – give the impression to express a choice close to the inspiration of the Italian Constitution, especially the duties to undertake an activity or a function that will contribute to the material and moral progress of society, to according to capability and choice of every citizen (Article 4). This duty, included in the right to work, is connected to the more general duty of social solidarity expressed in the Article 2. Furthermore, overcoming the individual and transferring the change of perspective into a collective dimension, the innovation seems to recall the disabling of traditional economic growth index and the preference for a fair and sustainable well-being goal, inclusive of correction for inequalities, as a criterion for evaluating the progress of the society.

4.Looking for innovation in the university tradition: a new relevance for social and humanistic disciplines in the high-tech world

The Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan (2013)¹⁸ identifies entrepreneurship education as one of the three pillars to support entrepreneurial growth in Europe. The European Commission in this case, starting from the evidence furnished by scientific research¹⁹, considers that investing in entrepreneurship education is one of the highest return investments that could be made. As we can see, passing on the level of showing effectiveness, entrepreneurship education returns to be measured exclusively in terms of business. However, it seems difficult to identify how else the effectiveness of the educational action could be measured, if the holistic dimension is assumed. In this case, the effects could only be seen in the very long term and would be difficult to measure, given the complexity of the social dimension.

According to the Commission, a number of Member States has successfully introduced national strategies for entrepreneurship education or made entrepreneurial learning a mandatory part of curricula, but more is needed. Member States are invited, *inter alia*, to boost entrepreneurial training for young people and adults in education by means of Structural Funds resources in line with national job plan. Learning outcomes for all educators have to be implemented and universities should become more entrepreneurial.²⁰

For universities in particular, the European Commission, in collaboration with OECD²¹, developed the Guiding framework for

¹⁸ COM (2012) 795 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, "Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan, Reigniting the entrepreneurial spirit in Europe", 9/1/2013.

¹⁹ Surveys suggest that between 15% and 20% of students who participate in a mini-company programme in secondary school will later start their own company, a figure that is about three to five times that for the general population (C. Jenner, 'Business and Education: Powerful Social Innovation Partners', Stanford Social Innovation Review, 27/8/2012).

²⁰ On this specific ambit, see the recent article of M. Dabic, *Entrepreneurial University in the European Union - EU, EU*, *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 12, 115-119 (2021).

²¹ The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is a global international organization (actually of 36 Member States) that works «to

entrepreneurial universities²². The framework is designed to help interested universities assess themselves and improve their capability in epitomizing innovation throughout their research, knowledge exchanges, teaching and learning methods, models of governance and external relations.

In this framework, entrepreneurship development in formal and informal teaching and learning is considered one of the available tools: first of all, if the objective is to enhance the student's ability to think and respond entrepreneurially, many different teaching approaches could be experimented to produce the desired learning outcomes (in addition to traditional lectures), i.e. the use of mentors, living labs, cross disciplinary learning, etc. Secondly, students may also start up and run their own companies, have competitions and awards, be ambassadors for entrepreneurship and run clubs. It is therefore suggested to deliver entrepreneurship education with real entrepreneurs, whenever possible, and also use a variety of methods, including case studies, games and simulation, real experience reports by start-ups and studies of business failure. An important but often under-exploited resource for the entrepreneurial university is the collaboration with the external environment and its stakeholders (i.e. communities, local organizations and governments, etc.).

An interesting aspect is that these guidelines should be considered in all areas of university studies, as methodological innovation in facing new challenges.

Taking this pathway, therefore, means at least to invest in the methodology training of teachers, which are experts in disciplines not directly related to the world of entrepreneurship. This aspect is instead insufficiently considered. But, from this point of view, the topic poses underestimated problems, both in the EU and in the national context, where it is translated into specific actions. The question primarily concerns pedagogical science, which is called upon to make its contribution; but, in any case, it is necessary to consider the limits of the public approach

build better policies for better lives». The organization goal is to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity and well-being for all.

²² The "Guiding framework for entrepreneurial universities" was developed as a collaborative project between the OECD LEED Programme and the European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture in 2012 (the document is available in *oecd.org*).

on teaching methods: mainstream visions couldn't invade the Constitutionally protected freedom of teaching. Finally, it should be considered that innovative teaching methods, aimed at stimulating the creativity of learners, have their own autonomy, that does not require necessarily the activation of the category of entrepreneurship education. An unresolved mix-up between teaching method and content can be glimpsed from this point of view.

In this context, according to the most recent literature,²³ the humanistic disciplines – which tend to prepare an open mind-set – take on surprising new relevance in the world dominated by technology. Humanistic education could be the best basis in order to effectively tackle the biggest social and technological challenges which require critical thinking about the human context, managing complex social decision-making and organizational process, creative thinking on innovative solutions for large-scale problems, carrying out ethical considerations²⁴.

5.From the European “soft law” to the national level: what’s going on in Italian educational system?

On April 2019, the European Parliament Committee on Culture and Education published the **Activity Report 2014-2019**, calling on the Council and the Commission to develop methodological support and tools for national education systems

²³ See J.M. Olejarz, *Liberal Arts in the Data Age*, in *Harvard Business Review*, July-August, 144 (2017); S. Hartley, *The Fuzzy and the Techie: Why the Liberal Arts Will Rule the Digital World*, Paperback (2018) which points out that the founders of companies like Airbnb, Pinterest, Slack, LinkedIn, PayPal, Stitch Fix, Reddit are people with backgrounds in the liberal arts and argues why it is false the dichotomy between human and technical sciences; G.S. Morson, M.O. Schapiro, *Cents and Sensibility: What Economics Can Learn from the Humanities. A provocative and inspiring case for a more humanistic economics*, Princeton (2017), which try to demonstrate that the humanities, especially the study of literature, offer economists ways to make their models more realistic, their predictions more accurate and their policies more effective and just; according to C. Madsbjerg, *Sensemaking. The Power of the Humanities in the Age of the Algorithm*, Hachette (2017), today's biggest success stories stem not from “quant” thinking but from deep, nuanced engagement with culture, language, and history.

²⁴ On the relevance of humanistic studies for the democracy, see M.C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press (2010).

in the area of entrepreneurship education and training, including social entrepreneurship, in particular to establish entrepreneurial traineeships and exchange programmes to give young people hands-on experience, and to support partnerships between educational institutions and companies via the use of the European Fund for Strategic Investment and the European Social Fund. The report emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurial skills and competences, acknowledging the important role played by lifelong learning and international mobility, asking the Member States to promote entrepreneurial skills for young people through legislative action aimed at ensuring quality traineeships and focusing on quality learning and decent working conditions. The EP Committee also stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to entrepreneurship based on a set of transversal key competences for personal and professional purposes and encourage full engagement among all stakeholders, in particular local business associations, enterprises and educational institutions.

In the last decade, many studies and comparative analyses on public policies undertaken at national levels were produced²⁵. In one of the most significant (European study, *Entrepreneurship Education: A Road to Success*²⁶) the impact produced by both specific and broader strategies is examined, concluding that where these strategies and actions were put in place, there has been a positive impact on the persons, on the training institutes, on the economy and on society. In particular, students participating in entrepreneurship education seem to be more likely to start their own business²⁷ and their companies tend to be more innovative

²⁵ See, *inter alia*, *Entrepreneurship Education at School in Europe*, Eurydice Report, 2016 which focuses on primary education, lower and general upper secondary education and contains information for 2014/15 from 33 countries participating in the Eurydice network.

²⁶ *A compilation of evidence on the impact of entrepreneurship education strategies and measures*, 28/1/2015. In 2013 DG Enterprise and Industry commissioned ICF International to conduct a mapping exercise of examples of research on the impact of Entrepreneurial Education. This report presents the outcome of the mapping exercise: 91 studies from 23 countries were identified.

²⁷ According to the Communication of the Commission *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan* (2013) mentioned above, since 2004 the percentage of European citizens who prefer self-employment to subordinate position has reduced, positioning itself well below those of the United States and China. Potential

and more successful than those led by persons without entrepreneurship education backgrounds. According to the report, entrepreneurship education alumni are at lower risk of being unemployed and have on average better jobs.

In European Countries the situations vary quite a lot. While in some States, especially in northern Europe, the experiences are dated and consolidated, but where the plans are more recent, the situation is quite different²⁸. In Italy there is a noticeable delay on many fronts, in comparison with the averages of European States.

In a more general perspective, in its annual reports on the implementation of the ET 2020 strategy, the European Commission recognizes Italy's improvement in the level of education. However, some data show the Italian backwardness compared to the rest of Europe, eg. in reference to a lower share of investment in education, mostly in higher education, and the difficulty of transitioning from education system to job place, even for highly qualified people.

Also the UN 2020 Monitoring Report on 2030 Agenda and the statistic related data shows lights and shadows for the educational goal in Italy. For example, early school leaving increased, as well as INVALSI studies and research highlighted important gaps in the skills of Italian language, Mathematics and English. Educational poverty is worrying in some regions of Southern Italy. Greater effort will have to be directed at reducing gender gaps²⁹.

In the current pandemic context, in which the consequences of the Coronavirus health emergency on the education system

European Union entrepreneurs find a difficult context characterized also by educational systems that do not offer the basis for a business career.

²⁸ Many institutions and documents furnish comparative data. Among the more recent studies, the Innovation Cluster for Entrepreneurship Education (ICEE) conducted a policy experimentation project started in January 2015 that ran until January 2018. The project was assigned by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Programme. The cluster produced a comparative analysis of eight national strategies on entrepreneurship education (involving Belgium/Flanders, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, and Norway). The selected best practices are available online at the following URL: <http://innovation-clusters.icee-eu.eu/ICEE/National-Strategies>.

²⁹ See statistic data in ISTAT, *Rapporto SDGs 2020. Informazioni statistiche per l'Agenda 2030 in Italia*, istat.it and UN, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*, in un.org.

must be taken into account, education takes on more importance. School closure and digital gap may have exacerbated pre-existing deficit. Although many data are not yet available, the risk of educational poverty worsening could be underlined, especially in the disadvantaged geographical and social contexts, compromising the best tool for removing inequalities³⁰. Therefore, within the framework of an economic system exceptionally stressed by the pandemic, entrepreneurship education needs to be highlighted, as a new fundamental public support for the economic growth.

We can see an upcoming expansion of this public policy. The Communication “European skills agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience” (30 June 2020) from President Von der Leyen, intends to contribute to European Recovery Plan. The Agenda to support employment and social policy, in the post-pandemic era announces, among the other actions, that the Commission will launch a European Action on Entrepreneurship Skills, which focuses on development of entrepreneurial mindsets and a more resilient workforce. In this context, entrepreneurship skills at all levels of education and training will be promoted to provide students with the knowledge and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial activity. This action will complement the Commission’s upcoming Action Plan for the Social Economy, that – *inter alia* – will promote entrepreneurial opportunities yielded by the social economy, such as helping local communities, striking local green deals and activating vulnerable groups.

In the context of Italian Constitutional law, as it is known, the legislative power in matters of education is shared between State and Regions. A sphere of autonomy is guaranteed to educational institutions and to Universities. In particular, it is up to the State to fix “the general rules” and the “minimum level of care”, while Regions are called to focus on the normative details. Professional training, as closely linked to territorial specificities, is written as an exclusive regional competence, even often crosses other subject and need cooperation between the two levels of

³⁰ See Save the Children, *L'impatto del coronavirus sulla povertà educativa*, https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/limpatto-del-coronavirus-sulla-poverta-educativa_0.pdf; and OECD, *Education at a Glance* (2020).

government. The articulated criteria used for the distribution of normative power could sometimes lead to legal disputes before the Constitutional Court between the involved levels of government.

For entrepreneurship education specifically, there is no national plan or strategy. However, there are some episodic legislative interventions and actions of the Ministry of Education, in the framework of the enhancement of individual skills in the school system. Although without a systematic framework, they began to introduce the culture of entrepreneurship into the Italian educational system. In particular, in 2017 the reference to the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship was introduced in the certification of skills at the end of primary school and the first cycle of education³¹. In 2018 promotional pathways for entrepreneurship education were introduced in upper secondary school, using financial support of European structural funds.³² Entrepreneurship education is connected, *inter alia*, to civics: according to this instrument, these skills can complement disciplinary skills, “to ensure that young people become active, creative and initiative citizens”. Assuming a critical point of view, even the suggestion, it is difficult to imagine how entrepreneurial competence, in the individualistic terms in which it is effectively declined, could be linked to active citizenship, increasing awareness. Therefore, at the university level, national initiatives to support this ambit are not established, outside traditional economics courses.

In the State’s main documents, the notion of entrepreneurship education is borrowed from the first Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, dated 2006, which lags behind the new cultural acquisitions. In consequence of this reductive point of view, the business aspects tend to prevail over humanistic and social ones. Indeed, according to the more recent common vision³³, entrepreneurship education aims at (and is useful for) the development of holistic personal soft skills and attitudes, rather than specific tools for business actions; creativity, ability to catch opportunities, to be innovative and connected with the contexts wishes to *create value for others in any*

³¹ See Ministry of Education, Decree no. 742, 3.10.2017- Annex B.

³² See Ministry of Education, decree no. 4244, 13.03.2018.

³³ See “EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework”, cit.

sphere of life. So, it aims to promote active citizenship and social and ethic awareness, a profile that in the Italian legislation seems to be recessive for a long time. For example, this idea, although considered in the accompanying letter of the Ministry of Education³⁴, seems to not be included in the document which establishes the guidelines³⁵ for funded no-compulsory educational projects in this ambit, as well as in the public call³⁶ addressed to upper secondary schools, which are focused principally on education for business, even with attention to social responsibility.

Although the spirit of initiative is a cross-curricular competence evaluated as a result of learning in the Italian educational system³⁷, school-work-exchange is the main significant structural experience relevant in this field. It introduces elements of work-based learning (dual learning) into school curricula. It officially entered in action in 2005³⁸, as an optional activity, in all the upper secondary school courses, as well as in the post-secondary technical ones and in the tertiary academic and non-academic technical training. As a consequence of the school's autonomy, the ways in which it is implemented can greatly vary³⁹

³⁴ "Circolare" n. 4243 del 13/3/2018.

³⁵ "Educazione all'imprenditorialità. Sillabo per le scuole secondarie di secondo grado", 2018.

³⁶The call (no. 2775 of 8/3/2017) asks for actions "aimed at providing students with courses in entrepreneurship education and self-employment, with particular reference to the knowledge of the opportunities and methods of doing business, with attention to all its forms (i.e. classical, social, cooperative and their articulations), to the promotion of the business culture, with particular attention to the development of the spirit of initiative, the propensity to risk, education to failure and success and awareness of the social responsibility of economic actors, to the skills for the development of a project idea in business opportunities through all its phases and to the development of organizational and relational skills such as, for example, the ability of teamwork, planning, communication". The call is in the framework of National Operative Programme for schools "skills and learning environments" (2014-2020), funded by European structural funds.

³⁷ At the level of primary school, the pupil should be able to demonstrate originality and spirit of initiative and carry out simple projects. At the level of lower secondary school, the student should be able to demonstrate originality and spirit of initiative, to assume responsibilities, to ask for help when is in difficulty and to provide help to those who ask.

³⁸Law no. 53/2003, art. 4, and Legislative decree, no. 77/2005.

³⁹ Surveys on experimented models are collected by ISFOL, a public research body active on formation and labor policies:

and the experiences have not always shown to express the programme's potential.

The measure is implemented as a compulsory activity only in 2015 (by the reform so called "La buona scuola"⁴⁰): in particular, the law fixed minimum standards for the program in the last three years of upper secondary school (200 hours in high schools and 400 hours in technical and professional schools).

However, bucking the trend, these standards were reduced by the 2019 budget law⁴¹ (90 hours in high schools, 150 hours in technical ones, 210 hours in professional ones), which cut the resources allocated for the programme (from 100 to 42.5 million/year)⁴². The policy for the programme's guidelines, arranged by the Ministry, in August 2019 received a negative opinion by the National High Council of Public Education⁴³. The opinion considers the resources as insufficient and the critical lack of consideration for disabled students. Furthermore, it's noted that from the policy's philosophy it shows how the programme is mainly aimed at favouring the acquisition of skills for occupations and the work ambient. This view is reductive with respect to the much broader meaning required of the orientation, which should be aimed at individual development in different sphere of life. In consequence of this reductive meaning, the policy prioritizes the business points of view and economic values, instead of the scientific-humanistic and social ones.

On September 2019 the Ministry of Education adopted the Guidelines on pathways for transversal skills and orientation,⁴⁴ which provides a minimum framework for schools that will implement these paths in the exercise of their autonomy. In this act the entrepreneurial skill is one of the four transversal competences individuated. The other three are: personal and social skills, in matter of citizenship and in matters of cultural

https://www.isfol.it/temi/Formazione_apprendimento/educazione-allimprenditorialita-1.

⁴⁰ Law no. 107/2015, art. 1.33.

⁴¹ Law. No. 145/2018, art. 1, 784.

⁴² The law changes the name of the programme in "Pathways for transversal skills and orientation" (Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento PCTO).

⁴³ Opinion no. 30, 28/8/2019.

⁴⁴ Ministerial Decree no. 774,4/9/2019.

awareness and expression. In this articulated framework, the four paths could become alternative and optional, while basic training on each of the different fields should be given to all students.

The entrepreneurial competence is defined, for the first time, in accordance with the recent literature, as the ability to act on the basis of ideas and opportunity and transform them into values for others. It is based on creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, initiative and perseverance, as well as the ability to work collaboratively in order to plan and manage projects that could have cultural, social or financial value. The Guidelines delegates to the school the planning of the paths, which are flexible and could be customized, as well as their organizational management. The paths could be realized in collaboration with host local subjects. One of the critical points seem to be the absence of public investment in the skills for planning the pathways as well as for mentoring, which are delegated *sic et simpliciter* to the educational institutions without specific training for teachers and school administrators⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ See V. Vinci, *Le competenze imprenditoriali degli insegnanti: sfide per la formazione, Education Sciences and Society*, Vol. 11, No 1 (2020).