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European Governance and Educational Policy

Youth Guarantee as a ‘Trail’ between Labour and Learning

Sandra Vatrella and Marcella Milana

ABSTRACT: *This article focuses on the relationship between European governance mechanisms and national policies. Specifically, we present a study on Youth Guarantee (YG) and examine how this policy tool impacts and modifies the field of adult education and training. In doing so, the article retraces the steps that have led this European instrument to assume its current configuration, identifies the funding mechanisms set up for implementing it and analyses the form YG takes in Italy. The article closes by presenting some considerations about the way these two policy areas (work and education), situated at the crossroads between European initiatives and local translations, converge within a fragmented framework which often stem from and feed into the ‘economic reasoning’ underlying both areas.*

KEYWORDS: *Youth Guarantee, Active labor market policies, Adult education, Adult training*

Introduction

Building on a broader research project (*Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive and Vibrant Europe*, ENLIVEN) carried out as part of the Horizon 2020 program, this article focuses on the way European governance mechanisms influence national policies in the field of adult education and training.

The concept of governance is used here to indicate the way public action has shifted over time: while such intervention was traditionally based on bu-

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reaucratic-hierarchical power relations, more recently it has become increasingly dispersed (Bevir, 2013) and conditioned by interdependencies between multiple actors or networks (Enroth, 2011). Understood in this way, «governance expresses a widespread belief that the state increasingly depends on other organizations to secure its intentions, deliver its policies, and establish a pattern of rule» (Bevir, 2019: Introduction, 2nd par.). Building on these premises, European governance is understood to mean the regional regime underlying public action in the European Union (EU) (*ibidem*). Such action is based on multi-level relations in that it creates connections among European institutions, national governments and other regional and local authorities in order to support «the formation of economic and/or political linkages among countries that are geographically near to each other» (Graziano and Vink, 2008: 7-8).

In this context, Youth Guarantee (YG) as an object of inquiry offers the opportunity to understand how a specific tool of governance operates. The tool, in this case, forges a close link between education and work, impacting the field of adult education and training and modifying it through action that is indirect but not any less effective for being so.

As the arguments developed below will show in more detail, the link in question appears in both the rhetoric of programme documents and policy, that is, in the formulation, adoption and implementation of a principle or course of action, in this case aimed at improving the economic and social condition of young Europeans. In this rhetoric, the academic performance results and evaluations carried out by international and national bodies (e.g. Programme for International Students Assessment, PISA; Programme for International Assessment of Adult Skills, PIAAC; national testing by the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System, INVALSI) are framed as a litmus test of the educational delays young adults face in the labour market. The policy identifies actions targeting the macro-container of adult education as the best site for addressing the issue of educational delays. It goes without saying that YG's logic and measures entail the involvement of the educational arena.

In light of this fact, we have elected to understand the rationale behind this involvement and the ways it is enacted by studying YG using a policy trail approach (Cort, 2014; Holford *et al.*, 2012), that is, by tracking the trajectory of YG as it is transposed from the European to the national level and then on to the regional level. Originally developed and employed as part of the 'LLLight'in'Eu-

rope' European project, the policy trail approach views policy as the result of «a range of complex processes that occur in transnational and globalized work spaces» (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010: 22). Therefore, as Cort (2014) also suggests, a policy trail lens is consistent not only with the concept of governance itself but also with the way this conceptual category has been applied in the field of education. In fact, «the notion that policy can be 'trailed' also gives recognition to the complex nature and consequences for both political structures and agency of the prominent multi-scalar model of lifelong learning governance within the EU» (Melo *et al.*, 2015: 11).

Methodologically speaking, 'trailing' a policy requires assuming a standpoint from which to map «the terrain the policy travels through rather than the policy itself, analysing how the policy is shaped through its journey» (Holford and McKenzie, 2013: 1). The task, therefore, is to observe how a policy takes shape over the course of its journey, through negotiation and/or challenge, so as to analyze the way it changes in interaction with individuals and organisations (Holford *et al.*, 2012; Holford and McKenzie, 2013). From a technical point of view, policy trailing therefore requires researchers to devise a composite research strategy which, in the specific case presented here, combines the extensive study of documents published on this subject with focused interviewing techniques (Cardano, 2011; Denzin, 2008).

Documents were collected and classified according to a 'geo-political' criterion, distinguishing between those produced at the European level (recommendations, directives, regulations and reports published by the European Commission), those disseminated at the national level (laws, decrees, ministerial documents, National Operational Plans, and, for Italy, reports published by the Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori (Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of Workers, ISFOL) and the Agenzia nazionale politiche attive lavoro (National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies, ANPAL) and documents produced at the regional level (regional operational plans, implementation measures).

After classifying these texts diachronically and by geographical relevance and normative cogency, we interrogated them using an analytical grid designed to identify the actors involved in the texts and the spaces through which the documents pass. Finally, an intensive and transversal reading of these empirical foundations allowed us to distinguish the key passages, the stops and turning points

in YG's trail as well as the forms it has taken over time and over the course of its path as it makes its way from the European to the local level.

In keeping with a policy trail strategy, document analysis subsequently converged into the process of delineating a trajectory around which to conduct focused interviews. The elements that had emerged from the texts as a result of the previous analysis served as useful stimuli in this process; they suggested questions we could pose to experts¹ in order to glean insights useful for understanding how and in what terms the policy ends up being transformed in its interaction with the individuals and organisations that put it into practice.

In this article, therefore, we begin by focusing on the European level so as to outline the nature of YG (section 1), then trace the steps through which this European instrument has reached its current configuration and identify the financing mechanisms put in place for its implementation (section 2). The second part of the article analyses the way YG takes shape in the Italian context (section 3).

Having positioned YG within the specific national context in which it was observed, we subject it to further investigation in terms of the specific dimensions of governance and management, exploring how YG is managed and what it becomes when translated into concrete initiatives and measures at the local level. The article concludes by presenting some considerations about the way YG intersects with adult education and training policies in Italy.

1. On the Youth Guarantee trail: How it originated and who it targets

Set up by the Council of the EU on 22 April 2013, YG was created to obtain «the full benefits of an active, innovative and skilled workforce while avoiding the very high costs of having young people neither in employment, education or training ('NEETs')» (Council of the European Union, 2013: par. 1). YG was formally launched on 1 January 2014 with the aim of providing young people under 25 (or 29 in some cases) living in EU Member States with the guarantee of a job or course of education or training within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. The educational component of the

¹ The researchers involved in the ENLIVEN project carried out a total of 52 focused interviews with people knowledgeable about economic and normative aspects framing YG at the country level in Austria, Belgium/Flanders, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Slovakia, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

guarantee therefore plays a key role in defining this instrument dedicated to all young Europeans over 15 years of age in conditions of educational and/or economic deprivation. That said, given YG's political emphasis on the NEET group, some preliminary clarifications are needed as to the way this group is conceptualised and the extent of the phenomenon in Europe.

Conceptually speaking, the NEET acronym evokes a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The concept was developed in the 1990s to identify unemployed young people who are not investing in their human capital. They are the so-called working dead (Rosina, 2015), that is, young people who wander aimlessly, disenchanting and disillusioned. In short, «They are vulnerable because of the transitional life periods they are going through, their lack of professional experience, their sometimes inadequate education or training, their often limited social protection coverage, restricted access to financial resources, and precarious work conditions» (Council of the European Union, 2013: par. 2).

Although this definition does mention the vulnerability of the target identified by YG, it seems to overlook the profound differences that characterize the NEET population in Europe, and indeed it is in this oversight that the definition proves ineffective. Suffice to consider how different the needs of young women, especially mothers, are as compared to disadvantaged young people with lower levels of secondary education or migrant backgrounds.

It is therefore not surprising that when youth unemployment rates in EU countries were reaching their highest levels ever during the 2009 financial crisis, the traditional way of describing the labour market crisis by simply dividing it into employed and unemployed people was no longer capable of capturing the different nuances emerging in youth unemployment. At the political level, therefore, what was needed was a better understanding of young people's vulnerability, one that transcends the employment vs. unemployment dichotomy. This is how the acronym NEET made its way into the European political arena as an initial political response to the need to comprehend the multiple facets of a phenomenon that was taking on alarming dimensions, soon to become the key subject of discussions about youth policies (Eurofund, 2016). The centrality of this issue shaped the concerns of politicians and researchers regarding the effects of the economic crisis on both training opportunities and the employability of young people under 25; as a result, EU policy-makers and academics developed a strategy of using a shared set of metrics to evaluate this phenomenon. The

NEET indicator was introduced at the European level in 2010 when the European Commission's Employment Committee (EMCO) and its indicators group decided to measure the size of the NEET population among Member States.

This indicator was adopted by EUROSTAT to measure the proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training as a segment of the total population of young people. Simple to calculate, this measurement is carried out on an annual basis using the EU Labour Force Survey. It should be noted that the NEET indicator does not overlap with measurements of youth unemployment rates. The latter instead represents the proportion of unemployed young people in relation to the economically active youth population. Thus, because of the basis on which standardisation is carried out (i.e. economically active young people), unemployed young people outnumber NEETs in relative terms, but not in absolute terms. That said, as Eurofound notes:

While individuals in the NEET category often display multiple disadvantages, including a low level of education, poverty and difficult family backgrounds, on the other hand the population of NEETs is made up of both vulnerable and non-vulnerable young people who have in common only the fact that they are not accumulating human capital through formal channels (Eurofound, 2016: 29).

In light of this point, Eurofound (2016) has broken the indicator down into seven subcategories. It is worth noting, however, that these subcategories of the population effectively captured by the NEET indicator take on different contours depending on the European country in question.

What, however, is the extent of the NEET phenomenon in Europe?

According to Eurofound, in 2016 almost 1.3 million young people in the EU were unemployed and had been actively seeking employment for at least 12 months, with concomitant effects on the burden of unemployment on the young person's psychological and relational well-being as well as his or her resulting long-term disengagement (Eurofound, 2017: 1). In the same year, about 6 million young people belonged to the NEET group. In relative terms, this means that in 2016, the 11.5% of the NEET group had dropped two percentage points as compared to 2013, when it accounted for 13% of young people in Europe aged between 15 and 24. That said, this percentage actually varies considerably from one Member State to another, with figures in Italy reaching a total of approximately 1 million young people.

This is the scale that the phenomenon has acquired to date. In other words, it is a complex interweaving of quantitative and qualitative factors that combine to generate one of the main concerns to have been raised at the European level in the last 15 years. As we will see, this phenomenon has occupied the European political arena since 2005 but the regulatory path it gave rise to did not gain material form in a consistent regulatory framework until the launch of YG in 2013.

2. Starting the trail: The regulatory path of YG and community support in Member States

The regulatory trajectory that eventually led to the launch of YG shows how the nature and reach of the texts produced at the European level have changed over time. From 2005 to 2013, in fact, such documents have progressively shifted from declarations of principle towards a lexicon that is more closely linked to the sphere of practice. This shift, as we will see in more detail below, is characterized by two closely related features:

- the modeling of increasingly specific active measures in terms of the content and activities to be implemented at the national level by strengthening the relationship between education, training and employment issues;
- reference to the sources of funding to be used to support YG schemes in Member States.

As stated above, the regulatory path under investigation here began in 2005 when the European Council agreed that «every unemployed person should be offered a new start before reaching six months of unemployment in the case of young people» (Council of the European Union, 2005). A few years later, in 2010, the European Parliament invited the Commission and Council to present a European Youth Guarantee so as to guarantee young Europeans' right to a job, an apprenticeship or training after a maximum of four months from the onset of unemployment (European Parliament, 2011). In its 15 September 2010 communication *Youth on the Move*, the European Commission built on these foundations by encouraging all Member States to introduce their own Youth Guarantee, promising it would support the design, implementation and evaluation of these programmes.

In keeping with this declaration of intent, the texts produced at the European level from 2011 onwards have gradually offered more and more detailed indications as to how Member States should achieve the annual targets set under YG. EU documents have thus begun to underline the need for active, rapid and effective measures, linking youth unemployment issues with education and training issues. For example, the Council Conclusions display this shift when they explicitly call on Member States to reduce poverty and social exclusion risks by providing education, training or employment to the NEET population. This policy line was further developed in the Council Recommendation published 28 June 2011, which places more emphasis on the implementation side of the policy. Indeed, the Recommendation stresses the importance of forging and reinforcing the link between educational and training systems and the employment sector.

2.1. Education, training and employment issues

This conceptual and practical connection among education, training and employment has been stressed even further since 2012. Indeed, as Escudero and Mourelo have noted (2015), it was 2012 that marked the turning point in the process leading to the creation of YG. Over the course of this year, YG policy developed along a path from general to more specific statements. It started with the production of a general legal framework, continued by explicitly referencing the sources of funding to be used, and ended with a number of suggestions about the objectives to be pursued and the related practices to be implemented. In particular, with the communication *Towards a Job-Rich Recovery* in April 2012, the European Commission launched an employment package asking Member States to combat youth unemployment and stressing the need for a European guarantee for young people. Subsequently, in May 2012, the European Parliament specified that this programme had to be made legally enforceable in order to most effectively combat youth unemployment (European Parliament, 2012). A month later, in June of 2012, the European Council asserted the significance of measures aimed at young people and emphasised that the European Social Fund (ESF) would finance these measures. In line with the trend of developing the programme's more practical side, on 10 October 2012

the Commission suggested both the type of measures to be implemented (e.g. measures to support self-employment) and the way such initiatives should be implemented (e.g. through start-up services).

2.2. EU funding support

The focus of the Commission's 20 November 2012 communication *Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socio-economic Outcomes* provides an interesting case in point. Here, concerns about youth employment are addressed from a specifically educational perspective. Indeed, this communication invites Member States to reform their educational and training systems to better align the supply of skills with the needs of the labour market. Subsequently, with its proposal for a Council Recommendation (European Commission, 2012) in December of the same year, the European Commission identified the main principles and pillars to underlie the establishment of YG while also specifying the governance mechanisms and instruments that MSs should use in managing it (for example, financial support through the ESF, monitoring and the evaluation of measures). The financial dimension has thus become increasingly prominent in terms of the space it occupies in policy documents, thereby moving even further towards a more operational/practical focus. This focus became so key, in fact, that «throughout 2013, there were movements to provide financing for the Youth Guarantee programme» (Escudero and Mourelo, 2015: 3) which resulted in the European Council creating the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) to serve as a specific financial instrument for implementing YG systems in Member States and specifically in areas with high youth unemployment rates.

In short, the regulatory path has gradually evolved from declarations of principle and intention towards the modelling of active measures in which education, training and employment are ever more closely linked and this link is stressed in increasingly forceful ways. The overlapping of these three spheres is not only conceptual. Rather, the education-training-employment nexus is made operational and translated into active measures through the EU's financial support to Member States, support which ultimately contributes to processes in which the EU-level policy is internally adopted at the national level.

This financial support from the EU is provided through two distinct funding streams: the YEI and the European Social Fund (ESF). As mentioned above, in February 2013 the European Council decided to create the YEI, thereby allocating 6 billion euros of the EU budget to supporting unemployed young people with a specific focus on regions where the youth unemployment rate was above 25% in 2012 (and again in 2016).

The main objective of YEI is to provide apprenticeships, traineeships, and continuing education that can be used to obtain degrees or certifications. In this sense, the financial instrument enables Member States to address the problem of youth unemployment by acting as a bridge between YG measures and the adult education and training markets. Furthermore, YEI is designed to reach NEETs directly and provide them with individual support through national YG programmes in that it finances measures ranging from apprenticeship to training courses, employer benefits and support for career development, depending on the specific needs of the young person in question. The funding made available by the YEI is used to implement the Youth Employment Package and specifically the YG schemes launched in the Member States covered by the YEI.

In order to benefit from YEI funding, however, regions with a youth unemployment rate of more than 25% must earmark a corresponding amount under the ESF budget line. The YEI thus supplements other EU funding streams the scope of which goes beyond individual cases to support overall education and employment reforms in the Member States.

Two months after the creation of the YEI, therefore, the EU Council (Recommendation of 22 April 2013) went on to clarify how these EU funds are to be used. Specifically, it is recommended that Member States:

Make full and optimal use of the Cohesion Policy funding instruments [...];
 Ensure that the necessary priority is given and corresponding resources are allocated for supporting the conception and the implementation of the measures related to the establishment of Youth Guarantee schemes, including the possibilities for financing targeted recruitment subsidies from the European Social Fund [...];
 Encourage Member States to make best use of the ESF, in accordance with the relevant investment priorities for the 2014-20 programming period, and the Youth Employment Initiative, where applicable, to support the set-up and implementation of Youth Guarantee schemes as a policy instrument for combating and preventing youth unemployment and social exclusion;

Support programming work under the Union's Common Strategic Framework Funds [...] including through peer learning, networking activities and technical assistance (Council of the European Union, 2013: 5).

In brief, ESF and YEI financing together allocated more than 15.1 billion euros to measures for youth employment and young peoples' integration into the labour market in the 2014-2020 programming period. As for the ESF, it is worth recalling that the distribution of these funds follows a criterion based on the regional gross domestic product (GDP) per capita as compared to the EU average. Italy, together with Spain, therefore received the largest shares among Member States. In addition, in April 2017 the YEI was judged to be «the most important policy framework for actions to prevent the long-term disengagement of young people» (Eurofound, 2017: 1), leading the YEI budget in particular to be increased to 8.8 billion euros.

3. Across national borders: The Italian response to Youth Guarantee

The trail as it has been mapped thus far illustrates the main steps in the journey YG took in drawing closer to national borders and making its way into a specific national context. The features of this context went on to affect the specific forms the measure has ended up taking in Italy.

The main features of note are an economic context characterized by a GDP at market prices that only grew from 27,400 euros per capita in 2006 to 28,500 euros per capita in 2017. Although national growth in Italy has tended to stabilize over the years, it lags behind that observed in other major European economies (ISTAT, 2018). As far as unemployment rates are concerned, Italy is not only above the European average, it is also drawing further and further away from average rates. This negative trend is especially evident with regard to the group that has been most deeply impacted by the economic and employment crisis, namely young people (Ferrarotti, 2011; Reyneri, 2014).

As regards education levels, in the 2008 to 2017 period the number of Italians aged 15 to 64 whose levels of education remained below primary and lower secondary schooling (levels 0-2) decreased by seven percentage points (from 47.9% to 40.9%); at the same time, the number of Italians who had completed

tertiary education increased by about 4 percentage points (from 12.7% in 2008 to 16.5% in 2017) (Eurostat, 2018). While encouraging, these figures should be treated with cautious optimism. While this indicator enjoyed a four-point-increase in Italy, it increased by almost 7 percentage points in Europe (from 21.2 to 27.9%). In other words, Italy followed the European trend but so slowly that the country not only failed to catch up with the EU average, it actually drew further away from it. Figures on NEETs also continue to be alarming. Rates in Italy vary from 15.6% in the North-East to 34.4% in Southern Italy (ISTAT, 2018) while the overall incidence of NEETs has tended to increase throughout the country. These findings continue to reflect the substantial disparity that has historically characterised the regions in the south of the country as opposed to those in the north while also exacerbating the gap between Italy and the European average.

The contextual features briefly outlined here form a complex scenario of factors that impact on national and local policies and thus condition the forms that YG takes in Italy. Suffice it to note that, in view of the country's specific unemployment rates, the age bracket of the target population for YG in Italy was extended to an upper limit of 29 years old.

It goes without saying that this context constitutes not so much the background against which YG has taken shape as the specific 'breeding ground' on which the Italian government was called to work in implementing this European measure². The first step in implementation was to create a structure of governance with the capacity to meet European requirements.

3.1. *Governance*

The Italian government started working on YG in 2013 when the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies (MLPS) decided to set up a National Operational Program (PON), which was then approved by the European Commission in 2014.

A fundamental step in this phase was establishing a Mission Structure (Legislative Decree 28 June 2013, n. 76) composed of representatives of national and local bodies as well as the MLPS (which was also Managing Authority

² Regarding this point, see also Rapanà and Vatrella (forthcoming).

until 31 December 2016), the latter tasked with drafting a National Implementation Plan.

Launched in May 2014, the Plan granted greater importance to the central government while offering local authorities the opportunity to adopt measures appropriate for meeting the needs of their specific areas. The central-governmental actors were made responsible for constructing the policy framework, setting up the monitoring system, defining this system's communication and information activities and creating a unified IT platform.

This IT system serves as a central hub for the technical data sheets for all the programme participants who are beneficiaries of YG measures, but it is the regions, that is, the actors in charge of implementation, who are actually responsible for these measures. The regions are therefore positioned as intermediate bodies within the framework envisaged by the national implementation plan, accompanied by the network of Employment Services (also coordinated by the regions), other partners located in local areas (that welcome young people), and the Managing Authority (the Ministry of Labour until 2016, replaced by ANPAL in 2017). The Managing Authority, a key actor in the unfolding of this trail, had to sign a bilateral agreement (Regional Implementation Plan, RIP) with each Italian region that specifies the active policy measures that the region plans to adopt (among the 9 measures mentioned in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Programme - YGIP; the available global budget, that is, the YEI OP resources that will be matched by each region using European, national or its own local funds; and the resources allocated for each measure.

The RIPs are thus political tools that allow the regions to develop complementary measures along the lines of the 2017 YEI OP while introducing their own variations in terms of defining both the policy target (in some cases 'young people' can be up to 35 years of age) and actions (YEI OP, 2017: 17) and how these actions will be financed. It goes without saying that the result is a patchy, inconsistent framework in which the offer continues to reflect local specificities above all.

In addition to managing financial resources (*ibidem*: 20), the regions are also tasked with coordinating the 'network' made up of public employment services and, in some cases, accredited private entities as well. The latter's role is to do intake and orientation and to identify the needs and potential of young people so as to define the trajectory most suited to each one's aptitudes and previous

professional experience. Naturally, the role played by the regions goes beyond the level of governance to also encompass the management and delivery of YG measures.

3.2. *Management*

The Council's Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee outlines a specific starting point for this process, namely registering with an employment service (and it should be noted that regional location is not binding, as young people are allowed to register in any part of the country, even in a region where they do not maintain an official address or place of residence). It is mandatory for applicants to register with the national portal or one of the regional portals, thereby expressing their desire to participate in the program and choosing the region or regions in which they would like to access the YG services. This step of choosing to participate works to self-select the most motivated and talented among unemployed young people.

Within sixty days of registering, the appropriate service in one of the selected regions contacts the young person to arrange for an appointment. At this meeting, the applicant is processed (given information, guidance and support) and then profiled to design a personalized trajectory leading to job placement or a return to training/schooling path.

Through this profiling, YG service providers are able to differentiate their efforts, and in particular their economic investment, on the basis of a person's 'employability rate': the lower the chance of finding a job, the higher the expected financial investment. This formula implies that, within four months of being entered into the system, the young person should receive an offer of admission/reintegration into a training/internship programme or a job offer.

The range of measures formulated at the national level according to different local needs enables each Italian region to implement the actions best suited to the productive characteristics of its local economy. In terms of training programmes, regions have responded by offering YG participants the opportunity to attend individualised training courses and by changing the system of extra-curricular internships. In short, the process of rethinking the programme has resulted in YG initiatives being combined with job placement services. In the

resulting system, if within one month of its end date an internship is transformed into an employment contract lasting 6 months or more, the employer is eligible for the financial incentive associated with the Job Placement measure (up to 3,000 euros) instead of the financial incentive for having offered the internship (up to 5,000 euros).

Conclusions: Implications for the development of adult education and training policies

The institutional arrangement of the Italian government reflects a logic of cooperative regionalism in which regions are granted legal powers in keeping with the European-inspired principle of subsidiarity, that is, conferring general administrative power at the political level closest to the citizenry. Through this arrangement, regions are empowered to tackle the socio-economic and cultural disparity that has historically characterised the country's north-south gap by addressing the specific needs of each local area. Moreover, youth unemployment is dealt with through a complex system of programmes and measures designed to support young people in achieving effective integration into the labour market. As is widely recognised, these processes are closely linked to academic achievement. It is no coincidence that Italian youth unemployment rates for individuals aged 15-29 (i.e. the age group eligible to access YG in Italy) increase especially if their ISCED level is low. If such a framework naturally leads active labour market policies to be integrated with education policies, it seems that Italy has created a 'third way' by considering these two spheres as a single policy area. To implement YG, Italy developed a multi-level governance structure that complements the fragmented framework of various measures, each with its own objective. The state then transformed this fragmented approach by reinterpreting YG, redefining and expanding both the boundaries of the intervention and its target groups in order to address specific contextual needs, with a particular focus on youth unemployment. National policymakers have not seized on YG as the terrain on which to construct a single, unified policy area recognized as a complex whole, however; quite the opposite, Italy has instead chosen a workfare-type approach in which education mainly plays an ancillary role with respect to employment. Specifically, this has involved continuously developing

measures that detach YG from educational programmes so as to enhance the employability of young people. These measures are interesting in that Italian YG documents, plans, programmes and monitoring reports are all intentionally focused on results in terms of employment rates and employability. As a result and in contrast to the rhetoric animating YG documents, training and education programmes play a relatively minor role in Italian YG initiatives. Moreover, few of these programmes focus on the way in which YG impacts education policies. These programmes are designed to reinforce work-based learning through compulsory traineeships or apprenticeships which in turn tend to link education levels more closely to labour market needs.

Regardless of the syntactic role of educational components in official communications, programmes and official reports, therefore, the actual role assigned to education remains the same; that is, education and training continue to be considered a means to an end. In this approach, education and training only count as valuable as long as they correspond to neoliberal principles of spendability in the labour market. Moreover, the success of any given programme is likewise consistent with neoliberal principles of its spendability on the labour market. As a result, a programme is considered successful when it can be seen to meet standardised indicators and benchmarks (Borraz, 2007), which, as others have shown (Gunter *et al.*, 2016), often stem from and feed into this ‘economic reasoning’.

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