MODULAR TRAINING IN ITALY

Vocational training in the developed countries is facing today a rapid transition. The change towards a society based on knowledge transforms the meaning and the working method, new professions are created, old professions change, and others disappear for good. The most important changes that reach the working world are:
• new competencies required by innovation technology;
• development of new technical languages;
• greater importance to culture;
• development of a culture for professional mobility
• continuous interchanging between study and work

Some key elements at a macrostructural level :

1.   More connection between vocational training and work and employment policies, mainly through the development of alternative models and orientation services: the growth related to the role and the strength of the enterprise as partner of the training process. The professions evolve at a pace which is too quick when compared to the training systems, the enterprise has a role of social integration which is more and more important, the individual has to perform functions which are different within the evolving organisations.

2. **The training systems should become dynamic** through a greater integration of services and involvement of actors (mainly at local level): duality between education and vocational training is recomposing. A tendency of the education and training subsystems to meet has been observed, in the State members of the European Union. Vocational training continues to evolve towards a qualifying and graduating system (based on a diploma, certificate) which brings it closer to the initial rules of training. Therefore we are assisting the growth of an integrated concept of the systems.
3. The growing individualisation of the training paths, in answer to the development of new technologies, the strengthening of the role of the individual in the training process.

4. Broadening the access to training, both because of the new citizen rights and the cohesion policies.
The end of the 90's starts a new tendency: primacy given to the organisation of the qualifying systems concerning the trainers and piloting:
• through an outlined approach, which fixes the scenarios of the evolution concerning the training functions (features of contrats d'étude prospective - CEP training in France);
• Through the definition of standards, for certification of training structures and competences of the operators: this is the case of Italy which is introducing a more integrated training system;
• through the formal definition of the trainers duties (this is the case of the German legislation dated November 1998 on the duties of the trainer which identifies the main missions concerning the different phases of the training process: analysis, design, piloting, evaluation);
• through the organisation of training of trainers based on the network, the partnership and distance learning.

The present economic impact together with the social relevance of vocational training has contributed to increase the number of actors of the system which were previously generically defined as trainers. To this we must add the difficult dividing line of the professional territory of training itself, which often is connected to other sectors. Again all this has caused strong discussions in the definition of what training involves and the roles to perform.

As far as students are concerned reference is made to their competencies mainly referring to:
- the curricula: *"the curricula make reference to basic, transversal and technical professionalizing competencies"*
- And to the national standards "the *standard (…) contains (…) the specification of the profile and the related basic, transversal and technical professionalising competencies (…)"*.

A more precise definition of such articulation is contained in the Guide Line for the final certificate:

"The basic competencies consist of the fundamental resources necessary to a person in order to access training and work, furthermore for the development of a real individual and professional path in relation to this it should be pointed out that after an appropriate reflection a contribution should be given to the educational and university channel which also offer development related to the professional competencies of individuals; a greater visibility and consideration to the basic competencies should be given. Basic competencies mean therefore the group of knowledge (and their use) which form both the requirement for an access to any further training course, and also the minimum base for access to the working world and professions, thus forming a modern citizenship right. Languages, IT skills, economics, legislation and work rights are only some of the examples of such competencies. In this respect the development of a wide range of basic competencies is today a joint goal, each one in its own area, education, vocational training and university.
The transversal competencies are those competencies that *(communication, relational, problem solving, etc.) are needed in different working situations and that allow the subject to transform the know-how into an efficient working behaviour belonging to a specific context.*
It is important to underline that all cognitive and methodological resources that education and university experience allows to develop are to be considered transversal competencies and therefore becomes part of the stable patrimony of the individual, although often it is declined with different languages.
The technical-professional competencies are composed of the know how and the techniques linked to the practice of the operative activities required by the working processes where reference is made in the different professional environments. *To this purpose it is necessary to appeal the specificities that characterise the different contributions that derive from the education system, university and regional vocational training, for the development of technical professional competencies".*

For the basic competencies "*requisites for occupation and citizenship* " are taken into consideration which are considered essential, in order to favour the access to training and work in the emerging scenarios and to develop an individual and professional path.

For the transversal competencies, **non working characteristics should not be analysed but rather the working behaviour of the individuals and the variables which can**

significantly influence its actions. Namely there should be an analysis methodology of the working behaviour of individuals.

For the technical professional competencies, instead the concrete operative activities linked to determine functions and working processes should be analysed, through an appropriate methodology of "work analysis" which is capable of "reading" the activities and reconstruct the picture of the competencies present in the same operative activities.

2 The capitalised training units as a tool for vocational training.

Higher Education and Technical Training (IFTS) courses:

"d) they are structured in modules and/or important units meant as a group of competencies, autonomously relevant, recognisable by the working world as a component of specific professional skills and identifiable as a result of the training course".

"As far as the training courses are concerned, the important competence units become the reference goal of the different didactic sequences which form the course itself.
These sequences are named "training units", and can or cannot correspond to an important competence unit.
Each training unit is defined by a specific denomination (title), aim, contents, duration, training methods and foreseen evaluation methods.
Since a training unit is finalised for the development of competencies, it could happen that in order to reach such objective the articulation of the unit itself into "training modules" might be useful.

According to this approach the training unit can be defined as a reference prototype unit to reach or recognise the professional competencies of the student and is therefore considered a codified tool to plan training actions for the acquisition of professional competencies.
Training Units usually have the following characteristics:

- *modularity* – Each unit is planned in such a way that it can be possible to connect it with the other units (or other credits acquired in a different form rather than training courses).

- *Autonomy* – Each unit sets goals and learning contents able to form a value which is recognised on the working market.

- *Multiple disciplinary trend* – The activities usually require the knowledge and ability in different disciplines, as well as the ability of implementing "professional behaviour plans";

- *Standardization of the describers* – Each unit is limited to recall the descriptive elements that form the essential standard for the development or the recognition of the competencies.

Observed under this point of view the training unit, allows the composition and fruition of an educational and training offer which is flexible and adequate to the needs of a coherent planning.

The adoption of a standard form points out the role played by the trainer, showing transparency of the results. The use of this type of training methodology is capable of satisfying the general situations of reliability and transparency which are features of the network protocols, avoiding, in the meantime, the risk of forming courses based on a combined mechanical logic of units "always and universally" suitable to every context.

The reason why in the IFTS, training units are used, is based on a principle of economising the transition costs: in reference to a variety of rigid and preset standards or, on the contrary, to the total freedom of *format* and methodological approach to planning, it allows to generate greater conveniences since it is flexible for local specifications and extensions.

The contribution of the training units to the reduction of costs for planning and setting up training emerges also from its functionality to activate different types of training *benchmarking:* internal (*carried out inside own organisation or project*) competitive (carried out *with other organisations or projects which are in competition*), functional and process oriented (*carried out with organisations or projects not in competition outside own sector of intervention*).

This way, within the IFTS the use of stand alone training units sensibly favour the research of the excellent procedures and the individualisation of the factors and the efficient methods to adapt and apply the best experiences to own exercising context. The competitiveness research induces the organisations to a more careful management of planning operational costs *competence based*, and increase the quality-price relation of own products and reduces feedback time to questions, favouring changes.

Besides favouring the possibility of capitalising the most innovative experiences, in order to learn as much as possible from the testing that took place in the sector, being a network protocol, communication and exchange it establishes a matrix for reference useful for negotiation of the training goals by the subjects that, belonging to different education and training and therefore starting from different languages and cultures, have to form an integrated and shared path. This negotiable valence of standalone training units has a decisive role both in creating the assumptions for capitalisation, the competencies acquired in own training and professional path, and also on a systematic plan, in creating the assumptions for a reciprocal recognition (between vocational training systems and education systems; between these and work environment) of training credits and the related competencies acquired.

Greater responsibilities and the strategic function assumed by the operators in the integration logic impose a greater need of competencies for all individuals and community of practices which have to interact during the definition process of the *competence–based* training offer. Furthermore it should be pointed out that, *benchmarking is not a service that can be bought, but finds its main assumption in the reciprocal exchange of information. Therefore it is convenient that* people directly involved (*final beneficiaries and planners of training*) can start a systematic confrontation between different experiences carried out, evaluating together the methods experimented and the results obtained, nourishing, even through training units, interaction processes as a joint network and to use the prototypes, experiences ideas elaborated by different subjects in different areas.

As shown on the scheme, the standalone training units process is articulated into three macro phases, chronologically arranged:
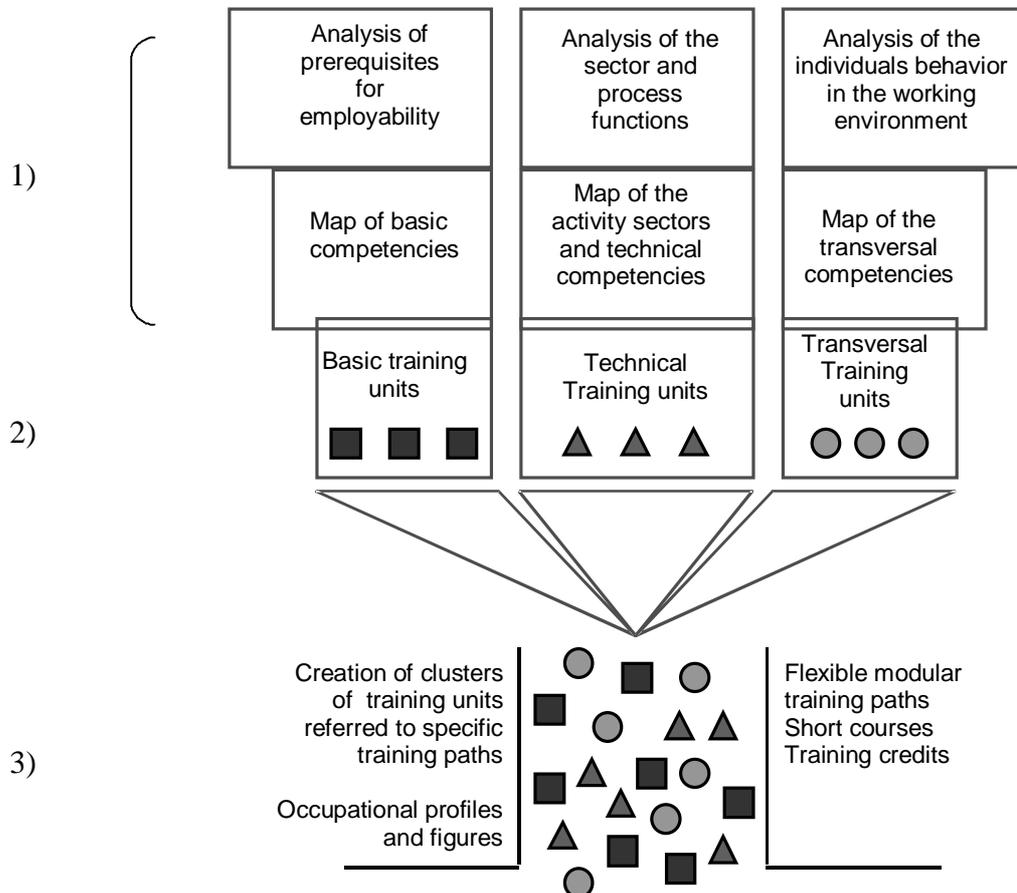
1. The analysis processes that have as *outputs* competence maps, aggregated and related to the *basic, professional and transversal competencies*;

2. the "interpretation" of the aggregated competencies into correspondent standalone training units;

3. the composition of the single training units in *clusters* which allow to train the professional profiles, with the consequent definition of the modular training paths.

Therefore the professionals of learning defined as "trainer" is not sufficient, since with this definition professional areas which in reality are radically distant are herein shared.
Such observation is confirmed in a confrontation among curricula experiences of various European countries which show, on one hand, a strong turnover of jobs in training, and an instability for the other professions, while on the other hand an overlapping of competencies involved in the learning process (tutor, counsellor etc…).
This brings to an inevitable fragmentation of the roles, closer to the various phases of the process rather than to a general transfer of knowledge.

In the perception agreed up to now, the trainer/teacher was he/she that allowed the student to learn knowledge, and transfer took place based on the fact that the trainer had the notions to be transmitted. In a similar traditional meaning know how appears as a specific group of notions, learning as the process of notion transfer even when not fully aware (mnemonic learning).

In the asserted model, the transfer of knowledge, <u>mediation of knowledge</u> has greater value.

In this range trainers are an element of the learning process, distributed in many roles, from the training needs analysis, to the evaluation after the training.

The trainer profile is becoming similar to a process consultant, and its sector can be defined as "learning engineering".

A need of continuous updating of the competencies opens a discussion on which can be the devices open to continuous training based on the modular approach and on the valorisation of training credits.

Remarkable opportunities are supplied by information technology and communication in the definition of the training methodologies, confirming the necessity of concentrating on innovation-training. Sophisticated techniques and technologies are used as didactic media but the didactics themselves is not evolved. Learning didactic has taken very short steps; technology has instead taken very long steps. The only possibility to fill the gap is to work on training the trainers.