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Evaluating the Pathways to Integration in Italy at a System Level

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1. The Methodological Approach

1.1. Research Objectives

To introduce the paper, we want to point out that this evaluation focuses on the "system" within the "Pathways to Integration" framework. The aims of the analysis are not therefore the single initiatives and single integrated interventions but rather the global strategies of the public policy-makers who have the aim of integrating the education, training and labour systems.

This paper thus analyses the integration between training and other labour policies in Italy from a "system" perspective to discover the general directions and architecture of integration *policy makers* during the 1994-99 programming of the European Social Fund (ESF)².

The main aims of the analysis, carried out on a national level (ESF Objectives 1 and 3), were:

- to choose the most appropriate analysis dimensions from those proposed in a Community framework³ for representing the features of the Italian case and consequent reconstruction of the overall role played by the ESF to foster the integration of training and labour policies;
- to analyse the main interventions of the ESF Regional OP to 'incentivise' the dissemination of integrated pathways in local training systems and see, where possible, if this link also extends to the education system (currently undergoing

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² The choice to carry out this survey within the framework of ESF-supported training interventions is also due to the significant role this social policy tool has assumed. In Italy, it represents over 77% of all regional investments assigned to vocational training (1996 data).

³ We refer to *Pathways to Integration* by the European Commission, DG V, defining four analysis dimensions for integrated experiences in Member States: the integrated approach, partnership, the individual approach and strengthening links with employment.

important reforms in Italy aimed – *inter alia* – at developing its ability to meet the demands expressed by the world of labour);

- to tap to the full particularly significant integrated experiences in Italy for fostering the further development of the integration of systems.

1.2. Activities

Under the methodological profile, the following activities were necessary to achieve these objectives:

a) definition of main survey areas: on the basis of the interventions planned on a national and Community level within the ESF framework and of the choice to highlight the pillars of integration on a **system** level, the evaluation gave priority to the following Regional Authorities' interventions under ESF Operational Programmes (OP):

- promotion of integrated policy strategies by Regional/Provincial⁴ Authorities;
- signature of long-term formal agreements and concerted programming between different actors;
- implementation of integrated training and labour services involving different stakeholders (see Box 1)

⁴ In the Italian Constitution, vocational training is delegated to the regions. However, the decentralisation of functions from regions to provinces is currently in progress. This means that some provinces are also responsible for financial channels for vocational training and programming, planning and training support activities. (Cf., *inter alia* for the centre-north of Italy, ISFOL, ESF Evaluation Unit *Valutazione finale dell'obiettivo 3 in Italia*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2000, pp. 285-291.)

BOX 1 -Survey Areas and Indicators of integration between training, education and labour systems

SURVEY AREAS AT A SYSTEM LEVEL	INDICATORS OF INTEGRATION BETWEEN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WORK
<p>Promotion of integrated policy strategies by regional/provincial Authorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • three-year and one-year regional plans and legislation merged with active labour policies • provincial plans merged with active labour policies • regional and provincial integrated organisational structures⁵
<p>Long-term formal agreements and concerted programming between different actors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formal agreements and pacts between local institutions and social and economic partners • labour pacts at a regional level • territorial pacts • tables and forum of concerted action
<p>Implementation of integrated training and labour services involving different stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integrated survey of labour and training needs involving different stakeholders • integrated networks for guidance involving different stakeholders • training pathways integrated with other active policy tools • interventions for strengthening local government and development systems

Source: ISFOL – ESF Evaluation Unit

b) construction of specific qualitative indicators able to identify, for each survey area, the web of experimental relationships launched on a local and/or central level between actors of the educational and training system and those of labour policies.

According to this approach, the interventions implemented on a system level within the various survey areas can be analysed on the basis of **indicators** (Box 1) defined by the following **objects of analysis**, for each survey area:

- the Managing Authorities of plans and programmes (Regional/Provincial Authorities)
- types of intervention
- implementation tools
- implementation procedures

⁵ Historically, local government training offices in Italy are mainly separate from labour offices.

- reference regulations/norms.

The existence of every one of these indicators - from the programming of common strategies (e.g. the existence of regional plans merged with active labour policies) to the joint management of training activity support services (e.g. the existence of integrated networks for guidance involving different stakeholders) - could signify the greatest degree of possible integration. However, the experiments analysed show that pathways, forms and instruments **vary according to the development achieved by the different regional training systems and their concerted action procedures;**

- c) **definition of qualitative indicators of successful integration** between training, education and work. Analysing the **objects of analysis** listed in point (b), some features for fully tapping the most significant experiences nationwide have been pinpointed (Box 2).

Box 2. Indicators of successful integration between educational, training and labour systems

Indicators of successful integration	Variables specifying/referred to the indicator
1. Agreements, pacts and conventions (national, regional or local)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional/provincial Authorities and other actors involved • goals of the agreement, pact etc. • contents of the agreement, pact etc
2. "Multi-actor partnerships" in which public and/private stakeholders from the following sectors are represented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocational training (regions, VTC, training providers...) • labour world (trades unions, consortia, enterprises and their associations, employment agencies, chambers of commerce) • education (Min. of Ed., schools, universities..) 	Joint implementation of the following stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • survey of labour and training needs • programming of the intervention and financial resources • training of trainers (e.g. instructors and business tutors) • implementation of activities broken down by objectives involving several different actors • co-ordination of activities (e.g. through technical support committees) • monitoring and final evaluation
3. Implementation of training and/or education pathways integrated with various labour support measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skill analysis • motivation actions and/or initial guidance activities • final guidance before entering the labour market • assistance or job placement actions (both employed and self-employed: job creation, individualised advice, etc.)
4. Direct participation of enterprises in implementing the integrated pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct hiring of beneficiaries • creation of conditions for their employability (occupational surveys, adjustment of selection practices, access to financial incentives, etc.)
5. Establishment/recognition of training credits between the vocational training system and labour world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • certification of the pathway • certification of skills • cases of reciprocity
6. Transferability of the intervention (multiplier effect)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adoption of a set of "regulations" in which the experience in question is expressly cited • reference to experiences in initiatives with similar goals, implemented in the same local context or in different ones • subsequent editions of the intervention attesting to its value as a model and its transferability

Source: ISFOL – ESF Evaluation Unit

The **indicators of successful integration** are mainly based on **crucial variables** for fostering the consolidation and further development of integration in terms of implementation of the legislative framework (upstream and/or downstream the experience), types of relationship between the actors involved and overall structure of pathways.

The qualitative indicators described in points b) and c) have been used to analyse the different types of integration by means of a **nationwide field survey**, carried out in:

- Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, Ministry of the University and Scientific and Technological Research, Civil Service Department, Imprenditorialità giovanile S.p.A.;
- regional Managing Authorities of the centre north and Mezzogiorno (vocational training and/or instruction and labour offices);
- Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano;
- Employment Agencies;
- managers and/or co-ordinators of particularly significant projects.

This survey has been backed up by in-depth interviews, carried out with the help of a special **survey field breakdown grid** (Box 3), that:

- draws a map of the forms and formalities of integration between education, training and other active labour policies adopted by the various institutional players in the different contexts (national, regional and local);
- analyses the state of implementation and development prospects for integration in the ESF framework;
- pinpoints and describes significant experiences.

Box 3. Field Survey Grid

A) Documentation to find:

- regulations, national and regional legislative texts
- regional/provincial plans and programmes (including invitations to tender, forms and relative enclosures)
- regional organisational charts
- formal agreements, conventions, pacts
- surveys and researches

B) Areas and presence/absence of indicators to survey:

1) Promotion of integrated policy strategies for the three systems

- presence of integrated strategies between education, training and work in programming documents: regional and provincial three-year plans, one-year plans, implementation programming
- identification/grading of any integrated strategies existing in Regional Authorities' organisational charts

2) Formal agreements, concerted programming

- presence of regional and provincial labour promotion agreements, pacts and conventions, and of territorial pacts, signed by different actors
- presence of integrated commissions, tables and forum of concerted action between representatives of the three systems

3) Integrated training services involving different stakeholders (implementation of strategies listed in previous points)

- presence of joint commissions, forum and working groups for surveying needs of and evaluating the training supply
- presence of integrated networks for guidance
- presence of integrated programming, designing, monitoring and evaluation groups
- presence of interventions for strengthening local government and development systems

e.g.: studies and research into:

i. Sectors relevant to local development; ii. training needs; iii. new qualifications or new skills and occupations; iv. specific cases of single training pathways or synergies between different projects involving: training pathways inserted in local development actions (territorial pacts, regional promotion contracts), training pathways for skills necessary for local development,

Source: ISFOL – ESF Evaluation Unit

The **predominantly qualitative approach** of the research work should be stressed. This is not only because of the limited availability of data provided by the national ESF monitoring, but also concerns the nature of the subject being analysed⁶.

It is evident that the evaluation of the impact produced by the ESF on a **system** level can be enriched with variables of a quantitative type. However, it would be unable to grasp the effects of co-financed activities within the framework of the education, training and labour systems (e.g. in terms of practices, experiments and transfer of experiences deriving from the aforesaid agreements).

Instead, the system evaluation is first of all a **process** evaluation, studying:

- i) the training pathways and modes of policy decisions;
- ii) "elementary processes through which the integrated programming designs have been implemented"⁷ in a top-down mode (including "operating contexts, programme implementation conditions and features"⁸);
- iii) the processes which have (vice versa) triggered, in a bottom-up mode, innovative programming choices.

Although an evaluation of the effects of integrated pathways on **individuals** was premature, as explained earlier, because of the type of monitoring system and also because it is still early to gauge the effects of the integrated interventions, the evaluation instead enabled something to be said about the structural effects on the performance of systems.

This is why we consider the methodological approach used has constituted (albeit with the aforesaid limits) an important launching pad for enhancing the knowledge and know-how required for evaluating the impact of the ESF on the education, training and labour systems.

⁶ As will be seen later (v. para. 3.1 , point 4) in the monitoring system for 2000-2006 it will be possible to collate data at a very detailed level, even providing the features of single projects. It is thus anticipated that it will be possible to read the impact of the ESF on integration both in terms of system and that of checking the effects of an integrated system on the quality of training. For example, it will be possible to analyse the effects of integrated training on direct beneficiaries in terms of employment outcomes.

To date, the employment outcomes surveyed for the Ministry of Education's Operational Programme show better results for the more integrated measures, and in particular for post-qualifications (cit. Bulgarelli, Edinburgh paper).

⁷ See: ISFOL - Evaluation Unit *Linee guida per il monitoraggio e la valutazione del Fondo sociale europeo obiettivo 3 2000-2006*, June 2000, polic.

⁸ Ibid.

2. The Main Results of the Analysis

2.1. Towards the Pathways to Integration

In 1988, the European Commission DG V defined four main dimensions for the evaluation of the *pathways to integration* implemented by the various Member States within the framework of the ESF co-financed interventions. The aim was also to ensure that national specific features influencing ‘integration policies’ would be comparable. These dimensions are:

- *the integrated approach*: those pathways aimed at fostering the employment of their beneficiaries with various follow-up activities (e.g.: guidance and initial support for beneficiaries, certified training pathways, work experience, assistance and counselling for job placement, direct integration in workplace);
- *the partnership concept*: here the promotion and consolidation of integrated experiences are mainly based on multi-actor partnerships, of both a vertical and horizontal type (with reference to specific sectors of activity and/or local contexts), of public and private bodies involved in managing training and labour policies (promoters of training interventions, *non-profit* bodies and other social solidarity organisations, institutional actors, social partners, enterprises and their consortia, etc.);
- *the individual approach*: those integrated pathways organised in a flexible and ‘personalised’ manner with regards to labour market needs, characteristics of beneficiaries and their living and working aspirations;
- *the strengthening of links with employment*: this classification criterion applies mainly to experiences involving a direct participation of enterprises and/or their representatives in integrated pathways (strengthening the partnership ideal where these bodies can simply validate the proposed activities)⁹.

The analysis carried out during the last ESF programming period demonstrates that the Italian experience, analysed at a system level, is based on the *partnership concept*. This in turn reflects those concerted formalities and practices (on national, regional and local levels) achieved by players in different systems (vocational training, labour world and, sometimes, schools) operating in a complex, well-coordinated and evolving institutional context. This context is characterised, *inter alia*, by:

- the ongoing institutional decentralisation of labour policies from the State to the regions;
- the regulatory and managerial powers of local Managing Authorities (regions and provinces delegated by the former) in vocational training and guidance, faced with a still mainly centralised educational system, although with new prospects introduced

⁹ *Pathways to Integration*, European Commission, DG V, cit.

by recent national reforms (e.g. compulsory training, reorganisation of educational cycles, autonomy of schools).

It is precisely *concerted action* that characterises the general trends and system actions of the *policy-makers* involved in integration. This approach has also affected, in an even more structured manner, the national programming process for the new ESF 2000-2006 period.

The promotion of tools, procedures and places for integrating the aforesaid actors is an important condition for strengthening the integrated pathways tested in the various local training systems. Other research demonstrates that the majority of the ESF co-financed projects for linking up education, training and labour policies stems from and is accompanied by a multi-actor partnership able, at least potentially, to foster the consolidation and subsequent development of these experiences on a local level¹⁰.

The *partnership concept* found in the Italian situation has a crucial influence on not only the consistency but also the quality of the link between training and labour policies. If there is no suitable level of social concerted action between the key actors of the industrial relations system (on a central, decentralised and local level) the management of integrated policies is more difficult or less focussed at the real needs of the local areas and the *target groups* present in them.

2.2. Integration on a System Level

2.2.1. Strong and Weak Points of the Italian Case

In general, the ESF has played a determinant role in triggering off or fostering integration processes in those regions (mostly but not all in the centre north) in which innovation can be inserted in a 'strong' training policy governance system and, in particular, where programming by macro-areas or macro-objectives is pegged to specific economic-social development hypotheses. In these conditions, the integration of the vocational training, education and labour systems has been underway for some time and the concerted actions described above reinforce and regulate the phenomena.

In the other regions, instead, the dissemination of the partnership ideal is more difficult and requires more time. It only acts as an accelerator of the integration process in

10 Cf. ISFOL – ESF Evaluation Unit, *L'integrazione tra formazione e le altre politiche del lavoro nel Fondo Sociale Europeo*, ISFOL – ESF Technical Assistance Unit Series – European Social Fund, May 1999;

ISFOL – ESF Evaluation Unit, *L'integrazione fra sistemi di formazione e istruzione nel primo triennio di gestione del Fondo sociale europeo*, A. Bulgarelli (ed.) ISFOL – ESF Technical Assistance Unit Series – European Social Fund, November 1997

contexts in which there are already elements useful for this end (e.g. integrated regional strategies and guidelines) and, more generally, cannot manage to create a greater link between training and labour policies if the system governing these processes is not able to promote, manage and disseminate the innovations they entail.

For constructing an integrated training system, the following aspects emerging during the analysis of the last ESF programming period constitute **strong points**:

1. The development of multi-actor partnerships for comparing and exchanging experiences acquired by those involved in the socio-economic development of the local area (local authorities, schools and universities, public and private training centres, enterprises and their support bodies, social partners' bodies).
2. Different integration modes between the aforesaid actors: both "*top-down*", that is imposed institutionally from above on the various situations (e.g. through national regulations and/or Community funds access procedures) and, above all, "*bottom-up*", originating in experiences of local networks, grass-roots partnerships or organisations.
3. The presence of integrated programming schemes and instruments in regional Managing Authorities: in some cases there are joint three-year plans supported by specific regional laws or, more often, training plans involving an explicit link with labour policies.
4. Greater flexibility of regional organisation, in which vocational training activities carry out a staff function with regards to other services (e.g. education and work) and, more rarely, become part of a single directorate covering either education activities or labour policies.
5. The progressive dissemination of forms and formalities for negotiating integrated policies through agreements, understandings and territorial pacts.
6. Experimenting integrated system actions, coherent with the need for a strong institutional engineering when linking the various policies. Within this framework, for example, there are experiments launched by central and regional Managing Authorities involving the continual analysis of vocational training needs; the construction of guidance and assistance networks for pinpointing and choosing various training and job opportunities; the implementation of training pathways integrated with other labour services; and the dissemination of interventions for strengthening local government and development policies.
7. The gradual overcoming, by ESF managing authorities, of the initial constraints and difficulties of a planning, management and organisational nature connected with experimenting integrated system actions. This has meant that the managing authorities had to:

- pass from a traditional ‘course’ perspective, mainly concentrated on the vocational training supply, to a ‘systemic’ approach with the aim of meeting specific needs through various actions combining different policies;
- involve different actors on both an institutional (e.g. regional officers in charge of training and labour policies) and operational level (not only training providers but also enterprises, social partners, educational establishments etc.).

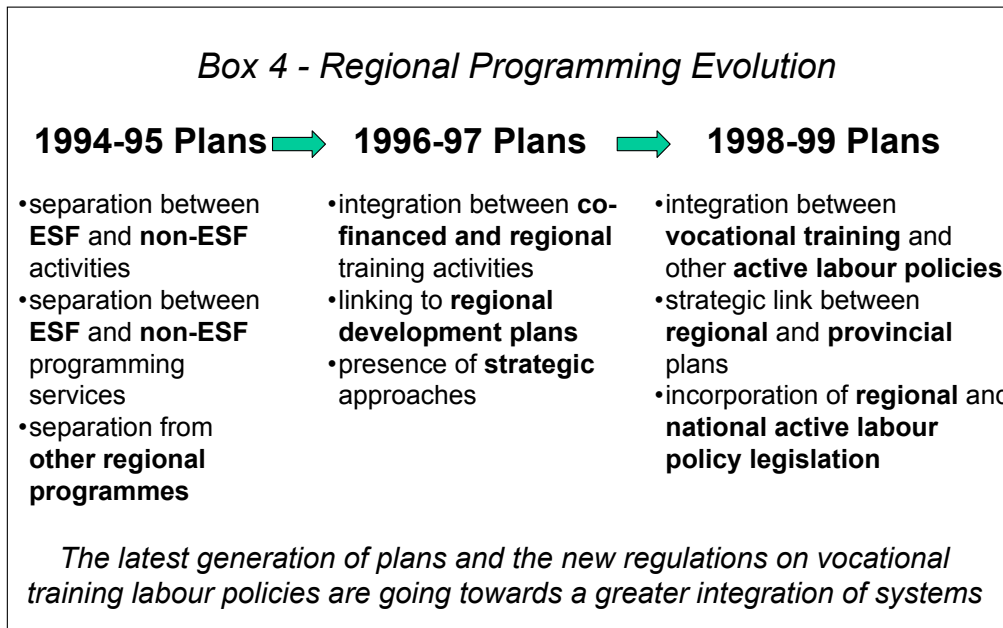
Some **weak** points still exist in the integration of education, training and labour policies launched on a national level with the support of the ESF:

1. Only in rare cases do the integration formalities and tools analysed simultaneously involve education, training and labour; usually the link is a bilateral one (between the education and training systems, between the latter and labour policies, or between the education system and labour policies).
2. There are still only a few integrated training and labour plans, especially in the Mezzogiorno regions, despite current trends in national and regional legislation and in national employment plan strategies.
3. Again in these situations, the link between training policies and those of local or sectoral development still seems weak; although the ESF has started to help create territorial pacts (integrating training with the already present job-creation measures) the launch of these pacts is lagging behind the approval of the co-financed training activities. Training is consequently less coherent with the aims of local development than it could be.
4. On an organisational level, is rare to find education, training and labour policies combined in a single unit; however, even when these policies exist in the same regional or local office at least on a bilateral basis (education/training or training/labour), the viscosity of structures (lack of adequate information system, lack of managerial competence, difficulties in working as a team, etc.) means that a system that should be integrated is still mainly dualistic.
5. Finally, there are still evident difficulties in transferring knowhow and good practices from one region to the other and from the central to the peripheral level in the training system nationwide, even greater in the Mezzogiorno regions. The most significant integrated experiences, scattered patchily over the entire country, are thus poorly publicised and even less transferred.

This overview must obviously also examine the profound differences currently existing in the various local training systems. Thus the various intervention areas considered as priority for the evaluation of integration on a system level have been analysed with the help of the indicators described in the chapter on the methodological approach.

2.2.2. The Promotion of Integrated Strategies

As far as the *three-year and one-year plans for vocational training and/or labour policies and regional regulations*, are concerned, the most significant link between training and labour policies has been achieved where there is a single regional regulatory framework: a unitary three-year plan supported by specific regional laws. The integrated situation is the result of an evolution (see Box 4).



On a lower level are those regional plans covering only vocational training but containing specific references to integration and envisaging projects and services integrated with labour. Moreover, in various provinces, active labour policy plans are being implemented to achieve also here those synergies with training policies envisaged on a regional level.

Often the regional laws reinforce links between training policies and labour policies already initiated by Regional Authorities before issuing the law (*bottom-up* pathway, see Box 5).

All this applies mainly to the centre-north of Italy. In the Mezzogiorno regions these laws tend to follow a *top-down* concept, that is translating and adapting national legislation on active labour policies to local situations, fixing tasks and functions of the regions, provinces and collective bodies¹¹. All the regional laws give the regions responsibilities for legislation, administrative organisation and the design, evaluation

¹¹ Cf. ISFOL, *Formazione e occupazione in Italia e in Europa - Rapporto 1998*, chap. IX, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1998.

and control of employment services. The region's role is expressed through the tool of the annual and long-term plans. The provinces are responsible for managing employment services and providing them in their area through the job centres. This achieves a vertical and horizontal integration of functions linked to active labour policies.

BOX 5 - Integration Modes

The **regional laws** of recent years on active labour policies can be divided into two types, differing not so much in their contents and target area, but in the bottom-up or top-down relation they have with national regulations.

BOTTOM-UP

The first group covers **regional laws** which **anticipate** and basically act as an incubator for the most innovative **national legislation** of recent years (mainly in the centre-north of Italy)

TOP-DOWN

The second group involves regional laws which **adapt national legislation** to **local** situations.

New laws do not bring integration if it is not already present in regional strategies and approaches or in practice.

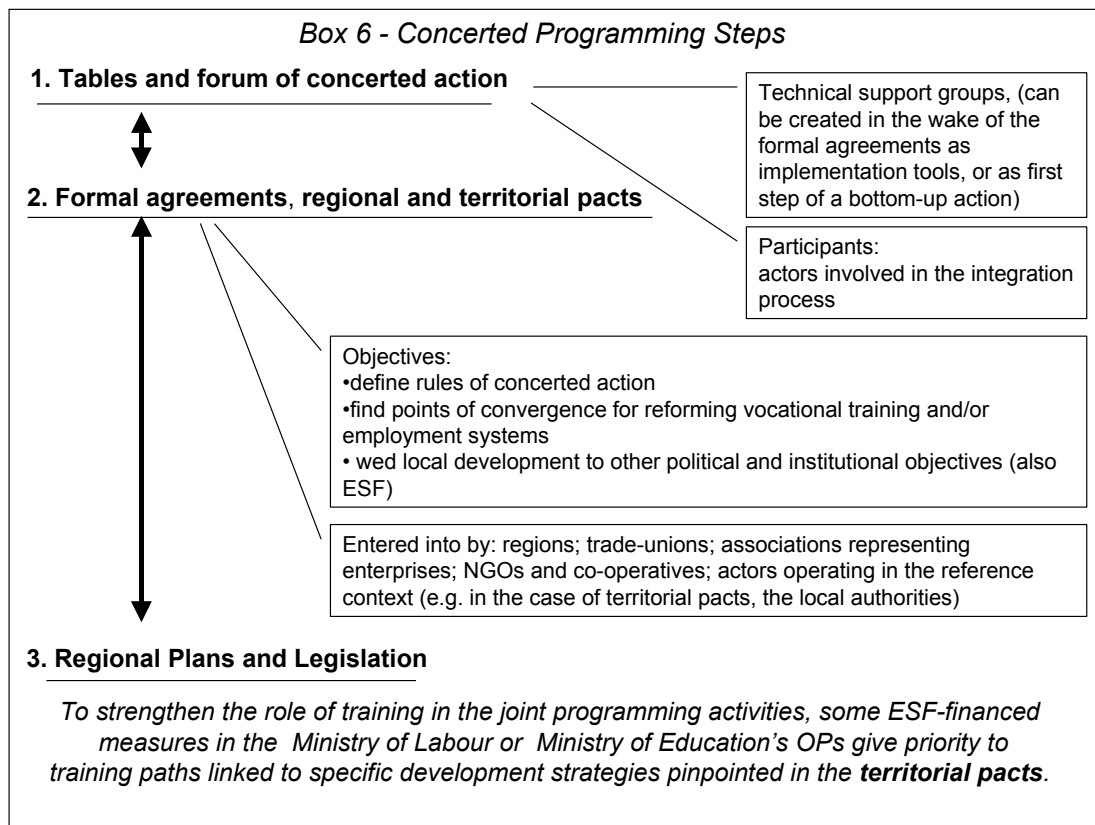
Another important context in which the link between training and labour policies occurs – or at least where it is possible – is that of the *organisational-structural schemes of the regions* and in particular with regards to the organisation of regional departments and offices in charge of training activities, labour policies and education.

We can speak of the integration of vocational training, labour and education management for Regions which have a single directorate responsible for several activities or, at least, the two poles of vocational training and labour. Not always, however does the existence of single office or directorate mean integration. A single organisational structure is no guarantee that the link between the systems will be speedily accomplished. In Italy, around half the organisations are organised according to this scheme, but only for seven can we speak of integrated internal structures (most of which are to be found in the centre-north). The remaining Regions have separate departments for the different systems, although some carry out joint programming or implementation activities with a tendency towards integration.

2.2.3. Agreements and Concerted Programming (Regional and Territorial Pacts)

In this survey area, numerous initiatives were found in which several actors, resources and professional roles were engaged in defining common strategies for local development and the promotion of the partnership concept.

Regions mainly tend to institutionalise forms and formalities for negotiating integrated policies through: (i) agreements, regional and territorial pacts; (ii) ‘tables’ and ‘concerted action forum’ (see Box 6).



The *agreements, regional and territorial pacts* often represent stages of a concerted programming and are closely related with the regional plans and legislation analysed in the previous paragraph. They are created both to define the rules of concerted action or to find points of convergence for reforming the vocational training and/or employment system and to wed local development to other political and institutional objectives of a more general scope or with the lines of intervention of the structural funds.

They are generally entered into by the regions (there are also cases of pacts between several regions), trade-unions, associations representing enterprises (industrial, SMEs, craft, traders, farmers etc.) and the main cooperative groups. Some regional pacts

specify associations or companies supporting or acknowledging the agreement, which is thus indirectly extended to representatives of the banking and credit system, voluntary associations, consumer bodies and regional research and training boards. In the case of territorial pacts, the reference context is the sub-regional area and the agreement involves actors operating in this context, in addition to others with regional responsibilities and roles.

The *'tables' and concerted action forum* also include the technical support groups created in the wake of the aforesaid programming agreements as implementation tools and permanent meeting and discussion points for actors involved in the integration process. These people have the task of designing and scheduling concrete actions based on the topics and directives contained in the agreements and ensuring adequate resources for implementing them.

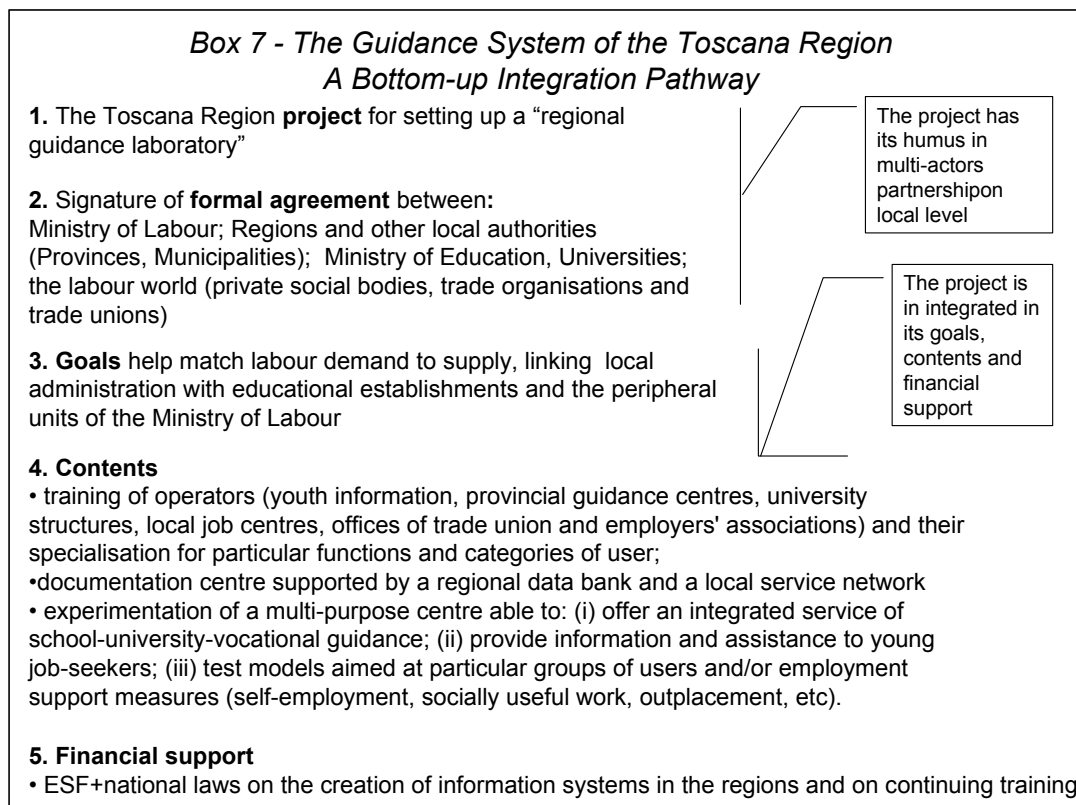
2.2.4. *Integrated Training Services Involving Different Stakeholders*

The third survey area covers the experimentation of integrated system actions. These actions require a strong institutional engineering for linking the different policies, and mainly consist of:

- (i) continual analysis of occupational and training needs;
- (ii) construction of guidance and assistance networks for finding the different training and job opportunities;
- (iii) training pathways integrated with other labour services;
- (iv) interventions for strengthening local government and development systems.

Several Regional Authorities have carried out *occupational and training requirement analyses* and other activities preparatory to integration, also providing information on other topics relevant to a greater link between training and labour policies (e.g., studies on the certification of training credits and *placement* surveys on employment outcomes of training activities). There is a greater awareness of these themes than in the 1989/93 programming, also proved by a nationwide system for surveying and forecasting labour demand and occupational requirements, combining data on the structure of employment from official sources with the demand for labour expressed by the enterprises (Unioncamere's Excelsior System). Different regions have institutionalised models for surveying training needs with the direct involvement of the social partners to encourage the development of an analysis methodology common to the various local contexts.

The development of *guidance networks and services* (see Box 7) is an area rich in initiatives, stimulated also by the recent nationwide reform of the labour. Here, the integration between education, training and labour policies is promoted both by strategies and regulations and by special experiments carried out nationwide. Through these initiatives, the central and regional Managing Authorities engage the actors from the systems examined in multiple activities to prepare an integrated guidance system. They might give priority – for example – to training trainers who have to acquire skills in this framework, and this applies above all to those regions in the Mezzogiorno which have a greater need to qualify and update human resources governing training



processes.

In the case of *training pathways integrated with other labour services*, the systems strengthening promoted by the ESF managing authorities is inserted in a complex framework with the aim of matching up labour demand and supply by acting on the overall configuration of the local training system. Included here are all the regional initiatives for reforming the training system, such as the development of employment agencies, the certification of the quality of training processes, the integration of education and vocational training and the insertion of disadvantaged groups in the labour market.

Finally, the *interventions for strengthening local government and development systems* stem mainly from multiregional initiatives promoted by the Ministry of Labour acting on both vocational training and labour policies and/or the local government system. Included here is the creation of information systems capable of supporting the new employment services, the matching of training demand and supply, and the monitoring of the occupational outcomes of the co-financed activities.

Other system actions of national scope accompanying the decentralisation of labour policies process have instead strengthened integration between the promotion of employment, training and guidance activities, also through the training support necessary for transferring staff functions from the peripheral offices of the Ministry of Labour to the regions and provinces.

In some cases, the regional Managing Authorities have promoted specific systems strengthening actions in integrated pathways. These actions include study and research into the needs of the local labour market; vocational guidance; entrepreneurial information and training; vocational training for work and at work; and support for employment and the start up of self-employment. These interventions are aimed at incentivising the mechanisms determining the demand for labour or at fostering a strong qualification of the supply, at the same time tapping to the full the potential of the vocational resources within the production organisational systems.

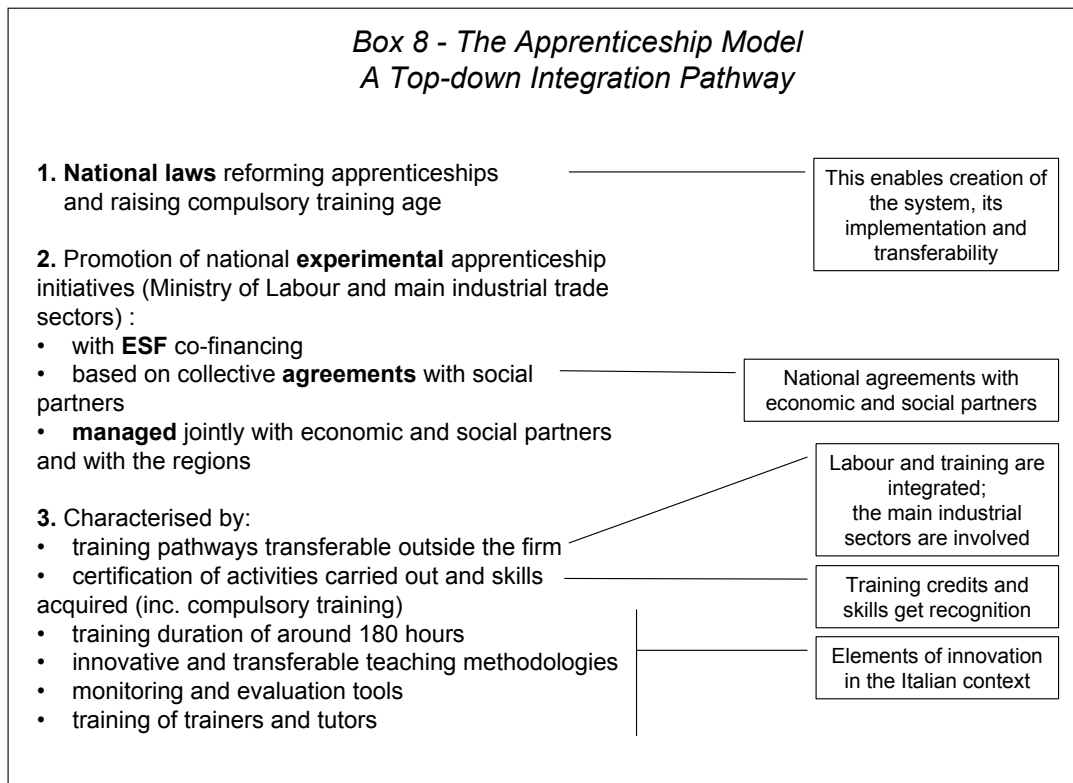
A particularly significant case in the Mezzogiorno regions of integration between systems on a local level is that of the development missions. These have activated a close-knit network of relations between municipal administrations and enterprises and have helped the units responsible for active labour policies to enhance their organisation and skills.

2.3. The Most Significant Integrated Experiences

Finally, the analysis of the ESF co-financed activities over the last programming period shows the presence nationwide of various excellent cases (see Box 8). The most significant integrated pathways – albeit with different participants, areas of integration, implementation times, places and formalities – have some common features. Here, the link between training and labour policies:

- comes from the concerted action “extended” to various types of actors, with an active participation of enterprises and/or social partners;
- includes the educational system in a single intervention framework (also here it is more likely that the link occurs either between training and education or between training and labour policies);

- develops, in the case of integrated training services, from the micro and/or project level through, for example, a work plan common to the various actors and the joint implementation of programming, coordination, monitoring and evaluation activities;
- produces effects also on a macro and/or system level in terms of the implementation of new agreements and/or understandings and of the transferability of the intervention into different contexts from the original ones.



The majority of these experiences has its natural *humus* in the multi-actor partnerships on a local level. This is partly due to the initiative of those involved in local development (local authorities, schools, training centres, enterprises and their support bodies, social partners' associations) and is partly a strategy for responding to the procedures regulating access to ESF contributions. This approach started with the co-operation between universities and enterprises under the "Comett" programme in the 1989/1993 programming period and is further strengthened by the subsequent one, and especially by the "Occupation" and "Adapt" Community initiatives.

One of the main tools for fostering this vitality on a local level is the various agreements, understandings and accords between training providers and those responsible for implementing labour policies, sometimes as a direct consequence of an integrated regional programming of local interventions. These linkage tools ratify the activity carried out. In some cases they are the outcome of a 'destructured' experimental

pathway and at the same time represent the premise for a new, more mature pathway aimed at consolidating and transferring concerted action and integration practices according to the *bottom-up* approach; an approach already found in the integration of education and vocational training systems¹².

¹² Cf. ISFOL – ESF Evaluation Unit, *L'integrazione fra sistemi di formazione e istruzione nel primo triennio di gestione del Fondo sociale europeo*, op. cit.

3. Integration in the Esf 2000-2006 Programming

3.1. Opportunities for Development

The integration between education, training and labour policies is one of the priorities of the ESF programming process for the 2000-2006 period. In this period, the ESF is required to contribute to the actions undertaken within the framework of the European employment strategy and annual guidelines on employment, thus amplifying the admissible intervention formalities. The idea is to jointly support people, structures and systems, to link up several activities within the framework of integrated pathways for entry and/or re-entry into the labour market and explicitly to support active labour policies and the link between training and education to foster lifelong learning and continual training.

The analysis of the Community and national strategies pursued within this framework has demonstrated that some results achieved during 1994/1999 (and highlighted in this paper) have also helped to define the future reference framework for co-financed policies.

In terms of process, for example, the many “national and regional tables” set up for the ESF 2000-2006 programming have indicated a further strengthening and extension to other actors of the *partnership concept*. In Italy, this concept has constituted the central and regional Managing Authorities’ main guideline for fostering the construction of an integrated system of education, training and labour policies on the various levels (local, regional and national).

On a level of contents the analysis of the overall strategies, programmed on a national level and developed by the central and regional Managing Authorities (Community Support Frameworks of Objectives 1 and 3 and relative national and regional operational programmes), demonstrates that:

1. The integrated system actions are considered crucial and have been strengthened:
 - (i) both to consolidate on a local level the link between the actors of education, training and labour policies on specific topics of common interest (e.g. the analysis of vocational and training needs, the development of vocational guidance networks and services, the dissemination of a system for recognising training credits, etc.);
 - (ii) and, above all, to help meet some strategic goals appearing in national provisions for reforming training and labour policies. In this framework, for example, the integrated system actions contribute to raising the school-leaving age to 18 years and to creating qualified employment services, constructing the necessary links between the actors involved (public administrations educational establishments, enterprises, social partners, voluntary bodies, etc.).

2. The integration between training and labour policies is closely linked to the occupational needs of the key sectors for economic development in particular local contexts (Mezzogiorno and/or areas in industrial decline and negotiated planning zones).
3. The development of integrated interventions (system actions and pathways addressed to specific target groups breaking away from a course-based concept) should be sustained by a multi-actor partnership linking the key actors of the local socio-economic development (i.e. from the education/training systems and labour world). The integration of these actors is important both to meet the effective vocational and training needs of the reference context and to foster the transferability of the final results of the integrated experience. Hence the Objective 3 Community Support Framework foresees that cooperation between the key actors of the partnership should be incentivised by a joint design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the intervention.
4. The Objective 3 Community Support Framework establishes specific indicators for monitoring the progress of integrated interventions and multi-actor partnerships supporting them. The central and regional Managing Authorities will thus have a more powerful information base for monitoring and evaluating integration also on a project level, to check its effects on the different target groups.

3.2. The Constraints

From a comparison with other European countries it can be seen that the effectiveness and development of the integration of education, training and labour policies also depends on some *strategic decisions of policy-makers on an institutional level*, involving¹³:

- the choice of implementing active and targeted labour policies instead of passive or general ones;
- the features and quality of the training and educational system, helping to foster the experimentation and implementation of integrated pathways;
- provisions aimed at strengthening links with employers to increase the probability of success of integrated interventions in terms of employability of participants.

In addition to these general conditions, the opportunities offered by the ESF to support the development of integration can be successfully exploited when there are training systems able to govern the innovation processes that the integrated pathways entail. This implies that *on a level of operational programming and management of*

¹³ Cf. J.Alan, J. Hansbro, P. Mooney *Pathways to Employment: the final evaluation of ESF Objective 3 in Britain (1994-1999)*, October 1999.

interventions the central and regional Managing Authorities - taking into account the results of the previous ESF programming period - should be able to:

- foster a greater participation of enterprises and educational establishments in the multi-actor partnerships to break away from the consolidated tradition of ‘bilateral’ integration (school/work or training/work) already found on a system level and which risks fragmenting the reference framework that one wants to unify;
- preside over the entire programming, management, monitoring and evaluation of integrated interventions, not only to prevent financing several activities with identical aims and/or categories but to foster the consolidation and transferability of successful interventions;
- rationalise the procedures for access to the different types of financing available, to encourage the entry of more resources for implementing joint system actions and single projects.

Finally, *on an operational level and with regards to executing agencies* there is the need to guide and support the integration process underway, by providing services for the various operators involved in strengthening and expanding the training supply.

The reference framework outlined by the recent national and Community provisions for the reform of training, education and labour policies is certainly helping to define the various tasks and functions of the key actors of economic and occupational development (Ministry of Labour, regions, local authorities, educational establishments, Ministry of Education, enterprises, social partners, etc.) guaranteeing that roles are not divided up or overlapping. However, besides the need to spell out ‘who does what’, those involved in the innovations already introduced and/or expected have to be guided, assisted and supported. This is done through specific services, such as information on course changes, guidance on the evolution of the various job positions, training for and updating skills as well as assistance in the ESF access and management procedures.

The integration process involves long-term and radical changes in mentality and organisation that cannot be left up to the will of the stakeholders but need to be incentivised and assisted to produce strategic results on a system level.

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