1. “Higher apprenticeship”: socioeconomic and political background

1.1 Introduction

Apprenticeship has a long history in the formation and functioning of the European economies. Its foundation can be located in the centuries of modernity, where young people, the apprentices, learn a profession working, and often living, next to masters of the respective profession. On this way European economies became capable to develop complex fields, particularly the industrial ones. Apprenticeship was one of the fundaments of industrial development in Europe. In economies and regions with an economic formation based mainly on other fields than transformation of primary goods (industry) apprenticeship did not play the same role. It remained underdeveloped. In such economies apprenticeship schemes do exist; but they are less important for the economic prosperity of the region. We may observe this in Italy, where the majority of the apprentices are in the regions with extended industrial production and much less in regions where the provision of services or the productions of agricultural goods (and of every kind primary goods) predominate.

Greece is a typical services providing economy. The industrial field never employed more than 22% of the active population. In our time of huge deindustrialization, and outsourcing of many of the important industrial firms, in the secondary sector are employed not more than 13% of the active population, in comparison with 75% of the employed in the tertiary sector and 12% in the primary economic sector. (Patiniotis 2007:176).

1.2 The “higher apprenticeship” policy in Italy

The Italian policy for establishing the so called “higher apprenticeship” is a very interesting innovation, where work based learning is combined with, in most of the cases, studies at the university at post graduate level. (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). This policy has as target “to improve the education level of young people and, at the same time (…) tries to start collaboration between schools/ universities and enterprises”. The target is thereafter the promotion of skills, competences and knowledge of the working population but also the tightening of the relations between the economic organisations and the teaching organisations, mainly universities, but also vocational schools.
Important parameters characterizing this Italian policy are, according to the available data:

- Apprenticeship is a labour (and training) contract and is present almost in all the economic sectors. Apprentices are paid workers, who have to attend specific vocational courses in order to acquire certifications.\(^1\) Target group for apprenticeship are young people from 16 to 29.

- There exist in Italy three forms of apprenticeship: [a.] for youngsters up to 18 years old; [b.] occupationally based apprenticeship; [c.] higher apprenticeship.

- Italy counts a total of 636,000 apprentices in 2007, 16.5% of 15-29 employed population.

- The salary depends on the “grade” attributed to the apprentices at the recruitment: it can’t be more than two levels lower of the final grade attributed at the end of the apprenticeship. The salary due for each “grade” is fixed by the collective bargaining.\(^2\)

- Enterprises pay as contributions (social security + national insurance) only 10% of the apprentice’s salary; firms up to 10 workers pay 1.5% for the 1\(^{st}\) year and 3% for the 2\(^{nd}\).

- For other workers the enterprises pay 40 to 45% of the salary as contribution.

- Higher Apprenticeship is introduced in 2003 reform of apprenticeship. For the first time the apprenticeship is linked to the education system because its purpose is acquiring a diploma released by the upper secondary schools, the universities or an IFTS certification (a post-diploma certification). Last August (2008) a new law has been passed that opens up higher apprenticeship to doctoral degrees. (D’Agostino S. 2008).

- Most of the apprentices are university diploma holders, e.g. they have finished their initial scientific studies before signing the labour contract with a firm. 16 of the ‘higher apprenticeship’ programs lead to a master’s degree and only 1 to a bachelor’s degree.\(^3\)

- The apprentices are employed mainly in industrial branches, primarily in the automotive industry and the information/communication branch. (Spattini. S. 2008)

- The ‘higher apprenticeship’ programmes are implemented mainly in the industrially developed north-central parts of Italy.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Only 17, 4% actually do.

\(^2\) Exception: in the banking sector an apprentice takes 64 € less than a qualified worker for the first 2 years and 32 € less for the 3\(^{rd}\) and 4\(^{th}\) year.

\(^3\) We have in that Italian policy a very special meaning of ‘apprenticeship’, by giving to the term a much broader content than the common one in other European economies is. In our understanding, that is very close to the official Italian paper, apprenticeship is addressing young people “with low educational attainment” (official Italian paper p. 2) enabling them to enter labour market as a qualified craftsmen/ woman.

\(^4\) The most successful programmes seems to run in the autonomous region of Bolzano, because these programmes are decided on the free will of the local decision makers and funded entirely by the province. It would be very interesting to make a special empirical investigation in order to understand why in Bolzano, but also in Lombardia and Piemonte, we observe good practices of the ‘higher apprentice’ policy. The results of such a research project could be helpful in deciding which modification of the policy should be probably decided in order to make this policy more successful also in other Italian regions.
It is noticeable that universities and vocational schools are willing to create special courses for groups of ‘higher apprentices’ with curricula decided jointly by the enterprises and the educational organisations. It obviously exists in Italy a ‘further education culture’ at regional level.

Some important points raised by the paper of Dr. Spattini could not be clarified even during the Peer Review workshop in Turin in order to complete our analysis on the important Italian innovation and present our final opinion about the transferability of this policy:

- Are the universities (or vocational schools) providing the same diplomas to the “higher apprentices” as they do to their regular (initial or post graduate) students/ pupils? Do these diplomas have the same form and value (= provide the same rights) according to the Italian legislation?

- How is it possible that some (few) 19 to 21 years old persons study at the first-level Master’s level? When did they finish their initial studies? (Spattini S. 2008: table 10).

- Is the teaching personnel paid more for the extra work it provides in the framework of the ‘higher apprenticeship’ programme, or is this teaching part of its duties?

- Does exist in Italy a forum, where economy has the possibility to express its wishes concerning the needed specializations, skills and competences of its future (prospect) working population? And if yes, does economy expresses in a clear way its needs?

- Who is deciding (and when) to send the young employees to the ‘higher apprenticeship’? The management directly after the hiring of a new employee, or is it a kind of bonus for the most promising employees?

1.3 The role Vocational education in Greece’s economic formation

In the Greek economy, like in many others in Europe especially in our flexible times, a person can virtually practice any occupation regardless of his or her intention and readiness in practicing this. This happens because in that country does not exist the strong concept of ‘Beruf’ (like in the German speaking or the Nordic countries) and the allowance to practice an occupation only after having finished successfully an occupational pathway. Many people belonging to different educational, and VET, grades practice the same occupation alongside another. Exceptions are only the so-called ‘safeguarded’ professions, which are practiced by persons who have undertaken specialist VET, eg. Electrician learned in apprenticeship (or in other VET pathways). In such cases they have to pass successfully exams in order to acquire a special ‘license’.

Since the formation of the Modern Greek state, in the first half of the 19th century, priority has been given to the development of general education. The development of technical and vocational education (VET), in which apprenticeship is a functional part, was delayed for many decades. This is true for the establishment of VET even in an imperfect form. It was only after the 1977 educational reform that relative large numbers of young people started to enter vocational education. This was never the case for apprenticeship (= studies in apprenticeship schools of the OAED – the Greek Manpower Organisation); only a small part of an age cohort learnt an
occupation in that way. The number of apprentices is declining in the last period, from 19,532 apprentices in 1998 to 12,254 in 2008.

However, higher education was and is still held in high esteem in Greece. Routes to higher education have a high status. In contrast, vocational education has been, and still is; to a large extent for the ‘failures’ of the school system. We observe here the same phenomenon as in many other countries, e.g. Italy. The wish of most families of those who graduate from the high school is entrance to a university or polytechnic.5

It is also necessary to take into account the fact that in Greece there does not exist from the lower classes, the social prejudices that prevail in other European countries against higher education. This means that many young people from humble socioeconomic origins enter and are successful in higher education. In the post-war period, over 40 per cent of students in universities or polytechnics have been from rural or labour origins. This coupled with the fact that Greece had the highest university level participation rate for 18 - 22 years old in the EU, means that Higher Education does a very thorough job in recruiting those with the ability to benefit from Higher Education from a wide social spectrum.

The social demand for Higher Education is satisfied in the Greek educational structure. Now days Lykeion (the upper secondary educational level) is accused of being nothing more than a stepping stone and a preparatory school for university. It has lost the profile of an autonomous educational grade, thus offering no worthwhile educational qualification to those 16-18 year olds who attend it and do not manage to continue into tertiary education, in which they would be offered the opportunity to get a specialized academic or technological profession. The tendency to pursue higher education is evident in that in addition to graduates from General Lykeion those from Technical Vocational Lykeion (ATEL) also are given the right to sit entrance exams for higher education. In the past parents and pupils fought hard in order to achieve these rights.

That all school routs are so strongly oriented towards entrance to higher education inevitably means that vocational education and training is almost universally seen as a residual option. The low status of VET is also reflected in the low status of teachers and trainers working in the sector. The low status of formal VET is reinforced by its relative lack of engagement with training either, despite most occupations being learned on the job. Indeed experience of formal VET has relatively little labour market utility, because of a lack of correspondence between the field in which people train and that in which they work.

There exist wide phenomena of ‘hetero-employment’, ‘multi-employment’, and ‘un-stratified’ employment in the Greek labour field, even for university graduates. (Karamessini 2008) They indicate the broad flexibility of the labour field, and disregard of the value of vocational education and training (VET), undermines those who do undergo such training. The fragmentation of professional bodies and their associated training adds further complications in that within formal VET it is possible to be trained in many different levels and specializations. For example, nurses employed alongside one another in the health system may have received between two and nine years training after compulsory school depending upon institution(s) they attended. There are five levels of nurse training, offered in a wide variety of state and private institutions, starting in VET schools and apprenticeship (two years of duration) and going through to university (nursing departments); but without there being a clear rationale for the differentiations.

5 Note that approximately 80 per cent of the upper secondary school leavers are holders of a general Lykeion leaving certificate.
1.4 The role of foreign VET paradigms for the formation of Vocational education in Greece’s economic formation – The case of apprenticeship

Foreign paradigms from specific countries or advices from international organisations, e.g. World Bank, influenced significantly the VET field in Greece. With the hope to modernize the educational system in Greece governments were asking for the advice of international organizations or other educational models. As it happens in other countries as well, these models were introduced mechanically without being effectively incorporated to the socioeconomic needs. It is obvious that the belief was that for a functional implementation of the educational changes the transfer of successful foreign models was enough. Uncritical acceptance of interventions reflects the magnitude of the destitution of the national educational policy (Pesmazoglou, 1985). Foreign influences often aim to promote the respective cultures within the Greek context, instead of responding to the real educational needs of the country. Pluralism of influences has degraded Greek VET to a mosaic of variform coexisting patterns, reflecting diverse cultural origins and educational goals.

In this brief account, the case of Apprenticeship Schools is worth of mentioning. Apprenticeship schools are implemented four decades ago following the German ‘dual system’. In Germany the apprenticeship model involves the combination of vocational training of students with the acquisition of experience with an employer. This system has a long tradition, responding to the actual manpower needs of developed industry. It is widely accepted that its success has been built on the collaboration and the intense interest demonstrated by the social partners involved (employers, unions, and state officials). In contrast, Greek industry remains underdeveloped, and social partners apparently are indifferent to educational issues, having adopted introverted behaviour, and being too absorbed by their own petty problems. Although employers do demand prior experience from job applicants, they appear reluctant to contribute. Government officials who consented to the transplantation of this model from Germany within the Greek context obviously overlooked the divergent goals and cultural discrepancies of the two countries. (Patiniotis + Stavroulakis: 1997: 196 f.).

2. Transferability of “higher apprenticeship” to Greece.

An important remark should be made here. The term ‘apprenticeship’ has in Greek a very strict definition. It means the learning for one of the 41 vocations and occupations which are offered in one of the ‘apprenticeship schools’ of OAED. For the same meaning Italy gives to the term ‘higher apprenticeship’ we should in Greek use another wording, like the term ‘Higher Specialisation’.

In Greece there could be a broad space for the transferability of this specific policy, because of the following parameters:

- Diplomas and certificates from universities and polytechnics are very favoured, as we have seen previously. According to the last available data 82% of 18 – 22 old young people study at the tertiary level in Greece and abroad. This means that higher studies are more and more becoming a status symbol and not only a preparation for entrance in the labour market equipped with advanced scientific competences.

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6 What the ‘real educational needs’ are can be decided only after analytical scientific investigations and open political discussions or discourses.
High is also the tendency, if possible, to study further, during the working time. Innovative firms offer as bonus to their employees the possibility to become, at the firms costs, more specialised at the tertiary educational level.\footnote{This was a result of several empirical investigations we have conducted during the last years.}

Post-graduate studies play an important role for the middle management in order to secure their jobs or to achieve a promotion.\footnote{These studies were very positive valued from our interviewees (average 8,4 of the 10 grades scale, whereas further specialization courses for unemployed became an average of (only) 2,6 in the same scale, as we found in our investigations.}

In the Greek universities the Institutes for Lifelong Learning have been created by law but have not started yet to operate. Probably these institutes could be the ones where the higher training of employees could take place.

This policy would connect much better the economic with the educational organisations; lacks of cooperation we observe today in these two important socioeconomic formations.

3. Future developments

As presented above higher education is held in high esteem in Greece, and therefore the majority of young people study at the tertiary level in a Greek or foreign organisation.\footnote{In all the last decades the majority of European students who studied abroad were Greeks.} Special knowledge, competences and skills are held also in high esteem, because young people know that they may secure their working future.

In order the policy of high apprenticeship, or any other term would be given, to be successful also in Greece a series of changes and interpositions are needed like:

- Alteration of the public policy concerning the support of the expansion of the knowledge based economy. The policies up to now have not concerned significantly the private sector. A series of innovative firms have their own programmes of enabling their stuff to study further but this does not happen up to now with the cooperation of universities (vocational schools) and firms in a framework organised by the public agencies.

- To universities and especially to vocational schools distrust exists to the demands of the private sector. The educational organisations are afraid that they will loose their autonomous character if they will be forced to answer separate the demands of private firms. That happens because they often support the opinion that if this will happen they will become a source of higher educational services and research will not have the appropriate place it should in a university.

- Private sector companies should change their usual operational way and have as abjection the long-term profit. Only if this could happen would be successful a policy which concerns the improvement of the knowledge and skills formation of their stuff.
Regional governments must take on the important duties they were assigned to and to create in the local environment the necessary framework to support the cooperation of economic and educational organisations concerning higher apprenticeship.

Unions at local and national level must help from their own territory this co-operation to become successful. It is obvious that this policy will not be effectual without the support of the employees and their organisations.

Last but not least it will be useful if EU could proceed to the level of presenting a common set of ideas concerning this issue to the member states. (Feronas A. 2007; Cowles M. et al 2001).
References


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