

THE FOLLY OF EMPLOYABILITY: THE CASE FOR A CITIZEN-DRIVEN MARKET ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

In this conceptual essay, the authors argue that the present approach taken in crafting economic, educational, and employment policies and structures imagines people as inanimate objects for policy makers and industry titans to leverage for their own interests. When the population is not immediately willing or able to accommodate the production and profit-making desires of the leaders, it is framed as a shortcoming in individuals and their communities rather than as a mismatch with the implicit assumptions of those promulgating such expectations. The authors develop an argument that if the policy makers and industry leaders truly believe in market solutions, then they should respect the vocational aspirations of the people and provide support for education and entrepreneurial skills to be developed in individuals to use as they wish. This recasting of a so-called "market" approach places the workers at the centre, believing that much stronger and sustainable economic returns would be realised whilst developing strong social capital in the process.

Key words: youth employability, tertiary education, vocational education and training, citizenship education, protean career, economic development

LA DISOCCUPAZIONE DEI GIOVANI E LA FOLLIA DELL'OCCUPABILITÀ: ARGOMENTI PER UN'ECONOMIA DI MERCATO ORIENTATA VERSO IL CITTADINO

SINTESI

In questo trattato concettuale noi, autori, difendiamo la posizione che l'approccio attuale alla formazione di politiche economiche e d'istruzione e politiche dell'occupazione vede gli individui come oggetti senz'anima, gestiti da chi ha potere decisionale e dai titani dell'industria secondo i propri desideri e interessi. Quando la popolazione non è pronta a soddisfare immediatamente i desideri produttivi o desideri, legati al profitto dei leader, questo è inteso come difetto degli individui e delle loro comunità e non come conseguenza di discrepanze di premesse implicite di coloro che diffondono tali aspettative. Per gli autori chi ha potere decisionale nella politica e i rappresentanti dell'industria, se in realtà hanno fiducia nei meccanismi del mercato, dovrebbero rispettare le aspirazioni di carriera degli individui e garantire il supporto alla strada d'istruzione da loro desiderata e allo sviluppo delle competenze imprenditoriali desiderate. La modifica di quello, che viene comunemente chiamato approccio "di mercato", pone al centro i lavoratori, poiché si basa sulla convinzione che con ciò saranno conseguiti effetti economici più duraturi e molto più forti, nonché uno sviluppo più forte del capitale sociale.

Parole chiave: occupabilità dei giovani, istruzione terziaria, istruzione e formazione professionale, educazione civica, carriera proteiforme, sviluppo economico

“Vocation is the place where your heart’s deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” - Frederick Buechner (1973, 95)

INTRODUCTION

Policy makers, pundits, activists and researchers alike have all consumed substantial time and media debating the causes and cures of the most recent global economic crises. Given its ruinous effects on economies, sectors, communities and individuals, it is unsurprising that stakeholders would be eager to explain and remedy the situation. Of course, there is considerable diversity in viewpoints about what the problem — or problems — may be, their causes and potential resolutions. Many of the assumptions and lenses informing debate are organized ideologically, alternately pointing toward regulatory, moderate or free-market frameworks for articulating the present circumstance’s etiological foundations and curative interventions.

PANIC AND POLICY

Voices from each sector of Civil Society make their respective arguments for increasing or decreasing regulations, which industry might be the best hope for a region’s or nation’s future, whether to borrow from International funders, proper interest and inflation rates to stimulate growth, and arguing over technicalities ad nauseam. When signs of economic recovery begin to appear, discourse languishes and then disappears altogether until the inevitable subsequent crisis, activating this cycle anew. Those who hold the most agency within a political structure tend not to be seriously affected by shrinking economies, but rather take such moments — intentionally or inadvertently — as an opportunity to employ fear mongering tactics to extract increased controls over a system rigged in their favour, further enhancing their own financial security while disenfranchising those whose labour they rely upon to entrench their status. Such an argument smacks of class warfare, and the accusation of that is generally effective in deflecting attention away from interrogation of the present systemic arrangement. This is further entrenched by pitting equally disenfranchised groups against each other, often through the use of anti-immigrant, racist, sexist and other forms of identity politics (see Deželan, 2012). Contexts vary, but there are invariably scapegoats identified and excoriated, directing attention toward the latest so-called culprit and away from the fundamental dysfunction of the economic system they supposedly undermine. Such tactics get used for the simple reason that they are effective. These strategies have been reliable for a long time, but in an increasingly global economy, they are no longer sustainable.

Consider the case of the United States, arguably the most powerful economy in the world. The New York

Times published a story (Lowery, 2013) reporting on a study conducted by the Urban Institute, a nonpartisan economic and social policy research center. The Institute’s findings included the startling fact that the current generation of young adults has amassed less wealth than the previous generation. In short, this is the first generation with lower economic prospects than their parents, not only in terms of earnings and the prospect of home ownership, but also the tenuous future for pensions and access to health care. This is notable not only for the obvious trend reversal, but also because the recent modest economic recovery silenced further discussion about it. And, another article (Tseng, 2013) in the ironically named *Fortune Magazine*, indicated that

from 2009 to 2012, the top 1% incomes grew by 31.4% while the bottom 99% incomes grew a mere 0.4% ... mean[ing] the top 1% took more than one-fifth of the income earned by Americans — one of the highest levels since 1913 when the modern federal income tax started, the economists note. More than that, the top 1% incomes are close to full recovery while the bottom 99% incomes have barely started to recover.

It is not irrelevant that, in the European area, since the 1990s university education has, ever more frequently, been referred to as higher education. This is not mere coincidence; it responds to a special internationally felt sensibility that refers to the need to focus on the whole person, at every educational level and, therefore, to attend to the many and varied dimensions of human life and of society. Some authors have referred to this worldwide phenomenon as: the “rise of civic-mindedness” (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994; Kymlicka, 2000). This sensibility can be found in the area of sociology and psychology, and of course, in the field of education (Callan, 1997; Pearce and Hallgarten, 2000; Sober and Wilson, 1998; Putnam, Feldstein and Cohen, 2003; Naval, 2003; 2006).

THE AIMS OF EDUCATION

It is generally agreed that higher education should prepare students to be reflexive, critical citizens, capable of agential thinking and action. A non-critical university student is inconceivable within the paradigm of education’s espoused values. Our critique, however, is that there is an incongruence between espoused and enacted values when students are simply being processed through so-called quality assurance regimes that seem more interested in producing cattle-like commodities for economic systems that secure the interests of a small privileged class. We would suggest instead that graduates of any educational program must be involved in social issues and try to conceive or change whatever is needed to pursue justice and the common good. This

demands the development of diverse skills that the university should inspire, and suggests that doing one's work effectively involves both technical and contextual dimensions. So, doing a "good job" should manifest as effective technical acumen at one's craft, producing work products as an expression of talent for the benefit of one's own livelihood and creative enterprise for the benefit of those receiving or consuming the fruits of labour.

We advocate for an alternative framework in which it is assumed that people have innate assets and talents that deserve encouragement, guidance, and opportunities for expression. It is recognized that the present discussion is conceptual, and readers could understandably become frustrated that a straightforward list of strategies or an aesthetically pleasing chart isn't included to solve the problem. However, such a static resource wouldn't achieve the aims of this essay. We are speaking of a dispositional shift rather than simply a tactical one. If readers could imagine the present economic and educational systems were embodied in a single person, that person would arguably be a cynical, oppositional and unpleasant one. In what ways could policy-making and resource distribution communicate a belief in human ingenuity rather than an assumption that people are ungrateful and weak, requiring regulation? History has repeatedly demonstrated that amazing and beneficial inventions arose from people and circumstances that were unconventional. Giving people access to educational programs and seed funding in areas of their choosing would be unconventional because it would communicate trust in a courageous way that only seems so because it is rare.

Related, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector and its activities are often superficially considered only in terms of instrumental preparation of students to complete certain job tasks competently. While many educators working in the VET sector must contend with such diminishing, marginalising and reductionist characterisations, they generally understand that the training they conduct is contextualized within the needs, aspirations and values of the people being trained, and those who will benefit from their work products. In fact, all sectors of education rely upon, and promulgate ethical principles, social sensibilities about honesty and integrity, and the notion that the work of their graduates is worthy of respect. The students, on their part, tend to be eager to learn and must overcome insecurities about their capabilities and potential social barriers to their entry and success in their chosen field.

While there may be critiques about changes in pressures and expectations of the various educational sectors, it is arguably the case that university education increasingly emphasises technical training and professional skills, and vocational education increasingly emphasises civic dispositions and reflective thinking. In other words, categorical lines and roles within edu-

cation systems, and between the educational and other civil societal sectors are increasingly blurred. This is not to suggest that the societal status enjoyed by these particular educational sectors are near parity, but it nonetheless points to their shared interests and the possibility of greater simpatico. We would suggest it is important to consider how such goals and values alignment could invite more access to, and support for education in general. More to the point, education is an enterprise that defies artificial separation of technical, professional, personal, thoughtful, communal, national, regional, and global; all of which are part and parcel of a whole. The parsing of this whole drives people apart, defying our innate need for connection, for seeing and being seen by each other.

This is not simply tender-hearted sensibility, it should be noted that the typical rhetorical and structural distinctions imposed on educational sectors and skill development happens also to be bad for business and the economy as well. Whibbs (2014) argues,

Increasing sectors of the economy are seeking applicants who hold, what [David] Ticoll [Special Advisor to the Canadian Coalition for Tomorrow's ICT Skills] called, 'mashup' skills: some level of critical thinking abilities, analytical skills, communications abilities, knowledge of industry sub-sectors and industry-relevant skills training. In this case, Ticoll was speaking about IT fields: visual design students who have some training in art history, web design, and publishing, or IT lawyers that have some training in computer science/studies. The discussion stuck with me: is the divide necessary? Does the divide between trade, diploma and degree-level education still serve the economy in the same way that it did decades ago? Could paths be developed to broaden 'mash-up' training between nontraditional degree and apprenticeship-level studies? Is it necessary? Increasingly, the answer seems to be: yes. Many industries are requiring graduates to have 'mash-up' training, but it is up to graduates to cobble together the necessary education and training.

RECASTING LENSES AND POLICIES: TOWARD A PROTEAN CAREER FRAMEWORK

Taber and Briddick (2011, 107), in discussing career and vocational counselling, argue that:

Work also provides a forum where people can express their talents and interests (Super, 1951), cultivate feelings of competency and esteem, take the opportunity to cooperate with others, and secure a means of economic gain (Herr, Cramer and Niles, 2004). While participation in work is fundamental for both society and the individual,

the nature of work has become more precarious in recent years (Kalleberg, 2009).

Moreover, discourses associated with economic and employment issues, as well as resultant policy frameworks almost invariably focus on impersonal and instrumental components such as the number of available or anticipated jobs in a given industry or the organization of qualification frameworks.

What tends to be missing, however, is attention to the psychosocial importance of work to individuals and communities, creating a substantial gap between conceptual and experiential dimensions of work. This gap interferes with effective development of civil societal infrastructure to achieve and maintain economic aims. Career, educational and economic policies relating to employment continue to be rooted in traditional theoretical notions that hard work will more than likely be reciprocated with stable, sustainable employment. Yet, any reasonable person would likely agree that this is no longer an accurate, predictable or sustainable reality (Taber and Briddick, 2011).

The increasingly global influences affecting employment opportunities, along with abrupt shifts in economic circumstances make it nearly impossible for someone to be reasonably assured of sufficient employment or a living wage. Briscoe and Hall (2006, 5) point to growing interest in examining career development as an expression of individuals' identities and even life purpose, noting:

In the last several years, the protean and boundaryless career concepts have framed the thinking of academics and career practitioners. They have enjoyed considerable success as accepted metaphors in the field of career theory. This popularity attests to the appropriateness and timeliness of these metaphors to describe the current economic and employment relationships that are defined in many cases by less loyalty, greater mobility, and less certainty. (Cappelli, 1999; Rousseau, 1995)

Taber and Briddick (2011, 108) further argue:

Today's world of work requires a different way of thinking about and approaching one's career in the midst of many uncertainties. Accordingly, career theorists have turned their attention to self-directedness as a means of understanding how people negotiate the multitude of intricacies they face in the work world as they attempt to maintain lifetime employability (e.g. Briscoe and Hall, 2006; Hall, 2004).

Briscoe and Hall (2002; 2006, 8) refer to a "protean" career as holding a self-directed orientation and ap-

proach, driven by that individual's values. In their view, two hallmarks characterize the protean career:

(1) values driven in the sense that the person's internal values provide the guidance and measure of success for the individual's career; and (2) self-directed in personal career management — having the ability to be adaptive in terms of performance and learning demands. We are more concerned here with the stance or "orientation" one takes toward the career rather than the career structure itself.

Inkson (2006) recognizes that the whole notion of a career is an abstract concept for which metaphors can be helpful for individuals and groups to make meaning of a set of experiences. The term, "protean career" was first introduced by Hall (1976) in their book, *Careers in Organizations* as a contrast to more traditional models. It refers primarily to a worker-centred and thus agential paradigm for consideration of careers, educational program, and a fundamentally entrepreneurial arrangement of economic and employment regimes. Inkson (*ibid.*) proposes:

...the protean and boundaryless career metaphors appear right for the times. The meanings of the terms and the imagery that they convey are in sympathy with conditions of rapid technological, organizational and social change. The metaphors are also ideological in that they legitimize individual career actors' emancipation from the constraints of "traditional" careers. The new metaphors implicitly and sometimes explicitly extol individual agency over organizational structure as a basis for career development, and advocate individual adaptability and pro-activity in changing or ambiguous circumstances.

The term, "protean" refers to a high degree of versatility and flexibility, driven by the person concerned according to their identity, temperament, values and self-direction (Briscoe and Hall, 2002). Thus, employment/employability models based on the concept assume mobility (both in terms of changing jobs and geographic locations) and career success are intimately entwined, part and parcel of the same thing (Forrier, Sels and Stynen, 2009). Indeed, the protean lens recognizes that human capital is increased through self-direction, values expression and mobility. If there ever was a time when people could rely on a particular job being available to them over decades, such is a now a relic of the past. So, rather than assuming a worker to be unreliable or otherwise problematic because of regular job transitions or periods of unemployment, the "new normal" so to speak calls for an appreciation that a variety of vocational changes is an indicator of resilience and versatility.

As such, people who pursue a variety of enterprises and educational programs offer social and cultural capital rather than the suggestion of unreliability or other concerning weaknesses. So, a policy and resource allocation regime based on reformed assumptions holds great promise for generating hopeful possibilities in a national, regional or global economy. Forrier, Sells and Stynen (2009, 744) offer the term, “movement capital,” suggesting that,

by including the concept of adaptability, we explicitly recognize that the notion of movement capital does not only involve building-blocks (human capital and social capital) and direction (self-awareness) but also dynamics (adaptability). Movement capital is at the centre of attention in an agency perspective on career mobility.

Sullivan and Arthur (2006) advocate for recognition of the interdependence between physical and psychological career worlds. A protean career model thus appreciates that individuals may practice a particular professional skill under several employers during their lifetime. The quality of one’s work products would thus be validated in a variety of ways (e.g. markets, qualification frameworks, feedback from beneficiaries, etc.) rather than solely through one traditional mechanism. There is also a strong recognition that personal or family circumstances (in addition to temperament, aptitude, and interests) figure into career interests and pursuits. This is a contrast to the traditionalist ideas associated with so-called employability frameworks. In short, a protean employment and education arrangement invests in people and their agency, whereas the models that dominate the current landscape invests in bureaucracy. Governments, industry leaders, and trade associations continuously repeat this pattern, investing in a form of sustainability that is illusory. This is why it may seem counterintuitive to suggest that resource shortage is not the factor preventing individuals from accessing funds and educational programs necessary to pursue their occupational aspirations. Rather, the available resources are consumed primarily by the very structures that espouse individual empowerment while enacting deprivation.

EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP

Interdependence through work provides individuals with ways to contribute meaningfully to the general social welfare of the community at large (Dreikurs in Taber and Briddick, 2011, 107). For this reason, we can underline all educational sectors’ contributions as transcendent of technical and professional preparation. They also act in service to the formation of mature, reflexive, critical individuals and an awakening of interest in civic issues among its students (Llano, 2003). This implies two aspects: the first, critical and the second, participative. Thus no sector of education can consign itself to merely

transmitting instrumental knowledge or lofty thinking, but must also see itself as a collaborator in the education of future technicians, professionals and citizens, irrespective of birth certificate, passport or social identity. In this sense it aims to promote the development of two types of skills among students (Veldhuis, 1997; Naval, 2000; Ugarte and Naval, 2008; 2010):

- Intellectual skills. They facilitate students’ conquest of critical thinking, by helping them be reflexive citizens who are capable of openly and constructively criticising the realities on which they have reflected. Outstanding amongst these skills are, among others, personal leadership, integrity and the capacity for decision-making.
- Participative skills. They help the students to increase their civic commitment and to exercise active citizenship responsibly. Particularly outstanding amongst these abilities are communication skills, negotiation skills, and a capacity to solve problems and resolve conflicts, initiative, and teamwork.

These skills may be developed in higher education within the different subjects in theoretical and practical ways that lend to knowledge translation. Society demands that students in any educational program graduate with more than excellent technical knowledge of their profession. Something else is needed, something that has been called professional skills: teamwork, honesty, dedication and industry, and communication skills (Le Boterf, Barzucchetti and Vincent, 1995). Moreover, these future professionals are required to be capable of making decisions based on reflection and analysis, and, for the sake of corporate social responsibility, are required to be sensitive to social problems.

The objective of developing intellectual and participative skills can be seen in the consolidated habits, which are the practical and operative proof of personal and social values. Educating people who will become technicians, professionals, entrepreneurs, civic and government leaders, partners and parents who are critical and participative citizens implies insisting that the students have stable attitudes such as: respect, solidarity, tolerance, comprehension, civic courage – tenacity or fortitude in their fidelity to their own convictions (Medina, 2002), interest in political and social problems, political confidence and efficacy, and loyalty (Naval, 2000). These skills are essential for quality professional achievement and are the bases for critical and reflective thinking, and also for that civic commitment which contributes to the common good. In short, it is a question of helping to discover the value of placing one’s personal freedom at the service of individual, professional and social improvement.

POLICY MAKING AND WORLDVIEW

This framework leads us to the inevitable question of reciprocity. It is likely that policy makers and business

leaders will find many points of agreement in what has been said here thus far. It has become quite fashionable to use phrases as “evidence-based” in setting policies and so-called best practices. In this case, evidence is defined as documented patterns of behaviour and work products arising from particular interventions or precipitating stimuli. Ironically, however, the majority of efforts to stimulate economies and increase production and consumption of goods and services involve regulatory pressures, demands, threats, and conditional access to the resources required to generate such outputs. Such tactics are regarded as “best practices,” but they represent an intensely cynical worldview, eliciting the opposite of what they claim to intend. Even the term, “employability” frames the individual or population concerned as having some measurable quality that is entirely based on the values of a group of people who implicitly have a lot of that quality, so much so that they would presume to judge the amount and value in the former. This is a diminishing and noxious dynamic that perpetually generates mistrust, resentment, disincentives to cooperation, and invariably painful and chaotic economic cycles that undermine social cohesion, civic commitment and the very fabric of democracy (see Deželan et al., 2014).

A gracious consideration of the pressures and challenges facing policy makers, bureaucrats, educators and industry leaders would lead us to assume that they too feel — at least at times — as if they are in a no-win situation. Protests, criminality, property destruction, social and economic stagnation, brain-drain, influxes of people who do not yet have the familiar and desired credentials leaders hope to see, and more generally a sea of tired and unhappy faces on the streets all give a sense that the situation is impossible and hopeless. We have all the evidence necessary to determine that our typical approaches — even our so-called best practices — don’t work, or at least not sustainably. Why not try something unconventional? Whatever we are afraid to lose is already gone, or perhaps it is only revisionist to believe we ever had it. It’s time to change our approach, and our suggestion for a new direction is novel only because of its simplicity.

BELIEVING IN PEOPLE

It may surprise some readers that we, too, advocate for market-based solutions. But, we need to clarify how we define the market. In this case, the market we speak of is comprised of the workers, the people whose labor is required for industries to function or to be conceived in the first place. If policy makers and industry leaders truly believe in market solutions, then they should respect the vocational aspirations of the people and provide support for education and entrepreneurial skills to be developed in individuals to use as they wish, trusting that this “market” approach would yield the strongest

economic returns while also developing strong social capital in countries and regions. This is not simply a romantic and naïve sentiment. Obviously the individuals who sell handicraft, fruits, and other goods and services on the streets will be witness to, and affected by trends in demand well before bureaucrats and corporate heads. The former can invent and test their ideas on short notice, while the latter are in a constant state of reaction. The former can target prevention and intervention efforts with fine precision, while the latter are inevitably out of sync despite any good intentions associated with policy making and resource distribution. A moderate, reasoned and prudent alternative is to invest in human capacity and the social capital it generates for the greater good.

Consider for a moment that we three colleagues who are writing this essay come from three world regions (Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and North America) and disparate personal backgrounds. We each had our respective interests as children and young adults, and pursued education and professional opportunities to the extent we were able in our respective situations. We had our respective successes and hardships, and fortunately gained access to educational programs that led to us all becoming university teachers. We teach different but complementary subjects to the benefit of our students and their future families, communities, employers, and nations. Had we waited to be identified by a governmental agency as prospective candidates for such posts, we would still be waiting.

Governments speak a great deal about jobs, but they are simply not capable of connecting people with their calling. However, they are well positioned to craft policy and resource allocation to encourage creative risk in ways that individuals may not be. There is an expression, “*one cannot grow a flower by pulling on it,*” and so governmental and industry leaders require discipline to transcend the control-orientated approach in favor of a trusting and organic one. The sociology of power makes this a countercultural proposition, but a sensible one that is rooted in the evidence of humanity. It is in that spirit, and in the service of vocation that we demonstrate this approach through the risk of sharing three personal vignettes that collectively illustrate the benefit of what we are proposing.

Case 1: Jason Laker

My maternal grandparents immigrated to the United States to escape Nazi occupation and war in their countries (Poland and Yugoslavia) and almost certain death (indeed, many of their family and community members were killed during that time). They arrived in Detroit, Michigan, USA without resources. My grandfather became a mentee of a man in the furniture business, and eventually he succeeded in establishing three stores of his own. As a child, I recall playing in the furniture stores, which had mock rooms to display sofas, beds, cabinets and so forth. Many adults of different cultures shopped

in the stores, and I had opportunities to study them without them noticing me. My paternal grandparents sold home improvement products such as new windows, doors and roofs. I would go with them or with my father on sales calls into people's homes. These two sets of experiences provided an education about people, families and communities that could never be duplicated in formal educational programs. We were not wealthy, but we fortunately had our material needs met by the industry of my family. I learned a lot about entrepreneurship and human nature, and the diversity of people with whom I interacted nurtured an appreciation of, and curiosity about human differences and our personal interests, goals and stories. My parents encouraged me to attend university — something they were unable to do — though they were not in a position to help me fund it.

Although I was studying Broadcasting and Communications, I was very active in student governance and various campus organizations. This led to my developing opinions and critiques about how the administration was managing the university, and I decided to pursue that as a career. I began my career managing a single residence hall and enrolling in an evening graduate program studying counselling. I applied for successively more advanced positions over the years, becoming a Dean of Students when I was 32, also teaching courses about gender. I moved to Canada when Queen's University hired me to oversee a large Student Services Division of 250 employees in 23 departments, and continued to teach and research about gender and social diversity, also becoming a Fellow in the Centre for the Study of Democracy in the School of Policy Studies. In 2008, I had an opportunity to attend an educational institute in Costa Rica at the U.N. mandated University for Peace, where I met my colleague, Kornelija Mrnjajac. I read about Concepción Naval's research on an educational listserv, and wrote to her with questions about her work to which she graciously responded. In 2009, she was invited to a conference in St. Petersburg, Russia pertaining to civic pedagogies, and she kindly obtained invitations for Kornelija and me. There, three of us were in the same room for the first time, and we conceived the idea for a book project about our shared interests in Citizenship and Democratic Education. This grew to two edited texts, one of which had a wonderful chapter about democratic and citizenship education in Slovenia by our colleagues, Tomaž Deželan and Alem Maksuti. In turn, Tomaž alerted us to the opportunity to write this article, leading to you reading it. The organic nature in which social interactions and curiosity enabled all that has happened is part and parcel of the model being advocated for here.

Case 2: Concepción Naval

Some time ago, I learned something from my family that has always been of assistance in my personal and professional life, and can be summarized in this phrase: "Dreaming is not enough". I think I have been a dreamer

all my life, but I have also been tenaciously hard working. That is to say, we must not allow the problems or difficulties that appear to stop us; let us consider projects for the common good with magnanimity, and try not to have a barren life but rather a useful one, which will leave its mark on society.

But there are no pathways laid out to achieve this. We make them, through the mountains, with our footprints. What I mean to say is that we should dream and work in accordance to give life to those dreams with freedom, with confidence, shoulder to shoulder with everyone, with no limits. What makes us constant in our determination? It is the vision of the good we can achieve, our purpose and end. So am I an idealist? Yes I am, but with my feet firmly on the ground. Dreaming is free, but fulfilling those dreams is not. The truth is that frequently we do not go far enough in our dreams.

I am sure that my life nowadays owes a lot to my dreaming during my adolescence. It was then that I decided on the professional vocation that has heartened and enlivened my work in the world of education and the university over the 25 years I have spent on these tasks. Several very different options were open to me then, due to the appropriate idealism of someone of my age and perhaps honed by my personality. A healthy desire to assist people was behind my choice of studies, summer pursuits, etc. There was no shortage of voices attempting to direct me towards the world of business, of economics, always with the utmost respect, at the beginning of my university studies when I expressed my desire to read Education. The reasons for this advice were clear: my psychological profile and flair, and above all... my future in the world of work would be clear; this was not so with Education Studies. I believe that I made the right choice, for every reason, and the passage of time has made me see this even more clearly.

Case 3: Kornelija Mrnjajac

As a child I played being a teacher. In my room, I made a blackboard out of my closet door and taught my imaginary classroom. When I was 14, I had to choose which high school to attend, and that was a challenge since I had no idea at that time what type of work I wanted to do as an adult. My class was very competitive. There were 36 of us in the classroom and the average score for whole class was 4.6 out of a possible five. Many of my classmates were children of lawyers, doctors, university professors and they knew (or their parents knew) what they would study. My father finished VET school and became a painter, and my mother finished primary school. All three of us knew that I should "go further" but they gave me freedom to choose what I wanted to be. They always said to me that I am learning for myself and they would support me in whatever I decided. It was during my time in grammar school that the political changes started in my country (the former Yugoslavia, now Croatia), which involved declaration of national in-

dependence, war and democratic elections. Those times were very insecure, and as I observe my classmates from grammar school, I can say that all those events made it much harder to grow into adulthood.

During my vocational journey, I moved to Austria where I worked on a horse farm. I also finished my doctoral study there. At the end of my study, a former professor from the university contacted me and said that they are searching a new person at their department (pedagogy) and she asked me if I have interest. I said yes, and have been a university professor for over seven years.

My professional career was driven by many coincidences (or perhaps there are no coincidences?) and is a good example of what happen when we lose the goal in our life. Without a clear picture and without knowing who we are, our strengths and weaknesses, we will be just driven by the stream. Others will decide what is good for us. In a situation in which it is difficult to get a job, like in Croatia where 10% of the population generally, and 50% of young people are unemployed, it can be a challenge for people to believe that they can work at what they love and get paid for it. Most of my students think that they have no influence on their destiny and that they will accept any job they can get. Yet many of them don't get a job for many years and with a university diploma they work in cafés and shops. I believe that we should shape the market. If we aren't working at what we have strength in, our employers will be frustrated and we will constantly get the message that we are not good enough. We should help children to get know themselves, their strong sides - how they react in certain situations, where they feel the best (e.g. in nature, in an office) and we should allow them to express their personalities without fear of being different and shape the conditions where they can develop their full potential.

IMPLICATIONS

The three authors have different social identities, were born and raised in different world locations under varying political and social contexts. None of our respective educational and vocational journeys were linear or predictable, including the ways in which we became acquainted. We combined motivation with opportunities to share our stories and activities with each other, leading to several mutually elevating collaborations. It is most unfortunate and offensive that luck is such a substantial variable in people's fate in a world that has enough resources for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Periods of economic decline activate panic and reactive political maneuvering. At face value, Austerity measures seem practical for the obvious reason that they are imposed to remove budget deficits. However, they create relational deficits, inflaming latent racial, ethnic,

sexist and/or anti-immigrant resentments, activating historically privileged groups to scapegoat those whom they perceive as interlopers in their entitled financial position. There is a documented pattern of precipitous increases in violence against marginalized groups, including women, during difficult financial times.

Humans simply do not have access to their better, more creative and industrious selves during times of fear, anxiety and conflict. If the policy of a government is to stimulate solidarity first, then synergistic alliances and economic recovery invariably follow. The present approach to governance during economic upheaval typically makes things worse, or presents an illusion of improvement that only benefits a privileged few.

"Employability" is a deficit-based framework that assumes the variables reside with the individual citizen, ignoring the influence of such things as discrimination (gender, race, ethnicity, nationality) or variations in access to financial resources, personal confidence, political and social influence, or even social capital and encouragement. In our conceptual discussion, as well as in our personal vignettes, we demonstrate that nothing in life can be predicted. Many opportunities are not obvious, and many potentially valuable uses for knowledge and skills rely on serendipity and kindness. It seems incredible to us that any leader would believe that a rational inventory of skills or their applications is possible or desirable, that these can be matched precisely with available jobs, or that such jobs would animate the spirit of the workers and produce good outcomes for employers and customers.

David Kirp, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, authored an opinion editorial article in the New York Times (2014) in which he asserts:

Today's education reformers believe that schools are broken and that business can supply the remedy. Some place their faith in the idea of competition. Others embrace disruptive innovation, mainly through online learning. Both camps share the belief that the solution resides in the impersonal, whether it's the invisible hand of the market or the transformative power of technology. Neither strategy has lived up to its hype, and with good reason. It's impossible to improve education by doing an end run around inherently complicated and messy human relationships. All youngsters need to believe that they have a stake in the future, a goal worth striving for, if they're going to make it in school. They need a champion, someone who believes in them, and that's where teachers enter the picture. The most effective approaches foster bonds of caring between teachers and their students.

This resonates with the fundamental premise of our argument that people should be at the centre of any policy making and/or fiscal activity. Further, humans devel-

op and flourish within relationships, and so it should be the goal of any policy maker to elevate human connections rather than escalate competition between them. It would seem counterintuitive to make access to grants, low or no interest loans, and free or low cost tuition to training and educational programs a universal right. Resistance to such an idea rests on fear, perhaps about resource limitations, abuse or fraud. This typically leads to onerous regulations and distribution processes rationalized as a necessity for some measure of order. But, this also means that all people — mainly the honest, sincere, and motivated ones — are subjected to the same constraints as the few who would not act responsibly. This is fundamentally suggesting that fiscal and educational policies are organized around mistrust and a pessimistic worldview. It is not difficult to list off examples of the most unpleasant and problematic behaviours as justifications. Arguably, neither would it be difficult to point

to examples of incredible ingenuity, poignant success stories, or acts of profound generosity. Which orientation would readers prefer to guide the political, educational and economic systems? More to the point, how is the present orientation working?

We propose that policy making and resource allocation should privilege the occupational and creative agency of the people, and their access to educational programs and social supports to help them invent or reinvent themselves. We would further argue that this would not be nearly as expensive as the control-based approach, the folly of which is obscured by perpetual fear of leaders and those who are relying on them. The infrastructure of distrust is costlier than its alternative. The faith required to implement this approach would soon be replaced by the dividends of dreams realized, financial returns, social cohesion, and the stability that our irrational policies have repeatedly failed to achieve.

NEZAPOSLENOST MLADIH IN NOROST ZAPOSLEJIVOSTI: ARGUMENTI ZA V DRŽAVLJANA USMERJENO TRŽNO GOSPODARSTVO

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POVZETEK

V tem konceptualno naravnem eseju avtorji zastopamo stališče, da trenutni pristop k oblikovanju gospodarskih in izobraževalnih politik ter politik zaposlovanja razume posameznike kot brezdušne predmete, s katerimi politični odločevalci ter industrijski titani upravljajo po lastnih željah in interesih. V primerih, ko prebivalstvo ni hipno pripravljeno ugoditi produkcijskim ali profitnim željam voditeljev, se to razume kot pomanjkljivost posameznikov ter njihovih skupnosti, in ne kot posledica neujemanja implicitnih predpostavk tistih, razširjajo taka pričakovanja. Avtorji zastopajo razmišljanje, da bi javnopolitični odločevalci in predstavniki industrije, če v resnici zaupajo v tržne mehanizme, morali spoštovati poklicne aspiracije posameznikov in zagotavljati podporo njihovi zeleni izobraževalno pot in razvoju v smeri zelenih podjetniških kompetenc. Preoblikovanje tako imenovanega "tržnega" pristopa v središče postavlja delavce, saj je osnovano na prepričanju, da bodo s tem doseženi precej močnejši in trajnejši gospodarski učinki ob hkratnem močnejšem razvoju socialnega kapitala.

Ključne besede: zaposljivost mladih, terciarno izobraževanje, poklicno izobraževanje in usposabljanje, državljanska vzgoja, protejska kariera, gospodarski razvoj

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