

Attitudes and labour life course: the young women facing the *start-up* policies in the case of a local guidance policy

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The research design, sociological background and hypothesis

This empirical paper aims to compare some objective conditions with attitudes with which women apply for an active labour policies. In particular the case inquired is located in Rome and is issued on *start-up services*, namely guidance to help people (in this case female target only, with no regard to the age) to report a *business plan*. Among a more than 1000 beneficiaries of the agency called «Capitale Donna», a sample of 306 women has been selected during 2008 to carry on a quantitative questionnaire to analyse traditional topics just like other issues based on the assumption that the actual employment (or at least unemployment) has to be crossed with desired sort of employment and other general working conditions (such as average of weekly working hours and desired average). In analytical words these are some relevant variables:

- age (in four modalities to avoid a large number of cells with few cases);
- sort of employment by a formal point of view;
- number of worked hours;
- a scale based on the concept of *achievement motivation* (McClelland, 1967).

The second and third points are split in two important aspects: actual condition versus desired condition in a *ceteris paribus* way: a woman in fact could have the aim to become self-employed because she can't get any other sort of employment, or, if income and other conditions could be the same, could prefer an employee position.

The sample of 306 beneficiaries was asked to answer the questions of a questionnaire that was designed through a previous qualitative step of the research. The main task of the research was to define – as a *fine-tuning* plan implies (Rossi, Freeman, 1993) – in some way the *specificity* and the *sensitivity* of the local policy according to the real expectations led by these women, both the young and the mature ones. In order to develop a tool to analyse the attitudes, a Thurstone-Likert like scale, already tested, was adopted (Cannavò, 2003). This choice was done to test the *need for achievement* degree by any beneficiary of – at least – the guidance public services. In fact to study the results from an age point of view ought to be useful to verify if young people may have different cognition of her own career trajectories and capabilities. The condition that quite anyone in the sample has is generally a weak employment status; at the same time they perceive the self-employment job as a solution for all their problem. A general background description of the situation inquired through the qualitative interviews has found out that – according to the main international and national literature upon young and gender social and labour studies (Budig, 2006) – the women suffer the lack of conciliation policies and the need to overcome all this on-going not equal situations compared to the traditional male-breadwinner paradigm. The workfare policies that has been diffused throughout Europe in the last decade (van Berkel, Møller, 2006) in fact pretended to be coherent with the European Employment Strategies elaborated and planned in Lisboa in 2000 year. In this study it is discovered that these policies has been hardly successful if the general condition of personal satisfaction and good jobs indices are taken into account because – as data will show – the active policies like this has been used and enacted by the beneficiaries as it were a *substitution policies* of other passive policies (Dennis, 1996; Blanchflower, 2004; Audretsch, Carree, van Stel, Thurik, 2005; Hughes, 2003). Moreover, especially young people aged around 30-35 with young child or children, people are in such a way got to solve their own conciliation and emancipation problems forcing what they can do. The particular theme of the self-employment, self-reliance career and (though micro) entrepreneurship does not simplify the

question because to pursue an employment like that other – not only financial – conditions ought to be present¹. The personal identity of a woman and the theme of the phases through which a person turns to be an adolescent to a full adult person are here stressed. The questionnaire in fact has been designed to grasp the more information possible to understand if there is any not-correspondence between what young women are doing, and what young people would really like to do if they could only really select (basically between to be employee and self-employed). The possibility to be a self-employed in other words is often a sort of *short-cut, self-tailor made, policy*. So in many cases this sentence is faced: “since I can’t get any other sort of job and I don’t see any social policy to help me effectively to match any position, I try to fulfil to be a self-employed as a sort of second best”. This sort of risk sounds to be very closed to what many contemporary sociologists write upon (Sennett, 1998; Dahrendorf, 1979; Supiot, 2003; Beck, 2000).

In any case, the textual open responses, that are discussed in a separated paragraph, show that there is a strong *entropic* effect in analysing the targets of a policy, in this case about *start-up incentives*. The complexity of the contemporary society and young people cannot here be analysed. However some key interpretations are here proposed in order to classify the beneficiaries. In fact there is a certain percentage of people who are strong in the labour market, and they look for some new motivation in a self-employment endeavour. In other cases this transitional feature can be read as a shift from a precarious position to a *free floating professional* employment (Mayrhofer, Strunk, Schiffinger, Iellatchitch, Steyrer, Meyer, 2004).

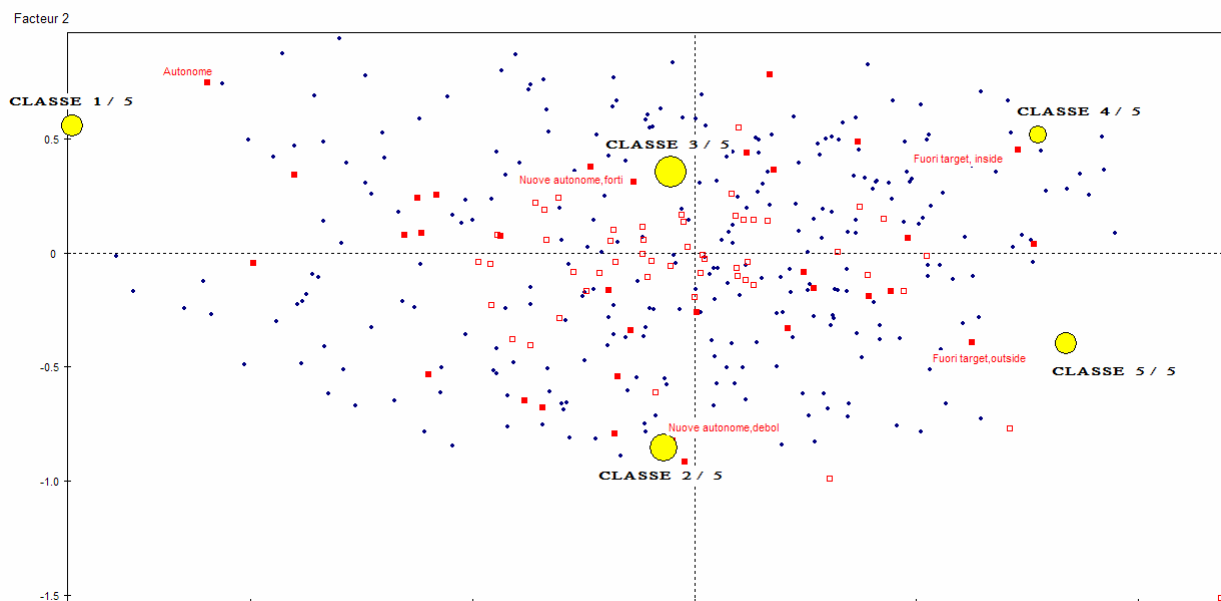
Trying to make a sum up and a description of the main hypothesis of this paper, the question that has led the research is to evaluate the targets that this local policy has collected from a *sensitive* point of view (Rossi, Freeman, 1993). To estimate this evaluation task, a typology of beneficiaries will be described, even through attitudes and expectations data that seems interesting as the new (self-)employed generations are coping with strong chances (Arthur, Rousseau, 2001; Arum, Müller, 2005; Bovenberg, 2007; Ester, Román, Vinken, van Dun, 2004).

The beneficiaries: an evaluational typology

The quantitative data, analyzed after the qualitative step, has enforced the question of target population dealing with this policy. More precisely it looks clear that there is a wide percentage of women who doesn’t really want to work as a self-employed. In spite of that, there is a lot of people who have been pushed to get information and used the guidance service to try a possible employment as retailer in trade sector or in any other small self-employed enterprise, or even as professional. An *ex-post* analysis of a MCA of questionnaire data has demonstrated that there is a very simple typological variable that can explain well enough the latent structure of the sample of the beneficiaries of this guidance policy. This variable crosses the actual employment dealt by women and the aspired employment they would like to have if they could decide in a *ceteris paribus* way. According to the definitions of target in the evaluation research literature, it is quite obvious that a policy for self-employment can’t dress so well to people who wouldn’t risk so much and would get a more traditional and safer employment. By doing so, it has been simpler and more efficient to analyse this over-popularization of the policy due to a perception of each people life courses. If a woman expects from herself to don’t have any chance to get a regular not-fixed term (standard) job due to child care duties, previous fragmented careers and other weak and weakening events and conditions, probably there will be some percentage of women who will decide to became self-employed just to have a job. As it is shown in the figure below, the typology’s modalities are very closed to the five clusters that come from the MCA. Moreover, the labelling

¹ This is one of the main reasons that justify the fine-tuning evaluation design.

seems to be the same, and the same frequencies suggest that there is a quite perfect overlapping between the typology and the more complex analyses carried on to discover some latent structure.



Studying the modalities of the variable this list can be described:

- actual employment not-fixed term (or “co.co.pro.”) and same desired employment (45 cases; 14,9% of valid cases). This group has been labelled *out target* and *insiders* in the labour market because they ought not to have chosen to be beneficiaries in an active policy like that. As a matter of fact (or better, as a matter of expectations and life course plans), they will not pursue this sort of path for themselves. However, they have a strong and affordable position in the labour market (hence, the *insiders* label) so that they can decide without rushing. It is to be underlined that a co.co.pro. position generally is perceived, and it is really so, as a step before to be employed in a standard way.
- The intersection set between “already self-employed women” and those who (in this special case to continue to) want to be self-employed. This people may be traders or professionals as well, so that a four inner typology could be done. This cluster has a frequency of 52 cases (17,3%), and they may not be excluded from the policy just because they already experienced at the present a self-employed position. They were labelled just as autonomous because they embody better the values of the achievement motivation that implies a strong need to express oneself and to be successful in the societal scene.
- Other two clusters are by the name of *new self-employed*. One of these is *new, weak, self-employed*. They are weak because of their situation in the labour market. They are the crossing of people who would like to become self-employed (both as trader and as free lance or professional), but is in a *nascent entrepreneur* position. They are weak because they are actually unemployed (not active in labour force is here included), or is illegally employed (generally this implies a very low income, rather than taxation frauds), or is employed but in a precarious way because the job(s) they have is intermittent, low paid, low learning acting and with quite cancelled perspectives to improve the career. So their weakness is both material and decisional because they don’t manage anybody, neither themselves. In this condition 71 women can be found, the 23,6% of the cases analysed through the sample.
- The second cluster of new self-employed is the *strong* one. They look forward to become self-employed and at the time of the interview are working as employees. They are 77 cases, so more than a beneficiary over four (25,6%). This cluster probably is the closest to the aims and

the target of the policy to foster guidance to people who want to start-up a new business. This is true if we consider the active labour policies as something different from a substitution and replacement of the previous model based basically on passive (and more expansive) labour policies.

- The last cluster of women is a sort of residual one. It consists of people who don't want to be employed or at least would work just as employee and meanwhile are working as self-employed (13 cases) or are not employed at all (39 cases). The addition of these last cases (56 that equals 18,6%) has been labelled as *out of target population, outsiders* from the labour market point of view.

The need for achievement in a transitional view

In this paragraph a very brief sum up of the achievement motivation scores for young women is shown.

Young women consider generally with more romanticism the choice of the partner ("It is right to love a person regardless how other people look at him/her"). However they believe that worthiness is a strong value (see "To rise up the social status is fundamental, especially for our relative" data) and even about the worthiness ("It is not useful to be worthy, because the prestige doesn't go to people who deserve it") underline may be some contradictions.

"To rise up the social status is fundamental, especially for our relative" for age

	Age				Total
	<32	33<38	39<46	47+	
Strongly disagree	42,9	43,7	32,9	22,7	35,3
Disagree	15,7	15,5	17,1	13,3	15,4
Low disagree	7,1	4,2	9,2	8,0	7,2
Neither agree or disagree	17,1	19,7	19,7	24,0	20,2
Low agree	2,9	2,8	7,9	12,0	6,5
Agree	11,4	5,6	9,2	12,0	9,6
Strongly agree	2,9	8,5	3,9	8,0	5,8
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: own elaboration

The mature women express more probably a very clear opinion in relation to some items that talk about the private and familiar sphere *and* the personal success: the younger women on the other hand have a more balanced opinions about questions that put the success and family care as a trade off matter.

"To preserve a social status it is right to sacrifice one's own private life" for age

	Age				Total
	<32	33<38	39<46	47+	
Strongly disagree	27,1	38,0	31,6	35,1	33,0
Disagree	12,9	9,9	13,2	10,4	11,6
Low disagree	11,4	11,3	15,8	6,5	11,2
Neither agree or disagree	14,3	14,1	17,1	13,0	14,6
Low agree	14,3	9,9	7,9	11,7	10,9
Agree	14,3	8,5	2,6	13,0	9,5
Strongly agree	5,7	8,5	11,8	10,4	9,2
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: own elaboration

Younger people of this sample more frequently take into account the importance that the social image and appearance have in social relations and its role to have success. This fact may be observed in the following table.

“It is important to take care of one’s goodlooking, because this helps to be successful” for age

	Age				Total
	<32	33<38	39<46	47+	
Strongly disagree	13,9	24,3	9,2	10,5	14,3
Disagree	13,9	4,3	10,5	6,6	8,8
Low disagree	12,5	5,7	11,8	6,6	9,2
Neither agree or disagree	29,2	25,7	28,9	31,6	28,9
Low agree	13,9	20,0	11,8	15,8	15,3
Agree	13,9	10,0	18,4	14,5	14,3
Strongly agree	2,8	10,0	9,2	14,5	9,2
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: own elaboration

Women aged 33-38 years old has an image of the power and of the success that is different from the issue of the gender emancipation. More precisely they look to have a stronger need for achievement that would come from needs that are different from the typical care work. In fact the strong scores for need for achievement may be seen in items like “A high-class position is the proper task for whom look for the economic success”, or for other items like the following.

“It is to be avoided to aim to earn more as a priority, if the family would pay for it” for age

	Age				Total
	<32	33<38	39<46	47+	
Strongly disagree	5,6	10,0	10,7	17,8	11,1
Disagree	5,6	2,9	6,7	4,1	4,8
Low disagree	2,8	4,3	4,0	6,8	4,5
Neither agree or disagree	18,3	10,0	13,3	15,1	14,2
Low agree	14,1	14,3	10,7	8,2	11,8
Agree	12,7	15,7	12,0	20,5	15,2
Strongly agree	40,8	42,9	42,7	27,4	38,4
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: own elaboration

But this kind of people don’t believe often in the importance of education to achieve success. Crossing the evaluational variable of the typology previously analysed with age doesn’t not reveal any particular result. Nonetheless, it is seen that the more the age, the more the frequency of women who rely on this specific policy upon start-up incentives the last chance to (re-)enter the labour market. In fact, the *new, weak self-employed* are about one third of the sample, but among the under 32 women this percentage plummet to 22,5%. The *strong new self-employed* show a different feature because they are younger than other. This cluster is the 31% among under 32 women, and practically the same among women aged 33-38; on the other side this cluster is around 22,4% and 21,1% among women aged 39-46 or over 47 years old.

If we consider the percentage of beneficiaries who are not centred in the target, both insiders and outsiders, it is noted that there is not so much difference with age. However, a further analysis of a correlation shows that the higher the scores of the need for achievement, the lesser the standard deviation of scores. There is a weak correlation between age and the need for achievement’s scores.

A discussion about the reasons to become self-employed

The main discussion that can be studied furthermore belongs to the qualitative responses. In this paragraph I analyse especially the open question “what means in your mind to (plan to) be self-employed?”. These answers have been read through the *locus of control* theory and meanwhile the pull vs. push way to look at the start-up incentive policy. It is found that in the main part of the interviewed has a peculiar way to justify their interest. Basically, they want to be self-employed to highlight their need to be independent, but meanwhile this need is combined with values of social usefulness. The self-made conciliation may be a key to define passages like these:

To commit, to risk how and whenever is necessary, to be independent, to be responsible of your own success and flop, to be able to match you interests with your job, to don't give up necessarily your loves and family. You may live better these latter because you should be happier even if with some heavy responsibilities.

Self-employment is my answer because I don't believe anybody may be happy and satisfied if he/she is far from his/her roots. You can't be happy if you realize to stay alone because you pursued just the success.

The stake is just to take advantage of ones own education to create an employment that ought to take into account the children care and family care in general.

The conciliation is meant as the need to risk in order to exit some marginalition situation. So forth, to overcome low paid jobs or unemployment seem something that women have to pay with personal risks:

It implies to march out because nobody wants to give you a not-fixed position, but self-employment implies too to have a chance to be known by more people and have your audience.

For me “to endeavour” means to break social, cultural and familiar scripts that come from the Italian tradition that is classist and malish.

The internal locus of control is lived with the idea that the policy is a “pull” condition, something that is actively acted by them with the purpose to react in a positive way to the inequality gender and age situation:

It represents the locking on the development of a professional identity that sizes better my intellectual purposes and my personal ethic and social credo

To diffuse to people your own professionalism and ideals. To have a way of life oriented to joy and fulfilment.

Some other few opposite case can be easily found. Briefly, here two cases of young women aged around 30 are selected in order to show the conciliation problem and, at the same time, the problem of this policy as a sort of a *second best* choice:

I have – like in for many other people belonging to my generation – a high education and some skills that are not demanded in the labour market. I work as professional sometimes as free lance gaining an income around 3.4 thousand euro per year. I prefer to become self-employed rather to go abroad because I have two children and I have quite alone the burden of their care. My husband wasn't available to leave his job as employee to move abroad with me and my children. I'm sure that to study is important, anyway. I look forward to be able to help my [female] children to let them fulfil professionally, because without the help by anyone, they will have my same destiny!

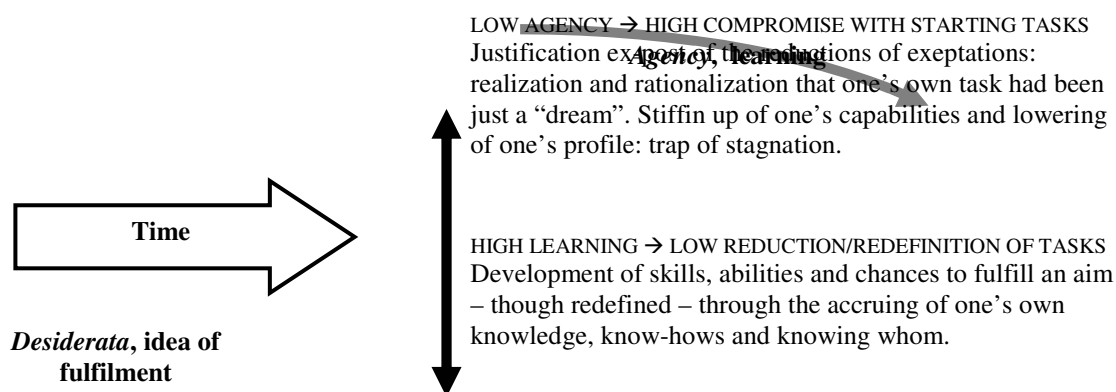
For me to start-up a new personal business means to try to achieve what I like to do. Frankly, I would have rather to do it as an employee, in a hierarchy.

Conclusion: toward a theory to define transitional careers within life course

One of the main results of the inquiry has been the possibility to define a proposal of theory to understand how perception, expectations and real chances are intertwined together. Putting this in other words, it has been interesting to see if and how a more general scheme could study the individual, entropic, ways to construct a life course. If we look at the qualitative data, for instance, we should give up the task to understand and govern the individual patterns. In formal words, the question is to understand how people may concretely and achieve personal aims with actual chances to fulfil them. In this case I try to formulate a sort of theory of the «reduction of the gap between the ideal future employment and the skills and abilities to enact a positive agency aimed to fulfil it».

The ideal employment (the dimension of the so called “dream”) represents one of the two tails of this theory. Looking at its limits, by one pole, one side, there is the most immature and farer (temporally and as probability) pole from the success: this is the ideal and impossible employment that should convey a strong self-esteem and satisfaction. This job of a dream may come from an idealized picture by personal considerations (not connected and coming from relatives or different *significant others*) or by the pressure of social criteria; this would depend from the sort of achievement motivation, that can't be highlighted further in this paper. Probably if this desired employment is referred to the social and economic success, the desire could be associated easily in the position of the employment (*i.e.* manager more than clerk) in spite of the sector or the specific sort of job. In this first meaning it could be useful to remember the system of expectations that many young people have in relation to the job they would like to pursue, something affirming an executive position (*need for power*) and avoiding the expressive dimension of a job. The second meaning may be more related to the concept of *need for achievement* that could be associated with the term “romantic” vision: young people desire a job regardless both the economic and income dimension and the social prestige too, because they aim to satisfy personal purposes, putting apart – many times fighting, going against – the dominant social values.

Fig. 2 A possible scheme to identify the gap between the desired employment and the capabilities and learning skills (*agency*) necessary to fulfill the desiderata



Source: own elaboration

In this second meaning the desired job in its more “childlike” limit is actually something far from the real possibilities to fulfil it. Trying to put some examples in this scheme (that are split for the two meanings of the achievement motivation that can be found in this inquiry), one pole could reasonably be the aim to become a manager; on the other side it would be the dream to become a humanitarian volunteer working in some area of the fourth world.

The second pole of this continuum is defined from the present employment (or at least unemployment) position meant from an “agency” point of view. The agency definition of a job, or at least of any situation, wants to mean the actual capabilities and the skills to develop through ones’ own job some learning and meta-learning skills, and to improve economic and especially social capital. The employment (both as employee or as self-employed; both the paid and volunteer positions) is meant in this case as a list of positions that should be all a sort of steps and preconditions for the following one(s) in order to eventually fulfil the desired employment. In this research the desired employment ought to be a self-employment one, but, as shown, this aim is not in every case perfectly overlapped and is part of the social problem. The positions that one person has sometimes may be a trap, though well paid; viceversa a position may be very profitable from an agency point of view even if low or not paid. By this definition, any position in a certain moment, must be considered positive or negative according to the degree by which it deploys low or high chances to get nearer to the previous and original desired sort of employment. By doing so, the traditional factors – such as earnings, security, not-fixed or fix term positions, any other labour rights – traditionally taken into account to evaluate a good or less job are not valid. Even the most traditional factors that defines the motivational aspect of a job are here not completely useful. A position with good potentialities to access and let become more real a dreamt employment, must let a person to learn and empower some skills and abilities of a certain job (*i.e.* informal learning). Most importantly, some meta-skills and some transversal skills about how to behave and play the social self (the *me* in the social interactionism vocabulary) are strictly necessary to develop a career as a successful self-employment. This pattern is valid both for professionals like traders who have both to have strong account competencies, as well as to be able to play a role in a very complex and ever changing markets. In fact, the social capital is determinant to improve one’s own portfolio, especially in terms of strategic vertices to be in touch with to accomplish good chances to be part of the aspired community.

The question of self-fulfilment as self-employed² could be accomplished according to this theory, not just fulfilling the original ideal model of one’s employment that could be an adolescent one, but realizing the necessity to do one’s account with his/her own expectations and starting chances. By thinking so, the self-fulfilment consists to change perhaps one’s dream, but to do it in lowest way. In other words, the image that was drawn reflects the deem to be forced in the wedge between dreamt and real. The constriction of the wedge is based on the flux of time that compelled anyone to one or another pole (redefined success, or failure). The failure could be, for instance, to realize *oborto collo* that one’s destiny has been, and will be, to content with the little that was achieved, lowering one’s previous expectations. The successful pole is defined by the capacity to tighten the wedge (so, reaching anyway a compromise with some limits of one’s starting situation) toward what has been aspired to. This latter way may imply a simpler destination. Obviously, an important role is played by the ability to enact an agency strategy, avoiding, if necessary, some *tactic* advantages of one of the many jobs or positions that can be found in a fragmented career. It is evident that in this conclusion other traditional sociological issues are considered, such as the vertical social mobility, or the perception of the *self* and the dramatic theme to relate the expectations coming from one’s family and adolescence to the performed self in the first steps of one’s adult life.

² It is not to be forbidden that self-fulfilment may be accomplished as employee, as volunteer, surely as entrepreneur, or as not-working rentier as well.

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