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Mapping and stock taking of Scouts for Green Apprenticeship

Country Snapshot ITALY

Developed by: REATTIVA

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Introduction: definition of the landscape of SDGs and Green Deal implementation in your country across the VET and business ecosystem

The Italian VET and entrepreneurial ecosystem are often able to connect with each other, fostering synergies capable of generating value and transfer of know-how and good practices. However, as will be seen in the following sections especially in relation to the SDGs and the achievement of the Green Deal goals, there remain some obstacles and barriers that slow down their pursuit. While these barriers represent challenges that are still open, they also offer the Italian landscape an opportunity to develop its future in a different, integrated and sustainable way and catch up with the accumulated gap in front of the sustainable development paradigm.

In order, first a series of quantitative and qualitative indicators of the two ecosystems slowing down the process of implementation of the SDGs and the Green Deal will be analysed, highlighting the main statistics available in the Italian landscape, the interviews conducted during the primary research phase of the project and other qualitative indicators capable of giving us a better understanding of the level of perception towards these issues.

Next, will be considered the main opportunities that characterize the two ecosystems in relation to Sustainable Development Goals, using an integrated and systemic approach, also illustrating a particularly interesting case study for the Italian VET system. Then, the most relevant barriers, skill-gaps and training needs for the VET ecosystem and the business ecosystem will be illustrated, also highlighting possible actions to be taken with the aim of supporting the growth and implementation of the sustainability paradigm in the relevant context. Finally, we will highlight some of the challenges that the two ecosystems will have to face in the medium to long term with the aim of achieving the sustainable development goals promoted by the 2030 Agenda and the European Green Deal, paying particular attention to the main exogenous and endogenous factors affecting the Italian context.

Quantitative indicators on SDGs and Green Deal implementation in your country across the VET and business ecosystem in ITALY

The Italian VET ecosystem is characterized by a multilevel governance composed of national, regional and local actors that interface with each other in different ways going to constitute a locally diversified system but remaining within the framework of national legislation defined by the Ministry of Education and Merit. Indeed, it is the Autonomous Provinces and Regions that are responsible for VET programs and the main apprenticeship programs, assisted by the Social Partners, who provide support in identifying active policies. In this context, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Green Deal have recently entered since the attention of Italian legislation aimed at sustainability-related issues has been created and strengthened only in recent years. A clear example of this is the introduction in schools of the teaching of Civic Education that occurred only in 2019 through L. 92/2019 (later supplemented by Ministerial Decree 35/2020 and Annex A), which contains education for sustainable development among its fundamental thematic cores. Therefore, results consequential that also as far as the VET ecosystem is concerned, the attention paid to these issues is of recent formation, also due to a sentiment related to sustainability little rooted within the consciousness, and more generally within the Italian educational culture.

The logical consequence is that VET actors themselves (such as, for example, teachers or trainers) recognize the importance of the new development paradigm, but at the same time just as readily denote the inadequacy of the policies currently in place. In this

sense, a teacher from a technical institute with a social-health address in the Tuscany region interviewed during the Primary Research phase of this project stated that within the school system the perception of the need for sustainable development exists, but unfortunately it too often remains only a theory. In fact, it often happens that infrastructure is not sustainable in environmental terms, or that a kind of indifference to sustainability issues is created by a significant percentage of students, teachers or staff. Another interesting food for thought is provided to us by the data on the objectives and motivations that incentivized human resources working in the VET ecosystem to carry out refresher and retraining activities in the 2018-2019 period collected on a sample surveyed by INAPP (National Institute for Public Policy Analysis) and reworked in the table below by CEDEFOP (European Center for the Development of Vocational Training) in the report "Teachers and trainers in a changing world: Italy."

Table A 3. Objectives of refresher and retraining activities for human resources employed in the VET centers surveyed, by geographical area, Italy (2018, 2019)

	Geographical area (%)				Total Italy		
	Nord-West	Nord-Est	Centre	Sud and Islands	N.	%	
					2019	2019	2018
Adaptation to the regional accreditation system / fulfilment of obligation foreseen by the regional accreditation system	50.1	53.7	64.6	57.7	669	55.9	60.2
Updating for legal obligations (legislative degree 81/08 ex Law 626/94, HACCP, etc.)	87.5	85.1	78.2	74.9	979	81.8	84.1
Updating of the existing competences	65.2	73.9	64.9	52.4	757	63.2	64.9
Acquisition of new competences	60.6	64.9	55.4	55.0	702	58.6	60.1
Internal mobility of staff	4.6	8.0	2.6	3.9	54	4.5	5.7
Personal career development	11.1	11.2	8.5	7.2	114	9.5	10.4
Changes in products or in services or in the production technologies	16.5	16.0	16.2	14.7	190	15.9	15.2
Changes in the labour policies	27.6	30.9	22.1	28.3	324	27.1	26.3
Changes in the marketing policies	13.2	18.1	14.4	11.7	166	13.9	16.5
Enhancement of product/services quality	39.2	44.1	43.5	37.1	484	40.4	42.8
Other	2.3	0.5	1.8	1.6	21	1.8	1.2
Total	431	188	271	145	1 197		

NB: Respondents 2019: 1 197 training centres have declared that they have realised updating and retraining activities for staff in the last three years.
 Respondents 2018: 1 378 training centres have declared that they have realised updating and retraining activities for staff in the last three years.
 The total is higher than 100 since multiple responses were allowed.
 Source: Inapp, OFP Survey (2019 and 2020 editions).

A reading of the table reveals an extremely heterogeneous landscape compared to the surveyed sample, with some positive percentage variations and some negative variations instead. In fact, in 2019, only 58.6 percent of respondents carried out training activities aimed at acquiring new skills (including those related to sustainability-focused training) and only 63.2 percent carried out training activities in relation to updating

their skills, showing, respectively, a negative decrease of 1.5 percentage points in the first case and 1.7 percentage points in the second case. Conversely, we can see a positive percentage increase of 0.7 and 0.8 percentage points in relation to participation in training activities aimed respectively at understanding changes in products, services and technological production as well as in changes in the labour market.

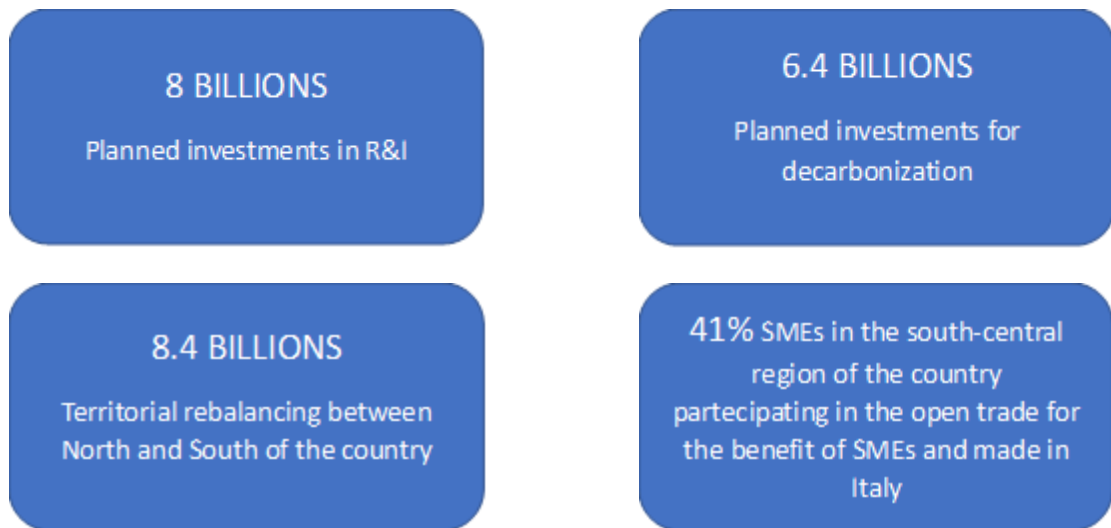
Another testimony from the public sector noted in the interviews conducted by Reattiva during the Primary Research is that of a librarian from one of the main libraries in Florence. Her point of view is consistent with the one previously highlighted and strongly points out the lack of perception and investment aimed at sensitizing library workers to the SDGs issues: there is very little investment in terms of human and financial resources, as well as relevant initiatives and events. Very positive elements, on the other hand, are: the possibility of international mobility to support cultural workers (promoted by the Ministry of Culture) which include the possibility of staying abroad to learn good practices on sustainability found in other countries; the partial digitization of documentary resources, which allows for the mitigation of the environmental impact resulting from cataloguing activities; and the provision of the resources present in the library for users. Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals, on the other hand, are growing strongly in the business ecosystem, especially regarding SMEs, thanks to several factors, such as:

- Local, regional, state, and EU incentives and facilities: numerous funds have been allocated, one example is the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRP), which is the economic recovery program with which the Italian government intends to manage the funds allocated by the Next Generation EU, and which is intended to support post-pandemic economic recovery;
- International and national regulatory framework aimed at integrating Sustainable Development Goals into business structures;
- Strongly growing and expanding entrepreneurial culture of sustainable innovation (with reference for SMEs and start-ups system): indeed, innovative initiatives and ideas are multiplying especially in the manufacturing sector. Business culture, under the gaze also of an increasingly attentive and aware public opinion, is moving toward renewal and the concept of regeneration.

According to the Report "Italian SMEs and Sustainability" (2020) prepared by the Forum for Sustainable Finance, the perception of sustainability in the corporate environment varies greatly depending on the sector of reference, but is perceived on average as "quite important" for 56 percent of the sample surveyed (equal to 477 companies of varying sizes). Specifically, the perception of sustainability reaches higher rates in agriculture/farming (48 percent) and logistics (29 percent), while it finds less acceptance in industry (22 percent) and construction (14 percent). Thus, a very diverse picture emerges of the perception of sustainability in business contexts in relation to the sector under consideration.

With the aim of making a true sustainable transition, the issue cannot be approached only from the side of perception, but also requires an analysis of what is to be accomplished in order to concretely achieve said change.

In this sense,



Confindustria's report "Confindustria for Sustainability" (2020) allows us to analyze in a nutshell some relevant aspects:

Starting from the above data, we denote a very strong and growing trend of investment in sustainable development, confirmed in the last two years by the data on ESG strategy/action plans already implemented: SMEs in the Italian territory in the 2020-2022 period have made a clear step forward: from 6 percent of ESG strategy/action plans already implemented in 2020 the figure has increased to 31 percent in 2022.

Here,

then, emerge from the outset the main elements that highlight a kind of "scissor" between perception and implementation of the SDGs between the two ecosystems, and that certainly slow down, to some extent, their propulsive thrust.

However, where these come in contact (think of the opportunities offered by work-based learning) significant synergies can be created and fostered. It is very common that a student who has carried out a vocational-training course within a company that presents attention to issues related to sustainability then stays on to work within that company or otherwise benefits from the experience gained in the field (and on the other hand the company benefits from the know-how brought by the student himself).

In addition, training carried out in real-life contexts is crucial for the development of green skills because it allows the student to directly confront innovations in a landscape (the corporate one) that is constantly changing and to learn communication, collaboration and critical thinking soft-skills.

Qualitative descriptions of SDGs and Green Deal implementation in your country across the VET and business ecosystem

As we have seen in the previous section thanks to the analysis of some relevant quantitative data, the impact of the SDGs and the Green Deal is felt and measured differentially depending on the reference sector taken in consideration. Within the Italian business ecosystem, the areas where the issue is felt most strongly are certainly those of agriculture, energy and manufacturing. However, contrary to what we might be led to think, even within the agricultural sector there remain significant critical issues that partially hinder the total achievement of the goals (think for example of the massive use of unsustainable pesticides or the low pay often paid to workers in the sector).

The issue of sustainable development is felt, however, as mentioned, in all economic sectors; here then, with the help provided by some interviews conducted during the primary research phase of this project, we will try to outline its contours in other sectors as well. One of the most driving sectors of the Italian economy is undoubtedly the tertiary sector. An assistant front office manager of a major international hotel chain (also present in Florence) reported that within her sector the perception of SDGs issues is present and growing. There are numerous examples of virtuous practices and behaviours implemented by the sector in favour of change with a positive impact on society and the environment: reducing the use of plastic, separate waste collection, sustainable mobility made available to its customers, and ethical training courses for employees are just some of the examples she provided during the interview. However, again as is often the case, the industry has yet to achieve the goal of drastically lowering its negative environmental impact.

In this sense, another important contribution comes to us from the interview we had with an employee of a company that deals with market research. In this case, the salient element she highlighted is that relating to the impact caused by digitalization: the use of the Internet, and more generally of information systems, is not zero-impact since, while it is true that on the one hand it reduces the use of a material such as paper, on the other it accentuates that relating to energy resources, and consequently results in a significant negative environmental impact. The very perception by employees in the industry of issues related to sustainability is there, but it is often not applied in daily operations.

The last

contribution we want to highlight from the primary research phase certainly goes in this direction, namely that of an employee of a cooperative enterprise who is involved in participation, and who is therefore in charge of developing shared proposals to innovate and update public policies depending on the stakeholder who happens to seek advice. The role of a company operating in this economic sector could and should be central to achieving the goals of the Green Deal and the SDGs, representing a stakeholder capable of influencing public opinion and "educating" the citizenry. However, it happens that at the corporate level there is often only an idea, which, however, lacks a practical foundation capable of permeating into the tools and measures adopted, and there is an absence of a network of similar entities with which to operate and develop good practices.

From the point of view of the VET context, we can say that in this area the focus on education and training for sustainability is growing throughout the country, although it is possible to highlight differentiated performance in different areas of the country by means of different local legislation.

Within the final document of the National Conference for Environmental Education and Sustainable Development of the States General of the Environment there are some indications aimed at supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Education and Sustainable Development, which must also be supported through the development of innovative business and consumption models, and contextually affirming the role of primary importance played by the training of teachers and trainers. Through education for sustainable development, the VET system, and more generally schools, must set themselves the goal of training students by providing them with the necessary tools: to understand the interdependence and complexity of global challenges; to adopt conscious choices of action in everyday life (food, resource use, mobility, tourism, etc.); and to critically evaluate individual and collective behaviours, which should be observed with a life-cycle approach.

This can be achieved by developing some basic and necessary lines of action. Environmental and sustainability education must not be a mere school discipline, but must become an active, motivating discipline capable of implementing interdisciplinary, participatory and interactive approaches. Clearly, to achieve this goal, it is essential that a change in teacher and trainer training also take place. In fact, teachers in order to integrate sustainability issues into their disciplines need training both at the beginning and during their teaching career with the aim of possessing the most up-to-date cognitive and logical tools, methodologies and pedagogical approaches.

Then it will be crucial to increase the relationships between the world of education and the extra-curricular world (Third Sector, Enterprises, start-ups) to enable students to closely observe innovative industry, best practices and acquire know-how also through internship and mobility opportunities, even hypothesizing synergies between the training needs of SMEs and the school system: for example, by doing so, with the help of students SMEs could report on non-financial performance through a sustainability report. Clearly, this "co-evolution" approach would benefit all stakeholders involved, helping them to re-generate from a perspective aimed at the pursuit of sustainability.

Opportunities: training available and operational tools

First, it should be emphasized that in the Italian context an organized and structured educational offer on sustainability has not yet been formed, as only a few timid signs in this direction are emerging at the moment. Unlike other European countries, where an educational offer based on the pivotal principles of sustainability has been present for years now, in Italy, also through the artificiality of its VET system, reforms and the introduction of elements of diversification of the educational offer take a long time to take place. The formal provision of educational services promoted by the VET ecosystem that is now firmly established within the education system tends to have elements marked by sustainability but does not incorporate it as a cardinal principle.

In this sense, an added value could be represented by one of the elements that encourage VET ecosystem actors: namely, the fact that they succeed in bringing students closer to the world of work (i.e., work-based learning). Taking advantage of the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills in a professional context would mean seizing the flywheel of change, because students and trainers trained with knowledge related to sustainability undoubtedly foster the implementation of sustainability in business processes and visions as well.

Among other things, in Italy there are several public agencies that, in the wake of the emphasis that issues related to sustainability are finding, seek to orient and detail the landscape within which the VET ecosystem should operate so that a sustainable transition that has VET students and trainers among its actors can be concretely realized.

On the other hand, as far as the main opportunities traced by the business ecosystem are concerned, they are mainly identifiable in a medium to long-term trend that characterize some areas:

- marketing side and product/service sales strategies: changing one's marketing strategies means for the company to think of its product/service in a different way and to attribute to it an innovative meaning and value;
- reputation and attractiveness attributable to the company that operates in compliance with the indications proposed by the SDGs and the Green Deal: the customer's perception of being in front of a product/service made or provided by a company operating in a sustainable way allows the company to be more attractive in the market and to position itself in a target reputed to be in strong growth;
- business model and process innovation: in order to pursue the sustainable development paradigm, it is necessary to adapt one's business model to the requirements demanded by the SDGs indicators, structuring the entire business activity according to these principles (in this sense, think of the consolidation of business principles such as Corporate Social Responsibility and the drafting of the Sustainability Report, both of which are considered by the more conscious public to be indices of attention to sustainability);
- reduction of costs in the medium to long term: the choice to operate sustainably poses the advantage that, in the face of an initial economic investment that tends to be greater, in the medium to long term it is possible to amortize most of the costs (e.g., energy costs, qualified personnel costs). However, it is important to point out that the perception of decreasing costs in the medium to long term by actors in the Italian entrepreneurial ecosystem is not associated with an expectation of increased revenues in the usual time frame, thus representing at the same time a challenge to be faced.

Case Study: The RiGeneration School Plan

ReGeneration School is the Implementation Plan of the UN Agenda 2030 goals promoted by the Ministry of Education that aims to support schools, and the VET ecosystem, in the cultural and ecological transition to sustainability values. Education and training play a major role in making students conscious resources and providing them with useful tools to enter the business ecosystem as vectors of change. The goals of the School ReGeneration Plan belong to the categories of society, environment and economy, and among the main ones are: overcoming anthropocentric thinking; abandoning the culture of waste; learning to minimize the impacts of human action on nature; acquiring green skills; and learning to build zero-emission, circular and regenerative enterprises and trades of the future.

Needs

The sustainable development paradigm finds in the Italian VET and entrepreneurial ecosystem some important barriers and skill-gaps that slow down its establishment:

- certainly, we can find legislative barriers: there is no consistent legislation due to the autonomy of the regions regarding the formulation and application of the framework defined at the state level by the Ministry of Education. This leads to divergences both in terms of the formulation of educational content and training modalities and in the speed of application of the constituted regulations, as much for the VET ecosystem as for the SMEs ecosystem; in particular, half of the SMEs state that bureaucracy is the strongest barrier for them against the application of sustainable initiatives, thus representing the main disincentive;
- another important barrier can be identified in the period of post-pandemic economic crisis resulting from the SARS pandemic COVID-19. In this sense, the Italian government also thanks to the structural funds of the PNRR is trying to reformulate some central issues of the education-training system, VET ecosystem included, and bring it closer to the challenges posed by the sustainable transition. In this context, the business ecosystem seems to have undergone an ambivalent effect: on the one hand, during the pandemic there was a sharp slowdown in terms of economic investment and sustainability-driven initiatives; on the other hand, post-pandemic we are witnessing a phase of growth in the attention paid by companies (primarily SMEs) to sustainability, ranging from social sustainability towards workers to raw materials and energy. In fact, about one in three companies say that integrating sustainability into their strategic choice criteria will help them get out of the current crisis, and about four in ten companies believe that the focus on social, environmental and governance issues will necessarily increase because of the new socioeconomic environment that is emerging;
- in addition, another obvious barrier found in the Italian context can be identified in a cultural gap of absolute importance. In fact, there is still a lack of perception of the importance of the issues related to the SDGs for an important segment of the population, causing a cultural backwardness that sometimes inhibits both part of the potential of the business world and that of education and vocational training. In fact, 38 percent of

Italian SMEs (Bocconi University report data) complain of a market that is not yet fully mature to respond to and embrace sustainability issues;

- finally, an important element that slows down the affirmation of Sustainable Development Goals in the Italian context is the skill-gaps that often arise between the skills required by the entrepreneurial ecosystem and those instead possessed by students. Here, however, VET training is emerging with increasing strength as a key player: it is also thanks to this that, especially SMEs, can approach students trained and educated in a manner consonant with the demands posed by the challenges related to environmental sustainability. Many are the cases, in fact, of international internships or mobility that have then enabled the matching and the mutual enrichment of skills.

It is also worth noting that, starting especially from the analysis carried out on the last barrier previously identified (skill-gaps), the Italian VET system needs more attention on what concerns its training needs. In fact, the curricula of teachers, trainers and VET students is different from the academic-traditional one; this means, for example, that in this sector there is a need to focus more attention on the acquisition of skills and capabilities in the digital sphere in order to master the digital revolution. In addition, there is a need to help teachers and trainers to develop problem/project-based activities with the aim of providing VET students with unstructured tasks, exploring problems or an open-ended situation, and developing a suitable responsiveness to the complexity of the real challenges posed by the world of sustainability. Another activity on which VET providers should be trained is to teach learner-ownership to provide opportunities for students to define the actions they will take and provide them with opportunities for self-reflection on sustainability-related issues. At this point, it becomes crucial for the Italian landscape to face the challenges posed by the Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals with some adjustments. First, the VET ecosystem should be regulated at the national level through a framework legislation by encouraging initiatives aimed at pursuing the aforementioned goals, also in agreement with the business world. Then, it would be appropriate to support the synergies that have come about in recent years between vocational education and training, the business ecosystem, chambers of commerce, industry associations and the third sector world with the goal of firming awareness to sustainability. In addition, the acquisition of the training needs of VET ecosystem actors should be fostered with the aim of training and being trained before the challenges posed by the sustainable development paradigm, and thus being able to convey their know-how within the SMEs ecosystem.

Challenges

The main challenges for SMEs and the VET ecosystem to work sustainably tend to distinguish between those of an exogenous and endogenous nature.

The first, and prevalent, exogenous causes are to be found in the higher costs required for the education and training of teachers, trainers and students according to the sustainable development paradigm, in the excessive bureaucracy typical of the Italian system, and in an entrepreneurial market that is still considered not yet mature to fully embrace this process of change.

In addition, another element to consider is that of language: there remains a language related to the topic of sustainability that is difficult for SMEs to understand, thus representing an obstacle in the process of linking theoretical and empirical knowledge to practices already adopted.

On the other hand, as far as endogenous causes are concerned, the main ones are identifiable in the value system and vision of top management anchored in an organizational system that is not inclined to work in a sustainable way, as well as in a training system that is not yet adequate to relate to the new dynamics related to environmental sustainability.

Surely one of the main challenges of the VET ecosystem will be to train hybrid figures, capable of having both

technical and specific skills and transversal skills capable of making them identify and grasp the vector of sustainability and implement it in training practices.

An active policy tool made available instead to SMEs to facilitate raising the level of human capital is that of the Fondo Nuove Competenze (FNC), included of the PNRR framework. Specifically, the FNC aims to support companies in the process of adapting to the new production and organizational models needed to take advantage of the benefits that can be pursued by the ecological and digital transition thanks to the possibility offered to workers to implement or acquire skills by attending development paths. We can

also say that the strengthening of networks and synergies at the local level between the two ecosystems represent a horizon to be pursued, since the link with the territory places a stronger emphasis on the importance of sustainable transition, both from an ethical-social point of view and from a more purely economic point of view. Indeed, it is at the local level, in economic and industrial districts, that the VET and SMEs systems are best able to come into contact, and it is here that the re-generation process determines the first benefits by allowing the two ecosystems to raise their profile and demonstrate their commitment.

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