



## First panel

The first talk in this first panel raised the issues of employability and entrepreneurship, addressing them within the context of what, in 1973, Daniel Bell called the post-industrial society in addition to Castell's views on the "Age of Information". Both expressions, *post-industrial society* and *age of information* describe changes in contemporary society. Among them, the decrease of manual labour and the expansion of the service occupations, especially those that are increasingly engaged in the processing of information and knowledge. Globalisation and networks add up to the bulk of change that inevitably affect the economy at large and specifically the labour market.

With the generalised contraction of European welfare states from the 1980s onwards, the idea of employability - understood as the ability to gain employment, maintain it or find a new job if necessary - was brought to the forefront of academic discussions, as well as of labour market policies. In this context, the emphasis on employability implies that the individual, not the State or employers, is responsible for her labour market prospects.

The second talk sketched a comparative view of the processes of Bologna and Copenhagen, which represent a major effort to adapt both secondary and Higher Education systems to the new realities of labour markets. This usually means to adjust skills and competencies to labour market demands. The Bologna process entails four technical tools, namely **the two cycle structure**; the **ECTS system**; the **Diploma Supplement** and **students' mobility**. We heard about the many different ways in which EU countries have interpreted Bologna's ideas. As a result, the two-cycle structure varies across countries as well as across schools within a country. Variation also sets the tune of the ECTS system. We also heard were also told the aims and the use of the Diploma Supplement are less than clear.

Finally, we heard that students' mobility is lower than expected, and that some countries, such as Poland or Portugal have specialised in sending students abroad, while countries such as the UK, France, or Germany, are major recipients. Hence, in a nutshell, fuzziness and diversity best seem to describe the Bologna process in the EU. A comment that also applies to the National Qualification Framework (NQF). We were left with the question of whether the NQF will indeed improve the relationship between Higher Education and firms, and thereby the employability of graduates. The conclusion was clear: much effort is still required to articulate all these different views on the implementation of the Bologna reforms in the EU.

Nonetheless, some Portuguese HE institutions are indeed concerned with the employability of their students and have been researching their own labour market. Their goal is to understand both employers' and students expectations and perceptions. IPAM is a case in point. The third talk presented and discussed the results of an empirical study conducted by IPAM researchers, who wanted to know whether their students have the right skills and whether students valued their training. Generally, their findings were in tune with previous research. It was however mentioned that the ultimate goal of the study was to help the school adjust its strategy to labour market requirements.

One cannot help thinking about instrumental views of education, which suggest a number of ethical concerns. In addition, there are reasons to believe that in the last decades ethics became a tool in the economic field, especially



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associated to social responsibility and other politically correct practices. This paved the way to an original ethics framework that was presented in this panel's last talk. Depicted as ontological ethics, a different and innovative conception that bears on practice in general, but seems particular pertinent to to address the realities of economic practice, action and skill development. The fact that scientific and philosophic ethics evolve around the human being led to all sorts of dichotomies and to instrumental views on ethics. As a result, ethics became a feeble, instrumental and technical device.

The new approach rather suggests that ontological ethics expands our horizons, re-situates us within the universe, and leads us to think globally. In other words, ontological ethics entails overcoming traditional dichotomies, such as human-animal, cultural-natural, and so forth. In addition, it needs to be in the very centre of human beings' construction, and that has to do with life-long learning, self-creation, and the full materialisation of human beings' potential, allowing for new beginnings, and the possibility of always starting over. Ontological ethics should also guide us to reflect upon the very realities that we came to debate in this conference: what is the meaning of employability? What is meant by entrepreneurship? What ideologies underline such expressions? What is skill? It should also makes us reflect upon the "only way" and "one best way" type of argument that we have already heard and will no doubt continue to hear in this Conference.

After the presentations, a few questions addressed the issue of humanistic perspectives on ethics, as well as the actual chance for mobility of graduates in the EU labour market. A few comments were also made regarding entrepreneurship, the theme for the second panel.

Thank you.

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