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Programme of the 13th edition presented in Rome

2018 Festival of Economics: ‘Technology and Jobs’

Technology can improve jobs and create leisure time - writes Tito Boeri, Scientific Director of the Festival of Economics in Trento - but its progress is accompanied by widespread consumption of tranquillisers. Every time there is an acceleration in technological progress, there is a revival of theories according to which machines will completely replace man. The end of work has been proclaimed hundreds of times, with a technological pessimism that goes beyond periods of crisis. And yet economies all over the world continue to generate millions of jobs, and the employment rate (the ratio between employed people and the population of working age) increased practically everywhere during the 20th century. Although unemployment can rise rapidly in periods of crisis and is unbearably high today in some countries, including our own, there is no trace of a long-term rise in unemployment. Automation means the destruction of jobs, with machinery replacing the work carried out by man, but automation also generally brings with it an increase in productivity and in wages for jobs that machines are unable to replace. In its turn, this creation of value for work leads to the creation of jobs. Although the frontier of automation moves rapidly and artificial intelligence technology is developing quickly, we are still a long way from replacing human work with robots for tasks requiring flexibility and discretion, or which in more general terms do not lend themselves to codification.

Not only does technological progress have an effect on the labour market - Boeri adds – but the labour market itself influences technological trajectories. Technological progress is anything but uniform. Depending on the institutions of the labour market, demographics and the human capital of a country, technological development can be oriented in different directions. Technological innovations detrimental to relatively unskilled jobs can nevertheless create employment opportunities of other kinds for people with few educational qualifications. In the last few decades, we have seen a polarisation of employment in many countries, with the creation of jobs at the two extremes in terms of employment skills: there has been an increase above all in relatively unqualified and highly qualified roles, whereas there has been a fall in jobs requiring a medium level of skills. Technological progress could be responsible for this polarisation, because it has driven many educated people, especially women, to participate in the labour market, with unskilled workers taking on domestic duties. Technological progress brings with it new distribution problems that our social protection systems would not appear to be capable of managing. They were introduced with the scope of containing the costs of cyclical fluctuation, but today they seem unable to deal with long-term structural problems, such as those linked to the future of

those who have suddenly seen their human capital depreciate radically. Today they can no longer cover new forms of employment, often disguised as freelance work, as in the case of much of the odd job economy using digital platforms.

The past can offer crucially important lessons on the impact of new technology. For this reason the historic background will have a major place in this edition of the Festival of Economics, based above all on data provided by economic historians. At the same time we must be aware of the fact that past history is a very unreliable guide for what we can expect in the next few decades. If there is one thing that is not linear, it is precisely technological progress. More than in past editions - **Tito Boeri concludes** - the Festival will welcome the inventiveness of technologists and economists. They cannot predict the future, but they can certainly imagine it with more concreteness and a greater ability to grasp the contradictions than many others.

The Festival will kick off on the afternoon of **Thursday 31 May**, with a lecture entitled “robot mania” by Professor **Richard Freeman** from the University of Harvard, who together with Tito Boeri will begin discussion of the subject “Technology and Jobs”, starting from a provocative question: “What will be left for us to do when it is machines that are working and earning?”

On Friday 1 June Professor **Joel Mokyr** from Northwestern University will deal with the relationship between economic stagnation and technological progress, while Professor **Barry Eichengreen** from the University of California, Berkeley will investigate relations between populism and economic insecurity. The physicist **Roberto Cingolani**, Director of the Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia, will instead offer a fascinating interview with a robot. In the afternoon, the writer **Evgeny Morozov** will analyse the war between American and Chinese businesses to exploit new technology. On Friday there will also be appointments with **Alan Kruger**, from Princeton University, who will talk about the changes that technology has made to our way of working, and in the evening with the first Vice-President of the European Commission, **Franciscus Timmermans**.

On Saturday 2 June, **Philip McCann** from the University of Sheffield will deal with the impact of technological change on local economies. **Imran Rasul** from University College London will instead talk about justice and ethnic discrimination. Then it will be the turn of **Federico Rampini**, a familiar face at the Festival, who will present a lecture on Trump’s America, from Silicon Valley to the Rust Belt. The philosopher **Remo Bodei** will reflect on what happens to the conscience of individuals when essential human faculties such as intelligence and decision-making are transferred to machines. **Mauro Calise**, **Andrea Gavosto** and **Gino Roncaglia** will exchange ideas on how technology is changing education in schools and universities. The day will conclude with **Diego Piacentini**, who has been a member of Amazon’s executive team and will talk about the digitalisation of the Italian public administration.

On Sunday 3 June, **Riccardo Zecchina**, formerly Professor of Statistical Physics at the Politecnico in Turin and Bocconi University, will deal with the subject of Big Data, and it will then be the turn of the economist **Luigi Zingales**, who will talk about financial technology. **Maurizio Ferraris** will instead discuss the era of total mobilisation, in which the web and mobile phones cancel the distinction between leisure time and time dedicated to work. The day will conclude with Professor **Michael Spence** from the Fung Global Institute in Hong Kong, who together with Tito Boeri will try to sum up the long debate characterising the Festival.

Once again this year **Tonia Mastrobuoni** will take us on an exploration of the most interesting books on economics published in the last few months, discussing them together with the leading players in the Italian and international public debate. Those looking for further information on the burning issues in economic and political current affairs can follow the **Spotlight** sessions: on pensions, Alitalia and banking crises.

CinEconomy returns this year, given its popularity with the public in previous editions, supervised by **Marco Onado** and **Andrea Landi**: films linked to the Festival theme will be screened every evening at Cinema Modena. The forums supervised by **lavoce.info** have also been confirmed, along with the Keywords sessions, which this year are dedicated to productivity, artificial intelligence and big data.

The **EconoMia competition**, run with the collaboration of the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR), the Association for European Economic Education, the Autonomous Province of Trento's Department of Knowledge and the Istituto Tecnico Economico "Bodoni" in Parma, is also being held again. The twenty young winners of the competition will all be guests in Trento during the days of the Festival and will receive a prize of 200 euro each.

As usual, entry to all the events is open and free of charge until full capacity is reached. No booking is provided for. Access to the events scheduled at the Teatro Sociale is by voucher, distributed at ticket offices from two hours before the beginning of each event.

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