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The Festival of Economics gets to grips with “Technology and Jobs”

The Festival of Economics, now in its 13th year, went straight to the heart of the matter today at the traditional opening session in Sala Depero. This edition is dedicated to the subject of “Technology and Jobs”, particularly interesting at a time when there is extensive investment in innovation, in terms of both resources and hopes, but also fears about the changes underway. Economists, scientists and experts from all over the world will be discussing the issues until Sunday 3 June. “The challenge of the changing relationship between technology and jobs can be successfully met” affirmed the President of the Autonomous Province of Trento Ugo Rossi “without giving in to fears, but at the same time without trivialising them. They should instead be explored and analysed. That is what the Festival is for. In Trentino we have made significant investment in innovation and research, but also in human capital, starting with schools, the university and young people. We are committed to bringing schools and training ever closer to the world of business”. President Rossi recalled that the most recent experiences launched in Trentino include training centres and the recently presented STEAM secondary school, with a four-year training programme.

The Mayor of Trento, Alessandro Andreatta warned against the risk that technology could be manipulated and lead to a shift away from democracy. “I hope”, he commented “that we will not be guided by algorithms, but will rather focus on respecting people’s rights and pluralism”. Innocenzo Cipolletta, President of the University of Trento, pointed out that after globalisation and waves of migrants, technological progress will bring with it a drive for automation that will have repercussions on the world of employment. “It is necessary to be aware”, he highlighted “and realise that there is a danger of powerful tension, which must be avoided by combating fear”. The publisher Giuseppe Laterza recalled that technology is a tool and that its success is not inevitable, as demonstrated by the powerful grip maintained by printed books as compared to e-books. “Young people”, said Paolo Collini, Rector of the University of Trento “are confident about technological progress and their future, and do not fear change, for which they know they must prepare”.

“As usual, the Festival wishes to contribute to the public debate on important matters”, stated Tito Boeri, the Scientific Director. “This year we are not just talking about technology but also about jobs, a crucial issue for our country. The question is also how to ensure that workers benefit from the increase in productivity that is achieved with technological development”. Gregorio De Felice, Chief Economist at Intesa Sanpaolo, highlighted how delicate the current international situation is. “Next year”, he added “the fall in turnover that took place with the advent of the crisis will be recovered. The surviving companies are now stronger and more competitive”. However, he explained, the situation is not as positive in terms of jobs.

The Festival’s opening session was coordinated by the journalist and RAI correspondent Eva Giovannini. Old and new forms of employment, free time and the quality of life, technological progress and the automation of manufacturing processes, hopes for the future and pessimism generated by the advance of machines, employment rates in different sectors, artificial intelligence and training of human resources: starting from these issues, this year the Festival of Economics intends to reflect on the current situation, but above all on what our future could be like, with major changes in the ways in which goods and services are

produced and distributed and a growing need for workers to keep up with technological innovation, which has experienced a rapid acceleration in the last few years.

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