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Growth without employment: are web and robot stealing our job?

Information technology and hi-tech application reshaped the job market. Machinery first substituted “blue-collar” workers, now the web is doing the same with “white-collar” ones. What about tomorrow? A debate on growth without employment - sparking from the book “At your place. How web and robot are stealing our job” by Riccardo Staglianò – with Italian Labour and Welfare Minister Giuliano Poletti and Linda Laura Sabbadini, statistician at ISTAT (Italian National Agency on Statistics).

“At your place, the title of my book – introduces Staglianò -, is not related to the future but is a situation already existing”. And the author provides a list of examples proving that statement. Starting from the most evident implication of self-service ticket machines in train station (that cost an half of an employee and release a double number of tickets), Staglianò describes also other hi-tech “job-destroying” application. “One amazing technology is for instance “Narrative Science” created by Kris Hammond – outlines Staglianò -, a software able to draft autonomously an article gathering data on the web, now focused on financial and sports, but in a future capable to cover 90% of issues”. Without forgetting “Sedasy” a machinery who operates anaesthesia without the presence of a doctor, that reduces cost form 2,000 US\$ to 200 US\$. Or the surprising application created by Andrew Ng named “Coursera” that provides on line courses reaching some 160,000 students worldwide, for the moment. Yet, Staglianò – quoting a Karl Benedikt Frey study on “jobless society” - demolishes also the myth of hi-tech as the biggest job-creator sector: “The share of US workers employed in hi-tech enterprises established after year 2000 is just a 0,5% of the total”. A concrete example of this phenomenon is the difference between the 140.000 employees at Kodak and the just 600 workers at Instagram.

“What Staglianò has just showed us – points out Minister Poletti – is the proof that world is running at very high speed. Usually, I like to make a comparison: from the “walking society” now we are moving to the “cycling-society”: you cannot stop, just go forward”. In Poletti opinion, if Italy continues to stand in defending position and does not accept the challenge for change, it will lose a lot of time, other than the already lost one. “As for the broad band – adds Poletti –, we are now discussing about it but is an action to have been done ten years ago”.

Finally, a suggestion by Sabbadini too: “I have recently heard about a “Ministry of the Future” in Sweden. It is exactly what we need in order to give Italy long-run goals as well as strategies”.

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