

Labour Law: New Workplaces in the Metaverse and Opportunities for Cultural and Heritage Professions

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The authoress will analyse the impact that the metaverse has and will have on the labour market, with a focus on the employment relationship, in the scenario of transitional (labour) markets that face several issues closely related to technology and digital. Microsoft's investment of nearly \$70 billion in 2022 on the metaverse, along with investments by Google and Epic Games and large groups such as Gucci, Nike and Walmart - to name a few - represent the tip of the iceberg of a process that is already well underway and in which we are all involved. On the one hand, the interaction of different elements of cyberspace – used to generate immersive experiences in augmented reality through the combination of physical and digital aspects of life, three-dimensional technology, the Internet of Things, and personal avatars – may represent a form of welfare. On the other hand, the legal issues are different both with respect to aspects that are more typical of digital/technology platform property law (to give an immediate example) and with respect to the issue of blockchain-supported platforms and the impact of the metaverse on the "workplace," which we are specifically interested in. It is necessary to delve into the different issues that arise in the Italian legal system. Such issues include both the status of the worker with the applicable discipline (whether framed under the discipline of transnational posting or falling under the discipline of the relationship with elements of internationality set forth in the Regulation (ec) no 593/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 of the Rome Convention on the law applicable to contractual obligations (Rome I) and labour control. Moreover, issues related to the protections provided in the Italian Workers' Statute (Statuto dei Lavoratori), not excluding psychosocial risks, must also be investigated. Another issue to focus on is contractual distancing. The status of the worker in the Metaverse is that of one who sits at a virtual desk in front of a virtual keyboard and screen for completely virtual work performance. Likewise, effects of social dumping arise in light of a possible labour crowdsourcing problem in Countries where labour costs are low. On the labour front, the questions that will arise are: what employment regulations and contracts will have to be applied to such professional activities? And what kind of new job profiles will emerge? Lastly, ethical questions also surface regarding the system of rules as well as the algorithms that will have to administer the labour market in a scenario in which human and artificial intelligence will have to coexist and contaminate each other. Further enquiry will be presented on the need to manage human capital and its strictly related impact on human resources to avoid social inequalities and discrimination.

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Finally, the impact on new job profiles and opportunities for cultural and heritage professions will be analysed.

Keywords: *Labour law; Labour market; Metaverse; Health & safety; Heritage professions.*

Introduction - Background and Problem Location: Metaverse and Labour Market Impact

Today, the scenario of transitional labour markets faces several issues closely related to the world of technology and digital. This scenario imposes a study that is not only and solely concerned with high-tech but embraces a number of aspects inherent to the direct and indirect impact on labour and job performance.

Microsoft's investment on the metaverse of nearly \$70 billion in 2022, along with investments by Google and Epic Games and large groups such as Gucci, Nike, Walmart - to name a few - represent the tip of the iceberg of a process that is already well underway and in which we are all involved. Suffice it to say, Facebook itself has changed its name to "Meta," and today the virtual reality of the metaverse is being used in marketing (including experiential marketing), education, engineering and manufacturing, real estate, etc.

On one hand, the interaction of different elements of cyberspace to generate immersive augmented reality experiences through the combination of physical and digital aspects of life, three-dimensional technology, the Internet of Things, and personal avatars may represent a form of well-being. On the other hand, the legal issues are different both with respect to more typical aspects of platform property law (to cite a more immediate example) and with respect to the issue of blockchain-supported platforms and the impact of the metaverse on the workplace.

Microsoft itself is experimenting with projects that can combine the mixed reality of Microsoft Mesh (a platform that allows people to connect with a holographic presence, share space, and collaborate from anywhere in the world; a demonstration video can be viewed in the following link <https://learn.microsoft.com/it-it/mesh/overview> with Microsoft Teams technologies, enabling participation in virtual meetings. The goal is to create a more interactive and collaborative work experience for remote workers while supporting remote users and hosting immersive virtual meetings to increase productivity.

In 2021, Microsoft, in its first step toward merging the physical and digital work worlds, has begun implementing a plan to allow workers to appear as avatars in its Teams collaborative software. Additionally, the Hilton Hotel Group, for example, is resorting to such technology to train staff for guest management.

By resorting to technology, it will be possible to give human features to artificial intelligence (AI) so as to transform chatbots typical of current websites into real interactions with "front office info points" guided by AI agents.

However, this all raises several issues both on the status of the workers (seconded or not) with their applicable disciplines and on labour control. There are also issues related to the protections provided in the Workers' Statute, acknowledging psycho-social risks.

Moreover, legal questions also arise regarding applicable law. For example, in the case of a platform: Is it the applicable internet law or the law of the EU Member State where the company owning the platform is based, or the law of the State where the server is located? What happens in the case of shared platforms?

Then there is also the question of the security of personal data that companies collect as well as that of their workers¹.

On the labour front, what employment regulations and contracts will there be to apply to such professional activities?

Finally, ethical questions also arise about the system of rules, as well as algorithms, that will be needed to govern the labour market in a scenario where natural and artificial intelligence will necessarily coexist and co-contaminate. Such ethical questions include how human capital will be managed while forbidding social inequalities and discrimination.

Labour law, at this time, is governed by a national "physical" legal system in different States, subject to international standards and EU law.

Findings/Results

Early Trials of the Metaverse in the Workplace

Currently, experiments of the metaverse in real workplaces are scarce.

To facilitate the interaction and make it usable in the metaverse, Meta Quest Pro was launched in workplaces; a range of visors dedicated to the world of professionals, such as designers and contact creators.

In this direction and to experience real 3D virtual realities, large groups are taking action with significant investments to start more and more concrete and real experiments in the workplace. It will certainly be interesting to monitor the results. In 2023, Zoom will interface with Horizon Workrooms to have avatars equipped with "legs" to unify the side-by-side of real and immersive space.

In Italy, some companies are starting much more simple experiments. In the Veneto region, a company near Verona has announced that it will cease travels for company meetings. They will replace the physical presence of employees with avatars, moving and interacting in various ways in the virtual meeting, the main goal being to reduce environmental impact.

Crédit Agricole, moreover, is experimenting job interviews with avatars in the metaverse with the ability to interact with other people present.

PwC Hong Kong purchased a 3D virtual world (created by Animoca Brands) in December 2021 to create a 3.0 web consulting hub; the goal is to enable the growth of a new generation of professional services, particularly those related to accounting and taxation in the metaverse.

In the United States, virtual military training is currently being experimented. The company Red 6 is developing technology that allows a fighter pilot to operate much more realistically than a conventional flight simulator. To date, there are already advanced systems in the military world, such as the high-tech helmet on

¹Heller (2020).

the new F-35 fighter aircraft, equipped with an augmented reality display that shows telemetry data and target information, as well as footage taken around the aircraft. Additional investments are being funded in increasingly advanced military systems.

Academia is also at work studying the effects of working in virtual reality over the long term compared to the same activities in the real world. Eighteen employees (volunteers) from a few European universities (including Germany, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom) were asked to spend five 8-hour days in the virtual classroom, after which they repeated the same test by physically returning to the university lecture halls.

The results were not inspiring, considering two participants dropped out after a few hours, suffering nausea, anxiety and migraine. Others experienced a range of stressors such as frustration (42 percent) and eye fatigue (48 percent). There was also an objective drop in productivity of 20 percent measured between a week spent in the metaverse and a week spent in real life.

Overall, this study helps lay the groundwork for future research on the metaverse, highlighting current shortcomings and identifying opportunities to improve the virtual reality work experience.

Also in Academia, one dissertation has already been discussed in the metaverse at the University of Turin; one student used an avatar of himself to illustrate his paper to professors.

Discussion

Europe's Position on Work Relationship and Workplace: Legal Implications of the Metaverse

Given the above premises, it is clear that the topic of the metaverse raises several legal issues that imply a paradigm shift, not only of the new approach of daily life both for citizens and business, but also in the diverse world of law: From the role of digital platforms up to privacy with immediate impact, issues that affect labour law and employment law.

Clearly, labour law as it stands today, is regulated by national legal systems in the different States, without prejudice to international standards and EU law.

At the European level, institutions have been observing the topic of work and digital platform. In 2019, the European Parliament published a draft report². Concurrently, the ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work has also called for the establishment of a Universal Labour Guarantee, applicable to all workers (ILO, *Work for a Brighter Future - Global Commission on the Future of Work*, 2019) although progress on this strategy has been relatively modest thus far.

More recently, in April 2021, the European Commission published its first draft Proposal for a Regulation on Artificial Intelligence (hence: AI Act)³ having the aim of ensuring consistency between existing Union legislation applicable to

²European Parliament (2019).

³European Commission (2021).

sectors where artificial intelligence systems are growing, particularly high-risk sectors⁴.

The document opens in Sect. 2 with the scenario of EU labour law influencing the development of AI systems used on employees. It addresses the possible consequences expected for those who provide AI systems (i.e. suppliers). It particularly covers the areas where EU labour law and AI overlap by analysing it from the employer's side.

Overall, the draft's perspective is an attempt to analyse and propose hypotheses and solutions for both organising work and managing workers. The process will undoubtedly generate an impact on both the EU and national labour law systems.

The text devotes considerable attention to the issue of discrimination prevention among Member States' legislations. It also considers EU law on occupational health and safety, envisaging harmonious solutions of the law.

The topic of metaverse and the impact on the employment relationship and workplaces cannot be separated from the other macro-topic of digital platforms, also at the attention of the European Commission. On December 9, 2021, it launched a legislative proposal, on the one hand, with the objective of reforming and improving the conditions of workers and, on the other hand, of supporting the sustainable growth of platforms and ensuring their legal certainty. Central in this regard is the proposed hypothesis of a directive that could focus attention on the employment status of platform workers and propose new rights for individuals, managed through algorithmic technology.

However, this does not exclude the possibility of envisaging, hypothesising and proposing a part of the analysis of the employment relationship through Artificial Intelligence, even the most problematic aspects with regard to the role of the traceability of work on platforms.

Labour Relations in the Metaverse: What Regulatory Patterns

It is now clear that the world of the metaverse generates a series of legally relevant relationships and working relationships established through digital platforms⁵ and with avatars. They, however, are and/or will be dissimilar to the traditional normative patterns of contractual institutions.

This is particularly true regarding new work patterns, such as ICT-based mobile work and digitally enabled forms of self-employment. Such new work patterns are taking hold around the world alongside non-traditional or non-standard forms of work which, as such, are not fully subsumed under the regime of full-time, permanent employment within the framework of a salaried and bilateral work relationship⁶.

Back to the present day, then, with even more specific variables, the theme of digital nomads will continue to be increasingly immersed in a decentralised digital

⁴Todolí-Signes (2021), who may be the first already in the near future to experience its effects; Wood (2021); Kullmann & Cefaliello (2021).

⁵ILO (2021); Graham, Hjorth & Lehdonvirta (2017).

⁶Pabollet et al. (2019); Stephany (2021); ILO (2016).

workspace. In this scenario, workers may be itinerant and geographically disconnected from each other and from the company for which they work.

Focus Italy: Categories of Employment and Labour

Italian law has a very structured discipline of worker protections (just think of the provisions contained in the Statute of Workers). There is a plethora of issues regarding the type of contract, legal issues and the emerging scenarios. This is similar to what happened years ago with the sharing economy and the phenomenon of "Uber". Precisely regarding the type of work, consider the possibility of multinationals increasing surveillance on the avatar worker by disguising self-employment⁷.

This would imply an improper classification of workers which would open the door to a nuanced scenario in which a variety of legal schemes could take hold. Perhaps they could even occur somewhere between employment and self-employment. Not only is the locality of work service performance virtual (a digital platform), but so is that of the provider.

The issues, in fact, could be far-reaching. If the case in the metaverse has many elements of contact with remote working (also regarding the discipline of surveillance), it also appears to be framed as a mode of performance of work whose choice would be voluntary. Conversely, it is not inconceivable that the Legislature could hypothesise the introduction of a new intermediate category of classification of labour relations, without prejudice to the division between the two broad categories of self-employment and salaried⁸.

In the aforementioned hypothesis about the aim of safeguarding workers, avatars operating in the grey area between autonomy and subordination, for example, some regulatory institutions on subordinate employment could be applied to such avatar workers if three specific characteristics are met: personality of the performance, continuity of the performance and hetero-organisation.

Hence the importance of defining the qualification of the contract type, since this also affects the termination of the employment relationship: Consider what happened regarding riders⁹.

The issue, then, is to be prepared in law by assuming a possible regulatory vacuum.

If to this end, then, the payment of wages in cryptocurrency, yet another feature of the metaverse, were to be added, the problem on the applicable law will become even more concrete. There will also be more confusion on the employment status of the worker and his/her protection, on the qualification and regulation of labour relations, as well as the difficulties of the current body of law to adapt and shape itself with respect to completely innovative cases. On this point, it should be noted that the use of cryptocurrencies as a method of remuneration for one's contracts and, in particular, the use of one's own cryptocurrency (with its blockchain) created specifically for this purpose could be a practical solution.

⁷Tullini (2020); Bozzao (2022).

⁸Ballestrero (2020).

⁹Carrà (2022).

Worker Secondment or Contract with Elements of Internationality?

A first topic of attention from a legal and doctrinal point of view concerns the applicable law and contractual distancing in the case of an avatar working in a metaverse, virtual workspace at a virtual desk with a keyboard and screen. The employee carries out work in completely virtual activity¹⁰.

Returning to the employment relationship, then, there is the question of which rules apply in the Rome I Convention (which replaced the 1980 *Rome Convention on the law applicable to contractual obligations*): The rules on transnational posting or the rules on contracts with elements of internationality?

The transnationalisation of labour relations, in fact, raises the question of the law applicable to the relationship itself. There are two hypotheses. In one, the metaverse workplace with a virtual avatar could be framed in the case of transnational posting, given that the performance of the avatar employee is configured as a temporary (seconded) provision of services by a company established in a country other than that of the performance itself. This prerequisites the need to resolve the question of the national law applicable to the employment relationship of workers under transnational posting by finding a discipline compatible with the Rome I Convention. In the other hypothesis, the posted discipline that could be disqualified is not clearly defined: It may be abusive or fraudulent, or perhaps does not meet all the conditions. Consequently, the general rules for disciplines of the Rome I Convention would apply.

It follows that from the standpoint of the potential problem of social dumping, such as from labour crowdsourcing¹¹, and in terms of applicable law, there are looming issues that deserve attention from the EU and national legislatures necessitating structured legislation.

Just as happened during the pandemic with smart working (years before, that issue had arisen with respect to telecommuting), this may have a direct impact on reducing business costs. Conversely, it may represent a fertile ground for access to an outsourced workforce in States where wages are much lower and, consequently, where there is weak labour and worker protection. A problem of labour crowdsourcing in countries where wages are lower cannot be ruled out.

The "Control" of the Worker: Surveillance

The digital transformation of work resulting from increasingly invasive technology, entails an increase in the opportunities for remote control of workers¹². Notably, if each new technology facilitates communications while also improving their quality, there is no shortage of critical issues. Work in the metaverse precisely affects the discipline of controls¹³, similar to what happened with agile work. The problem that arises is, therefore, the balancing of opposing interests.

¹⁰Dhondt, Oeij & Pot (2021); Baldwin (2020); Pizzoferrato (2021); Mainardi (2020).

¹¹Donini (2015).

¹²Zoli (2016); Ricci (2016); Forlivesi (2017); Rocchini (2019).

¹³Zuboff (2019); Spinelli (2018); Bellavista (2019); Ingraio (2021).

The discipline that would find application in Italy is Article 4 of the Workers' Statute and the general prohibition of remote control of workers' activities to respect and guarantee their personality, moral freedom and dignity, in conjunction with other norms of the system¹⁴. These include the provisions of the Code for the Protection of Personal Data (as amended by Decree No. 101/2018). In addition, recalling that Art. 114 precisely notes the prerogatives of Art. 4 of the Workers' Statute, Art. 115 of the same (Code) makes reference to teleworking, agile work and domestic work. It conditions the employer's obligation to guarantee respect for employee personality and moral freedom, while the employee is obliged to maintain the necessary confidentiality for everything related to family life.

The reference, now, is to agile work, considering that to date the metaverse has many elements of contact with the mode of smart working. Therefore, it is believed that the cases being analysed are similar.

It follows that also for work in the metaverse it will be necessary to focus on:

1. Exercise of employer powers in accordance with legal limits, albeit through digital tools and digital workers (avatars);
2. Limitation of working time and disconnection. On this point, it should be noted that the regulation of agile work stipulates that it may be carried out in compliance with the maximum daily and weekly duration limits provided for¹⁵; for convenience, reference can be made to the temporal correlation with normal working hours. It follows that an initial issue to reflect upon is not only that of doctrine and jurisprudence, but also with the Legislature, the reconciliation of the system of operation of the metaverse work model with the regulatory paradigm on remote control.

The application of Article 4 of the Workers' Statute *prima facie*, in fact, appears to be out of date due to the way the norm is formulated. Hence, applying the current regulatory framework of controls to these innovative and changing forms of remote work, and in the metaverse mode, is anything but easy. It appears difficult to identify a dividing line between the area of remote controls susceptible to prior authorisation and that of monitoring work technologies that, for justified business reasons, are exempt from constraints and considered legitimate *ex se*.

Given these premises, the question must be asked whether or not it is necessary to consider a new lineage of the Workers' Statute. Isn't it time to re-think the Workers' Statute, a project that has remained unfinished¹⁶?

¹⁴For a literature review on the latest changes in the discipline by Art. 23 of Legislative Decree No. 151, September 14, 2015, and subsequently by Art. 5, paragraph 2, Legislative Decree No. 185, September 24 (2016) see: Sartori (2020); Bellavista (2016); Del Punta (2016); Maresca (2021); Proia (2022); Lambertucci (2016).

¹⁵Bavaro (2018); Levi (2019).

¹⁶See Biagi & Tiraboschi (1997-1998).

Health and Safety in the Workplace

There may be advantages of the possibility of sharing a room with both colleagues and an avatar present, such as bringing together senior managers and operational staff to forge links. To date, however, this has been impossible through a screen. Still, sharing a room may also give rise to problems regarding health and safety aspects, without prejudice to the effects inherent in the organisational structure, which will be examined later.

First, it will be necessary to assess the relationship is and the effects are in cases where, in one workplace, there are both individuals and avatars. In the case, for example, of a plant with in-person workers and avatar workers, what happens if they encounter each other and injuries occur?

For the moment, we can consider as a model already tested with concerts that have been started in the mixed mode. In such typologies, however, it is not clear if they can be assimilated to workplaces tout court. Therefore, with respect to the current knowledge regarding the impact of the metaverse on workplaces, from a labour law perspective, it seems arduous to make long-term predictions considering both the unstoppable technological evolution of the devices and the countless fields of application.

To date, the use of avatars has been experimented on with respect to multidisciplinary prevention projects in the workplace. One such example is “Albo” of the Department of Law and Political, Economic and Social Sciences at the University of Eastern Piedmont. Albo decided to analyse all the critical issues related to worker safety by recreating different types of work environments by taking advantage of virtual reality and avatars to make Simulation videos in which dangerous situations are shown.

However, from an ergonomic point of view, working in the metaverse may have elements of advantage over current smart working. In the aforementioned latter case, it is true that there is a prevailing element of flexibility-allowing workers to move from their home location to the office, from the café to other places. At the same time, this may also have negative effects from an ergonomic point of view, compared to working at a workstation that complies with a whole series of requirements in line with the provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Consolidation Act (for example, of poor posture).

The advent of VR and AR technologies will allow the avatar worker, for example, to use different virtual screens, arranged in exactly the way he or she prefers, as well as to have a virtual keyboard to be called upon as needed, with alerts and notifications turned on or off as needed. One will be immersed in a kind of limitless office as within fully immersive VR environments such as those offered by Oculus Quest 2.

There is also the concern of people's psychological safety that could be strengthened or consolidated in virtual environments. Understandably, it would be good to consider whether the use of such technology could be in the first place on a voluntary basis (along the lines of when it happened previously with traditional smart working). Then, leaders could consider the use of such technology as an accompanying tool, which in any case would not replace the relationships that are

created between people in a traditional work environment. The issue of health and safety is central to workplaces in the metaverse both because of the implications related to new cases of work-related stress, depression and anxiety (which could be caused or exacerbated by remote work, noting that the metaverse is essentially an extension of remote work) and because of the premise of VR sickness i.e., the feeling of nausea that arises from overly prolonged exposure to virtual reality.

Hence, in Italy, the advisability exists of also evaluating an update of the provisions of the Consolidated Occupational Health and Safety Act (Legislative Decree No. 81 of April 9, 2008, and ss.mm.ii).

Conclusion

How Personnel Management in the Company is changing: Selection and Training Processes

Personnel management will be significantly impacted in employment relationship management, assessment, and in the reward phase. Besides that, it will also be significantly impacted in the phase preceding and preparatory to recruitment selection, as well as in overall assessment, reskilling and upskilling activities.

On the one hand, recruiting companies will have to convert to technology companies with platform-based approaches to online recruitment and selection and perhaps acquire or merge with traditional recruiting companies operating in high-volume markets. On the other hand, the HR areas of companies will have to equip themselves first and foremost to strengthen their areas/divisions and to train staff on the use of the metaverse. This will come through retraining of corporate resources as well as through the use of professionals (including external ones) to provide training in an area in which new professional figures will emerge as specialised designers and engineers.

This scenario will tend toward systems in which companies will increasingly seek talent (from anywhere in the world) and will have to adopt much more flexible labour policies to retain and hire new professionals, including outsourced ones.

The aspect of employee training in the metaverse, though, could have significant positive implications. Notably, the same (training) through an immersive mode can be more effective than through an e-learning mode. It thusly impacts on the fruition of training content even for the harder forms of training, such as the acquisition of skills (using, for example, the tool of 360-degree viewers) to bridge gaps.

This aspect is of interest, for example, in professions such as the medical professions not only for continuing education profiles, but also for the performance of activities. Think, for example, of surgical residents from anywhere in the world who could/will stand alongside a major heart surgeon while performing an operation.

All this will affect policies as well as the provision of professional profiles, e.g., ambassadors with the task of organising meetings with experts in the field and updating teams on new developments.

Not only that, but companies' policies will need to be adjusted with respect to the automation of processes to adapt to new business models as well. On the more specific front of human resource management, policies will need to be adjusted by identifying algorithms capable of bringing together aspects related to human intelligence with those of artificial intelligence (AI) both in relation to the selection of candidates and to their evaluations, including in career plans. Ethical questions arise in the background about the system of rules as well as algorithms¹⁷ that will have to govern the labour market in a scenario where natural intelligence and that artificial intelligence will inescapably coexist and co-contaminate, and about how human capital will have to be managed.

Algorithms¹⁸, therefore, alongside the protection and privacy of workers' data, (which will not be analysed here), will face the challenge of building ethically sustainable models both to preserve human uniqueness and characteristics, and to avoid discrimination¹⁹.

Hence, it follows that there is an immense investment by both governments and institutions as well as companies, in particular R&D areas/divisions to govern change and social responsibility, always having the protection and welfare of employees as an objective.

Regarding career plans, avatar workers should be guaranteed by specific contractual clauses, such as to allowing career advancement and growth in the company in a coordinated manner without creating discrimination. Noting that the metaverse will change the business models of companies, the effects will also be on organisational models and management tools and may also affect the inherent part of platforms and software to be used for payroll payment, for example in cryptocurrencies. If one considers that a company based in one State may have employees, avatar workers located in several parts of the world, and according to the current regulations should be subject to multiple social security and taxation regimes, it is clear that the provision of a single system/platform that can act as a Single Registry could represent a simplification, compared to the current management. This is without prejudice to the fact that there is still a problem related to the fiscal and taxation aspects of labour law as well, which should be addressed in a unified way and shared by the States, perhaps with a sort of so-called "cloaking" discipline.

On the hierarchies front, the advent of the metaverse should result in a reduction of those abovementioned aspects. Several studies²⁰ show that the potentially equality of team members interacting in a virtual environment is such that it provides individuals with a less pervasive presence than in real life. Efficiency grows in relation to the construction and determination of goals and leads to an increased sense of motivation. It follows that virtual environments

¹⁷Adams-Prassl (2020); Jarrahi, Newlands, Lee, Kinder & Sutherland (2021).

¹⁸De Stefano & Aloisi (2020); Dagnino (2019).

¹⁹Kullmann (2019); Prince & Schwarcz (2020); World Economic Forum (2018).

²⁰Watson-Manheim, Chudoba & Crowston (2012); Ducheneaut, Moore & Nickell (2007).

can serve as mitigators and/or levellers of hierarchies, with the effect of consequently promoting social and professional interactions that are inherently characterised by equality, openness, and the absence of predetermined positions.

Besides that, space-sharing or rather more democracy in terms of space and physical presence could reduce distances (for example, the division of rooms reserved for management, usually on other floors where board meetings are held; the physical distance between headquarters and operations; also the separation of production departments from sorting centres and so on) and improve corporate culture.

New Job Profiles and Opportunities for Cultural and Heritage Professions

As anticipated in the opening paragraphs, this essay aims to promote the study of the research strand of the welfare of the heritage, and to support and monitor the work of the Assembly of “Gli Stati Generali del Patrimonio Italiano” (The States General of the Italian Heritage), taking place on May 20, 2021. The Assembly represents a laboratory and an opportunity for reflection and study on the state of the art of our historical, cultural and artistic heritage.

Behind this lies the concept of heritage as an engine of economic development, which also finds its foundation in European policies (as discussed in detail in §4) and which must become the *fil rouge* of Italian strategic planning.

This is all the truer in an historical moment such as the current one, in which investments for recovery are at the centre of the political agenda and of the aforementioned National Recovery and Resilience Plan presented to the European Commission as part of the Next Generation EU (750 billion euro European program for the relaunch of an EU economy overwhelmed by the pandemic crisis). The Plan views Italy as the main character in a project of reforms to increase the sustainability of its economy and make it more “resilient” to the changes that are looming in the years of recovery from the Covid crisis.

In 2020 the MiBAC already started strengthening specific interventions, such as the Strategic Plan “Major Projects Cultural Heritage” whose aim is to boost the competitiveness of Italy with interventions and investments on assets and sites of great interest and national importance. These are necessary and urgent for implementing organic projects of protection, redevelopment, enhancement and cultural promotion, in order to increase the supply and demand for use/cultural fruition²¹.”

This Plan, launched step-by-step from August to December 2020, brings culture and tourism together and provides funding of 25 million euros which, added to 103,630,501 euros already allocated (precisely in August 2020) for other projects reach the total value of 128,630,501 euros.

²¹See MIC, General Secretariat, Strategic Plan for Major Cultural Heritage Projects.

Other projects have also been launched on the digitalisation front and with innovative investments. For example, unique in Italy with Hevolus Innovation (an international company, specialising in research and development of innovative business models for a phygital customer experience) experimentation is being conducted to attain historical and artistic heritage. This partnership also generated the implementation of the project for the HoloMuseum of Castel del Monte (in collaboration with Infratel Italia and Microsoft Italia) to enhance culture, the use of digital, and to offer visitors fruitful innovative experiences while expanding the (cultural) opportunities and relaunching tourism.

Therefore, a broad vision based on work and employment is central and strategic; a vision that points to an innovative management and international scope of heritage to define strategies for the design of structural policies to support and enhance the heritage in a vision anew, detached from the obsolete dynamics and approaches.

In this scenario, “Gli Stati Generali del Patrimonio Italiano” represent an assembly structured in several Commissions (Academies and Universities, Cinema, Economy-Finance-Investments, Europe, Events, Technological Innovation, Work and Employment, Landscape and Territory, Real Estate, Professions, Restoration, Tourism) The aim is to intensify the specificities/details/peculiarity related to the heritage, in order to reach a systematic cognitive survey of the sector, with a consistent, multidisciplinary and transversal approach as well as a participatory method.

Among its various goals, it is particularly interesting because it is in line with the innovative vision mentioned in § 3, to set up an *ad hoc* fund, *Il fondo del patrimonio d’Italia* The Italian Heritage Fund, which could represent an input for the start of a series of actions and investments, including international ones, in the Italian heritage. All this is accomplished bearing in mind the central role of fundraising, patronage and sponsorship in favour of Italian heritage.

The model is a new governance of heritage that networks and allows the dialogue between the different souls and minds of the players in the cultural heritage, both public and private. Universities and banking foundations are also already actively involved in cultural projects, ensuring a strategic convergence for an integrated management of the different projects.

To cite some examples in this regard, in 2021 the Cariplo Foundation alone has allocated 140 million euros for Arts and Culture. The moneys go towards identifying new forms and versions of cultural participation as well as management and the demand for organisation. This reaffirms the central role of culture as a vital element for the social and economic growth of the community, identifying strategic assets necessary for the restart of sites and activities: the proximity, for a renewed involvement of the public and creativity for the rethinking of the production and organisation of cultural initiatives²²”.

On the public front, the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti is strategically involved in promoting and supporting projects to valorise Italy's tangible (historical,

²²Fondazione Symbola (2021).

artistic, archival and real estate) and intangible cultural heritage and its excellence in the world, as well as supporting the spread of the values of the business culture of Italy's industrial history.

The States General of the Italian Heritage/Gli Stati Generali del Patrimonio Italiano (also in the shape of a platform for debate for the network of interdisciplinary experts involved) have a methodological approach that starts from the detailed analysis of the requests of the heritage actors, from the intersection between sectors, supply chains and the needs of the territories in order to grasp the specific contribution of each activity in the formation of the added value and of the employment of the sector as well.

A shared path between the stakeholders and the actors of the system/apparatus for the search of a new collective identity is configured as a “Journey of knowledge” based on the exploration of places, social and cultural contexts, the animus of man living in a unique historical period in which it is essential to pool knowledge and culture at a time when we are learning from the present.

This is a project that aims to initiate a continuous, open and shared front (with many voices) on the topics of interest and to lead to the definition of a “Strategic Plan of Italian Heritage” containing proposals for policy, promotion, development and enhancement of Italian heritage. This vanguard is shared and supported by the bodies and organisations operating in the sector that can make, at the same time, a participatory proposal to be submitted to the institutions, primarily the Ministries, responsible for planning, regulating and supporting the heritage sector.

In this context, it is also important to promote and encourage a new and sustainable entrepreneurship of cultural heritage for economic revitalisation that aims to create employment and employability policies, simplifying and stimulating public-private partnerships and the integration of companies in the sector, while also easing the exchange and transferability of best practices.

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