

"Invest in yourself or risk being outdone"

EDUCATION / Public event at Università della Svizzera italiana on "The future of work".

Employees, and not just employers, are also responsible for continuing education.

by Roberto Giannetti

In recent years, the world of work has found itself in a sort of 'persistent revolution', which – among other effects – is putting pressure on workers. How can we cope with this situation? This and more was discussed by leading experts yesterday in Lugano, at Università della Svizzera italiana (USI), during the conference "Future of work", organized together with the UBS Center for Economics in Society.

David Autor, Ford Professor of Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, opened the conference with a keynote in which he underscored the fact that technology does not destroy jobs but rather represents a great opportunity for society.

The challenge of technology

However, there are also threats. For example, Prof. Autor used a graph showing that low wages have stagnated in the US in recent decades, average wages have fallen, and only high wages have increased. "The challenge of technology – he explained – is not that there will be fewer jobs, but fewer good jobs. Also, more technology does not necessarily mean more "shared" wealth, and society must do something to solve these problems".

At the panel discussion that followed, moderated by USI Professor Rico Maggi, the CEO of UBS Sergio Ermotti emphasized a term used by Professor Autor, "agility".

"I find this word very interesting – said Ermotti – in fact many tend to "settle down" once they reach their goal, but then it will be difficult to maintain that position. Today, even the individual worker should be committed personally. You have to take the time to invest in yourself. If you don't, you risk being outdone. Today, more than ever, continuing education is important".

Ermotti also pointed out that the banking sector in Ticino and Switzerland has changed a lot, and that now there are other strong growth sectors, such as logistics, fashion, biotech, and so on. The situation is also more difficult for young people today. "No one should think – he noted – of keeping their first job forever. And even employers cannot avoid investing in technology, because they risk being overtaken by a new competitor".

The Swiss system

Mauro Dell'Ambrogio, former Secretary of State for Education, research and innovation, explained the importance of education, which however is not everything. "I have often travelled abroad – he said – and I've seen how education systems are not replicable. Switzerland's strength lies not only in its schools, but in its families, its culture, and so on. Essentially, we need an interconnection of different factors". Dell'Ambrogio also defended the Swiss apprenticeship system, which provides good opportunities. "It is not said – he noted – that only those who have a University degree can improve themselves".

Ferdinando Giugliano, columnist for La Repubblica and Bloomberg, pointed out how in Europe there is too much rigidity, which does not help the labor market.

(image caption) Guest speakers, from the left, Sergio Ermotti, David Autor, Ferdinando Giugliano

(highlighted text) The keyword in the world of work is 'agility': everyone should seek continuous self-improvement