

## The Activating Role of Welfare Institutions and the Voices of the Youth in Transition from School to Work<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

The trajectory between school and professional life can be seen as one of the most challenging periods of life for the youth in the midst of other relevant transitions typical to young age. Due to the current changes in labour market as well as in educational and economic structures, the meaning of work in young people's transitions has an increasing importance. Today's society demands for a stronger dependence of individuals on labour markets and the welfare state rather than on more traditional institutions thus widening the employment opportunities available (Giddens 1991, Beck 1992). However, this dependence brings along new types of risks as well as opportunities specifically concerning social security and welfare measures provided by the state. Thereby, the social policies and institutions do not simply provide answers to social problems and make individual trajectories smoother but contribute to shaping the life-courses of young people by providing norms and requirements for their realization (e.g. Mayer 2012).

The active labour market policies introduce new ways of managing unemployment by means of integration and sanctioning measures in order to activate the beneficiaries in exchange for welfare benefits. The implications of these policies on the responsabilization of individuals and the private sphere have been widely recognized (Bonvin 2008, Borghi & Van Berkel 2007, Clarke 2004, Handler 2004). In ‘the active welfare state discourse’, unemployed people are constructed as responsible for seeking labour market participation and preventing unemployment (Van Berkel & Valkenburg 2007). Hence, the labour market policies produce dominant discourses with normative connotations on unemployed. Such meanings are held real, maintained and reproduced by social subjects who participate in reproducing and transforming the culture through which the same actions are made understandable (Jokinen et al. 1999). Social constructionism brings forward the evolution of these processes and their association to the social structures produced in social interaction or by language (Gubrium & Holstein 2008). In the institutional context of activation policies, the meanings given to unemployed are constructed in the normative climate of discursively creating an active and responsible welfare client and it is precisely these constructions that the approach is intended to discover.

While the objective of the activation policies is reduction of unemployment levels and quick reintegration of the beneficiaries in the labour market, the issues of social justice and wellbeing of the beneficiaries have received less attention (Bonvin & Orton 2009). The

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capability approach offers tools for identifying the pitfalls within these policies and proposes policy recommendations by focusing on real freedom of the individuals to lead the life ‘they have reason to value’ (Sen 1999: 291). In this way, it is able to promote the prospective aspects of social policies by means of policy suggestions most likely to advance human development and capability expansion (Alkire & Deneulin 2009).

## **1 The theoretical framework**

### **1.1 The capability approach and the concept of agency in welfare**

The aim of the paper is to bring forward the role of the active labour market policies as they take place in the implementation level in Switzerland. I attempt to unveil these developments and their effects on young people's transitional pathways as they take place in an integration program for unemployed youth in Western Switzerland, in the canton of Vaud. An important aspect is the agency of the youth and their role not merely as policy targets but also, as outlined by the capability approach, appreciated by their value *per se* (Sen 1999).

Unemployed youths are one of the main targets of activation due to their lack of experience in the labour market, exposing them to paternalistic measures. Young people tend to have lower professional expectations, making them more prone to accept jobs with poor conditions than adults (Crespo Suarez & Serrano Pascual 2004). These factors illustrate the need to emphasize issues linked to the agency of youth within the frame of social policies: their abilities to autonomously construct their own trajectories, their aspirations and capabilities to participate in the reproduction of meanings attached to this phase and for expressing their voices. The latter refers to capability for voice (CV) as ‘the ability to express one’s opinions and thoughts and to make them count in the course of public discussion’ (Bonvin & Thelen 2003: 1). The concept brings importance to the democratic process and opportunities of the individuals to express their ideas and desires and to participate in the decisions made for their behalf.

### **1.2 Social constructionist approach on welfare**

Another focus of the paper indicates the implications of these aspects to the ‘clienthood’ (Hall et al. 2003) of the young participants. Clienthood refers to the meanings given to a participant in the integration measure as implied by the activation policies primarily in their implementation. Within the program under investigation the term includes the perspective of the socio-educative professionals as well as the subjective construction of clienthood by the participants. The latter perspective is scrutinized by the notion of ‘institutional selves’ as the construction of identities through the realities of the ‘social institutions that increasingly shape the discursive contours of subjectivity’ (Gubrium & Holstein 2001: 95).

This additional aspect introduces the activation policies from the social constructionist perspective enabling the analysis of the normative expectations carried by the institution. The reality is seen by the meanings given within the social environment where for the individuals the institutional discourses often appear as given, externalized reality framing the space for one's self-identification. The social constructionist point-of-view then provides tools for uncovering human activity in the process of constructing these institutions as they become externalized in interaction (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Unfolding the institutional realities enables a review of the participants' capabilities specifically in terms of voice. The activation policies in their implementation level necessarily contain such constructions of the institutional actors and thus implications on the opportunities to participate in the construction of institutional identities.

As an analytical tool, critical discourse analysis is used in order to capture the meanings given to the participants. The approach takes into account the discourse practices as shaped by power relations and the effects of discourses upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge (Fairclough 1992). The aim of the research was to discover the power structures as imposed by the policy level formulated in everyday speech of the institutional actors. The supposition is that the power structures become apparent by the discourse analysis at the program level, whereby the actors reproduce meanings of the policy discourses based on activation.

### **1.3 Linking the capability approach and social constructionism**

The normative and evaluative framework provided by the capability approach is complemented by the theoretical support of social constructionist framework. The latter is brought forward by combining different traditions of discourse analysis such as Foucauldian theories describing active labour market policies as the institutional or 'State apparatuses' (Foucault 1980) that use strategies of power relations supported by knowledge. In addition, discourse analysis provides a tool for uncovering such relations by looking at the organization of texts and talk as well as the processes through which intersubjective understanding is constructed and reproduced (Nikander 2008).

Whereas social constructionism presents the idea of an individual in a dynamic and social manner, the role of the capability approach is to provide a normative frame considering individual needs and wellbeing. It captures the essential features of the interactions covered by social constructionism by translating the meanings of activation into a formula of actual opportunities for expressing oneself and by denoting the possible obstacles for realizing relevant functionings. The capability approach thus brings the meanings constructed into a more practical and political frame and asserts a normative claim for policy purposes. Similarly, it provides a frame of reference for the juxtaposition of activation policies to other social political traditions. It enables the consideration of whether the program promotes capabilities as opposed to e.g. excessive focus on human capital and thus contributes to further design of measures addressing human capabilities. Human capital refers to the general perception of labour as an investment principally by means of education and skill formation, which is seen as central for economic success in the information economy (Giddens 2000). Thus, whereas human capital approach focusing on individual skill formation as improving employability has a tendency to emphasize individual shortcomings (Garsten & Jacobsson 2004), the capability approach offers a more holistic perspective by introducing a consideration of the context and opportunities available to individual in the labour markets.

## **2 Material and methods**

### **2.1 Three levels of analysis**

For discovering the degree to which the activation based welfare measures promote capabilities, a useful tool is provided by the notion of 'informational basis of judgement in justice' (IBJJ) developed by Amartya Sen (1999). The IBJJ designates 'the information that is taken into account when assessing a person or a situation, to the exclusion of all other types of information' (Dif -Pradalier et al. 2012: 2) and has a great impact on the design and implementation of public policies thus contributing to shaping the social reality (Bonvin & Farvaque 2005). The IBJJ enables the discovery of whether the focus is on capabilities or employability, the latter of which in the policy context refers to those factors that enable the individual to seek employment, make a career, or to keep a job (Garrouste 2011).

Employability entails a policy focus on supply – side interventions improving individuals' aptitudes and skills and hence according to Garsten and Jacobsson (2004) illustrates a shift of focus from 'lack of employment' as a structural problem to 'lack of employability' of the individual. In the strictest form of ALMPs employability associates unemployment to personal failures and deficits of the individual (e.g. Pohl & Walther 2007).

To adequately process the IBBJ of the organization, the analysis covers the three important levels for understanding the organizational processes of social work. First of all, institutional logic, formulated in the policy context, actively shapes the processes of the organization while leaving a wide space for interpretation (Hasenfeld 2010). Secondly, analysis of the actual practices in the program and the client-agent relations provides an idea of the service logics in the organization; the ways in which the policies are interpreted by the welfare professionals. Lastly, scrutinization of the individual level as the agency and voice of the beneficiaries enables an analysis of the actual impact and effects of the policies and the discovery of the frame of the activation logics.

Thus, the informational basis depends on the legislative framework, institutional infrastructure, practices, and social norms as well as the beneficiaries' competencies. Accordingly, when it comes to evaluating the capability for voice of the beneficiaries, all these three dimensions should be taken into account: 1) the formal aspects of the policy-making process such as the degree of involvement of concerned individuals in the public policy process implied by legal provisions, 2) the margin for manoeuvre of the welfare agents, and 3) the skills and other internal prerequisites of the individuals to express him/herself (Bonvin & Thelen 2003.)

## **2.2 'Semestre de Motivation' as an activation measure**

The data collection took place mainly on the implementation level of activation policies, in an integration program called *Semestre de Motivation* (SeMo). In Switzerland, this program has a high value as an integration measure among young people ending their obligatory schooling, since it is the only measure providing welfare benefits during the initial waiting period of 120 days. This means that the young people having finished their obligatory schooling and not having paid unemployment contributions are eligible for unemployment benefits after the waiting period. The specific program of study was one of six SeMo service providers in the canton of Vaud. SeMo is a measure for activation and integration for young people designed to help them in realizing a professional project and preparing them for entering the labour market by offering workshop participation, individual guiding, classes and external internships. The target group is unemployed young people aged 15 – 25 without professional plans that have finished their obligatory schooling. SeMo is financed by the unemployment insurance regulated at the state level and managed by the cantonal authority of employment measures providing individual allocations of approximately 380 euros per month.

The data consists of 14 semi-structured interviews with the participants of the program and 8 interviews with the socio-educative professionals working with the participants. Exploratory observation of one week in the program provided an additional perspective for the organizational logics and practices. These interviews were conducted in two phases, first round in December 2011 and a second round a year after, in 2012. In addition, text analysis of the legal frame of unemployment insurance and the conventional agreement between the service provider and the cantonal authority of employment measures gives frame for the interviews conducted. This stage aimed at discovering certain institutional logics that prevail and set the base for the capability for voice. The conventional agreement outlines the

requirements and expectations for participants and the welfare agents alike and constitutes the base for evaluation processes by providing an understanding for the action of the actors in the implementation level.

### **3 The swiss educational system and labour markets**

Swiss educational system can be characterized as a dual system, in which the apprenticeship combines professional training to vocational classes at school. Consequently, vocational training has a high value in the school to work transitions as around two thirds of youth have taken part in the dual system of apprenticeship two years after obligatory schooling (OFS /TREE 2003). The population in SeMo is particularly oriented to gaining an apprenticeship by the end of the programme, as its principle aim is preparation of the participants for professional training, not directly into the labour market. Also, most of the participants have followed the school level that principally prepares them for vocational training.

The Swiss labour market is characterized by a high gap between offer and demand of labour, leading to a mismatch between the individual aspirations and jobs available. Very often the professional wishes particularly of the low qualified young people are a subject of intervention due to this mismatch. The labour market changes have brought along a reduction of apprenticeship places, followed by an increase in the demand of educational credentials. As a consequence, the selection-based school system creates increased difficulties for the least qualified to enter vocational training (Perriard 2005).

### **4 Labour market adjustment by ‘cooling out’**

As a consequence, the youths go through practices that aim at ‘cooling out’ (Goffman 1962) their professional wishes to the point where they can realistically be met with regard to the labour market situation. Following the interviews, cooling out appeared as the need to formulate a ‘plan B’ as a response to the demand of qualifications in the aspired profession. Some of the interviewees had already gone through processes of cooling out and were in search of a job that better corresponds to the situation in the labour market. Apart from few cases insisting in following their own path, the participants expressed the need to adjust to the labour market and follow the realistic options for employment. For example, a response given by a participant wishing to be a designer to a question about her plan B:

“Well, logistics manager, it's a bit more...because like usually a designer or like that you should in any case have quite a high level of education...so...I know that as a logistic manager I would already have more chances of finding something” (Adèle F17).

Some of these cooling out factors can be described as cooling down the professional wishes, which mainly took place when the aspirations too high with regard to the labour market situation were adjusted within same professional field. These processes imply a special mission of the professionals to cool the professional wishes downwards while still corresponding to the original professional field of interest:

“If, for instance, a young person searches for...as a salesman, which is a profession that...requires a certain level of education and if she has a low level of education, she will...often not find it so then she will rather search for, for example, as...a sales assistant, which is...a profession...that requires a lower level of education” (SeMo Professional).

Instead, the processes of total cooling out from the initial professional aspiration were common with participants for whom this prior aspiration was particularly high or considered

as unrealistic. The aspirations levelling to dream jobs were not expressed until specifically questioning the young people about their actual aspirations without taking into account lack of qualifications. This is a factor that illustrates the efficiency of the cooling-out practices in bringing forward the adapted professional aspirations rather than their number one wish or desire.

#### **4.1 Cooling out as a result of high demands in the labour market**

In general, the cooling out discourses focused on the demands of the companies and employers and to the overall demand of high educational credentials in Switzerland. One's school level in Switzerland can be seen as a determinant factor, due to the education system characterized by early selection by two different levels in the federal level. In the canton of Vaud, during the school time of the participants these two levels were differentiated to VSO providing lowest qualifications while VSG and VSB represent higher level of qualifications.

In SeMo, most of the population had followed the lowest school level, which makes them one of the most vulnerable groups in the labour market. Therefore, it is not surprising that the participants associated their difficulties in finding a job to their low school level and credentials. This was expressed as the mismatch between the demands of the 'bosses' and their own lack of qualifications. The increasing demands, in addition, were associated to the economic crises and to the lack of available jobs. Meanwhile, raising awareness of the labour market situation is at the core of the program by processes of reality checks and cooling down of professional aspirations:

"In case they delude or they have a hard time in...accepting or recognizing their difficulties...well, it's part of our mission to...make them conscious of the reality" (SeMo Professional).

As a consequence of the reality checks, the participants are very aware of their value and their real opportunities in the labour market. The consciousness spans through the recognition of shortage of jobs available in the labour market to the idea of a mismatch between the labour market needs and the wishes of the youths. This mismatch was recognized as the lack of jobs available leading to high competition for the few, most popular jobs and to the adaptation of wishes.

#### **4.2 Adaptation of professional aspirations and focus on employability**

What can be seen from the cooling out discourses is that they promote a certain adaptation to the labour market demands from the participants. The participants' dream jobs are considered as too high, as unrealistic regarding the reality of the labour market. Often, the centre of adjustment evolves around the individual aspirations instead of the labour market demands. The current situation in the labour market as taken for granted implies that the role of the individual is to adapt to the situation rather than vice versa. From the participants' point-of-view, adaptation is illustrated by their recurrent use of the word 'something' replacing the professional aspiration:

"Yeah, I don't feel like not doing anything for...for one year or like that so...that really motivates me to find something" (Jacqueline F16).

Here the job Jacqueline would like to find is left unspecified and replaced by a nominator that opens up the possibility for any job available. This space is further widened by the reference to 'not doing anything' as time spent in not working, which implies unimportance of activities

unrelated to work. Working as doing something is evaluated as a means to avoid doing nothing, as filling the gap. Thus, in the context of the scarce employment opportunities, the space for individual aspirations widens up extending to professions that before might have been unthinkable requiring flexibility in constructing professional trajectories.

As a consequence of this adaptability and their awareness of the competition in the labour market, the focus seems to be on personal skills and cognitive as well as behavioural aspects. Since the labour market situation is considered as a structure over which they have little power, the natural object of change are the individual qualities. Therefore, the personal aptitudes and attitudes are called upon:

“There are a lot of young people who are searching where there is...one key place...or two, so it's...it's hard but you have to be motivated...you should never...give up” (Jean-Pierre M18).

Jean-Pierre presents an idea of compensation of the lack of available places and the following emotional turmoil with the promotion of motivation and persistence. The personal qualities can be interpreted as compensating the difficult labour market situation, implying that the situation demands for adjustment of the individual to the labour market needs.

The individual deficiencies and behavioural problems are at the core of the discourses related to labour markets. As the premise of the SeMo program is to prepare the young people for entering the labour market by enhancing motivation and learning responsibility and respect, the underlying assumption of the individual is that of lacking these qualities. These assumptions in Michel Foucault's (1978) terms can be related to dominant discourses setting the conditions of possibility for individuals for the construction of troubled selves. The ways of presenting identities needs to be coherent with the dominant institutional discourses and the familiar identities in order for them to make sense. Therefore, as a consequence of the focus on labour market participation, the young people position themselves through ‘problematization’ of the self. Construction of institutional self by activation logic implies a certain exposure of the self in the discourses of individual factors as the causes of unemployment. Hence, the self and one's skills are posed at the centre of attention in the process of addressing the responsibility of unemployment. In addition, the activation discourses bring forward a notion of the value of the self as an employee in the labour market:

“To prove people that I am worth more than I was before” (Jean-Pierre M18).

The value of the self is seen through employability whereby the participants seem to reflect their situation by taking the position of the possible future employer. Self worth is measured in terms of the labour output they are able to contribute. As the extract illustrates, young people seem to internalize the employability discourses by resorting to descriptions of their value with regard to the labour market as well as focusing on personal aptitudes, skills and weaknesses. Such work pervasiveness in an individual life seems to promote work 'as a career and vehicle for self-fulfilment' (Maeder and Nadai, 2009: 75), implying the dominant identification of the self as an employee.

#### **4.3 Individual responsibility for unemployment**

The internalization process of the current dominant discourses is explained by the construction of institutional self through activation logic. The self and one's skills placed at the centre of attention implies a resort to individual responsibility of unemployment. As a

common phenomenon within the frame of the active welfare state and new governance these discourses refer to the responsibility of the individual in preventing unemployment and seeking for self-sufficiency (van Berkel & Valkenburg 2007). Also the interviewees seemed to depict an active, responsible and self-sufficient individual, along with assigning responsibility on the self in making use of the opportunities provided by the welfare institutions in order to pay back the benefits later on:

“Well, they [the professionals and the director] expect that I find quickly a job, for...because here I'm more using the money of the society rather than...I make myself useful for it” (Henri M16).

The references to the individual as a burden to the society are inline with the human capital (see Becker 2009) emphasis on the individual skills, abilities, education and training. The duty of the individual is to invest in one's human capital without posing a material burden on the welfare system (Dean 2006). Recurrently, the individual responsibility was associated to the need to earn the interest and trust of the future employer by showing activation and interest. This discourse is further developed by positioning the self in the situation of a possible employer:

“A young person that doesn't want to do anything and who...who doesn't want to work euh...I understand if the boss doesn't keep him, if you don't invest yourself” (Henri M16).

By assuming the need to show activity and motivation Henri is creating an implicit image of a passive young person lacking these qualities. The discourse on individual responsibility was often accompanied with reproduction of the youth as irresponsible and inactive thus bringing further the individuals' duty to invest themselves in their work. The perspective of the employer gives even more depth to this image of the young person justifying their expectations for investment towards the employee: it is legitimate to demand an employee a high devotion to their work. An assumption can be read from this claim referring to deservingness: the bad-behaving employee has deserved to be fired. From the opposite logic, good work brings good results:

“If you work well, you will be compensated...you are paid well, you have a place...you have a family, you have a nicer house, holidays (...)” (Damien M17).

In order to earn the valuable things in life such as family and house, one needs not only to work, but to work well. This idea brings further evidence to the activation discourse investing oneself for the job, which then brings along a reward of the work well done.

The idea of having to deserve the welfare benefits and self-responsibilization with regard to the labour market needs can be associated to the notion of citizenship based on contract, whereby the access to rights is conditional upon active participation in the labour market (White 2000, Handler 2004). The state is seen as the provider of opportunities and for exchange of benefits the individuals' duty is to make use of them by maximizing their employability. The contractual nature of the welfare naturally has its form also in the frame of the welfare measures. In SeMo, the enrolment is based on creating an individually tailored professional plan, including objectives of a minimum amount of internships and on following the rules of the organization. The objectives are negotiated with the participants, agreed upon and controlled by the regional employment centre. A failure in following these objectives

leads to sanctioning measures, a loss or reduction of allowances and eventually a possible suspension of the program.

## **5 Adaption as passivity**

The responsabilization and contractualization discourses both imply a certain power imbalance whereby the individuals are the focal point of intervention. Similarly, this imbalance can be seen in the discourses of welfare subjectivity whereby the participants are constructed as the subjects of institutional intervention. This is illustrated by the construction of institutional selves through passivity and ‘placability’ from a welfare measure to another. In the context of welfare processes, the participants tend to present themselves in passive terms as being placed, put, sent or taken from one welfare measure to another rather than taking the position of an active individual exercising free choice. Another aspect of the passivity discourse points to the adaptability of individuals to the new situations as the recurrent use of ‘It’s like that’ – discourse. One characteristic of this discourse is the reference to the existing state of affairs as permanent and unchangeable. Often, a relevant authority was named such as the professionals, the director of the program or the system in order to explain the inability to change the situation. Adaptability emerged as a lack of initiative or motivation to change the situation or alternatively introducing the lack of opportunities to make a difference:

“Well pff...I cannot do anything so I go with it” (Agnes F16).

“It’s the adults and not us, so if we need to address them with "vous" then we’ll do that” (Isabelle F16).

Passivity poses a paradox on the activation measures where the subject is supposed to be self-activated while expected to adapt to the situations without questioning the base of these measures or sanctioning procedures. Thus, the activation discourse presents a contradiction between an active and activated individual, the former proposing rhetoric of active adaptation and flexibility and the latter an externally motivated dependent individual (Crespo Suarez & Serrano Pascual 2004). Here, the policy makers possess a power element in the creation, reproduction and maintenance of an image of the welfare subject as active but adaptable at the same time. The welfare subject can be constructed with a range of qualities depending on the benefit that this reconstruction holds for the decision makers. In addition, the discourses are reproduced in the society by the citizens, including the policy targets themselves. This is maintained by the ‘portrayal of the currently socio-economic order as simply given, an unquestionable and inevitable horizon which is itself untouchable by policy and narrowly constrains options, essential rather than contingent’ (Fairclough 2003: 95).

## **6 The capability approach implications**

Viewed against the CA, the focus on employability and individual responsibility poses problematic implications for the agency of individuals. Deriving the responsibility solely from the individual premises places the blame on the individual whereas from the CA point-of-view, ‘the individual agency’ as what the individual is able to do needs to be combined with ‘social agency’ as the opportunities available to her (Bonvin & Thelen 2003). The concept of agency by the CA gives a normative stance on people ‘as being actively involved—given the opportunity—in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs’ (Sen 1999: 53). Responsibility inflicted on the individual is problematic as long as s/he is not provided with the necessary resources. Following Sen’s ideas of capabilities, the capacity to act should be complemented by freedom of choice along

with the resources and conversion factors allowing for the real functioning of the person. The welfare state should then bear a part of the responsibility by providing real opportunities for enabling the individuals to bear their part of the contract.

The contractual frame itself and the internalization of obligation by the young people bring along certain implications for their capabilities. While obligation in many cases was mentioned as a necessary incentive for job search, the underlying influence of the contractual frame seemed to cause stress and anxiety among the people interviewed. As the contract – based measures promote fast integration into the labour market in order to reduce the welfare costs, young people are put under pressure by constant control of meeting objectives, deadlines and expectations of quickly attaining an apprenticeship. When the participants are subject to severe time limitations as well as pressure given from outside, their opportunities for formulating a coherent professional plan and aspirations are constrained. This is due to the cooling out effect implying that finding an apprenticeship, no matter what kind, has the priority in their aspirations.

### **6.1 Aspirations lowered down by adaptation**

Hence, the cooling out practices have an impact on the abilities of the young people to construct their professional trajectories as well as their professional self - definition and self – identification. As these practices promote adaptability to the labour market changes by bringing down aspirations and dreams, the young people often need to resort to the ‘realistic’ reflection of one's life where the labour market needs are to be met by personal adaptation. As a consequence, particularly affected is one's capacity to aspire as ‘an ethical horizon within which more concrete capabilities can be given meaning, substance, and sustainability’ (Appadurai 2004: 82). The capacity to aspire in this sense can be seen as a metacapacity defined as a precondition for the realization of other capabilities, such as the capability for imagination: Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a ‘truly human’ way (Nussbaum 2000: 78). As the young people's aspirations are set low due to the reality checks in the program, their capabilities for imagination are affected in a way that hinders the expression of their dream jobs leading to adaptation of their preferences to meet the labour market needs.

Having time, the ability to use this time in a meaningful way, and the freedom from pressure can enable a coherent planning and construction of a professional trajectory taking into consideration individuals' true aspirations. As Comim (2003) suggests, individual's capability to handle time is essential in exercising autonomy as it enters at the core of making decisions. In the case of the young people, their autonomy is reduced by the constraints to the process of decision-making and to the timing of the participant's biographical processes.

In addition to the ALMPs, the Swiss school system has an impact in the low aspirations of the individuals due to its selectiveness at the secondary school level. Partially, due to the hierarchy between the school levels in the canton of Vaud, the young people graduated from the lowest level (VSO) have often experienced stigmatization and discrimination during their experiences in internships or in the selection process simply due to their school level. Furthermore, the discriminatory practices are maintained due to the cooling out practices and the participants' acknowledgment of their difficulties in finding a job outside the internship as well as their low aspirations that prevent the participants from quitting the internship. Another, perhaps more powerful reason for staying in the internship is that quitting would cause sanctioning in the form of benefit reductions. Following Hirschman's (1970) terminology of exit, voice and loyalty, the latter is the only realistic option not only due to the

limitations for the option of exit and voice by sanctions, but also due to the cooling out practices.

Moreover, the contractual frame of activation policies brings an additional impact on this discrimination based on the school level by the discursive environment promoting adaptability of the individuals. The cooling out practices add up to this adaptation process as taking any job available is seen as better than not having a job at all. This is well illustrated in the SeMo that poses an obligation of doing one internship per month, implying that the quality of the job experience is compromised by the number of internships. There is, thus, a discursive environment of work ethics that promotes the importance of having something to do and to avoid time of inactivity at all costs, which has an important impact in the adaptation process. Hence, the selectivity of the Swiss school system combined with the indirect effect of the active labour market policies contributes to stigmatization and discrimination of the young people, further bringing down their aspirations.

## **6.2 Capability for voice**

Regarding the aspect of voice, the contractual base is maintained by limiting the option of exit by the threat of sanctions. Similarly, the option of voice is constrained since the sanctioning system is considered as non-negotiable leading to the natural choice of loyalty. The loyalty option is further illustrated by the discourse on welfare subjectivity and the following tendency for adaptation. As the capabilities approach ‘commits itself to respect for people’s powers of self-definition’ (Nussbaum 2011: 18), the participants’ self-definition can be seen as influenced by the institutional reality of welfare measures. The readiness to adapt to the current institutional state of affairs and the decisions made by relevant welfare actors implies a certain conformity reproduced by dominant discourses. The expression of oneself as a welfare subject passively following the welfare path paved for them instead of autonomously making decisions implies a lack of agency and voice in the discursive reality produced by the individuals. Thus, the lowered capacity for aspiration affects the aspect of voice as the individuals identify themselves mainly through their school level and their professional value in the labour market as well as their welfare subjectivity. The latter is maintained by the subjective experiences of inability or lack of opportunities to bring forward their desires and concerns within the program.

In addition, the time pressure experienced by the young people as well as prioritization of job search seemed to have an effect on voice, since the lack of time discouraged them from bringing forward issues they felt as important. Therefore, the capability to handle time can also be seen as a metacapacity for the realization of capability for voice. This means that the reduction in the autonomy and control of using time seemed to affect the opportunities of the individuals to use voice.

## **7 Conclusions**

When it comes to the individual responsabilization for unemployment and the following welfare passivity of the participants, there are implications that not all the aspects of the capability for voice, autonomy and participation have been taken in consideration. As the contradictions in the activation discourses show, there is a certain frame of adaptability expected from the unemployed youth regarding their desires and wishes. Consequently, what risks to be ignored, is personal career development effectively starting from the premises of the young people themselves, not as imposed activation but from real freedom for self-development. Instead, with the frame of activation based on constraint and threat for exclusion, tensions built up for labour market entry, possibly leading to self-blame and further

risks for marginalization. While offering a wide variety of opportunities and flexibility for some, the effects of globalization bring insecurity and inequality in the labour market as well as in the welfare regime for the most vulnerable groups. Whereas the unemployed with low qualifications benefit from the integration measures, the jobs created are often precarious and rarely offer a sustainable solution for these young people (Blossfeld et al. 2005). As a consequence, the youth in the most vulnerable situation risk to be further marginalized unless their transitions can be built in a constructive way, enabling the acknowledgement of structural factors for unemployment. Due to the young age of the participants, the recourse to unquestioned adaptability to the institutional reality poses a challenge for the identity construction as the self as capable and autonomous actor in the society.

While human capital oriented labour market policies are important in order to focus on the skills enhancing measures for young unemployed, the capability approach allows a wider perspective on the individual and structural opportunities for attaining a meaningful job. The human capability perspective goes beyond employability indicators and adaptation to labour market needs by committing to the achievement of wider array of objectives than increasing individuals' self-sufficiency for the benefit of economic prosperity. In addition to skills and knowledge, the capability approach promotes a holistic understanding of human capabilities by taking into account the resources and the context and opportunities for their realisation (Dean et al. 2005). More capability-friendly policies would entail a genuine participation of all partners involved with a long-term perspective and the equilibrium of individual and collective responsibility (Bonvin & Farvaque 2003).

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