



## Vocational Opportunities of Unemployed Young Adults

*Daniel Rebbe, Universität Bielefeld*

### 1

This PhD thesis is about the unequal chances and opportunities in the life of young unemployed people in Germany and their transitions into the labour market. Adolescents and young adults under the age of 25 are highly affected by the lack of apprenticeships and unemployment (cf. ILO 2010). Their chances to get an apprenticeship and a subsequent employment according to their preferences and / or choice seem to be considerably depending on their socio-economical status and social backgrounds. An increasing rate of “not unemployed” young people, who do not find an apprenticeship or a suitable employment, are situated in a complex transitional system that offers a broad variety of temporary bridging measures for vocational training and vocational orientation (cf. Bosch et al. 2010). Furthermore, the German labour market shows a vast increase of loan jobs and short term employments, implicating a tendency change from normal to precarious and atypical employments (cf. AAW 2009, p.111ff.). According to the briefly described critical conditions of the labour market not just any kind of work and employment is worthwhile for individuals, but the quality of a work and decent dignified employment conditions individuals can identify with, are essential to their life chances and well-being (cf. INKOTA 2009; WEED/ver.di 2010). The socio structural conditions for that may require legislative activity directed to grant equal opportunities for participation in different societal areas for every citizen (cf. Nussbaum 1999). Under present circumstances many young women and men are depending on social services and assistance for general and vocational integration help. Questions regarding principles, design, planning and professional realisation of such assistance are highly relevant.

The promotion and support of access to employment has been a field of social work practice for a long time. As well as other fields of practice of social work, employment promotion was confronted with fundamental organisational changes and processes of economisation during the last years (cf. Burghardt/Enggruber 2005). These characteristic changes of the social services can be seen in broader changes of the welfare state (cf. Buestrich et al. 2008; Kessler/Otto 2009). Their various consequences for the practice of social work in the field of employment promotion will be analysed in this research. Therefore it is of fundamental interest how professionals deal with the resulting institutional changes, but also how to deal with power and reflect on their own political positions towards social justice, social inequalities and causes of unemployment.

In dealing with unemployment the individual activation has been a main answer and focus of labour market and social policy within the last years (cf. Seifert/Struck 2009; Bonvin 2009; Galuske/Rietzke 2008). As different programs have been invented to support young adults developing better employability in order to efficiently increase their chances for participation on the job market, this might imply and lead to the assumption that the main problem of being

unemployed lies primarily in the individual constitution and behaviour (or “non-behaviour”) of a person and therefore the person needs to be activated and trained in order to fit better to the needs of the local labour market. This point of view seems to neglect the multiple societal causes for unemployment (apart from possible individual factors) and the problem of structural inequalities within labour market and society and the possible resulting lack of chances and opportunities (cf. Bonvin/Farvaque 2006) e.g. because of class, gender, ethnic roots etc.(cf. Winker/Degele 2009). Among others Schneider/Otto (2009) ply for a shift from a narrow employability focus to broader developmental and capability focussed labour market policy in theory and practice, especially when it comes to the support of young people. This does not mean that the employability and the functional skills of a person shall no longer play a role in employment support but from an educational and developmental point of view the persons’ chances and opportunities of own reasonable choices are not reduced to a certain functional behaviour.

Another problem could be seen in the fact that people who are unemployed are usually depending on the supply of certain resources which– as a sanction – can be reduced to zero, if a job offer is not accepted. This can force people to neglect their own choices , intentions and goals with respect to a “good working life”.

This research is designed to stress the intentions of the young people about a “good working life”. Therefore unemployed young people will be interviewed with the focus on their individual biographies, their life circumstances and their experiences in the employment promotion processes and on the labour market. In this context the presumed processes and experiences of alienation and stigmatisation are biographically explored and reconstructed. In addition qualitative interviews with professionals in the local labour agencies are conducted in order to reconstruct and analyse the basics of efforts to labour market integration and how they are enacted in institutional practices. The crucial point of this investigation will be the case management processes and their social and political (pre)conditions on the individual as well as on the institutional level. Within this context the professional identity, the explanatory, interpreting and operating logics of case managers will be explored with respect to their considerations on and constructions of needs, basic capabilities and opportunities of young people. The analytical frame is mainly drawn by the Capability Approach/Capabilities Approach of Amartya Sen und Martha Nussbaum (cf. Sen 2001; Nussbaum 1999). Drawing from the Capabilities Approach, especially to the connected fundamental debates about the philosophy and theory of social justice, human development and well-being of humanity, it is aimed to identify imbalances regarding the social participation and life chances of the young people and to provide answers to the questions under which conditions human flourishing can be enhanced and what is required from an educational scientific perspective to achieve it (cf. Otto/Ziegler 2009; Otto/Ziegler 2010).

Therefore the leading question of this research is:

How do the strategies and practices of professionals in the local labour agencies fit to the needs and opportunities of unemployed disadvantaged young people and how far are their capabilities enhanced during professional counselling and integration processes?

According to that main question the following sub questions unfold:

A. What are the models of interpretation and explanation and what are images of youth, early adulthood and unemployment on which the professionals build up their work and which

concepts and operating logics derive from that for the counselling and job placement processes? How are these models and logics reflected among the professionals and in the institutional context?

B. What concepts about a satisfying and valuable job situation, apprenticeship and vocational training do the young adults have? And according to that, to what extent can they realize their ideas, expectations and plans?

C. What are the problems, gaps and conflicts that influence a satisfying and “successful” course of the professional processes and how are these related problems and conflicts seen and handled on both sides?

Thus, the empirical objective of this research is to develop typologies of how the changes, developments, aims and problems in the field of employment promotion are handled and perceived by case managers and unemployed young people.

## References

**Arbeitsgruppe Alternative Wirtschaftspolitik (AAW):** Memorandum 2009. Von der Krise in den Absturz? Stabilisierung, Umbau, Demokratisierung. Köln 2009: PapyRossa Verlag.

**Arnold, Helmut; Böhnisch, Lothar; Schröer, Wolfgang** (Hrsg.): Sozialpädagogische Beschäftigungsförderung. Lebensbewältigung und Kompetenzentwicklung im Jugend- und jungen Erwachsenenalter. Weinheim und München 2005: Juventa Verlag.

**Bonvin, Jean-Michel; Farvaque, Nicholas:** Promoting Capability for Work: The Role of Local Actors. In: Deneulin, Séverine; Nebel, Mathias; Sagovsky Nicholas: Transforming Unjust Structures. The Capability Approach. Dordrecht 2006: Springer. P.121-142.

**Bonvin, Jean-Michel:** Der Capability Ansatz und sein Beitrag für die Analyse gegenwärtiger Sozialpolitik. In: Soziale Passagen. Journal für Empirie und Theorie Sozialer Arbeit. 2009: Heft 1. S.8-22.

**Bosch, Gerhard; Krone, Sirikit; Langer, Dirk** (Hrsg.): das Berufsbildungssystem in Deutschland. Aktuelle Entwicklungen und Standpunkte. Wiesbaden 2010: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

**Burghardt, Heinz; Enggruber, Ruth** (Hrsg.): Soziale Dienstleistungen am Arbeitsmarkt. Soziale Arbeit zwischen Arbeitsmarkt- und Sozialpolitik. Weinheim und München 2005: Juventa Verlag.

**Buestrich, Michael; Burmester, Monika; Dahme, Heinz-Jürgen; Wohlfahrt, Norbert** (Hrsg.): Die Ökonomisierung Sozialer Dienste und Sozialer Arbeit. Entwicklung – Theoretische Grundlagen – Wirkungen. Grundlagen der Sozialen Arbeit. Bd.18. Baltmannsweiler 2008: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren.

**Galuske, Michael; Rietzke, Tim:** Aktivierung und Ausgrenzung – Aktivierender Sozialstaat, Hartz-Reformen und die Folgen für die Soziale Arbeit und Jugendberufshilfe. In: Anhorn, Roland; Bettinger, Frank; Stehr, Johannes (Hrsg.): Sozialer Ausschluss und Soziale Arbeit. Positionsbestimmungen einer kritischen Theorie und Praxis Sozialer Arbeit. Wiesbaden 2008: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. S.399-417.

**INKOTA-netzwerk** (Hrsg.): Gute Arbeit, Schlechte Arbeit. Decent Work und der Kampf um eine würdige Beschäftigung weltweit. INKOTA-Dossier 6. Berlin 2009.

**International Labour Organization:** Global Employment Trends for Youth. Special issue on the impact of the global economic crisis on youth. Geneva 2010: International Labour Office.

**Kessl, Fabian; Otto, Hans-Uwe** (Hrsg.): Soziale Arbeit ohne Wohlfahrtsstaat? Zeitdiagnosen, Problematisierungen und Perspektiven. Weinheim und München 2009: Juventa Verlag.

**Schneider, Klaus; Otto, Hans-Uwe** (Ed.): From Employability Towards Capability. Luxembourg 2009: Inter-Actions Edition Forward.

**Nussbaum, Martha C.:** Gerechtigkeit oder Das gute Leben. Frankfurt am Main 1999: Suhrkamp Verlag.

**Otto, Hans-Uwe; Ziegler, Holger** (Hrsg.): Capabilities – Handlungsbefähigung und Verwirklichungschancen in der Erziehungswissenschaft. Wiesbaden 2009: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

**Otto, Hans-Uwe; Ziegler, Holger** (eds.): Education, Welfare and the Capabilities Approach. A European Perspective. Opladen & Farmington Hills 2010: Verlag Barbara Budrich.

**Seifert, Hartmut; Struck, Olaf** (Hrsg.): Arbeitsmarkt und Sozialpolitik. Kontroversen um Effizienz und soziale Sicherheit. Wiesbaden 2009: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

**Sen, Amartya:** Development As Freedom. Oxford 2001: Oxford University Press.

**WEED; Ver.di** (Hrsg.): Gute Arbeit unter Druck. Auswirkungen der EU-Freihandelspolitik auf Beschäftigung und Arbeitsbedingungen. Berlin 2010: Pegasus Druck und Verlag.

**Winker, Gabriele; Degele, Nina:** Intersektionalität. Zur Analyse sozialer Ungleichheit. Bielefeld 2009: transcript Verlag.

**Author's Address:**

Daniel Rebbe  
Universität Bielefeld  
Research School Education and Capabilities  
Email: [daniel.rebbe@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:daniel.rebbe@uni-bielefeld.de)

**Social Work  
& Society**