



## **Social Integration Policies for Young Marginalised: A Capability Approach**

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### **1 Introduction**

From the mid-eighties, social policies are increasingly being turned into re-commodification tools, i.e. their main objective is no more to compensate for income loss, but to promote quick and possibly long-lasting reintegration into the labour market. This evolution has coincided with the emergence of various activation requirements imposed on recipients, upon which entitlement benefits are often made conditional (esp. in devices set up within the unemployment insurance and social assistance programmes). In this context, activation is frequently identified with compliance with the expectations defined by officers of the public administration. Thereby, it is claimed that activation can take place without, or even against, the beneficiaries' consent. In other words, the prevailing view of activation or empowerment is imposed in a top-down way, and this applies especially to the most disadvantaged beneficiaries, who are also those submitted to the harshest requirements or sanctions. By contrast, the capability approach (henceforward CA) insists that genuine empowerment cannot be achieved if the empowered, i.e. the activated, person is not willingly participating to the process. In this alternative framework, the enhancement of individual capabilities requires both empowerment and free participation: if the former is missing, the individual recipient's freedom remains formal (in the Marxian sense); if the latter is not guaranteed, then empowerment boils down to paternalism. Hence, the challenge that the CA poses to the activation strategy is to design programmes able to both empower the beneficiaries and respect their freedom to lead the life of their choice. This task is particularly requiring for the most disadvantaged people, among whom marginalized youth. Our paper aims at providing an analytical and normative framework for assessing social integration policies set up for marginalized youth. Section 1 presents in some detail this framework, i.e. it proposes a concrete way to implement the CA in this specific field. Section 2 applies it to a specific case, i.e. a programme developed for marginalized youth in a Swiss canton. The concluding section summarises the main teachings of the case study both in normative and methodological terms.

### **2 The capability approach**

In the CA, the aim is to analyse the extent of the individuals' "real freedom to lead the life they have reason to value", according to Sen's recurrent formula (e.g. Sen 1999). In order to implement this approach in the field of social integration policies, in particular those addressing marginalized youth, three issues are key (Bonvin 2008):

1. what normative reference is used? In other words what actual objectives and targets are pursued when it comes to integrating marginalized youth: work, employability, capability for work (i.e. the real freedom to choose the job they have reason to value), or capability for work and life (i.e. the real freedom to

choose the life they value, esp. with regard to the balance between work and other dimensions of life), etc.?

2. what information is considered as relevant in the pursuit of these objectives? More precisely, when individuals are assessed, what dimensions of their life courses are emphasised: qualification, professional experience, other dimensions connected with their life trajectory such as family life, health, housing, or more subjective dimensions including their expectations or even their tastes? Policies aiming at integrating marginalized youth will differ to a considerable extent, depending on the informational basis selected. Indeed, reality is very complex and the way to describe it is not straightforward, i.e. it necessarily implies a selection between available information with a view to focusing the intervention on the selected data;
3. how are these two (the normative reference and the informational basis) defined and implemented? Who participates to the policy processes aiming at settling those issues: experts, public administration officers, local agents in charge of implementing those policies, the beneficiaries or end users, etc.? Depending on the set of people associated to these processes, the result will certainly differ to a great extent: for instance, experts left by themselves tend to impose their own view on the other actors and to discard the normative viewpoints and the information that local actors or beneficiaries could provide. Indeed, democracy as a constructive process (i.e. one in which social values and norms, but also public policies – their normative targets and their informational basis – are the result of a social construction, that takes all viewpoints into account and makes them count within the decision-making process – Sen, 1999) is key in the CA. Any exercise of social description and evaluation ought to include as many participants (i.e. as many informational bases and viewpoints) as possible.

The first two issues are closely interconnected: as a matter of fact, according to the normative target pursued, a specific set of information (what Amartya Sen calls the “informational basis of judgement in justice”) will be collected. Let us see more in detail what this implies when analysing public policies for marginalized youth.

In the analytical grid provided by the CA, at least three distinctive sets of data should be taken into account when assessing the level of individual capabilities. These include:

a) *resources or commodities*, i.e. all goods or services (be they public or private) that are available to a person. These encompass not only the income, or the goods and services that one owns or can acquire, but also all transfer incomes or cash benefits provided by social insurance or social assistance programmes;

b) *individual conversion factors*, i.e. all individual characteristics that allow (or prevent) the conversion of the above mentioned resources into capabilities or real freedoms to lead the life one has reason to value. The impact of those features (some of them ascribed, e.g. age, gender, etc., others achieved: competencies, qualifications, experience, etc.) tightly depends on the way they are valorised in their environment, i.e. it cannot be grasped irrespective of the social context;

c) *social conversion factors*, i.e. all dimensions of the social environment that may impact, positively or negatively, on the conversion of resources into capabilities. These include in particular the following aspects:

- what social stratification prevails (and along what lines: class, gender, nationality, competencies, etc.)? In other words, what categories or groups are particularly valued or despised?
- what social norms or values are dominant in the society (or the group) concerned?
- what economic or social opportunities are available (in terms of professional and social integration)? In particular, are they equally available for all target groups?

To assess a situation against the CA, one should take into account the whole informational configuration listed above: not only the resources and the individual features (be they assets or handicaps), but also all dimensions connected to the social and environmental context, i.e. to the collective valorisation of these factors and to the opportunities available to convert them into capabilities or real freedoms.

Hence, when analysing public policies for social integration in support of marginalized youth, it is crucial to see whether, and to what extent, they include information about all these dimensions or if they exclude some of them. In the latter case, that would imply that their normative basis relies on a reductionist notion of integration or activation. In order to assess such policies, then, one key issue is to grasp the specific meaning given to the concept of activation in the case of marginalized youth. More precisely, what kind of activation or integration efforts are expected from young marginalized people? If their activation or agency is viewed in strict connection with having a job on the primary labour market, then the relevant informational basis will encompass only the dimensions related with professional integration, and consequently all other informational bases will be discarded, e.g. housing, health or family problems will not be taken into consideration. If agency is envisioned as something that encompasses all relevant dimensions of the young people's life trajectory, then a much broader informational basis will be privileged. Furthermore, policies focusing on integration into the primary labour market may encompass a plurality of normative references and informational bases. In what follows, the three most frequent solutions to the issue of professional integration are briefly presented and assessed against the CA: a) workfare, b) employability as individual adaptability, c) employability as reflexive adaptation of the individual and the labour market.

Workfare policies suggest that a quick return to the primary labour market is the most appropriate solution, therefore adequate incentives are set up to promote such an outcome. All programmes under the "Making Work Pay" label (OECD 1994) are in line with this option. Here, the cause of unemployment is identified with the excessive cost of the labour force, and all tools that allow to diminish labour costs (i.e. to make of hiring a profitable option for employers), and to reduce cash benefit measures (i.e. to revise welfare benefits with a view to suppressing all dependency or poverty traps), are welcome. The solution to all social problems is work, and work is strictly interpreted as a matter of financial attractiveness both to employers and employees/job-seekers. What matters is that work rewards (financially) all stakeholders: for employers and those responsible for job creation, its quality-price ratio should be better than that of capital and wages in other (lower-income) countries; for workers and job-seekers, its remuneration should be higher than welfare benefits. As a consequence,

the solution to youth marginalization in workfare strategies is a combination of wage and labour cost flexibilisation and a reduction of cash benefits. In such cases, there is little probability of a real negotiation about the content of activation policies. Rather, the young marginalized are called to comply with the financial requirements of the labour market, and they are endowed with little or no power to bargain their wages or the content of their activation programmes.

By contrast, human capital strategies insist on the development of individual competencies and skills. The aim is also to make the labour force or the job-seekers more attractive in the eyes of employers, but the means (and the selected informational basis) significantly differ from workfare policies. By enhancing the level of qualifications and competencies, it is hoped that employers will be pushed to keep their employees or to hire new ones. In other words, what makes the labour force attractive is not (only) its low price, but (also) its high qualifications. However, such human capital approaches encompass a wide variety of views, ranging from the enhancement of marketability (i.e. what matters is again the quality-price ratio, but the emphasis is put on increasing the quality of the labour force in some very specific respects) to the ambition of shaping a more equitable and inclusive labour market via a massive investment in human capital development. According to the option selected, the focus will be put on diverse forms of training and education. If marketability is the priority, then programmes teaching how to efficiently apply for a job (i.e. write an attractive CV or persuasive cover letters) will be developed and, at the macro-level of the labour market, the ambition is not to raise the overall employment rates but to increase the individual probabilities of success in the job search effort. In other words, the objective is not to reduce the queue of people waiting for a job, but to let some of them move forward in this queue. The solution to youth marginalisation then passes via the teaching of efficient ways to market oneself in the eyes of potential employers. That boils down to what we suggest to call “employability as individual adaptability”.

If high quality training is the priority, then long-term programmes will be set up thanks to the development of a wide-ranging social investment state. Such an investment in human capital will in turn result in improved economic competitiveness and increased capacity to create jobs, i.e. it will contribute to creating a more equitable and inclusive labour market (along the European Employment Strategy motto “more jobs, better jobs”). In this case, the relevant information relates to the enhancement of human capital, that is envisaged as the basis for a new virtuous circle between economic prosperity and social justice (Layard and Nickell 1991). While the marketability option clearly privileges a one-way adaptability (i.e. workers or job-seekers need to adapt to the labour market needs), the more ambitious approach opts for a two-way, or reflexive, adaptability between the supply-side and the demand-side of the labour market. However, the means mobilised towards demand-side adaptability are mostly left to market actors or social partners. In other words, while supply-side adaptability resorts to the whole range of compelling measures developed in activation strategies, demand-side adaptability does not rely to an equal extent on public intervention. It rather depends either on the goodwill of market actors, or on the social partners’ capacity to mobilise.

For marginalized youth, these last two strategies imply, in the first instance of employability, that they will be equipped, as quickly as possible, to match the labour market requirements (and that they will enjoy limited freedom to choose in this respect); in the second instance, that they will be provided more ambitious training programmes with a view to their long-term professional integration and, hopefully, to the emergence of a more inclusive and equitable labour market (again, their freedom to choose will be limited during the implementation of

the activation strategy, though it is hoped that it will be considerably increased as a result of this strategy). In both cases, the normative reference is employability and the selected information strictly relates to this issue, which means that other dimensions of marginalized youth's life trajectory are not taken into account<sup>1</sup>.

Let us now apply this analytical framework to a specific case, namely an ambitious programme developed in support of marginalized youth in a Swiss canton, i.e. the programme FORJAD.

### 3 Empirical observations

#### *Institutional context*

In 2006, the Swiss canton of Vaud reformed its law on social assistance in order to better tackle the difficulties faced by its beneficiaries. A stronger emphasis has been put on social and professional reintegration measures organised by external providers in the framework of the so-called Integration Income (RI for the French "revenu d'intégration"). However, the budget available for these measures was much too small to guarantee that every beneficiary could effectively access such programs (Piotet 2004). After a great deal of consultations and analyses, the cantonal department in charge of Social Affairs decided to identify the young adults between 18 and 25 year-old as a priority target group. Indeed, among the nearly 1,800 social assistance beneficiaries aged between 18 and 25, only 30% had completed vocational training or had earned a professional degree (Von Muralt and Spagnolo 2007). Some previous studies also emphasised the obstacles faced by these young adults when trying to get study grants (Regamey 2002; Schaub et al. 2004). Their situation was further aggravated insofar as the status of student was incompatible with the payment of welfare benefits. In addition, other authors observed a high rate of drop-outs, which often coincided with an unfinished mandatory schooling (Fragnière et al. 2002; Valli 2005). These studies popularised the nickname "JAD" to label this category (JAD stands for the initials of "jeunes adultes en difficulté", which means struggling young adults - Regamey et al. 2001). As national studies identified the lack of training as one of the major factors accounting for poverty among young people (e.g. Drilling 2004), the cantonal department of Social Affairs, together with the departments of Education and Employment decided to set up a new program in order to promote vocational training<sup>2</sup> among the JADs. This programme labelled FORJAD, which stands for "formation pour les jeunes adultes en difficulté" (Training for struggling young adults), started during the summer 2006. Thereby, the issue of marginalized youth was identified mainly as a problem of training or educational deficit, and the selected informational basis was tightly related to this specific dimension.

The FORJAD programme is based on progressive stages supposed to lead to the achievement of a vocational degree. At first, each JAD meets a social worker that has to perform his/her social assessment. This first step is also based on the fulfilment of more formal criteria such as the age (being between 18 and 25 year-old), the absence of vocational training and the fact of living outside the parental household. At the second stage, the ones that are deemed ready

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<sup>1</sup> Such reductionism is not unavoidable. As a matter of fact, other more holistic approaches succeed in combining interventions focused on training, work, and other aspects of the life trajectory.

<sup>2</sup> In Switzerland, vocational training plays a major role in the transition processes from school to the labour market, insofar as about two thirds of young people take part in the dual system of apprenticeship.

to undertake some kind of vocational training will meet a so-called “integration adviser” who will help them to formulate an integration project specifying their professional goals and the most appropriate ways to reach them. Some of these young people will be able to immediately look for a vocational training, and according to the selected profession, they either find an employer who agrees to be their apprenticeship master, or they apply to a vocational school. For the others, they will follow a social integration measure (so-called MIS for “mesure d’intégration sociale”) aimed at assessing and validating their professional project. At the same time, the MIS will also help them in their search for an apprenticeship, while offering basic language and maths lessons in order to prepare them for the entry tests organised by the larger firms recruiting apprentices. These two activities (help in the search for apprenticeships and basic training) are often complemented by a professional activity in a labour market programme (usually for 6 months). The MIS are envisaged as part of a selective process, i.e. not all JADs integrated in such measures succeed in undertaking a vocational training. Those who pass successfully all stages and are allowed to begin an apprenticeship are then followed by a coach and can benefit from school support courses.

### *Facts and figures*

The Integration Income (RI) entitles jobless people (without any right to social insurance benefits, or waiting for such benefits) and workers whose income does not reach the subsistence minimum (the so-called “working poor”) to receive a public financial assistance, as well as social or professional integration measures. Social assistance covers more than 20,000 people in the canton of Vaud (3% of its population) for a budget of around 126 million Euros (or 3% of the cantonal budget). One-third of the RI beneficiaries are under 18 and 14% are between 18 and 25 year-old (Von Muralt and Spagnolo 2007).

In order to eliminate possible disincentive effects resulting from benefit loss or substantial reduction due to leaving welfare and starting vocational training, the department of Social Affairs and the department responsible for awarding scholarship grants designed a directive to coordinate the welfare and the scholarship systems. This coordination allows young people participating in FORJAD to get funded for both their training costs (by the cantonal office for grants) and the coverage of their basic needs (by the Integration Income). There is also another financial incentive insofar as the JAD are also allowed to keep up to 126 Euros per month out of their apprentice wages.

In 2006, the Canton spent 1.26 million Euros (i.e. 40% of its budget for social integration measures) on measures specifically targeted at these young adults. This was achieved in collaboration with a dozen providers of socio-professional integration measures throughout the Canton. This action allowed to supply nearly 240 places per year for medium-term measures (6 months) with socio-educational follow-up designed primarily to assess the social and personal situation of the youth, to evaluate their academic and professional achievements, and very quickly, to confront them to the labour market demands (Von Muralt and Spagnolo 2007). Our research team specifically investigated three of these measures that were recognized as “pilot programs” (Bonvin, Hugentobler and Moachon 2007).

The new opportunities opened by this programme coincide with new duties for the beneficiaries and their families. As a matter of fact, their parents’ financial situation is thoroughly examined, and those with sufficient means are asked to contribute to the cost of their children’s vocational training. There is also an increased focus on financial sanctions,

insofar as the young adults refusing to undertake training or those leaving a social integration measure without medical reasons can lose up to 25% of their Integration Income.

### *Problems faced by the participants*

During the first year of the programme, training providers and welfare agents observed that the professional integration of the JADs involved in the measures was made more difficult for the following reasons:

- There was a significant gap between the young adults' actual school knowledge and their vocational training project.
- The JADs frequently faced physical and mental health problems.
- The psycho-emotional issues related to chaotic life courses, often marked by immigration, school drop-out, or problems within the family, often generated dependent behaviours or mental health troubles.
- In certain cases, extended periods of inactivity affected negatively the learning capabilities and the endurance of young people in the workplace.
- The financial situation of these young people also appeared to be a crucial issue. Many participants had debts amounting to more than 15'000 Euros. This often acted as a disincentive to return to paid employment, because wage garnishments would cut their income to much the same level as the Integration Income (Von Muralt and Spagnolo 2007).

### *The selectivity issue*

The entire FORJAD system is built on a step-by-step logic. It is supposed to help the JADs progressively climbing all the stairs up to the achievement of a vocational degree. However, given the problems encountered by the participants, especially their personal history in terms of failures and dropouts, such a logic implies creaming practices. Indeed, one interviewed integration adviser, in charge of the initial social assessment, distributes the JADs population as follows: nearly a quarter of them are young mothers who are not necessarily ready to start a measure, because they have nobody to look after their children (most nurseries requiring a work certificate); another quarter have addiction or severe psychological trouble; among the remaining half, some are not motivated or do not have a sufficient level of school knowledge. All in all, according to him, only about one quarter of the JADs are capable to start a measure and motivated by a vocational training perspective.

As mentioned above, the social integration measures are envisioned as a further selection tool. Providers are expected to validate the young adults' professional project. During this stage of the selection process, high levels of drop-outs have been observed in the three surveyed programmes. Indeed, more than half of the young adults did not attend the measure until its end. Furthermore, the fact that a JAD completed a measure did not imply that he/she would be selected by an employer or by a school in order to start vocational training. Hence, the JADs integrated in such measures have to successfully pass three tests: a) to be recognised as competent by the provider of the social integration measure, b) to be selected by an employer or a school, and c) (like all other apprentices) to complete the vocational training. As in many

other activation programmes, the integration efforts mainly benefit to those with the highest skills and job-readiness.

#### *The availability of training opportunities*

Financial incentives and the mobilisation of personal networks are the main tools used to create training opportunities for JADs. Indeed, the interviewed providers of social integration measures state that the canton expects them to mobilise their personal network, including relatives or acquaintances, in order to find employers agreeing to open an apprenticeship in their firm for FORJAD beneficiaries (or to persuade them to take this step). Moreover, the canton decided to financially support public administrations that accept to train a FORJAD apprentice. The providers themselves get favourable conditions if they hire the best participants as trainees. The canton also pays extra money to some vocational schools that accept to receive more trainees.

The enhancement of the JADs' professional experience is another way to increase their probabilities to get an apprenticeship. To this purpose, all providers of social integration measures offer opportunities to get working experience within firms belonging to the primary labour market. Usually, participants have to approach the firms themselves, but the providers can give them a list of employers who formerly accepted to receive them during a few days (mainly in order to assess them, along the selective logic detailed above). Sometimes, especially in SMEs, these working experiences can convince the employer to open a trainee job, but this is rather exceptional. For instance, one of the three measures we investigated concluded an agreement with a large retail firm that agreed to offer unpaid 3-week-long working experiences to selected participants. These experiences went on smoothly (the shop manager was even wondering why these young adults had not found a job yet), nevertheless it proved impossible to hire the JADs as trainees, because this retail firm does not hire trainees over 20 year-old for a first vocational training.

Indeed, the Swiss vocational training market already shows a considerable mismatch between supply and demand. In August 2006, the official data listed 74'000 signed apprenticeship contracts, 3'500 vacant places and 22'000 young people looking for a trainee job (Kaspar 2006). This situation led the employers to set up entry tests during which the applicants' literacy and numeracy levels are assessed. As a result, vocational training standards have been raised during the last years and this also includes increased requirements to abide by the school and corporate disciplinary expectations. JADs are reputed to be less reliable against such normative standards, which is a further obstacle in their way to get a trainee job.

#### **4 Conclusions**

When assessed against the analytic grid provided by the CA, the FORJAD experiment may be summed up along three main dimensions: the available resources, the individual conversion factors and the social conversion factors.

With regard to resources, the increased means devoted to the integration of marginalized youth coincide with a diminution of the resources attributed to other categories of beneficiaries. Indeed, half of the available social integration measures are booked for JADs and integration advisers spend most of their working time with beneficiaries belonging to this age group. At the individual level, FORJAD resources are mostly used in support of the young adults with the highest training-readiness. Hence, the undeniable increase of available resources is paralleled by a twofold inequality resulting from the implementation of FORJAD:



between JADs and other age groups on one side, between “training-ready” JADs and their counterparts of the same age group on the other side.

Concerning individual conversion factors, there is an exclusive focus on vocational training, which denotes the strong human capital component of the FORJAD model. This encompasses both marketability and higher quality training objectives. The first stages of the FORJAD programme tend to emphasize marketability insofar as the participants are taught how to apply for a trainee job or for a professional school. The second part, however, is more oriented towards higher quality training. But the goal is not to have a reflexive effect on the labour market, but mainly to diminish the risk that the JADs claim welfare benefits later on during their life.

Social conversion factors are notoriously absent from most Swiss activation programmes. In the FORJAD case, we should however point out the various efforts deployed by the canton to open new training opportunities for the participants. On the one hand, providers are called to support the JADs in their search for an apprenticeship, esp. by mobilising their network; on the other hand, financial incentives are provided to the firms and institutions that accept to receive FORJAD beneficiaries as trainees. All the same, the investigation clearly shows a discrepancy between supply-side and demand-side interventions: while the enhancement of human capital mobilises a vast range of tools (including constraints and sanctions if necessary), the intervention on the demand-side mainly relies on incentives supposed to generate the corporate actors’ goodwill.

These provisional results demonstrate the necessity to define other ways of assessing public policies in support of marginalized youth. Focusing exclusively on efficiency, with the ambition to measure to what extent the public administration targets have been reached, does not allow to capture other potential inadequacies of public policies. As a matter of fact, evaluation is not simply a technical matter aiming at defining the most efficient tools to reach predefined goals, but also a more ambitious process that needs to question the very relevance of public policies. In our view, the capability approach takes significant steps toward an alternative approach to public policy evaluation, that does not only encompass technical issues related to efficiency concerns, but also normative questions of appropriateness.

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