

Introduction to the Case Studies

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The aim of the following nine case-studies is to enhance understandings of successful ways in which to support young people who encounter difficulties, or who fail, in the ‘standard’ routes of education and the transition towards employment, by empowering their capabilities for voice, work and education. By applying the capability approach, we have elaborated a perspective which highlights:

1 The relation between freedom, education and work.

The importance of educational resources does not lie exclusively in increasing individual professional skills and economic productivity. It also lies in reducing inequalities and empowering young people to lead integrated and active lives in society. In this sense we refer to the capability for education as the real freedom to choose a training/curriculum programme one has reason to value. This poses specific challenges to public policy, namely through education and training. Likewise we use the notion of the capability for work to indicate the real freedom to choose the job/ activity one has reason to value. Therefore the capability for work is a very complex issue that encompasses a series of dimensions and the need to take into account the plurality of views about what ‘valuable work’ is (Bonvin, 2012). It requires a focus on issues and dimensions such as adequate skills, the availability of work opportunities and access to them, etc. (Hollywood, Egdell, McQuaid and Michel-Schertges, 2012). The questions adopted by the case studies take into consideration this complexity: in what conditions does the process of developing skills in young people correspond to a process of capability building? How can sustainable growth be realised so that it increases at the same time as the inclusion of the young in the labour market and social life?

2 The relation between capabilities, the knowledge society and the future.

Capabilities are intimately connected to the availability of knowledge through which young people can steer their own future development and contribute at the same time to the development of the society they belong to. Crucial, therefore, is the capacity to realign themselves to ever changing circumstances and actively pursue and realise occasions for learning and face the requirements of a knowledge-based economy. In this sense what is at stake is clearly the future, both individual and collective. Therefore, besides resources, opportunities and freedom of choice, young people should be empowered with the capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2010). This concerns “how human beings engage their own futures” and the normative frameworks from which the desire and imagination of the future take form.

3 The relation between capabilities, voice and democracy.

Voice is essential for sustaining capabilities. In fact, when choice comprises of pre-determined options, Sen holds that there is no real freedom: “The relevant freedoms include the liberty of acting as citizens who matter and whose voices count, rather than living as well-fed, well-clothed and well-entertained vassals” (1999: 288).

It is in this light that voice assumes relevance as the “political” expression of capacity. More precisely the capability for voice is “the capacity to express one’s opinions and thoughts and to make them count in the course of public discussion” (Bonvin and Thelen, 2003). In this sense Sen emphasises that voice is neither an alternative nor an accessory, but operates as an integrating part of well-being. On this basis, the case-studies focus on how to equip and enable young people to be capable as participants in labour markets and as democratic citizens of a European society. Our research highlights the voices of young people and their chances to lead the life they value and thus provides better opportunities for young people to play an active part in decisions affecting them.

Apart from the differences in educational and welfare regime context, the nine cases analysed are different in their methodologies, levels, contexts and intervention targets. Also the architectures of governance are different, both vertically along the EU/national/regional/municipal axis, and horizontally with reference to the relations between public and non-public actors.

As said in the fourth chapter, the main criterion for programme selection are those that have applied new or innovative approaches; although the transitions of young people with less favourable labour market opportunities who are not involved in any specific kind of programme are also explored (Swedish case study) (see table 1). In three cases (France, Switzerland and Italy), the target is early school leavers; two cases (Denmark and the UK) deal with the young unemployed; in the German and Austrian cases the subject is young people with no upper secondary education qualifications; the Polish case study concerns young people in upper secondary vocational school who suffer from low skills; and the Swedish case is about higher education graduates experiencing difficulties in finding a desired job.

Table 1: Case study descriptions

Topic	Country	Case Study Description
Early school leavers	France	Two state regional action plans: ‘Regional plan against school dropout’ (Rhône-Alpes) and ‘Local networks for school perseverance’ (Aquitaine).
	Switzerland	FORJAD (formation pour les jeunes adultes en difficulté/training for struggling young adults) programme set up by the cantonal department of Social Affairs, together with the departments of Education and Employment. FORJAD gets marginalized youth out of welfare programmes and offers them the possibility to achieve a vocational training.
	Italy	‘Trespassing Project’ operated in Naples by a community development agency. The project provides personalised paths towards labour market for young people not in employment, education or training.
Unemployed	UK	Two third sector programmes in Scotland that help disadvantaged young people aged 16-25 make the transitions from unemployment to employment by providing work placements and work experience opportunities.

	Denmark	Basic Vocational Education and Training Programme (EGU) at the local municipality level for young people who have failed their earlier schooling (e.g. early school leavers, or students of technical schools that have given up their education).
Those in upper secondary vocational school who suffer from low skills	Poland	Implementation of programme 'We empower you to learn' (programme of cooperation between education and the power industry) in one of Warsaw's upper-secondary vocational schools.
No upper secondary education qualifications	Austria	The 'Youth at Work' (Jugend am Werk) programme which offers supra-company training places for a range of apprenticeships in craft, industry and service sector professions. The supra-company apprenticeship training is seen as a "safety net" for those young people not able to find apprenticeship training on the labour market.
	Germany	Two contrasting programmes within a local transition management institution were chosen to represent the spectrum of interventions available there: Kompetenzagentur (Agency of competence) and KSoB (Courses for pupils without vocational qualification contract).
Higher education graduates experiencing difficulties in finding a desired job	Sweden	Young people with an individually composed bachelor's degree in one of the disadvantaged academic fields/subjects.

(Source: Hollywood, Egdell, McQuaid and Michel-Schertges (2012). Methodological issues in operationalising the Capability Approach in empirical research: an example of cross-country research on youth unemployment in the EU. Social Work & Society, Vol. 10 Iss. 1 2012)

The reasons for such a variety are to be found in the need to set up a cross-country comparison capable of throwing light on the most significant situations in the transition from compulsory school to further education, from education/vocational training to the labour market, and from unemployment/outside the labour market to employment or further education (Hollywood, Egdell, McQuaid and Michel-Schertges, 2012).

Our conceptual and analytical framework has allowed particular situations to emerge and at the same time has helped clarify our key questions: how to reduce inequalities and address the inadequacies and the mismatch between education and the labour market? What conditions allow young people to maintain and update over the long term the necessary competencies for living in, and contributing to, a democratic knowledge society? What individual, social and environmental factors promote or impede young people's capabilities for education, for work and for voice?

To answer these questions people and contexts, and individual and collective dimensions have to be considered all together. On one hand, the individual level is indeed essential to the concept of capability, and it is the dimension in which capabilities may be exercised and increased. Therefore the perspectives of young people themselves have been taken into account. On the other hand, the conditions that allow for the development of capabilities have their roots in institutional and social contexts and frameworks, and in the organisational cultures that define public intervention. To be free to choose what they have reason to value, young people need to be embedded in a context which allows them to exercise their freedoms.

Therefore the case studies have highlighted the link between the individual and social dimensions of the capabilities, revealing those factors that allow the promotion of individual capacities and the modes in which they are constructed in the relation between context and persons. From this point of view our research aims at highlighting in what sense the promotion of capability for education, work and voice of young people is decisive both for individual well-being and our collective life.

References

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