RE-InVEST
REBUILDING AN INCLUSIVE, VALUE-BASED EUROPE OF SOLIDARITY AND TRUST THROUGH SOCIAL INVESTMENTS

Social disinvestment and vulnerable groups in Europe in the aftermath of the financial crisis

The case of early school leavers in Geneva, Switzerland

Jean-Michel Bonvin & Francesco Laruffa

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Introduction[1]

Although 'inclusive growth' is one of the pillars of the Europe 2020 strategy, the social dimension of the strategy has lost momentum with the (Euro) crisis and the ensuing priority given to macro-economic stabilisation policies. The agreed target of alleviating poverty by 20 million poor in 10 years cannot be reached anymore due to the crisis. Instead, inequalities are growing, unemployment and poverty are reaching new records, particularly in the peripheral regions of the EU. However, in 2013, the Commission launched a major endeavour to rebalance economic and social progress: the Social Investment Package (SIP). Whereas the trends in - and causes of - increased inequality and social exclusion have already been extensively studied, the economic, social, cultural and political consequences of this growing divide are less clear. RE-InVEST aims to fill this gap by evaluating the SIP from a human rights and capability perspective. The first step in this endeavour is a diagnosis of the social damage of the crisis in terms of (the erosion of) human rights, social (dis)investment, loss of (collective) capabilities, and loss of trust.

Hence, a first key working assumption of RE-InVEST is that growing distrust and indeed resentment among the population towards institutions in general and European institutions in particular may be attributed to (a rejection of) the neoliberal policies employed by national as well as European elites in recent years. In particular, it seems quite plausible that the retrenchment of the State, in conjunction with rising inequality and income insecurity, may have undermined trust, especially among the poor and the 'precariat' (Standing, 2011). A second key working assumption of RE-InVEST is that the social damages of the crisis can be understood through the notions of erosion of basic social rights and of disinvestment in capabilities of individuals and groups in the EU. This implies analysing experiences of insecurity, poverty and social degradation from those perspectives. Human rights (and basic economic, social and cultural rights in particular) can be seen as the cornerstone of European values and thus an essential part of our European heritage (Hart, 2010). By fragmenting and weakening public services as well as civil society organisations, trade unions etc. solidarity is undermined and the role of collectivities in enhancing individual capabilities is constrained. In order to diagnose the effects of the crisis, RE-InVEST aims at giving vulnerable people a voice and therefore has opted for using a participatory research approach. Researchers and participants jointly analyse the impact of the crisis on capabilities and human rights. At least two individual biographies per project partner are collected as testimonies of the social damage.

Our national report focuses on the case of Switzerland and, specifically, analyses the impact of the crisis on a group of young people experiencing difficulties in their transition from school to work in Geneva (Switzerland). In Switzerland, the economic crisis has hit much less hard than in other European countries. Thus, in the Swiss case, the 'crisis' can be interpreted in connexion with the overall structural change towards post-industrialism, increased international competition and budgetary pressures on social expenditure. The 'crisis' also impacts at the individual level in the life of young people faced with difficult transitions from school to work – a period of crisis also in the etymological sense of a moment for questioning, reflecting and discerning about one's own identity and conception of the good life. There are at least two reasons for focusing on young people. First, young people are among the most vulnerable social groups in Switzerland, with the 18-25 having the highest rate of social assistance take up in the population (except the 0-18 category). While young people in general are more vulnerable within the Swiss society, it is clear that low-qualified ones represent the most vulnerable among the young people – and we therefore chose to focus on

1 We wish to thank Emilie Rosenstein, Benoit Beuret and Nicolas Bovio for their very valuable support in conducting the empirical research underlying this report; the team of Scene Active for allowing us to conduct this study and the group of young people for actively participating to this collective research.

them. Second, the importance of concentrating the analysis on a group of NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training) lies in the fact that it constitutes one of the crucial targets of social investment policies. Indeed, such policies aim at the improvement of human capital and at the maximisation of the employment rate. In contrast, these young people are not in education or training, nor in work. Thus, they are excluded precisely from the activities oriented towards human capital formation and paid work, which are the two spheres most valued by the social investment paradigm. From this perspective, understating the causes of a school-dropout, the aspirations and values of such young people is especially relevant to an informed diagnosis of the crisis.

1. National context

The economic crisis in 2008 has hit Switzerland much less strongly than other European countries. An economic recession could be observed in 2009, but quickly the economy recovered and there was an increase of the employment rate together with a decrease of the unemployment rate, although the latter remained at higher levels than at the beginning of the century. The negative impact of the crisis could be contained in Switzerland mainly thanks to two anti-crisis policies: first, the prolongation from one year to two years of so-called 'technical unemployment' benefits (due to their firm's economic difficulties, workers are allowed not to work full time or not to work at all but the unemployment insurance pays wages at the level of 80% and their employment contracts are preserved: thus, these workers do not appear in the unemployment figures as they are still considered as employed), second the adoption of a fixed exchange rate ceiling with the euro. The objective of the former was to support the capacity of Swiss firms to overcome a difficult period. In this way, they were allowed about three years to surmount these difficulties, by relying on the help of public unemployment insurance during the prolonged 'technical unemployment' period, as well as by non-renewing fixed-term contracts (that have been increasingly used in Switzerland from the mid-nineties) and by compensating extra hours . The implementation of this measure reveals that the crisis has been mainly interpreted as a contingent or cyclical fact, limited to a specific period of time rather than as a long-term and structural crisis. The economy was hit quite hardly and therefore needed a longer time to recover, but still there was no doubt that it would recover in the end. The adoption of a fixed exchange rate ceiling was meant to preserve the competitiveness of exporting industries in the face of the falling value of the Euro. Yet, this strategy was abandoned in 2015 (without previous announcement in order to avoid financial speculations on the exchange rate) because it was too expensive for the Swiss central bank to maintain the exchange rate with the Euro fixed. The abandonment of this measure implied the fluctuation of the exchange rate and a relative appreciation of the Swiss Franc towards the Euro, which is a source of great concern for exporting industries. From this perspective, it is not clear to what extent the weakening of the Euro will lead to a structural and long-term crisis of the Swiss economy.

However, despite the fact that the economy in Switzerland has not suffered from the crisis in terms of economic growth (Figure 1.1.) and that unemployment levels for the overall population remained low, it seems that young people are a particularly vulnerable social group, facing a higher and growing unemployment rate (Figure 1.2.).

Figure 1.1 GDP growth in Switzerland 2005-2015. Source: OECD

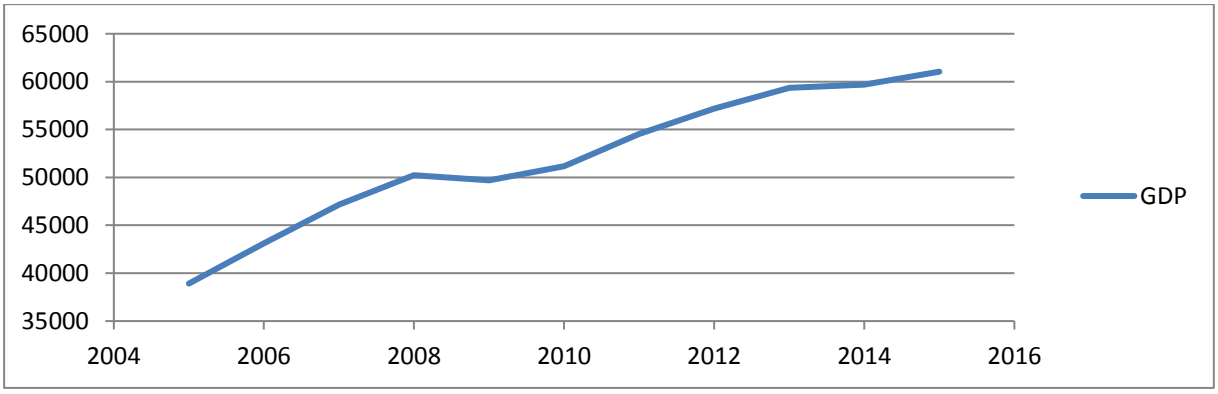
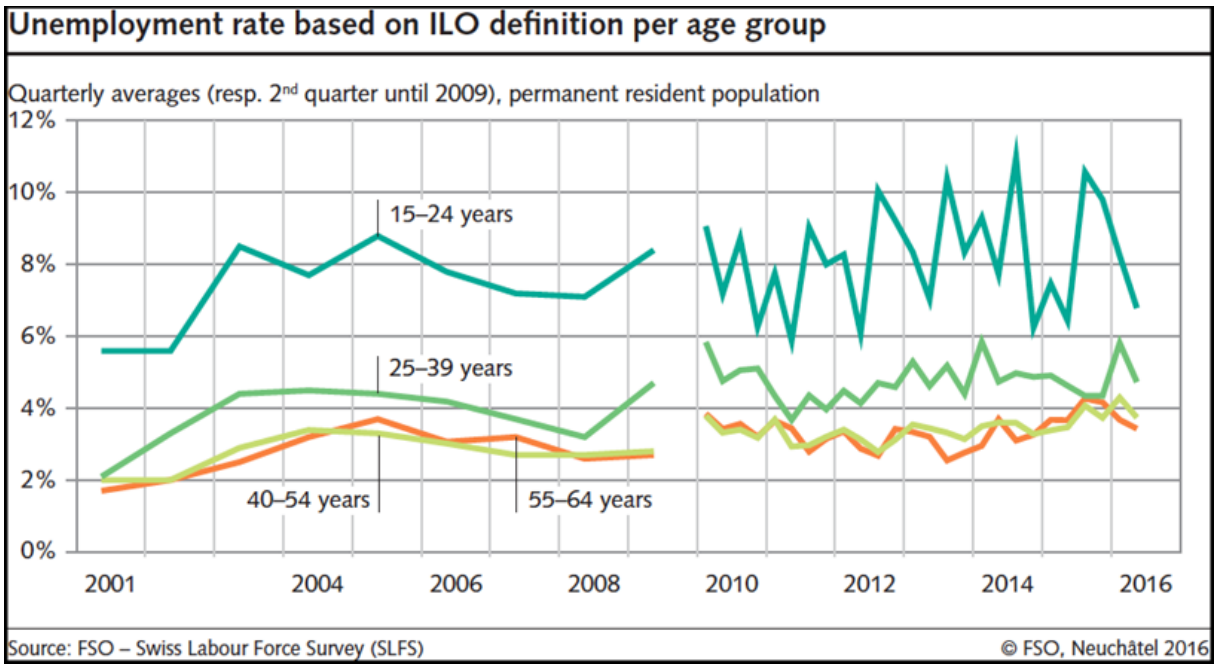


Figure 1.2 Unemployment Rate in Switzerland by age group. Source: OFS



In particular, with regard to the focus of this report on young people experiencing difficulties in the transition from school to work, it is important to note that in recent years many different transition measures have been developed, signalling an overall declining capacity of the educational system to include young people in a 'normal' course. Indeed, there are an increasing number of NEETs and young people passing through transition measures (i.e. not following the 'conventional' tracks toward dual apprenticeship or the academic path). Yet, to understand the difficulties of the young people in the transition phase between school and work it is necessary to clarify the most important characteristics of the educational system in Switzerland as well as the situation of young people in general and of those leaving school (dropouts) in particular.

The educational system in Switzerland is characterised by a high stratification between different tracks and by early tracking. At the age of 11 pupils are channelled into different tracks according to their school grades. Then, at the age of 15, they are distributed into three main paths, namely: the Collège (which gives access to university), the Ecole de Culture Générale (ECG) and the Formation Professionnelle (vocational training, with possibility to do it full time or in a dual system which involves beyond attending school also working in an enterprise). It seems that there is a 'stigmatisation effect' for pupils from the lower school-types (i.e. with the lowest grades at age 11) so that even after having controlled for the effective PISA-competencies, a negative effect of the early selection processes in firms persists. Furthermore, in most cantons the obligatory school ends at age 15 – which is quite early in international comparison. This means that at this point in life young people are already considered responsible for choosing their future profession - starting a vocational training - but also for stopping attending school. After compulsory education, 65% of all young people enrol in a vocational education or training program (VET), while 25 % enrol in general education schools leading to matura, which is the prerequisite for entering the university (Stalder & Nägele 2011). Early tracking and high degree of stratification result in a high level of inequality reproduction and low equality of opportunity. Indeed, Switzerland is one of the OECD countries in which the parental occupational status has the strongest effect on the literacy-scores of youngsters. Furthermore, in Switzerland the difference between the performance of native and first generation immigrants is one of the highest in OECD countries (Fuentes, 2011). Thus, it seems that the educational system is not able to compensate unequal starting conditions and actually it even reinforces initial inequalities, especially because of early

tracking. Despite some evolutions in the sense of building bridges between existing tracks, this remains a strong specificity of the Swiss educational system when compared with other EU countries.

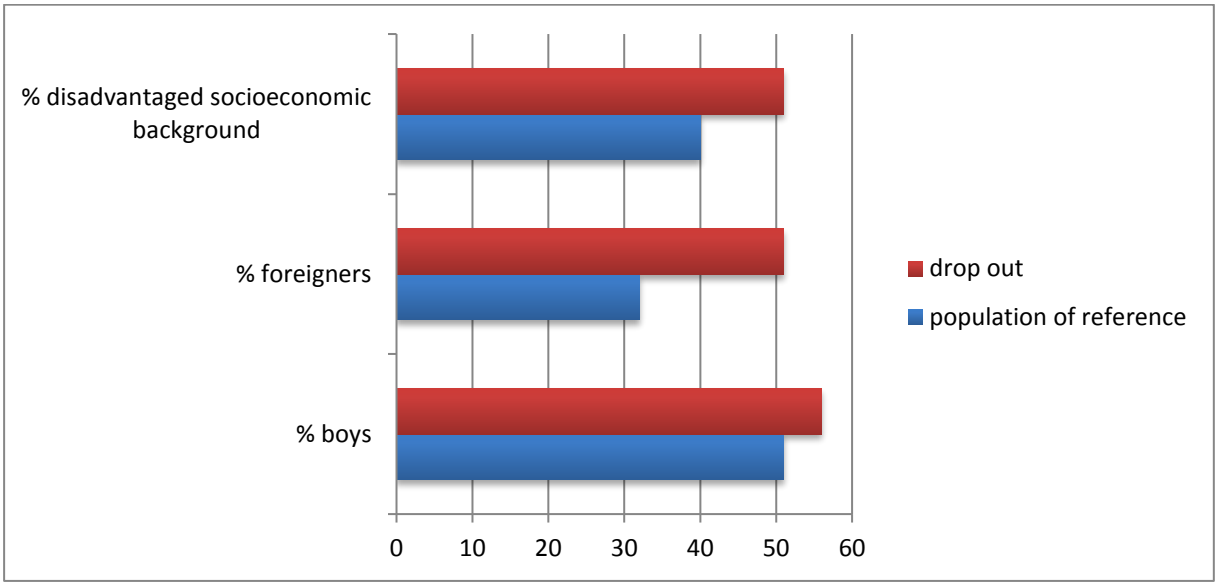
Furthermore, another reason for the high inequality produced in the Swiss educational system is that employers are the sole gatekeepers for accessing (dual) vocational training and apprenticeships. This means that employers establish both how many apprenticeship places are available (and in which domains) as well as the criteria for accessing them, which implies that the admission to apprenticeships follows an economic (rather than educational) logic and access to most upper secondary education is operated through a market driven mechanism. This makes the offer of apprenticeships also highly dependent on the economic fluctuations of the labour-market. Thus, in contrast to Austria and Germany where the state plays an active role either in directly providing state-funded apprenticeships (Austria) or regulating the supply of apprenticeships (Germany), in Switzerland the VET systems largely relies on the free market.

At the same time, Switzerland is one of the European countries with the lowest rate of school dropouts, which is well below the OECD mean (Petrucci & Rastoldo, 2015) and the transition from school to work appears less complicated than in other countries given the comparatively low unemployment rate among young people. Yet, precisely because having obtained a diploma has become the norm, the negative consequences of lacking a qualification in terms of higher risk of unemployment and precarious employment are especially strong in Switzerland and stronger than in the other OECD countries (Ibid.). For instance, circa 70% of all social assistance recipients between 18 and 25 are without upper secondary education.

All in all, the Swiss educational and apprenticeship system has proved to be a highly selective one, where school marks act as signals for employers when they recruit candidates for an apprenticeship. This implies that youngsters with bad marks and other negative signals are disadvantaged in many ways: the lack of apprenticeship places when the economy slows down boosts selective practices, where stigmatisation by employers vis-à-vis pupils with bad school marks or displaying other signals interpreted negatively (lack of motivation, cultural differences, etc.) tend to play a crucial part. Here, market mechanisms do not seem able to solve the problem. Furthermore, the early selection mechanisms at work in the school system tend to reinforce the selectivity of the market. Hence, more than 20% of every cohort cannot find an apprenticeship place (or follow the academic path), and therefore have to enter the transition system. This situation in turn led to the quantitative extension of so-called 'bridging offers' for young people in such situations. About 20% of all youngsters and 40% of the pupils from tracks with 'basic' demands are now enrolled in such programs. Thus, the level of state intervention in Switzerland remains low and private enterprises have an essential say in all main features of the VET system: public intervention has not moved in the direction of regulating or taming the apprenticeship market (i.e. no obligations are imposed on employers to hire apprentices; or the state is not envisaged as a kind of last resort employer for apprentices that could not find a market solution), but rather in that of developing different programs and measures aimed at improving the marketability of young people. Hence, one can say that there is a form of social investment in this area, with the central objective of raising the rate of upper secondary graduates to 95%. Indeed, enhancing access to upper secondary education is widely envisaged as a silver bullet for reducing later welfare expenditure (the objective of cost containment is central to all reforms of the Swiss welfare State). Yet, the preference for market solutions is not questioned. This is the specificity of the Swiss path to social investment. In this context, supply-side adaptability is clearly privileged at the expenses of demand-side interventions.

In the specific case of Geneva, around 1,000 young people each year leave the school without having obtained a qualification (Petrucci & Rastoldo, 2015). In this population, boys, immigrants and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds are overrepresented (Figure 1.3.).

Figure 1.3 Socio-demographic characteristics of school drop-outs in Geneva



Source Petrucci and Rastoldo (2014)

It seems that the higher probability of boys to leave the school without the diploma with regard to girls is explained by their worse performance at school, their behaviour involving more often violence and criminality, their worse attitude towards teachers and their weaker affective support within the family. However, in explaining the probability of school dropout, the kind of school frequented by the young people is much more important than socio-economic and gender factors. Hence, the lower the status of the educational track in which one young person is (e.g. a transition measure like SeMo; Atelier and Accueil and, even if to a lesser extent, ECG and vocational training), the higher the probability of his or her school dropout. The same is true for the percentage of young people that goes back to school after having left it: more than ¾ of those who left the Collège start a formation in the following year against only 20% of those who left a transition measure or Accueil. Similarly, having experienced already problems at school is a strong predictor of school dropout and of non-re-start in the following year.

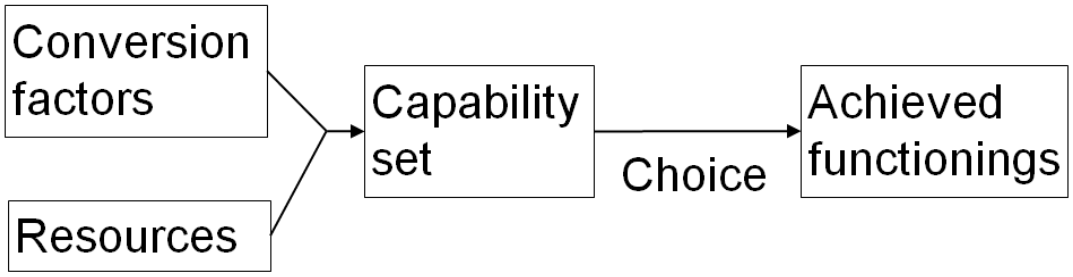
However, all these factors explain only a small part of the phenomenon of school dropout. Indeed, many factors influencing this choice are difficult to measure and it is extremely problematic to collect data on issues such as the lack of interest, motivation and self-esteem, the presence of personal problems within the family and the quality of relationships at school – all factors that seem to play a crucial role in the process that leads to becoming a dropout. Thus, the population of those leaving school without the diploma is highly heterogeneous and a dropout can be the result of different reasons. In particular, it seems that rather than the single risk factors, it is their combination and cumulative effect that generates situations that can end up in a dropout. Within the group of young people that we studied, these vulnerability factors were strongly present, with a large part of the group composed by young people with a migration background, a low socio-economic origin and often a very difficult family context. From this perspective, even factors that seem strongly individual-based such as 'lack of motivation at school' and that thus provide the basis for legitimate inequality through the notion of meritocracy can be actually largely explained by social and structural factors.

2. Theoretical and methodological Approach[2]

Re-InVEST aims at investigating the philosophical, institutional and empirical foundations of an inclusive Europe of solidarity and trust. To this end it draws on capability and human rights based participatory approaches. *Human rights* form a common European basis of values and describe at the same time core elements of what constitutes well-being and a good life. Further, human rights are transformative by empowering people. Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to everyone. International law, including treaties, contains the provisions which give human rights legal effect. Ideas about human rights have evolved over many centuries and gained strong support after World War II when the United Nations adopted the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights - which set out for the first time the human rights and fundamental freedoms shared by all human beings without discrimination of any kind. Human Rights are universally agreed basic standards that aim to ensure that every person is treated with dignity and respect; they are interdependent and indivisible, meaning that rights are linked and not protecting one right may impact on another, they belong to all people without discrimination. Usually set out in law, through international or regional treaties, or national legislation, they form a legal statement of universally accepted principles of how the state should treat its citizens and other people living within its jurisdiction. Human Rights include Civil and Political Rights, such as the right to life, the right to a fair trial and the right not to be subjected to torture; and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, such as the right to work, to join a trade union, to health, to education, and to an adequate standard of living. Specific groups are protected in specific treaties such as women, children, people with disabilities, minorities, and migrants. For vulnerable people the usage of a rights-terminology has proven to change their perspective by making them aware of their rights and the ways in which their current situation compromises these rights.

The *capability approach* as developed by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) defines a person's well-being in terms of the beings and doings (the functionings) a person achieves and her capability to choose among different combinations of such functionings. For leading a life one values and has reason to value resources and conversion factors are preconditions (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Resources, conversion factors, capability set and achieved functionings



Resources refer to the material conditions of a person: her income, the goods and services she disposes of. Conversion factors help her converting resources into doing and being well. There are personal conversion factors such as skills and bodily features, social conversion factors such as social norms and social institutions and environmental conversion factors such as climate and geography. In the end both the achieved functionings as well as the freedom to choose a life one values matter. For assessing the capabilities of

2 The general presentation of the theoretical and methodological approach was written by Ortrud Lessmann.

vulnerable people Re-InVEST aims at giving them a voice. Their participation is fostered by relying on *participatory action research* that directly results in policy recommendations. Participatory action research views participants as co-researchers who have special knowledge about their own situation. Hence they are not only asked or interviewed on their views but take part in research by engaging in, examining, interpreting, and reflecting on their own social world, shaping their sense of identity. It is a circle of knowledge generation that emerges from this method and includes the steps of knowledge production and sharing, empowerment by participation, newly generated knowledge and action that builds upon this knowledge (Figure 2.2). Crucial for this kind of knowledge generation is the 'merging' or 'crossing of knowledge' that comes from three parts: scientific knowledge as gained by researchers; knowledge which the poor and excluded have, from their first-hand experience, of the twin realities of poverty and the surrounding world which imposes it on them; and the knowledge of those who work among and with these victims in places of poverty and social exclusion (Figure 2.3).

These are the core elements of the Participatory Action Human Rights and Capability Approach (PAHRCA) developed in Re-InVEST. PAHRCA entails seven steps (Toolkit, 44-45):

1. identify and meet partner NGO/gatekeeper;
2. preliminary 'meet ups' (for trust building if necessary);
3. first meeting with participants – trust building;
4. developmental: implement developmental human rights & capability approach;
5. inquiry/data gathering;
6. identifying patterns (key issues and themes of concern to the group);
7. undertake action/outcome using one or combination of approaches.

Figure 2.2 Merging of Knowledge

In Geneva (Switzerland) we decided to focus on vulnerable young people, experiencing difficulties in the transition from school to work; especially school-leavers and NEETs (not in employment, education or training) who were engaged in a project ('Scene Active') aiming at their insertion in society. The specific methodology we applied was inspired by the method of the sociological intervention, originally developed by Alain Touraine in the 1980s to study social movements. More recently, it has been applied in different contexts. Especially relevant for our research is the work of McDonald (1999), who undertook the sociological intervention with marginal young people from the poorest neighbourhoods in Melbourne, Australia. Rather than simply collecting data, the aim of the sociological intervention is that of identifying the struggle to become an actor, whereby an actor is 'a participant in the production of society' (Touraine, 2000: 906).

In this context, the role of the sociologist is that of encouraging and helping the research participants to increase their awareness and capacity for action.

In particular, the sociological intervention is based on three research phases: preparation, confrontation and finalisation. The aim of the preparation phase is threefold. First, the research participants should reflect on their personal experiences and try to develop collective claims. Second, the sociologists should help them to refine their arguments, for instance providing empirical evidence supporting their claims. Third, during this phase, the research participants are invited to think about an interlocutor with whom to share their thoughts and opinions during the next phase. The purpose of the confrontation is that 'social actors do not construct narratives in relation to researchers, but in relation to other social actors' (McDonald, 2002: 258). In fact, the strength of the sociological intervention derives 'from the way it locates narrative within relationships': in contrast to conventional models of narrative 'focused on telling stories to sociologists', in the sociological intervention, 'actors become engaged in a struggle to give an account of themselves to other social actors' (Ibid.). In this process, research participants are not simply telling their stories and personal experiences but they are struggling for their recognition and their subjectivity. They are trying to become actors. As such, the sociological intervention can be seen as a *democratic practice*, a 'social inquiry' in the sense of Dewey, whereby common knowledge is produced through deliberation and communicative action (Habermas, 1987; Bohman, 2004). The final session (finalisation session) constitutes an arena of feedback and selection of the collectively most relevant features. The whole process is reconsidered under an evaluative stance (where did we begin? where are we now?).

Our group consisted of up to 11 young people participating in the project 'Scene Active'. Access to the target group was given via personal knowledge of the people responsible for the implementation of the program. The project 'Scene Active' is a one-year program aimed at the composition of a theatre play: through the theatre and the different ateliers (for example the young people designed their own costumes and the scenography), the aim of the project is to let them (re)discover their talents and (re)gain the self-esteem the young people need to develop a professional plan. The 11 young people participating in RE-InVEST have been selected on a voluntary basis, i.e. they declared their interest to attend our meetings. In total we had one meeting with the responsible of the project, six collective meetings with the group of young people, seven individual interviews with young people belonging to the group and two 'confrontation sessions'. The atmosphere was friendly during all collective meetings and they trusted us since the beginning. Almost all of them actively participated. They gave us the possibility to conduct individual interviews and 6 of them actively engaged in the participation to the two confrontation sessions.

In order to stimulate reflection on the individual experience and the debate on common subjects, in the first four sessions we used some visual and interactive methods. For instance, in the first session we let the young people tell the story about their personal experience and the subjects that they would like to discuss on through a drawing and then comment their drawings (see examples in the appendix). We then prepared some posters on the most important themes they wanted to work on. In another session we used some sentences, formulated as newspapers' titles, expressing different and conflicting viewpoints on young people's situation in a provocative way to stimulate the discussion. We also undertook games and role-taking activities, which allowed launching a collective debate on the selected topics. In the fourth section, we brought some statistical material and newspaper articles describing and commenting the situation of school-leavers in Geneva. The aim was to strengthen the coherence of young people's arguments and to raise their consciousness and understanding of their common situation. Apart from these collective sessions, we met the young people individually and in smaller groups in order to go more in depth and help them further strengthen their own arguments.

Concerning the second phase, that of the confrontation, the youngsters had the opportunity to confront their views (issues, questions, etc.) with the invited persons. We had two confrontation sessions and the second one was public. The invited persons were selected on the basis of an initial discussion between the youngsters and the research team. Somehow, the invited persons had to symbolise the 'adult world' and the 'institutional world', such as a politician or an administration head officer, etc. At the end, we managed to invite for the first session (which took place in June 2016) two administrative heads, responsible of two

public services linked to professional guidance (the first) and information for young people on social assistance (the second). The second confrontation was organised as a public event and took place in September 2016 in the context of the so-called 'Week of Democracy' at the University of Geneva. The public confrontation also constituted the 'action' in our participatory action research design. It consisted of a public debate between six young people representing the group, the ministry in charge of the education system in the Canton of Geneva and the responsible of the cantonal employment services, aimed at supporting labour market inclusion. The group of young people not only presented their experiences at school and their difficulties in finding a job or an apprenticeship but also formulated some concrete proposals and submitted them to the politicians and high civil servants. The proposals developed by the young people included the reform of the school system towards a more inclusive and difference-sensitive school, the establishment of a guaranteed apprenticeship for all young people in search of a training, the reduction of the importance attached to school grades both within and after the school and the improvement of the supporting services in terms of psychological support and of taking care for extra-school problems such as family or migration-related legal issues. Their interlocutors were highly impressed by the maturity of their proposals and their ability to sustain a public confrontation of ideas.

Apart from this collective research, we collected two individual biographies from two young people, one girl and one boy, who volunteered for this. We met them in separate sessions from the group meetings and on an individual basis, with the two of us being present. The crucial point about story telling is that the stories have to be respected and cannot be judged as 'right' or 'wrong'. The focus is on life-stories rather than discussions and debate and the participants tell whatever they want to tell the interviewers (voluntariness). From this perspective, the biographical method respects the focus on freedom characterizing the capability approach because the interviewed person is free to choose what she tells and to select what she believes to be the most important information. Furthermore, the absence of judgement and even of analytical statements by the researchers reflects the deep respect owed to each human being inherent in the human rights framework. Therefore, the objective is not to draw a true picture of these young people and their future, but to recall what they say about themselves and their future at a specific point of time.

3. Two selected biographies

3.1 First biography

H. is 17, almost 18 years old. She was born in Geneva. H. left the school because there were more and more bad gossips about her. At first it was only at school but then she started to get insulted and receive bad comments also on social media. So H. left the school. Furthermore, since H. thinks that in Geneva everybody knows each other, she did not simply want to change school and she does not want to start it again. At the beginning H. was very good at school. Even if she had to work hard on her own because no one helped her, she made the whole primary school at the highest level. She only had some difficulties later, during the orientation cycle, where she had some problems in mathematics. She did not get any help because the teacher thought it would be a waste of time to help her. In contrast, some other teachers were more careful and they offered help. Yet such help was limited to the school domain, they were not interested in her life beyond the school and in particular they could not help her in respect to familial issues, precisely where she needed most support.

In fact, at home it was never easy for H. Her mother is Philippian and she has not cared much about her family. H. has always cooked for herself and for her brother because her mother never cooked for them. With her mother H. does not really have a mother-daughter relationship: she told H. only once 'I love you' when H. was at the hospital. H.'s mother works a lot as governess and nanny in a family of rich Americans. The smallest of their children is often at H.'s home and he is like a small brother for her. Even if her mother earns enough money they are quite poor because she plays a lot. In the past, she played a lot of money at the Casino, maybe up to CHF 1,000 per week. H. sleeps in the same room with her mother. Yet her mother is never there, she comes only for sleeping. She is always in the kitchen playing cards with her friends. H.'s mother was often violent with words to her. She often humiliated her, telling that she has no value and that she cannot do anything. In particular, H. dreams to become a singer – she also had some experiences in singing in public during the '*fête de la musique*' in Geneva. However, her mother does not support her. On the contrary, when H. failed two exams for entering two schools of arts, her mother discouraged her to try again, telling her that there was no point in trying again because she is too bad for succeeding. For H.'s mother music is simply leisure and cannot be considered work. Thus, she does not want to pay for a music school for H., which would be too expensive.

With her father, things were even worse because violence was not limited to words. Her father is Egyptian and has always lived in the USA while only sometimes coming to Geneva and staying for a certain period of time at home. Last time, he lived for one year and a half at home. During this period, he has often beaten H. up. Now it is better because H. has a social worker who takes care of her. Thanks to her, H. has a dossier in the office for the protection of the child and she lived one year outside her home, where there were problems with her father. Hence, H. left and she lived first with her boyfriend, then with a cousin and later with her best friend. In this period however she was not good at school because she always went out or watched the TV with her friend. Thus, the social worker advised her to go back home. However, in order for H. to come back home, her mother had to sign a formal promise that she would have no longer contacts with her husband, who then went back to the US. Now H.'s father has no longer the right to see H. Also, thanks to the social worker H.'s mother plays less in the casino.

Yet, this kind of support would have been much more helpful for H. if it would have started sooner. She asked for help to the social worker for the first time when she discovered that she had no papers (passport or permit of residence) while she was looking for an apprenticeship. Before that moment, she did not know that she had no papers because in Switzerland you can go to school even without papers but in

order to get a work contract - even if it is only an apprenticeship contract – you must have them. Her parents never told her that she had no papers - and indeed the whole family does not have papers. H. would have preferred to know that from her parents instead of discovering it like that. It was at this point that H. asked for help to a social worker, who then became very important for her: *'the social worker changed my life' (…) 'she is like a mum'*. For example, she brings H. to her free-time activities and she advises her on many issues. She initiated the procedure to get official documents for H. and thanks to her now also her mother and her brother - who is studying to become a hairdresser - will have soon the papers they need to live in Switzerland legally. Furthermore, it was the social worker to propose H. to go to Scene Active. She is also helping H. to find an internship. Since H. thinks that becoming a singer is a dream, which is very difficult to attain, she is looking for an internship in a kindergarten. This is a job that H. would like to do if it does not work with the plan of becoming a singer.

3.2 Second biography

M. is 20 years old and was born in Portugal. When he was 10, he came to Switzerland where his parents looked for a better future. They were employed in a restaurant but his father was very ambitious and wanted his own restaurant. So his parents left first, leaving M. and his sister (at that time 2 years old) in Portugal for one year with their grandparents. Once they found work and an apartment, M. and his sister also came to Switzerland.

At the beginning it was very difficult for M. He could not speak French and at school his schoolmates always mocked him, insulting him with words that he could not understand. He was often left apart. Furthermore, it was difficult to follow the lessons at school and he had to visit some special courses to improve his French. Yet, M. has worked hard and could manage to go to the 'normal' school after two years in the special school for foreign students. Those schoolmates who insulted M. actually made him even stronger and motivated to work hard in order to show them his value.

So, after having done the 6th and the 7th special class, he passed to the 8th in the 'normal' school (at an intermediate level). However, when he was 14 years old he started to work every day after school in the restaurant of his father. And in the weekend he had to work until 2 in the morning. He was compelled by his father to work in the restaurant. He didn't like this job and he had no motivation to do that. He also started to have some problems at school. Now that he was in the normal school, it was difficult for example with German. He never learned German before while his schoolmates started to learn German very early. He also had some difficulties in geography, biology and history. Yet, the teachers did not look for the reasons why M. had difficulties at school. They had no understanding or patience.

Hence, M. ends up in the 9th class in 'Atelier' (specific class for pupils with difficulties at school), which always gives a bad impression to employers. He wanted to go to ECG, a school aiming at preparing students with general competences - which is not considered as providing especially high qualifications - but the teacher discouraged him to do so and insisted that M. should find an apprenticeship. In particular, this teacher was firmly convinced that M. was talented for the world of selling and persuaded him to do some internships in two textile shops and an alimentary shop. However, M. did not like this experience and he quickly became aware that selling was not for him. M. wants a job where he feels that he is doing something useful, rather than simply standing there, doing nothing or doing as if he was putting things in order. After the '9 atelier' M. started the SCAI, a transition measure which lasts one year, consisting of courses in small groups (i.e. 10 people) offering a range of practical ateliers. In terms of time, it is more or less like a school, from 8am to 6 pm each day – with a free afternoon per week.

During this year, M. and his family lost first their apartment and then the restaurant. His parents have always been late to pay the rent. They paid, but they were always late. One day, M.'s mum and his sister wanted to go home but some people were changing the lock of their door. Without saying anything, the owners were simply putting them outside. Only because of the chance that his mother was there, she could ask to enter the apartment one last time just to take the most important things with her. She had only two minutes to collect her most valuable affairs. M. never saw again his play-station, TV and other stuff. The

same day M. and his family went to the office of the social assistance to ask for help but the people working there said that the office was about to close and that they could not help them. What could they do? They were on the street. Where would they have slept that night?

M., his parents and his sister started then to live in a hotel near Geneva but beyond the border, in France, where it was less expensive. They lived all four there in a double room for one year. In this period, M. was always late at school because of the long trip from the hotel to the school and the teacher instead of asking about the reasons or trying to understand, simply let him wait outside the classroom until the break. In the same period M.'s parents also lost the restaurant. After one year living in the hotel, some former clients of the restaurant, who had become friends of his parents, hosted them in their apartment. Then M.'s father found a job in a restaurant and his mother worked as housekeeper. Finally, M. and his family found an apartment that they could illegally rent.

After the SCAI, M. started to follow the 'semestre de motivation', which is another transition measure lasting one semester in which young people get some money (paid from the unemployment insurance) and can follow a plurality of ateliers. In the same period he also discovered thanks to a test that he suffered from hyperactivity, which could explain his difficulties in remaining concentrated, especially at school in a group context. Since then he takes some medicines in order to improve his concentration capacities. M. finds it strange that his teachers had never noticed his hyperactivity before.

After the 'semestre de motivation', M. spent one year doing nothing. After a while he followed a course in English and a course of singing. He also started a music venture whereby the state pays him for developing a music project (like producing a cd). Yet, M. thinks that it is impossible to work within the music domain because in Switzerland such kinds of artists are not supported. He also made two internships in the logistics sector. Working in the logistics like the post service was a very good experience and he liked very much this job. M. especially likes this job because you feel that you are useful. You have a mission, like bringing a packet to a certain address. Unfortunately however M. did not get a place of apprenticeship after the internship. Others had better grades than M. and employers preferred to have the best candidates. Since then, M. has sent a lot of applications, but he did not get one positive answer. Thus he was demotivated and he started to hang over, go around and smoke with friends. At the beginning it seemed cool to do nothing the whole day but after a certain period of time, it was very frustrating.

'But then it came Scene Active and happiness started' as he puts it. It was a social worker from the social assistance - M. gets benefits from the social assistance - who proposed M. to go to Scene Active. Thanks to Scene Active, M. has discovered that one should do something because he is motivated and not because one is compelled to do that. M. thinks that also at school, it should be different: it would be important to have teachers and other professionals who explain young people why it is important to go to school. For M., one should not go to school because he is obliged to. Rather, students should understand that it is for themselves, that school will be important later to find a job. But M. thinks that this is far from clear to many young people and should be better explained. Many of them, like M. himself, have no clear answer when they ask themselves *'Why is it important to learn biology?'* Teachers should explain this and be able to answer to such questions about the sense of going to school. Furthermore, M. argues that public services should be put in place in order to help parents in supporting and motivating their children. Thanks to Scene Active, M. has learned a lot. If he had had this interview one year ago, he says, he could not have told us all these things. In fact, he changed a lot.

After Scene Active M. will return to Portugal. He will go there with his mother and his sister (recently, M.'s parents got separated). They will go to Lisbon where the new boyfriend of M.'s mother lives. M. will start there a training program in the security field. In Portugal, you have to pay for the training but then at least you have one. And later it is possible to do a career, starting with being a security guard in a supermarket, then later in a pub. If you are good and you have completed the whole training with a little bit of chance you can become a bodyguard and escort stars from the airport to their hotel. Even if *'it is a job like all others'*, it is interesting because you have to keep yourself in good shape doing sport, you have to learn a martial art and you feel useful. M. is also convinced that in Portugal he will have more possibilities in the domain of music. Indeed doing music remains his dream - at least as a hobby.

4. Analysis

Through the many group discussions with the young people, we could observe that the rights to equal respect on the one hand and to education on the other hand have been denied for many of these young people. Many have experienced marginalisation and disrespect at school; some also made explicit reference to racism and discrimination. Almost all would have needed more support instead of being subjected to competitive pressures to 'be better' than their peers. This pressure contributed to marginalise them through the individualisation of their difficulties, stigmatizing them for not being good enough (also frequently leading to self-blaming behaviours). This lack of support and recognition resulted in a lack of education since many left school before having completed a qualifying training program or even compulsory education. The violation of their rights to respect and education is reflected in their lack of capabilities. In fact, they have been denied the instruments for forming their own conception of the good life and the means for achieving their human potential (indeed education and respect are central preconditions for attaining both); in certain cases, their capacity to aspire seemed to have been reduced by these circumstances. It must also be emphasised that they never presented themselves as victims of circumstances, but always 'acknowledged' some degree of responsibility for their situation.

Furthermore, the young people reported several times their deep-seated lack of trust towards politics, politicians and more generally towards social institutions (including school). During some of our discussions, the group was characterised by political apathy, distrust towards institutions and pessimism about the possibility of any positive change or progress in their personal as well collective situation. In general, they do not trust politics, at least not in the traditional form of elections:

'If there are three proposals but none satisfies us, what can we do? Shall we continue to look at the increase and decrease of percentages while we continue our bullshit life? (…) It is always the same story, nothing changes.'

Thus, they have a sense of impossibility to change the status quo. This feeling of powerlessness in respect to a system, which is too difficult to reform, translates then in political apathy. Yet, despite this pessimism the group was able to lucidly criticise the 'system' and its values of competition and classification as well as the school, which aims at preparing for such system. On the bases of such criticisms they made some proposals and suggestions while pointing to the project Scene Active as the model to follow for a reform of the educational system. In this section, we report some core subjects emerged during the group discussions and considered especially important by the young people themselves.

4.1 Critique of classifications at school

A first critique to the school system was the use of grades for classifying people. In fact, through grading, the young people felt *'judged and categorised'*. The discussion around categorisation and prejudices was very insightful. They were particularly interested in challenging the dominant principles of classification at school, such as individual merit, measured by marks and in struggling for alternative principles of classification. The problem of classification identified by the group is that it is mostly based on some forms of prejudice: *'how can you classify people without prejudice?'* Moreover, once that you are classified as a bad student it is very difficult to improve your position later on.

Hence, for our group *'classifying people is bad'*. The most important reason for this is that they feel that they have no possibility to influence the criteria of the classification, which are thus imposed on them. Indeed, they argue that some people can learn one thing better than others but these other people may be better at learning other things. An example that was often invoked was the German language: why should the mark obtained at school for German determine the value of people when they candidate for an apprenticeship?

Hence: *'The fact that we had not good marks at school does not imply that we are idiots. It means simply that studying is not for us.'* One boy in particular argued that school marks are an excessively narrow informational basis to assess the value of pupils, thereby unconsciously using Sen's terminology.

More generally, the youngsters perceive that they lack the possibility to choose what really interests them at school. Teachers give them homework to do and exams and tests to overcome but:

'Without thinking, for not even a second, if this is what you want to do or if this is what you should do, or if this is what is important to you. Then we are classified and then you are out. (…) The system establishes what is good, what is not good. Then, if you get a three or a four [i.e. a bad mark], you are worth nothing.'

'The problem is that it is at school that we discover if we are going to succeed in life or not (…). For example, it is at school that it was told me that I am bullshit. You are not going to succeed and you, you are good. You have good marks then you are going to succeed, you will have a good job.'

'But who decided what we have to learn at school?'

'Who has chosen for us?'

'Who said that this is right and this is wrong?'

This discussion on the criteria of the classification and on the fact that these criteria remain beyond of control by the people involved in the process reflects the reflection done by theorists within the capability approach. These highlight the fact that public policies are always based on a certain 'informational basis' (Sen 1999), independently of the fact that this is made explicit or kept implicit. Furthermore, the process of defining the 'right' informational basis should be democratised: the people targeted by a policy should have a say on the informational basis of the policy (see e.g. Bonvin & Orton (2009) on the case of activation policies). In particular, it seems that using school grades to assess the pupils' value represents an excessive narrow informational basis.

Indeed, the education system is oriented towards the values of competition and productivity:

'They form us in order to become the best ones; we must be better than the others: there are tests, like boxing, we must be the best. But why? Who tells this? (…) What is the sense of being better? We are all equals, I mean, none is better than the other.'

In this way, the theme of classification is directly linked to that of exclusion of the weakest members of society: *'Our system structurally lets people aside, it cannot include everyone, it cannot propose everyone a positive experience. On the contrary, precisely the goal of making some people better-off requires that others are worse-off.'*

As a lightly disabled girl explained:

'I was told: we cannot create a special school for you. I was slow – I could not even walk. I was stigmatised during all my life (…) I was told: you are behind, you cannot succeed.'

The diagnosis of the problem directly translates into the solution, which is identified with a school as inclusive as possible. As the girl who went to special schools because of her light disability put it:

'I think that schools should receive everybody in the same class: no discrimination, no foreign people, everybody. If you are handicapped and on wheelchairs or a person a little fat; there is the idiot on one corner, the shy on the other, the person who seems not to have problems but actually have 40, the one who looks to have 40 problems and actually has only 26.'

Hence, the solution to the exclusion is seen in a school open to all and the same applies to the apprenticeship system:

'Employers want to hire only the best ones. (…) Those that are not good enough - those that are told not to be good enough - what do they do? (…) Everybody should have the right to a professional training, not only those that employers have chosen to be the best ones.'

The young people contested hierarchy also beyond the school:

'In our society if you are a lawyer you are like God, if you are a butcher, well I am sorry for you. But maybe the butcher is happy with what he has.'

Thus, starting with the school and their personal experiences they expanded their critique to the whole 'system'.

4.2 Critique of 'the system'

The group of young people criticised the 'system' for being driven by three ideologies:

- the '*ideology of progress*', '*which implies that the new is always better than the old*';
- the '*ideology of individualism*', '*which separates human beings in order to make out of them good consumers (…) but also to make them fragile. When we are alone, in a difficult moment we are fucked-up. The ideology of competition further increases individualism and separation, encouraging the fight one against the other*';
- the '*ideology of growth*', which '*involves the will to always grow, more and more and always better': 'The objective is to be more productive, to make a product of better quality; this is the sense of our society. These are the rules of the game in which we play. (…) It is a society based on growth. In order to grow, it is necessary to produce even more*'.

In contrast, to these dominant ideologies, the youngsters oppose an utopian vision in which society is oriented towards human wellbeing, the respect of nature and solidarity:

'Do we want a world where the central value is human wellbeing or one where the most important values are productivity and profitability?'

In particular, with regard to solidarity, as opposed to individualism and competition, they emphasised '*care*' and '*taking care of others*'. Furthermore, they argued for example for abolishing national states and borders and for having '*a sole flag*' for the '*whole humanity*'.

This strong critique of the system and the dominant values in society is inherently in tension with the strong will to be part of society. In other words, there is a tension between wanting to be included in a given social order (adherence to the dominant values) and the will/desire to transform such social order. This tension has become evident when many young people in the group criticised the grade system at school. Many of the young people in our group lamented that employers gave them no chance to show their value at work because employers assess the worth of the candidates looking at their school marks. The fact that the majority of them do not have good marks discriminates against them. The negative signal coming from low marks creates a stigma, which impedes them to find an apprenticeship. Thus, most of them want actually to find an apprenticeship – which is much less 'revolutionary' and more 'system conforming' in respect to the critique that some of them made of the 'system'. In particular, they often stated that they did not know beforehand the consequences of leaving school or having bad grades. They stated that they were bad at school but now they are ready to work. Now that they are confronted with the hard reality of not finding a place in society, they are ready to work seriously. In this way they also point to structural and external factors, such as the lack of apprenticeships – that should be guaranteed to every person rather than being the privilege of those students with good marks.

In some other cases, the tension between the critique of the system and the will of being part of it becomes an explicit contradiction. For example, while on the one hand they criticised the dominant ideas of success and richness in society, on the other hand they tended to adhere to it in the formulation of their personal ambitions, such as '*becoming an influential woman*'. However, generally speaking, they were firmly convinced that *'money is not important'* and that *'richness is not everything and it is possible to be rich of other things, such as experiences'*.

4.3 What is the point of education?

The critique of the system opened the discussion on the purposes of school and education in general. Indeed, the task of the school seems to be that of preparing the young people for the system that they criticise. Hence, many were not motivated to learn at school because they could not see the point of learning:

'We are not passionate because we cannot see the goal.'

'I think that more should be done in order that students are interested to go to school.'

'The school should show us the beauty.'

Thus, it seems that the fundamental concern for this group is twofold: how can young people find a place in society while at the same time remaining faithful to themselves? And what role should the school play in this process? The young people are pressured to become 'employable'. However, they do not want simply to become employable, they want to remain autonomous, faithful to their values, interests and goals. For example, with regard to work, the young people stressed that they do not want simply a job in order to survive but that it must be a work, which allows a certain degree of self-realisation:

'Simply having a job in order to pay the bills is not interesting. Of course, I would like to have access to some consumption goods but I would like to do something that I like'.

Thus, the desire is *'to work because of passion and not because of need'* – even if this aspiration to self-realisation through work is often disappointed by the work experiences they already had.

Yet, this desire to live authentically and autonomously is source of problems because it creates a clash between personal aspirations and the exigencies from society:

'While looking for the sense of our life, (…) we get some proposals from the context we live in, what I call the system'.

When the sense of life is not self-determined and freely chosen, it is imposed from outside:

'If the sense does not come from ourselves, it is imposed.'

Thus:

'"to 'exist" etymologically means "being outside": how can we exist if we are told that we have to be inside there, because this is the norm, this is the way you should be. In this way they impede us to exist and this is the most depressing thing on earth, we all have a dream and a mission (...) and if we don't get the chance to discover it, it is a catastrophic loss for humanity.'

The problem is then that:

'We are like circles in a society of squares (...) and the strategy that is used is that of the 'formation' - and indeed the language is important - we are formed so that we can fit in the wished form. Our society is oriented towards the formation of human beings rather than helping a person to form herself.'

The school aims at transmitting *'the information needed in order to be included in society as it is at the moment'*, that is, at forming *'people who follow the rules of the market'*.

The strong need to become oneself confirms the thesis that puts authenticity as one of the core ethical values in contemporary society (e.g. Taylor, 1989). On the other hand, for the group the value of authenticity appears to be in tension (or even in conflict) with the equally strong will to be recognised (Honneth, 1995). However, this conflict is not only present at individual level but it also emerges in the discussion on the normative function of school and education. What should be the relevant 'informational basis' in assessing the quality of the educational system? While there was agreement that this could not be simply based on the results or performance, in terms of marks, it was more complicated to positively define what the goal of the educational system was. In particular, should the school aim at adapting people to the 'system' (especially the labour market) or making them capable to participate at the transformation of the 'system' itself while discovering the sense of one's own life? The group is - at least at theoretical level - firmly convinced that the school should not simply prepare for the labour market but rather support each student to '*find the sense of his or her life*':

'The school should provide us with the instruments to change the world.'

And with the instruments to discover the individual talent, which if it remains undiscovered would be a waste for society as a whole. Furthermore, the school should find a balance between being open to all, without discrimination, while at the same time providing individual and personalised support. Yet, the tension remained between this openly stated vision, which remained abstract and ideal, and their more concrete and pragmatic will to find an apprenticeship, to find a job, etc.

Nevertheless, the value of authenticity and of discovering oneself remains central and influenced many discussions, thereby highlighting some important limitations of the educational system in Switzerland. In particular, the task of helping one to become oneself is especially important in the orientation phase, in which teachers and consultants play a fundamental role in helping the young people to choose their way. In the group, the youngsters had a mixture of good and bad experiences with consultants. However, many pointed to the lack of support and time during the orientation phase and to the fact that it starts too early in life:

'The moment for the choice comes too early and the options available are extremely limited and constraining.'

'I think that at age 15, it is much too early to ask someone what he or she wants to do.'

Another limitation was the lack of available subjects to choose from at school. Thus, *'the school should propose different experiences'*. In particular, more room should be given to practice music and arts and it should be given more freedom of choice:

'Giving the possibility to the people to evolve in the direction they want to evolve and not in the direction where it is said one should develop.'

Hence, the system as it is fails to provide enough time and the opportunity to try different experiences in order to develop a conception of the good life, and especially of the kind of job one has reason to value. Such remarks are crucial from a capability approach perspective, which gives so much importance to the individual choice and the freedom to choose. But as a boy said:

'In fact these are non-choices (…) we did not get sufficient information to take a real decision and still this choice shapes our future life.'

In particular, having a desire or an idea about what kind of job one wants to do is not enough, one has to try it so that the possibility to access apprenticeships and internships is especially important.

The group of young people also seems to embrace some critical positions in pedagogy such as Freire's ones (Freire, 1970), when they state for instance that teachers should be in some ways '*empty*' in order to receive what others say because *'teachers are often full of things and they pour them on us so that there is no place for interaction'*. Thus, they argue for more parity, students' participation and more communication between teachers and students:

'Teachers say we do not want to learn and we say: yeah, but can you see how you teach? So the problem is that the two sides do not listen to each other. They accuse each other instead of simply looking where the problem lies.'

In the context of the two confrontation sessions, the educational system was criticised also for not taking into account pupils' extra-school problems, such as within the family or with regard to administrative and legal issues, such as obtaining a legal working or residence permit. Special schools for disabled pupils were also strongly criticised and the young people intensely argued for an inclusive school with special and individual support whenever necessary. Many also mentioned the need of more psychological support during difficult phases. In general, they argued for a school adapting to the needs of the young people instead of adapting young people to the school. From this perspective, the central mission of the school is that of allowing all, that is each and everyone, to develop his or her own specific talents. This discussion on the purposes of education is crucial from a capability and human rights perspective. Indeed, from these two

perspectives education should be seen as an end in itself and as a means for expanding human freedom rather than a mere means or a resource to be exploited for economic goals as in the human capital approach (e.g. Robeyns, 2005; Nussbaum, 2008).

4.4 Scene Active: A capability-friendly intervention based on human rights

The bad experiences done in school are contrasted to the positive one of Scene Active:

'It is necessary to develop spaces of expression and of existence. Then we can change the world (...) we are in a box and we can change the form of the box step by step permitting the existence of new and different forms. Scene Active is an example of this. (...) A space where we can do different experiences and where we can go at our own rhythm.'

In particular, the project Scene Active is seen as a great opportunity for beginning again with new forces after a period of 'crisis':

'It is like starting again.'

'We start again from the beginning with new shoes.'

Hence, the project Scene Active is described as a positive rupture in the crisis. A very shy girl was like transformed and now she speaks without problems in front of the group and the researchers. When some in the group are surprised, she says:

'I am very shy. But they asked me to do an exercise that nobody never asked me to do before.'

Thus, in Scene Active, they feel that they are respected, recognised and welcomed as they are – see Honneth (1995) on the importance of recognition. Furthermore, they are listened to and given a voice:

'Here we are listened to.'

'Here the voice is given to the youngsters and this is what is missing at school', where things are not discussed: 'it is like this and cannot be different.'

'At school they do not want to know if you have a problem with your family or a certain suffering.'

'There is no time; you have to learn this and that.'

'Here we have a different motivation than at school.'

'And they give us the time we need. If we don't understand something, they explain it even 50 thousand times, they do that.'

Also with regard to the problem of classification, Scene Active was different:

'We were classified in Scene Active in four different ateliers but we did not feel to be judged by this.'

'First of all, in this case we could choose what we wanted to do.'

'We did the classification ourselves.'

Furthermore, this classification involved no hierarchy – it was not about being better but rather about differences in personal goals, competencies and interests. The group pointed out several times the relevance and the value of human diversity. This however is for the youngsters not sufficiently valued in our society and in particular at school where the same performance criteria apply to everyone. In contrast:

'I think that we should get the possibility to work at our own rhythm rather than at the rhythm of others. We should do what we are capable to do and not more because many times we have the impression we cannot cope with the tasks that we are given. Sometimes some people need more time, well it should be possible for them to take the time they need to do what they have to.'

'The teachers at school explain something and those who understand, good, and those who do not understand, they have no time. It's impossible! Not everyone learns in the same way, each of us has its own manner. They should take the time so that everybody can understand (...). I am sure there will be much less failures because I am not stupid. It is just that I was humiliated during my whole life, I did not get enough time to do the things.'

In these discussions, the project Scene Active is always presented as a model to follow and an example for the school. The project Scene Active constitutes a space of 'care', of respect and recognition; a space where they are listened to and where their voice is taken into account. The same should happen at school: an emancipatory school would be one that, while truly universalistic, helps each person to develop his or her own conception of the good life, following one's own rhythm. In contrast to a school that encourages the adaptation of preferences to the status quo, this would be a school alimenting the 'capacity to aspire' of young people (Appadurai, 2004).

Scene Active can be seen as a capability-friendly intervention also because its focus was not simply activation towards the labour market but towards a broader inclusion in society and democracy. As the director of the project said:

'We want to help them become democratic citizens, not simply productive workers for the economy.'

This points to one of the crucial differences between activation and capacitation: while activation policies generally aim at making individuals 'employable' following market (employers') criteria, a capability approach to labour market and social policies would be centred on expanding the real freedom of individuals - conceived as democratic citizens. The Project Scene Active is arguably also based on a human rights framework because of the respect accorded to each person, independently of other criteria, such as performance at school and respect of behavioural rules (e.g. punctuality). In other words, young people felt that they were ends in themselves and beings of intrinsic worth. In the human rights framework this view is made explicit in the fact that human beings are conceived as subjects of rights (rather than, say, receivers of charity or economically self-sufficient actors).

In short, the project *Scene Active* seems to play an important role in capacitating the young people, providing them with the instruments for orientation (indispensable for developing an own notion of the good life), enhancing their self-worth (a necessary precondition for the exercise of other capabilities and rights), as well as developing some professional qualities and skills. Moreover, the project may also contribute to increase their trust towards institutions (they are all very happy about how they are treated and respected in the project) and their confidence about the possibility to develop alternatives and bringing about positive change in their individual and collective lives. Finally, the research process itself and especially the two confrontation sessions have constituted a further capacitating element, especially improving young people's agency as social and political actors (worth mentioning: our research has been presented as part of the Scene Active program to youngsters).

5. Conclusion

While the crisis has not hit Switzerland very significantly until now (although the scrapping of the exchange rate ceiling with the euro could change the situation quite dramatically in the long run), certain categories of the population have been hit more severely, among them disadvantaged youth (e.g. Meyer, 2014). There is a wide-ranging fear that these youngsters will lead long-term careers of dependence on social assistance, thus illustrating the salience of the 'moral hazard' and 'dependency trap' in the Swiss context (it has however to be noted that the rhetoric of abuse or 'blaming the victims' is not as present for young people as it is for older categories of benefit recipients). In the discourses and scientific analyses, the emphasis is put on the lack of qualifications of youngsters, thus focusing the attention on this factor. It has been shown that an increasing part of young people have difficulties to pass smoothly the transition from school to work. Actually, in the Swiss context, two transitions can be identified: T1, from compulsory school to tertiary education - dual apprenticeship or academic paths - and T2, from tertiary education to the labour market. The project that we studied in this research, Scène Active, focuses more on T1, as it strives to bring young vulnerable people back to tertiary education, mainly via dual apprenticeship.

The reason for choosing to focus on young people experiencing difficulties in the transition from school to work is not only that they are among the most vulnerable social groups in Switzerland but also that the NEETs constitutes a crucial social group in order to investigate the normative aspirations and assumptions of the social investment paradigm. In fact, this group is outside both education and work, which are the most valued activities in the social investment approach. It thus comes as no surprise that the group of the NEETs is also one of the most important targets of social investment policies. In particular, Switzerland is an example of a supply-side vision of social investment that seems to bring about good results for most categories of population, but maybe to a lesser extent for disadvantaged youth. Therefore, a study of the strategy developed for this specific group allows drawing conclusions about what does not work and why, thereby paving the way toward proposing an alternative strategy of social investment more in line with a human rights and capability approach. Indeed, the social investment strategy seems to reduce the 'NEETs issue' to an economic problem. In other words, the main concern is the lack of human capital investment accumulated by this social group and the consequent difficulties in entering paid employment. There is of course a social rationale behind this concern, namely the social inclusion of these young people. Furthermore, investing in education is seen as a way of breaking the intergenerational transmission of social disadvantage. Yet, the broad social inclusion objective is often reduced to labour market integration while education is also narrowly interpreted as the process leading to the acquisition of the necessary skills that permit access to paid work.

In contrast, what is needed especially for people 'with multiple problems and needs' is a 'life-first approach' (Dean, 2003). In other words, what is necessary is a place where these young people are listened to and accepted as they are; they need first of all respect and recognition of their intrinsic value and dignity as human beings. Furthermore, they need capability-friendly policies rather than activation policies oriented towards the mere integration in the labour market or the educational system. Capability-friendly policies have broader and more open-ended objectives and aim at the inclusion in a society of democratic citizens rather than the sole inclusion of workers in the economy (Bonvin & Galster, 2010). Thus, the function of education should be the formation of the democratic citizen rather than only the 'citizen-worker' typical of the social investment approach (Lister, 2003). Capability-oriented policies aim at encouraging young people to develop a conception of the good life and at providing the instruments to pursue such autonomously matured personal goals. We found that the project Scene Active comes very close to the ideal of capability-

oriented integration programmes. However, such kind of projects cannot do everything (they are not conceived as protected islets, but as bridges toward the inclusion into society) and in particular they do not control the 'demand-side', i.e. they cannot guarantee that a place is available for the young people when they are outside the programme: public policies should also develop strategies to assure that there are enough jobs and apprenticeships and that school becomes a 'space of care', where young people experiencing difficulties are given room to express their concerns and are listened to.

The discussions conducted with the young people of Scène Active concerned many different subjects but the most important and recurrent were: unequal access to the educational system; racism and discrimination; lack of respect; lack of opportunities to prove one's value; lack of time and support in the orientation phase where one has to choose what he/she wants to do; the value of personal identity and authenticity; aspirations and desires about the future; the value of work. The group challenged some of the dominant ideologies, such as meritocracy, competition and economic interpretations of wellbeing. Even if the young people were less prepared to develop alternatives and they were sometimes contradictory in their arguments, they were capable of bringing some crucial elements in the discussion, allowing them to criticise the grading system at school, the nonsense of '*being better than your neighbour*' and the narrowness of the idea of richness interpreted purely in monetary terms.

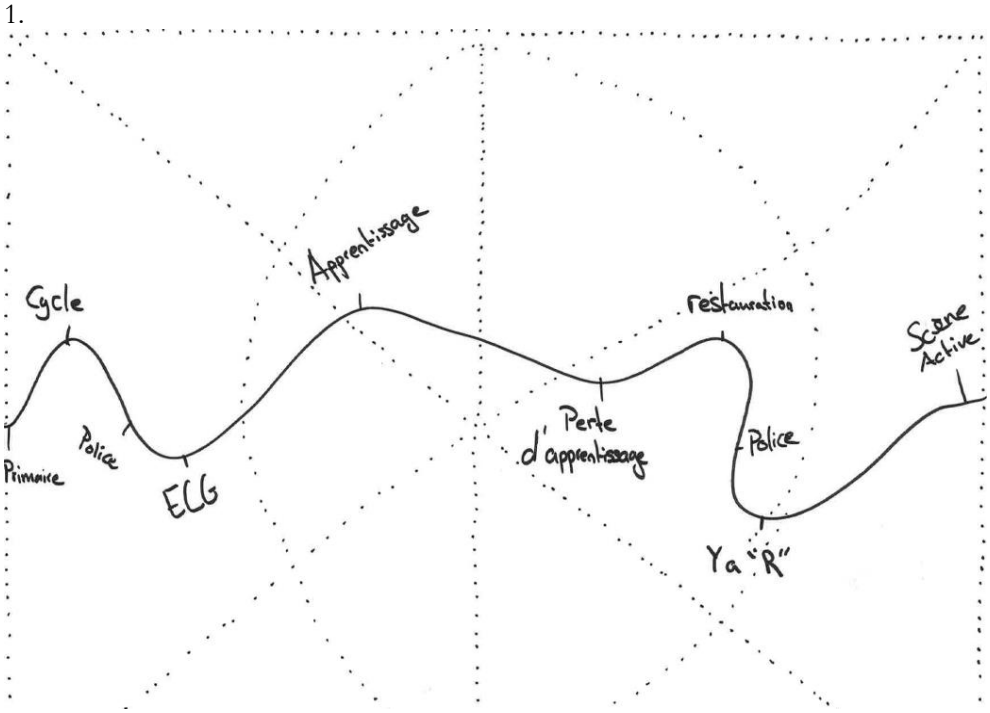
5.1 Policy implications

To conclude, one can draw some important policy implications from this study. In particular, while over the last decades the number of transition measures has substantially grown in Switzerland, these seem not be very efficient in re-integrating young people in the educational system. For instance, M. has participated in many of these transition measures without achieving this objective. This seems to be due to the fact that such measures - precisely like the school - too often tend to ignore the *causes* of these young people's difficulties. Thus, instead of taking in charge the root-causes, the measures often focus on acting upon the symptoms. Indeed, the two biographies reveal that extra-school issues, and especially family-related ones are frequently the sources of the troubles that these young people experience at school. To be sure, this makes it difficult for public policy to intervene in such matters belonging to the 'private sphere' and involving a lot of informal elements, which are hard to control and regulate. However, it is clear that if public policies want to address such multidimensional and complex questions, the solution must involve many different policy fields and areas of intervention. For instance, M.'s biography points to the lack of social housing - among other issues - whereas H.'s biography illustrates the limits of a strict migration policy - again, among many other problems.

The critique that the young people we have worked with addressed to the school system and to the transition measures, and their symmetric praise of the project Scene Active suggest that what these youngsters mostly need is a place where they can find people capable of listening to them and appreciating them as they are and who are ready to patiently leave them the time to flourish, while encouraging and supporting them in this process. After all, the theatre play was a great success, thus showing that these young people are able to complete great achievements, once the appropriate enabling circumstances are provided. The approach that characterises the project Scene Active differs from the one inherent in many transition measures - and eventually more and more in the school - in a way that echoes the critique that capability and human rights theorists move to the human capital approach to education (e.g. Robeyns, 2005). From this perspective, the deepest challenge surely involves the politics of culture: what is needed is to re-establish education as an intrinsic value aiming at making people free and at preparing democratic citizens rather than conceiving them as an economic resource to be mobilised or even exploited in the global competition. In the public confrontation session, the six young people who were present showed that they are able to be full citizens and that being an active citizen can be even enjoyable. This positive result was achieved thanks to their participation in the project Scene Active and to their involvement in the research process, which succeeded in reawakening their desire to actively contribute to the construction of the future.

appendix 1 Pictures of participatory process

1.



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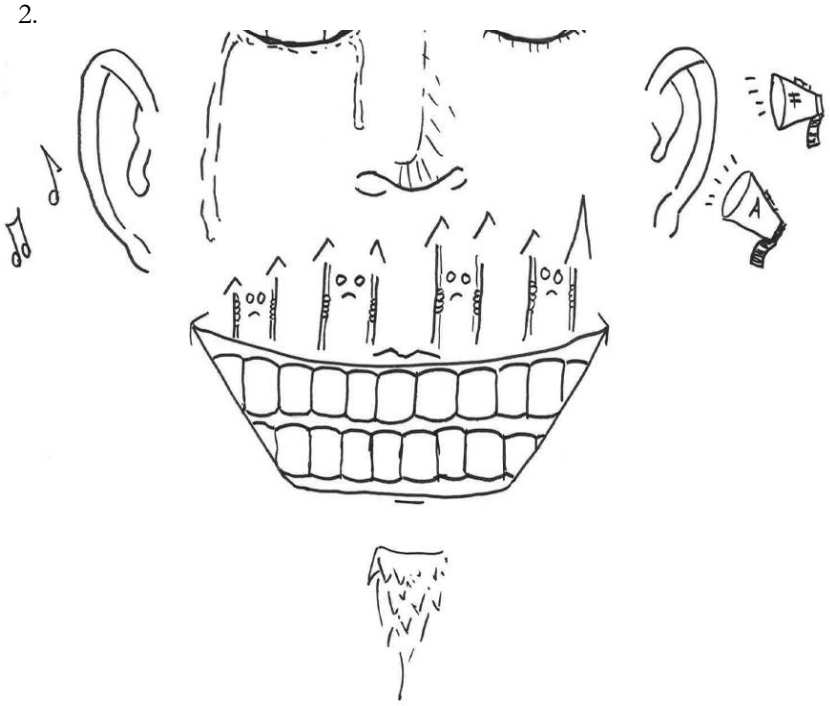
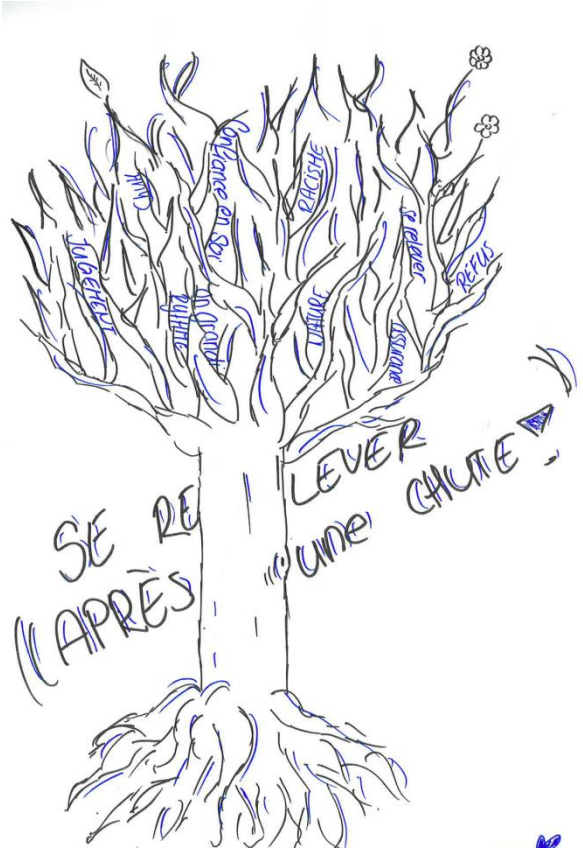


3.


SE RE | LEVER
(APRÈS UNE CHUTE)

4.

les autres
Moi (Maitenan)
et moi (avant)

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