

A capability approach to public policies for marginalized youth : the case for FORJAD in the canton of Vaud

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A Capability Approach to Public Policies for Marginalized Youth

The Case of FORJAD in the Canton of Vaud¹

Introduction

Since the mid-eighties, social policies have increasingly being turned into re-commodification tools, i. e. their main objective is no more to compensate for income loss, but to promote quick and possibly long-lasting reintegration into the labour market. This evolution has coincided with the emergence of various activation requirements imposed on recipients, upon which entitlement to benefits are often made conditional (esp. in unemployment insurance and social assistance programmes). In this context, activation is frequently identified with compliance with the expectations defined by officers of the public administration. Thereby, it is claimed that activation can take place without, or even against, the beneficiaries' consent. In other words, the prevailing view of activation or empowerment is implemented in a top-down way, and this applies especially to the most disadvantaged beneficiaries, who are also those submitted to the strongest requirements or sanctions.

By contrast, the capability approach (henceforward CA) insists that genuine empowerment cannot be achieved if the empowered, i. e. the activated person is not willingly participating to the process. Developed by Amartya Sen, the CA relies on the distinction between functionings, i. e. what a person actually is or does, and capabilities, i. e. what a person could be or could do. In this framework, the enhancement of individual capabilities requires both empowerment (i. e. being adequately equipped in terms of capacity to act) and free participation: if the former is missing, the individual recipient's freedom remains formal (in the Marxian sense); if the latter is not guaranteed, then empowerment boils down to paternalism. Hence, the challenge that the CA poses to activation strategies is to design programmes able to both empower beneficiaries and respect their freedom to lead the life they have reason to value², since public action ought to focus on capabilities and not on functionings. This task is particularly requir-

ing for the most disadvantaged people, among whom marginalized youth are of particular symbolic significance in a context of economic crisis and unemployment increase.

In contrast with most conventional approaches, the CA allows to evaluate and question activation policies not only in relation to their efficiency (i. e. how many people get back into the labour market?), but also in their substantial content (i. e. activation as imposition of certain behaviours – functionings in the terms of the CA – on people or as development of their capabilities and real freedoms to choose the life they have reason to value?).

Our paper pursues two main aims: providing an analytical and normative framework for assessing social integration policies set up for marginalized youth on the one hand, implementing this framework in the case of FORJAD, a programme set up in the canton of Vaud to help marginalized youth that receive social assistance benefits enhance their employability by completing an apprenticeship, on the other hand³. The paper relies on documentary analysis of legislative provisions and administrative directives, as well as on ten semi-structured interviews conducted in 2010 with both cantonal officials and frontline social workers. This fieldwork has been conducted within the WorkAble project (EU-FP7). Section 1 introduces in some detail the CA, and suggests a concrete way to implement it in the field of social integration policies. Section 2 presents the FORJAD programme and its recent developments. Section 3 assesses the most important features of this ambitious programme against the yardstick of the CA. The concluding section summarises the main lessons from the case study.

The capability approach

The CA is used to analyse the extent of the individuals' "real freedom to lead the life they have reason to value", according to Sen's recurrent formula (e. g. Sen 1999). Hence, it calls for assessing public policies against their contribution to the development of capabilities for all beneficiaries (and not only for the happy few). In order to implement this approach in the specific field of social integration policies, three issues need to be tackled (Bonvin 2008):

1. What objectives and targets are pursued when it comes to integrating marginalized youth: putting them back to work, enhancing their employability, developing their capability for work (i. e. the real freedom to choose the job they have reason to value), or their capability for work and life (i. e. the real freedom to choose

the life they value, esp. with regard to the balance between work and other dimensions of life), etc.? The main issue here is to grasp the specific meaning given to the notion of “activation” in the case of marginalized youth. More precisely, what activation efforts are expected from young marginalized people? If activation is viewed in strict connection with having a job on the primary labour market, then the intervention will focus only on the dimensions related with occupational integration, and consequently all other aspects e.g. housing, health, family problems, etc., will be discarded. If activation is envisioned as something that concerns all relevant dimensions of the young people’s life trajectory, then a much more encompassing intervention will be designed. This issue can also be related to Levy’s distinction between a “thin” version of activation advocating the rolling back of state interventions, and a “thick” approach requiring much more from the State and the individual alike (Levy, 2004).

2. What information is considered as relevant in the pursuit of these objectives? More precisely, when individuals are assessed, what dimensions of their life courses are emphasized: qualification, professional experience, other dimensions such as family life, health, housing, or more subjective dimensions including their expectations or tastes? Policies aiming at integrating marginalized youth will differ to a considerable extent, depending on the informational basis selected. In the analytical grid of the CA, at least three distinctive sets of data or information should be taken into account when assessing the situation of beneficiaries:

- a) *resources or commodities*, i. e. all goods and services (be they public or private) that are available to a person. These encompass not only one’s income or properties, but also all transfer incomes or welfare cash benefits. The conditionalities imposed on such resources are of great significance, e.g. if cash benefits distributed by the welfare state are conditional upon the adoption of an appropriate behaviour, then the access to resources is made more precarious;

- b) *individual conversion factors*, i. e. all individual characteristics that allow (or prevent) the conversion of available resources into capabilities or real freedoms to lead the life one has reason to value. The impact of those features (e.g. age, gender, competencies, experience, etc.) depends on the way they are valued, i. e. it

cannot be grasped irrespective of the dominant values and norms in a specific social environment;

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

- › What social stratification prevails (and along what lines: class, gender, nationality, competencies, etc.)? In other words, what categories are valued or, on the contrary, disparaged?
- › What social norms or values are dominant in the society (or the group) concerned? What is the image of marginalized youth in society, and particularly among employers?
- › What opportunities are available (in terms of occupational and social integration)? In particular, are they equally available for all target groups?

To assess a situation against the CA, one should take into account the whole informational configuration listed above: not only the resources and the individual features, but also all dimensions connected to the social context, and esp. to the way resources and individual characteristics are valued and to the opportunities available to convert them into capabilities or real freedoms. In terms of public policy analysis, it is therefore crucial to see whether, and to what extent, policies include information about all these dimensions or if they exclude some of them. In the latter case, that would imply that they rely on a reductionist notion of integration or activation (e. g. putting people back to work as quickly as possible is always the best solution, whatever the resources, individual or social conversion factors at hand).

3. How are the normative reference and the informational basis of activation defined and implemented? Who participates in these tasks: experts, civil servants, local agents in charge of implementing those policies, end users, etc.? In Sen's perspective, the inclusion of as many stakeholders as possible is key to the development of capability-friendly policies. This is tightly connected with what we suggest to label "capability for voice", i. e. in this case marginalized youth's ability to express their wishes and expectations and make them count in the field of social integration policies. Indeed, if activation is defined by employers or experts or public admin-

istration officers alone, then the voices of all those activated are discarded, and this would result in biased normative references and informational bases. To avoid this, “capability for voice” is envisaged as the necessary complement of the configuration of factors identified above (resources and conversion factors), since it requires that everyone has the real possibility to be actively associated in the selection of the informational basis and the design and implementation of social integration policies.

Let us now apply the CA framework to a specific case, namely an ambitious programme developed in support of marginalized youth in the Swiss canton of Vaud, i.e. the FORJAD programme. Assessing this programme against the analytical grid of the CA allows comprehending whether it results in enhancing or constraining the beneficiaries’ freedom to choose and lead the life they value. It thus allows tackling crucial issues such as self-fulfilment or real freedom to choose one’s training or job. The next section presents the origins of the FORJAD programme, its main features when launched in 2006 in the canton of Vaud as well as its recent developments. We will then examine, in the light of the CA, three of the most important issues raised by its implementation, namely the selectivity issue, JADs’ capability for voice and the mismatch between supply and demand on the Swiss vocational training market.

The FORJAD programme and its recent developments

Origins and institutional context

In the early 2000s, social workers and institutions dealing with social and occupational (re)integration faced a rapid and important increase of a new type of public – marginalized young adults and young adults at risk of marginalization – and decided to investigate this phenomenon. In the canton of Vaud, the so-called “JAD collective⁴” created the nickname “JAD” to label this category (JAD stands for the initials of “jeunes adultes en difficulté” which means struggling young adults) and conducted a pioneering study published in 2001 (Regamey et al., 2001). However, no programmes targeting JADs were launched in the canton of Vaud until 2006. A stronger emphasis was then put on social and occupational reintegration measures with the introduction of the so-called RI (“revenu d’intégration”). However, the budget available for these measures until then was too small to guarantee that every beneficiary could access such programmes (Piotet 2004). Hence, the cantonal department in charge of Social Affairs decided to iden-

tify young adults between 18 and 25 as the priority target group. Among the nearly 1,800 RI beneficiaries aged between 18 and 25 in 2006 when the FORJAD programme was launched, only 30% had completed vocational training or earned a professional degree (Von Muralt and Spagnolo 2007)⁵. Thus, a decision was made to bring as many welfare recipients of this age category as possible back into vocational training and apprenticeship. However, the status of student or apprentice was incompatible with the payment of welfare benefits according to the Law on social assistance. This meant that young adults on social assistance who entered training were losing welfare benefits. As a result, many of them had no choice but to return to social assistance. “*The FORJAD programme has its origins in the will to overcome this contradiction*”, as the Head of the welfare and social assistance service explains.

Therefore, the cantonal department of Social Affairs, together with the departments of Education and Employment decided to set up a new programme in order to promote vocational training⁶ among the JADs. This programme was labelled FORJAD, which stands for “*formation pour les jeunes adultes en difficulté*” (training for struggling young adults), and started during the summer 2006. In order to eliminate possible disincentive effects resulting from benefit loss or substantial reduction due to starting vocational training, all involved departments designed a directive to coordinate the welfare and the scholarship systems, and allow young trainees to keep the benefits paid by the RI.

Thereby, the issue of marginalized youth was identified mainly as a problem of training or educational deficit, and the selected informational basis was tightly related to this dimension. This choice to use vocational training as the mean to (re-)integrate marginalized youth received the political support of both the right wing and the left wing. The FORJAD programme also aimed at responding to the growing financial weight of the social assistance programmes dedicated to marginalized youth, as well as to the risk of long-term poverty, persisting over generations, and the constitution of so-called “*assisted families*”. From 100 beneficiaries in 2006, the year of its launch, the FORJAD programme includes more than 600 young adults in 2010 (out of 3 000 RI recipients aged between 18 and 25). And the cantonal objective is to raise this figure up to 1 000 JADs in the next few years.

Design and implementation: a step-by-step and individualised logic

The FORJAD programme is based on progressive stages supposed to lead to the achievement of a vocational degree. This step-by-step logic is completed by an individual follow-up. Five steps can be distinguished, both in a chronological perspective and for analytical purposes.

1. At first, each JAD meets a social worker who has to perform his/her social assessment. This first step is also based on the fulfilment of more formal criteria such as benefiting from the RI, age (between 18 and 25), absence of vocational training achieved and living outside the parental household.
2. At the second stage, those deemed ready to undertake vocational training meet an “integration adviser” who helps them formulate an integration project specifying their occupational goals and the most appropriate ways to reach them.
3. Some of these young people are able to immediately look for a vocational training. According to the selected profession, they find an employer who agrees to be their apprenticeship master, or they apply to a vocational school. All others follow a social integration measure (so-called MIS for “mesure d’intégration sociale”) aimed at assessing and validating their professional project but also at testing their motivation and job readiness. All MIS are provided by subsidized associations since the cantonal social assistance services outsourced their execution. The MIS also help young people in their search for an apprenticeship, while offering basic language and maths lessons in order to prepare them for the entry tests organised by the larger firms recruiting apprentices⁷. These activities are often complemented by an occupational activity in a labour market programme (usually for 6 months). The MIS are envisaged as part of a selective process, i. e. not all JADs integrated in such measures succeed in undertaking a vocational training and in finding an apprenticeship. However, this stage is not “eliminatory”, it can be repeated many times if the young people are not ready to begin an apprenticeship or do not find an employer willing to hire them.
4. The JADs who pass successfully all stages and find an apprenticeship, sign an apprenticeship contract and become FORJADs. They are then individually supported by a coach in four different areas – academic, vocational, social and personal - and can benefit from school support courses. All coaches are social workers

belonging to the same association (TEM-Accent) and their support ends three months after FORJADs' successful completion of their vocational training.

5. Like all other apprentices, FORJADs have to pass the exams and get their diploma. This is the last stage of the FORJAD process. They then have to find a job on the labour market.

These young adults are helped to become able to manage all spheres of their life, outside and inside the workplace, in order to become autonomous individuals. The FORJAD programme thus combines supply-side interventions directed towards labour market integration with a special attention to the contextual dimensions of every beneficiary's life (e.g. presence of children requiring adjusted working hours, necessity of a satisfactory and stable housing situation, adapted debt-solving strategy). To all these purposes, coaches provide FORJADs with useful information (e.g. about access to specific help, funds and welfare complementary provisions). Hence, the main objective of the FORJAD programme is to adequately equip young adults for the labour market and to develop their individual capital in order to enhance their chances of occupational (re)integration.

From the RI to the scholarship grants funding

In order to eliminate possible disincentive effects resulting from benefit loss or substantial reduction due to starting vocational training, the departments of Social Affairs, of Economy and of Education designed a directive to coordinate the welfare and the scholarship systems.

Until 2009, the FORJAD programme was mainly funded by the RI (covering both the training costs and the basic needs although most of its beneficiaries were apprentices⁸). However, this situation was a legal exception under the Law on social assistance for which the status of student or apprentice is incompatible with the payment of welfare benefits. That is why the funding of the FORJAD programme was transferred to the cantonal office of scholarship grants in September 2009. Since then, the RI still funds the preparatory MIS dedicated to JADs (from stage 1 to 3 above) while, for those who are accepted into apprenticeship, they become FORJADs and are then supported by the scholarship grants (stages 4 and 5). This transfer of funding is summarized by the Head of the welfare and social assistance service as follows: *"In order to sustain the FORJAD programme, a decision was made to align the standards of the scholarships distributed with those of the RI and then, to transfer the young people from the welfare assistance system to the grants funding system. This was also to comply with the legal*

bases as we had twisted them when implementing the pilot programme. (...) Moreover, for political reasons, we could not imagine designing a programme with a lot of privileges for a minority of the population who were marginalized, while at the same time, all other grantees remained with CHF 520 (400 Euros) per month."

This reform contributed to lower the overall budget dedicated to social assistance. Moreover, the alignment of the scholarships standards (i. e. a "package" logic based on an annual payment) with those of social benefits (i. e. a real costs logic, monthly reassessed) has resulted in a general increase of the amount of scholarships. This implied a reinforcement of the selective logic in the scholarships system. In the words of the Head of this service: *"We cannot say that everyone won with this system. (...) The access to the provision has been made more difficult. So those who designed the reform knew from the beginning that about 30% would be losers, but with a limited loss of money. On the other side, among the winners, there were people who had much larger gains in terms of scholarship."* Hence, the changing funding bases of the FORJAD programme resulted both in higher amounts of scholarships for a few marginalized youth and tighter eligibility criteria, coinciding with the exclusion of almost a third of scholarship applicants. Furthermore, if the transfer had no financial effect for many FORJADs, it had direct and negative effects on the living conditions of some of them as one field social worker argued: *"FORJADs are now facing financial difficulties. And I think it's quite a common situation among them since the transfer from the RI to the scholarship grants office and the end of the support in several fields: health insurance, care, for example dentists, housing, and other costs. And then, CHF 100 or 200 (80 or 160 Euros) per month is quite a lot for them."* However, adjustments are being made so that FORJADs are still allowed to resort to the RI in such cases.

While the overall budget dedicated to social integration measures (MIS) has notably increased, from 3.5 million Euros in 2006 (4.6 million CHF) to more than 15 million Euros in 2011 (20 million CHF), the proportion allocated to JADs has continued to increase (from less than 40% of the whole budget allocated to MIS to more than 50%, now the official minimum). Although they represent only one out of six RI beneficiaries, young adults between 18 and 25 year-old have been confirmed as the MIS main target over recent years. Such a choice coincides with a possible discrimination of other age categories, and is contested by many interviewed field social professionals.

The implementation of FORJAD against the CA

The selectivity issue

The entire FORJAD system is built on a step-by-step logic. It is supposed to help the JADs progressively climb all the stairs up to the achievement of a vocational degree. However, given the problems encountered by some participants – in their life course many of them have faced failures and dropouts, physical and mental health problems, debts⁹, etc. – such logic implies creaming practices. As a result, the programme mainly benefits those with the highest skills and job-readiness. One interviewed integration adviser, in charge of the initial social assessment, distributes the JADs population as follows: nearly a quarter of them are young mothers who are not ready to start a measure because they have nobody to look after their children; another quarter have addiction or severe psychological trouble; among the remaining half, some are not motivated or do not have a sufficient level of education. All in all, according to him, only one quarter of the JADs are capable to start a measure and are motivated by a vocational training perspective: *“These young adults have a wide spectrum of difficulties: debt, housing, addictions, being without family support... A picture often rather dark. Therefore, there are a lot of things to solve out before having a career plan. In 2006, the cantonal objective was to bring 100 young adults in this programme. In comparison with the 1,800 youths benefiting from social assistance, they were the cream of the crop! But that left 1,700 cases unresolved. And it still is that way! If only about 200 or 300 young people enter the programme every year, they are necessarily the best: those who have already solved their financial problems, their addictions, are able to wake up in the morning to go to work.”*

Moreover, the policy-makers who designed the programme assumed that a distinction had to be made between people in deep social need who would not succeed in returning to the primary labour market (for whom social assistance was indicated as *“the last resort”*) and those who could return to the labour market through specific training. The cantonal Head of the specialized education and training support service summarizes this as follows: *“Working on FORJADs, bringing them into vocational training is also a way to tell them: ‘no dude, you’re not going there! You’ve got two arms and two legs and you’re coming with us to do something. What you see out there is just for those who have real difficulties, and it’s the last safety net. But you, you’re not in that last net, so you’re asked to return into the mainstream.’ This is a message a little preachy but it’s socially acceptable because*

there are no reasons to go out and cry with them and extort money from the State to keep them in legal, social and economic precariousness, while all those that will be rehabilitated will pay taxes, and generate economic activity. And we're working on it, and that's why the FORJADs are symbolic."

As mentioned above, the MIS are envisioned also as a selection tool. At this level (preparatory to FORJAD), providers are expected to validate the young adults' professional project. During this stage of the selection process, high levels of drop-outs have been observed. Indeed, an empirical investigation about 3 such measures showed that many of the young adults did not attend the measure until its end and only 20 to 40% of them succeeded at this preparatory stage of the FORJAD programme (Bonvin, Hugentobler, Moachon, 2007). Figures for 2010 show that rates of success, as defined by the public administration, significantly vary along the MIS investigated and the target group, since they range from 5% to 57%.¹⁰ Furthermore, the fact that a JAD completes a measure does not imply that he/she will be selected by an employer or by a school in order to start vocational training.

Hence, the JADs finally integrated in the FORJAD programme have to successfully pass four stages:

- a) to fulfil the formal criteria and be recognised as eligible and competent at the pre-FORJAD stage,
- b) to be recognised as competent and motivated at the FORJAD preparatory level (during the MIS-JAD),
- c) to be selected by an employer or a school,
- d) to complete the vocational training and get their diploma (FORJADs, like other apprentices, complete successfully their vocational training in more than 70% of cases).

Hence, the FORJAD programme makes a significant contribution to the enhancement of capabilities, but many JADs are still left aside, although the number of beneficiaries is constantly increasing. Two issues seem to be key in this respect: the issue of available funding in order to take more JADs on board on the one hand, that of designing other types of programmes for the JADs who are not able to immediately integrate the FORJAD logic on the other hand. In the absence of these two conditions, the focus on training and apprenticeship as a normative reference for JADs' activation might result in reinforced selectivity.

JADs' capability for voice

The role of the integration advisers is to guide young adults during the FORJAD preparatory stage towards a career plan that has to be *“as realistic and achievable as possible”*. As they strive to match labour supply and demand, they appear as traffic officers according to the metaphor used by the cantonal Head of the specialized education and training support service: *“They show the roads, the flux, the red and green lights, they provide the necessary information to enable young adults to decide.”* The young adult's capability for voice may here be constrained by a possible top-down imposition of institutional views and/or goals through the intervention of the integration adviser. Some efforts to enhance JADs' capability for voice are however made by the integration advisers: *“We try to make them all (the FORJADs) actors in the process. First of all, we don't call them ‘beneficiaries’ but ‘participants’, what changes the whole set. Because sometimes words lead to deeds! And we try to get them to be partners in the process.”* The way in which MIS providers are funded by the canton of Vaud at the preparatory stage of the FORJAD programme (i. e. for the whole measure, regardless of the number of participants), clearly allows a more individualized follow-up of each JAD. Such an approach increases the local agents' margin of manoeuvre when fulfilling their task, but due to differences in conceptions of professional know-how and culture among the various local agents intervening in the programme, it does not necessarily result in a corresponding enhancement of the beneficiaries' capabilities to express their views and expectations and make them count.

Besides, the opportunities opened up by the programme coincide with new duties for the beneficiaries and their families. As a matter of fact, their parents' financial situation is thoroughly examined, and those with sufficient means are asked to contribute to the cost of their children's vocational training. There is also a stronger focus on financial sanctions, insofar as the young adults refusing to undertake training or those leaving a MIS without medical reasons can lose up to 25% of their RI. Hence, access to resources is submitted to more stringent conditions. The exit option, i. e. the refusal to undertake training or the decision to leave a MIS, has a financial cost for the beneficiary that could make the availability of such an option more problematic for him or her. However, the deterring impact of these financial sanctions is disputed by field social workers as the following quote illustrates: *“Normally, a JAD who refuses a measure can be punished, and should be punished, with a deduction of 25% of his/her income, so that he/she does not fall below the minimum subsistence level. (...) This type of finan-*

cial sanction is relatively inefficient, that's for sure! Anyway, JADs know they cannot be punished more than 25%, so they do not care."

Hence, with the emergence of the RI and the FORJAD programme, entitlements to cash benefits are made partly conditional, which might go against the idea of "passive empowerment" developed by Amartya Sen. This notion advocates that all members of society be guaranteed access to adequate resources and individual and social factors of conversion, whatever their behaviour in terms of active job search or willingness to train. By contrast, the FORJAD programme makes access to social benefits partly conditional upon the young recipients' appropriate behaviour. Under such conditions, beneficiaries may be constrained to loyalty in some cases, which could be interpreted as a call for adaptability that limits their capability for voice. To sum up, the JADs' capability for voice is allowed to flourish, provided the conditions defined by legislative provisions and administrative directives are respected. This issue however also depends on the state of the labour market and its ability to create training opportunities.

The availability of training opportunities

Financial incentives and the mobilisation of the social workers' and the JADs' personal networks (including relatives and acquaintances) are the main tools used to create training opportunities. Indeed, the canton has decided to financially support public administrations (which hosted the great majority of the first FORJADs) and firms that accept to train a FORJAD apprentice by assigning them 3750 Euros (CHF 5000) for every new apprenticeship and by exempting them from social contributions on wages paid to FORJAD apprentices. MIS providers themselves get favourable conditions if they hire the participants as trainees at the end of the MIS. The canton also pays extra money to some vocational schools that accept to receive more trainees.

MIS providers underline the crucial importance of raising the employers' awareness, creating a constant dialogue with them and combating the negative image of JADs among some of them. Hence, they spend a lot of time and energy persuading employers to create training and working opportunities for young beneficiaries. The enhancement of the JADs' professional experience is another way to increase their probabilities to get an apprenticeship. To this purpose, MIS providers encourage JADs to get (unpaid) working experience and internships within firms belonging to the primary labour market.

Moreover, and this constitutes a structural constraint for the FORJAD programme, the Swiss vocational training market shows a mismatch between supply and demand. In August 2006, the official data listed 74 000 signed apprenticeship contracts, 3 500 vacant places and 22 000 young people looking for a trainee position (Kaspar, 2006). This situation has improved in recent years since the Confederation, the cantons and the labour organizations have established a number of measures such as a system of coaching and mentoring to help young adults in their search for an apprenticeship (the so-called CMFP, standing for “case management formation professionnelle”). In 2009, the official data reported that Swiss firms offered 78 500 apprenticeships while 79 000 young people were looking for an apprentice position and the most recent data show that the overall figures of supply and demand on the Swiss apprenticeship market very closely match each other. However, some sectors like construction and catering are always unable to fill all the apprenticeships they offer. Indeed, a balance between supply and demand at macro level may well be compatible with a limited degree of capabilities at an individual level, for instance if young people are looking for trainee jobs in saturated sectors. Because of the persistent, albeit significantly declining, mismatch between supply and demand, requirements imposed on new apprenticeship candidates are still important. Indeed, vocational training standards have been raised during the last years and this also includes increased expectations to abide by the school and corporate discipline. JADs are reputed to be less reliable against such normative standards, which can be a further obstacle in their way to get a trainee job.

Thus, attention to social conversion factors (i. e. the situation on the vocational training market) is a key dimension of the FORJAD programme, but there is a significant difference between the tools mobilized on the supply and demand side. This implies that if people are equipped for the market (in terms of specific occupational competencies acquired through vocational training, but also in terms of more general social and relational competencies tested at FORJAD preparatory stages and required for adaptation to the workplace), the reverse does not apply to the same extent. On the supply side, pressure and sanctions are resorted to alongside individualized follow-up and support, while only persuasion and financial advantage can be mobilised on the demand side.

Conclusion

Since its launch, the FORJAD programme has constantly grown thanks to its success unanimously celebrated by all cantonal stakeholders. When assessed against the analytical grid provided by the CA, the FORJAD programme takes significant steps in the direction of capability-friendly policies, but still calls for further investigation in three respects: the available resources, the individual conversion factors and the social conversion factors.

With regard to resources, the increased means devoted to the integration of marginalized youth coincide with lesser resources attributed to other categories of beneficiaries. Indeed, at least half of the available MIS are booked for JADs and integration advisers spend most of their working time with beneficiaries belonging to this age group. Moreover, FORJAD resources are mostly used in support of the young adults with the highest training-readiness. Hence, the undeniable increase of available resources is paralleled by a twofold inequality resulting from the implementation of FORJAD: between JADs and other age groups on the one hand, between “training-ready” JADs and their counterparts of the same age group on the other hand. Such inequalities certainly follow from the strong focus on training and apprenticeship (i. e. a specific definition of activation), which does not fit with all JADs’ needs or possibilities. This raises the necessity to set up other, so-called “low threshold” programmes for the least “training-ready” JADs, a path that the cantonal authorities increasingly follow.

Concerning individual conversion factors, the focus on vocational training denotes the strong human capital component of the FORJAD model. The first stages of the FORJAD programme insist on increasing the marketability of the beneficiaries, insofar as participants are taught how to apply for a trainee job or for a professional school. The second part, however, is more oriented towards higher quality training. But in both cases, the objective is to enhance JADs’ adaptability to the labour market and not to equip or adapt the labour market for them. This also results in limitations on the JADs’ capability for voice, since such adaptability is a prerequisite that cannot be debated or negotiated.

Social conversion factors are notoriously absent from most Swiss activation programmes. In the FORJAD case, we should however point out the various efforts deployed to open new training opportunities for the participants. MIS providers and JADs’ individual coaches are called to mobilise their network, and financial incentives are provided to firms and insti-

tutions that accept to receive FORJAD beneficiaries as trainees. All the same, there is a discrepancy between supply-side and demand-side interventions: while the enhancement of human capital mobilises a vast range of tools (including constraints and sanctions if necessary), the intervention on the demand-side mainly relies on incentives supposed to generate the corporate actors' goodwill, with the risk that such goodwill will disappear as soon as financial incentives and/or active communication campaigns stop. By contrast, a more balanced and capability-friendly view would require that the labour market be also adapted to the JADs' needs with regard to productivity requirements, working conditions, pace of learning, etc. This is a challenge posed to all activation programmes in Switzerland.

All in all, the capability approach allows a more nuanced picture of the FORJAD programme and its outcomes to be drawn, emphasizing both its assets and its present limitations. As such, this case study shows the relevance and added value of using capabilities as a yardstick for the analysis and assessment of public policies. It also demonstrates how the CA can open up realistic avenues of reflection for future reforms, with a view to improving the efficiency and appropriateness of social integration policies.

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Notes

- 1 This paper was written in the framework of the WorkAble project "Making Capabilities Work", funded by the EU seventh Framework Programme (grant no 244909).
- 2 This point raises the difficult issue of "adaptive preferences" or the inability to make informed choices. In such cases, for instance when individuals refuse to participate in (presumably) beneficial programmes as a consequence of adaptive preferences they have acquired as a result of disadvantage, demoralization, disenchantment, etc., the CA could admit some (limited and temporary) degree of compulsion in order to encourage them to re-evaluate their judgment. However, the conditions under which such compulsion could be acceptable are very restrictive in the CA perspective (e.g. Sen 1992, Bonvin and Farvaque 2008).
- 3 The expression "marginalized youth" will be used henceforward in the meaning developed by the cantonal administration of the FORJAD programme: it refers to young adults aged between 18 and 25, benefiting from social assistance, without any vocational training achieved and living outside the parental household.
- 4 The different members of the JAD-collective were the following: the ASEMORelais (socio-educational action in an open environment), Jet Service (Youth and Labor service) within the protestant social centre of the canton of Vaud, the cantonal social centre, the Saint-Martin centre (drug dependency unit, Vaud), and the direction of the social security and environment offices of the city of Lausanne.
- 5 National studies also identify the lack of training as one of the major factors accounting for poverty among young people (e.g. Drilling 2004).
- 6 In Switzerland, vocational training plays a major role in the transition processes from school to the labour market. About two thirds of young people take part in the dual system of apprenticeship.
- 7 Such tests, called basic and multi-check, are not a legal requirement for entering an apprenticeship. They allow employers to strengthen the selection among apprentices.
- 8 JADs are also allowed to keep up to 150 Euros (200 CHF) per month out of their apprentice wages.
- 9 Many JADs have debts amounting to more than 15,000 Euros (20'000 CHF) and this often acts as a disincentive to return to paid employment, because wage garnishments would cut their income to much the same level as the RI (Von Muralt and Spagnolo 2007). According to one social field-worker, this situation can be prohibitive for obtaining an apprenticeship, especially in the fields of sales or logistics where employers often impose a clear debt record as a condition for getting an apprenticeship.
- 10 These rates have been calculated on the basis of figures provided by the cantonal Service in charge of the implementation of the FORJAD programme. Notice that they do not include the young people who have left the programme before its end.