

IP UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

CROSSING THE CAPABILITY APPROACH WITH THE LIFE COURSE PARADIGM (IP5)

The individual project led by Jean-Michel Bonvin draws on Amartya Sen's theoretical framework to develop an analytical model of agency within structure. It includes notably a mixed-methods study on the living conditions of people on disability benefits and a qualitative study on young adults on social assistance.

The aim of IP5 is to understand to what extent social integration policies are effective in protecting vulnerable people and helping them living a valued life. In order to investigate this issue, IP5 mobilises the capability approach (CA) developed by Amartya Sen. According to Sen, the ultimate objective of welfare policies is to increase people's capabilities, i.e. their real freedom to lead a valuable life. Rather than focusing on employability or efficiency, the CA invites us to question the appropriateness of welfare intervention regarding individual needs and aspirations. Crossing the CA with the life course paradigm is a theoretical and methodological challenge. However, paraphrasing K. U. Mayer, it is a promising way to provide life course sociology with a "coherent body of theory" and to develop an analytical model of "agency within structure" as advocated by R. Settersten. Moreover, by questioning "what people have reason to value", the CA allows us to grasp processes of choice and decision-making that are often left aside by sociologists and confined to the "black-box of the actor".

TWO CASE-STUDIES

In the framework of IP5, Jean-Michel Bonvin supervises two case studies applying this perspective to vulnerable target groups. The first one started in 2011 and was carried out by Maël Dif-Pradalier and Emilie Rosenstein. It assesses the capabilities of youngsters involved in the FORJAD programme, providing vocational training for young adults on social assistance in the canton of Vaud. One of our research objectives was to question the capacity of

the programme to embrace a life course perspective and support adequately participants in the school-to-work transition. To do so, we used a qualitative methodology. Two waves of interviews have been completed (2011 N=32, 2012 N=20) and a third one is currently in progress. Analyses showed that FORJAD significantly increases the possibilities to complete an apprenticeship but not for the majority of recipients. Comparing the situation of our sample at T1 and T2 showed that, less than a half made a successful transition (from social assistance to apprenticeship or from apprenticeship to employment) between 2011 and 2012. This underlines the importance of the issue of timing and the necessary resources to develop social policies able to make trajectories more linear and overcome vulnerability on the long run. These results have been discussed through various KTT activities, for example during the first FORUM LIVES (November 2013), bringing together members of LIVES and cantonal authorities of Vaud and Fribourg as well as professionals involved in youth policies; or during a one-day conference held at the HETS&Sa | EESP (December 2013), where 200 academics and professionals met and discussed our results.

The second case study started in November 2012. It questions the living conditions of people on disability benefits and constitutes the topic of Emilie Rosenstein's PhD. Here, disability is conceived as a critical event or a turning point that destabilises individual trajectories and increases

the risk of vulnerability. The aim is thus to assess the modes of intervention (rehabilitation, active measures, pensions, etc.) promoted by disability insurance, regarding recipients' needs, aspirations and their position over the life course. This study uses a mixed methods research design. The quantitative part consists in sequence analysis, based on a cantonal dataset of disability insurance (N=95'184). Two sets of analysis have already been done together with Felix Bühlmann. The first one uses a biographical perspective and retraces the entire trajectory of people who applied for disability benefits between 1960 and 2012 in the canton of Vaud. The second one is focused on their "institutional trajectory", from the moment they claim for disability benefits to the administrative closure of their case. Using cluster analysis, we identified the main trajectories of disability recipients. We relate them to a series of socio-demographic variables (sex, age, nationality) and also to the legislative reforms undertaken by disability insurance. On this basis, the qualitative part of the study will start by the end of 2014. It will involve semi-directed interviews carried out with recipients and providers of disability benefits in the canton of Vaud. This second part of the study will assess with a capability perspective the impact of disability insurance on recipients' trajectories, on their experience of disability and more specifically, on their capability for work, i.e. their real freedom to take a job they have reason to value.

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