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An unaffordable fringe of society? The Matthew effect in dual-vocational education and training programmes for disadvantaged youth in Switzerland

Pisoni Delia

UNIL | Université de Lausanne

FACULTÉ DE DROIT, DES SCIENCES CRIMINELLES ET D'ADMINISTRATION PUBLIQUE

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pour l'obtention du grade de
Docteur en Administration Publique

par

Delia Pisoni

Directeur de thèse
Prof. Giuliano Bonoli

Jury

Prof. Yves Emery, Université de Lausanne
Prof. John Gal, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
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IMPRIMATUR

Le Décanat de la Faculté de droit, des sciences criminelles et d'administration publique, sur proposition d'un jury formé des professeurs Giuliano Bonoli, Yves Emery, Maël Dif-Pradalier et John Gal sans se prononcer sur les opinions de la candidate, autorise l'impression de la thèse de Madame Delia Pisoni, intitulée :

An unaffordable fringe of society?

The Matthew effect in dual-vocational education and training programmes for disadvantaged youth in Switzerland

Lausanne, le 31 août 2021

Prof. Nils Soguel
Vice-Doyen de la Faculté de droit,
des sciences criminelles
et d'administration publique

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List of abbreviations

ALMPs	Active Labour Market Policies
EAER	Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research
EU	European Union
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	Public Employment Services
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SERI	Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation
SIMs	Social Insertion Measures
SLBs	Street-Level Bureaucrats
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
TA	Thematic Analysis
U.K.	United Kingdom
U.S.A.	United States of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VPETA	Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act
VPETO	Vocational and Professional Education and Training Ordinance
WW-II	World War II

Acknowledgments

Once upon a time, a little girl came home from a random primary school day and informed her parents that she had made a decision: she would not continue studying the following year, but start to work. To learn that this was not possible and that the police would come to return me to school if I continued with my plans was astonishing, indeed, I had, still, so many (astonishing) things to learn. That little girl has now grown up, not so much taller, but for sure older and is now writing up her Ph.D. thesis. Needless to say, many things have happened since that distant day. What is sure, however, is that to reach this stage is not only my accomplishment, but a blend of support, help, advice, privilege, and also all the luck I have been blessed with throughout these years. What is also sure is that many people have been and are not as fortunate as I have been. Until everyone has the same access to life chances, initial disadvantages will compound future disadvantages; this can never be emphasised enough.[1]

To me, the long journey towards a Ph.D. has truly been a training ground for humility. On the one hand, because of exposure to the great vastness of knowledge that has been produced and is currently in production, as well as realising all the knowledge that is still missing and has yet to be determined, inevitably leads one to face the immense ignorance rooted in oneself. On the other hand, during this long and difficult journey, one cannot escape from also learning the numerous and varied personal limits of oneself; indeed, it is necessary to be wholly dedicated, while also accepting these limits. My hope is that, through this thesis, I make a modest but useful contribution to the never-ending quest of improving social policies.

It is time for me to humbly thank all the people who have contributed, in one way or another, to this work. Since I cannot list every single person, I will just mention the people more directly involved with the thesis, whereas I address a general but very warm thank-you to the rest of my friends and family for their treasured support. First of all, I would like to thank Prof. Giuliano Bonoli: for giving me this great opportunity, for his advice and for his patience throughout all these years. I would also like to thank the members of the Jury, Prof. Maël Dif-Pradalier, Prof. Yves Emery, and Prof. John Gal for their precious and constructive feedback that contributed to improving the present dissertation. I am very grateful to all the people that agreed to be interviewed for this work: this dissertation would not exist without your precious inputs. I would also like to thank my Ph.D. colleagues, especially Ada, Alex, Anna, Björn, Brice, Cyrielle, Fabienne, Georgia, Moudo, Nicolas and Ornella: it has been a pleasure making some of this journey in your company. I would like to thank the members of the GOVPET Leading House for their numerous suggestions and comments on my work. I would like to thank Sandra for her always cheerful company. I would like to thank Maurizio, for having woven the threads at the very beginning, making this all happen. I would also like to thank Prof. Michel Oris, who has not only inspired me throughout my studies, but has been able to motivate me throughout the Ph.D. process with a simple single sentence of encouragement offered at the very beginning. Last but not least, of course, I would like to thank my family for the constant and fundamental support. Both the old one, for the lifelong support—Mami, Papi, Caro, Oli with Jonathan and Fynn, and my grandparents—as well as the new one—Giuseppe, for the continued and precious support and love over the last more than ten years, and Iole, for being the wonderful and cheerful new challenge in my life.

On a professional level, I would like to dedicate this work to the professionals who are working hard on a daily basis to improve the situation of disadvantaged persons. On a private level, this work is dedicated to my family: the old, new, and future!

[1] With this, I do not at all intend to suggest that an academic educational path is superior to a practical one, but simply to illustrate how far my personal nature actually is to the academic sphere, and how life can evolve in totally unexpected directions.

Introduction

The shift from industrial to post-industrial societies, as well as changes to socio-demographics, have induced major societal and economic transformations. Indeed, in most post-industrial economies, labour markets have undergone structural changes, such as tertiarisation, technological evolution and globalisation, thus increasingly requiring a skilled workforce (see e.g., Bonoli, 2013; Nicaise & Bollens, 1998; Sheldon, 2002). Consequently, the demand for (highly) skilled labour has increased, whereas the supply of low-skilled jobs has fallen. On a societal level, family constellations have multiplied, and the population has begun to age (see, e.g., Bonoli, 2005). These changes, along with a significant economic crisis in the mid-1970s, disrupted the established conception that defined social policies during their 'golden age' (post-WWII–1970s). Indeed, the primarily passive social policy schemes, based on social insurances linked to the labour market status of the male breadwinner, were no longer appropriate to protect all citizens from the various hazards of life.

Consequently, welfare state retrenchment appeared on numerous political agendas, and social policies were also given a more 'active' role, moving away from the safeguarding of individuals' subsistence and purchasing power that had occupied the core of 'passive' social policies, towards becoming tools to help unemployed people to reintegrate into the workforce. Additionally, to respond to the challenges stemming from this new social context, the mid-1990s saw the proposal of a new approach to social policies: social investment. According to this approach, instead of compensating for failures of the labour markets, social policies were required to prepare citizens to integrate labour markets into the new 'knowledge economies'. Indeed, this strategy aims to reconcile social policies with economic efficiency by turning them into a productive factor sustaining, instead of weighing on the economy. To achieve this, as the name suggests, the strategy was to invest in people in order to equip them to manage the challenges in the labour market and in life more generally in the context of modern 'knowledge societies' (see e.g., Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017; Hemerijck, 2017; Morel, Palier, & Palme, 2012).

To achieve this goal, investments in the development of people's human capital have become a salient tool. Indeed, to integrate and achieve a stable foothold in 'knowledge economies', education plays an increasingly pivotal role. People lacking post-compulsory education face a significant risk of unemployment or even enduring detachment from labour markets (e.g., Bell & Blanchflower, 2010; Bonoli, 2005; López Vilapana, 2013; OECD, 2019; Scarpetta, Sonnett & Manfredi, 2010). A particularly crucial population for the social investment strategy are children and young adults. Indeed, on the one hand, returns on investments in education seem to decrease rapidly with age (Heckman, 2006). Thus, it is crucial that youth obtain access to education as early as possible. On the other hand, a significant amount of research has highlighted that unemployment spells at a young age have a particularly detrimental and potentially scarring effects that leave long lasting blemishes (see e.g., Bell & Blanchflower, 2010; Bigos *et al*., 2013).

Consequently, many governments have introduced programmes to support youth to manage the often problematic transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education (transition I). Particular attention has been directed towards dual-Vocational Education and Training (dual-VET) systems, which combine in-school theoretical education with on-the-job practical training, as these are deemed to facilitate the even more challenging transition from education to work (transition II) (e.g., Nilsson, 2010; Salvisberg & Sacchi, 2014; Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010; Shavit & Müller, 2000; Stalder, 2012). However, access to dual-VET has become increasingly difficult in countries with a strong dual-VET tradition, such as Germany (Schmidt, 2010) and Switzerland (Höckel, Field, & Norton Grubb, 2009), with the latter including "increased requirements to abide by the school and corporate discipline" (Bonvin & Dif-Pradalier, 2011, p. 9). Therefore, since upper-secondary education has become crucial for professional integration, and dual-VET is supposed to facilitate transition II, programmes facilitating youth who are struggling during transition I to access dual-VET programmes are supposedly politically, highly salient.

However, it is crucial that these programmes also reach out to the most disadvantaged individuals, i.e., those who face the biggest difficulties in entering the market, as their risk of becoming far removed from labour markets and facing social marginalisation is the most significant. Nevertheless, due to a phenomenon called the Matthew effect, particularly these particular individuals may be less able to profit from public resources. Indeed, as the Matthew effect determines, people in a situation of privilege are more likely to benefit more from available resources, compared to their more disadvantaged counterparts. Conversely, people in a situation of disadvantage are less able to benefit from available resources. Robert K. Merton coined the term Matthew effect, introducing the concept into science in 1968. Subsequently, Hermann Deleeck introduced it into the concept in social policy research in 1975.

Considering the salience of human capital development as outlined above, a Matthew effect in dual-VET programmes for disadvantaged youth might have particularly detrimental and long-term repercussions on welfare states and individual well-being. From an individual point of view, this translates into missing out on life-chances and worse integration prospects for the most vulnerable and most in-need individuals, while, from a societal perspective, it translates into significant long-term expenditures in terms of social benefits paid to the excluded person, and lost public revenue that would have been paid by this person in the form of taxes, if professionally active. Given the significant risk of permanent exclusion from labour markets, it is therefore in the interest of public policy to reach out to the most disadvantaged youth, giving them the opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty through better work prospects.

Hence, whereas it would be in the interest of policy makers to limit the Matthew effect in dual-VET programmes for disadvantaged youth as much as possible, social policy research offers reasons to believe that this might not be the case. In the present work, I wish to shed light on the mechanisms underlying and leading to the Matthew effect in public programmes geared towards supporting disadvantaged youth to achieve a dual-VET certificate in Switzerland. The guiding research question is: why and how does the Matthew effect occur in VET programmes for disadvantaged youth? The research approach to answering these questions is an in-depth investigation of two case studies with a critical stance and following grounded theory principles. The main data source are semi-structured interviews with actors deemed crucial to the youth's access to the measures in question, complemented with desk research of primary and secondary sources.

The first selected case is a unique programme implemented in a larger French-speaking Swiss canton. This programme has been set up within the framework of the cantonal social assistance scheme in response to the deteriorating situation of young adults (18–25-year-olds) over several years. Similar to elsewhere in Switzerland, the canton faced a sharp increase in struggling youth since the 1990s, with a rapid increase in youth unemployment and, since the 2000s, an additionally consistent increase in youth among social assistance beneficiaries. A large majority (about 70%) of the young adults who were benefitting from social assistance had not accomplished any post-compulsory education. The lack of upper-secondary education was deemed a major determinant of the deteriorating situation of this age group, and of their difficulties to (re)insert themselves into the labour market. Indeed, being prevented from pursuing education while receiving social financial assistance, youth at the benefit of social assistance without post-compulsory education faced a particularly high risk of remaining locked into a precarious situation (see e.g., Regamey, 2001), such as requiring financial social assistance allocation or (occasionally) participation in the low-skilled jobs sector.

As a response to this undesirable situation, the studied programme was introduced in 2006, first in form of a pilot project and, subsequently, given its satisfactory results, becoming a permanent programme in 2009.[2] The broad objective of this programme is to increase young adults' long term opportunities in the labour market

[2] The programme has been substantially reformed since January 2017, however, for time issues, the present study refers to the measure's set-up previous to that reform.

and supporting their completion of post-compulsory education, with a particular focus on dual-VET. To achieve this, each youth enrolled in the programme receives holistic and individualised support from a coach from a specialised not-for-profit association. This coach accompanies the enrolled youth on an individual basis throughout the entire apprenticeship, offering support on a professional, pedagogical, social, and personal level. Moreover, a scholarship provides for the participants' training expenses and ensures revenue with which to live.

To access this programme, a prerequisite is therefore to have found an apprenticeship position. In order to support the young adults in finding such a position, specific support has been established for beneficiaries of social assistance between 18 and 25 years old who have not accomplished post-compulsory education. Initially, social workers assess the particular social situation of the youth. However, since social workers do not have the necessary resources to support youth throughout the search for an apprenticeship, the cantonal social affairs department has contracted several external organisations offering social insertion measures (SIMs) with which to support the young adults of the target group to find an apprenticeship and access the programme. These contracted organisations are predominantly private, not-for-profit organisations who support people to (re)gain access to the apprenticeship or the labour market. Hence, on the basis of the social assessment, social workers may direct the youth towards such a specialised organisations, wherein they receive more intense and targeted support.

The measures offered by such organisations vary in their foci. Some are more 'low threshold', focusing more on soft skills, self-confidence and regaining a 'working-day rhythm'. Others, those with a 'high threshold', place particular emphasis on cognitive skills and job applications. Generally, all of them involve developing a professional plan, filling learning gaps, and searching for an apprenticeship post, as leading the participants towards an apprenticeship is the core objective for all the contracted organisations. Whereas low threshold measures do not select participants in terms of their distance from the apprenticeship market, high threshold measures are geared towards youth who are already more or less prepared to integrate into the apprenticeship market, and therefore apply quite strict access conditions (e.g., command of the language, no social issues—such as psychological or substance abuse problematics, having a childcare solution in case of children). SIMs' contracts with the cantonal authorities last one year and are renewed on the basis of a success rate which has gradually increased over the years (from 20% to 50%). As the focus in this dissertation is *access* to dual-VET programmes, data collection and analysis is less focused on the programme itself (i.e., once a youth has found a position and is coached throughout the apprenticeship), but is mainly geared towards the 'preparatory phase' (regarding SIMs' activities, in particular), as this has significantly influences the accessibility of the young adults wishing to enrol in the programme.

The second selected case was initiated at a federal level, with the general aim of offering all youth the opportunity to complete post-compulsory education. In 2006, the federal government, the cantons and 'organisations of the world of work' jointly agreed to target an increase in the share of youth holding an upper-secondary education degree, from 90% to 95% by 2015. The early detection of youth struggling with transition I and interinstitutional collaboration were core elements of the measure that was conceptualised in order to achieve the target. While the measure was launched, on a federal level, in 2008, its implementation was delegated to the cantonal level on a voluntary basis. Consequently, each canton could decide whether and how to implement the measure. However, some basic guidelines defined by the federal government had to be respected in order to benefit from the initial federal funding and a regressive financing model during a subsequent consolidation phase. By the end of 2015, the cantons were obliged to take responsibility for the entire financing. Consequently, the various cantonal measures developed in different directions, although commencing from a common foundation.

For the present case study, the selected measure was implemented in a small, affluent Swiss–German Canton as a pilot project in 2009, and became permanent in 2015. The cantonal VET department delegated the measure's implementation to a private association already active in the field of accompanying disadvantaged youth during their apprenticeship, in the form of a public–private partnership. This partnership is negotiated on an annual basis, determining the number of youth the cantonal department will finance and, thus, that the organisation will support in the coming year. The aim of the measure is to support youth (15–24-year-olds) at risk of failing transition I due to multiple difficulties. With a focus on early detection, the measure can begin at the end of compulsory schooling, supporting the youth throughout this transition as well as throughout VET. Throughout this process, the measure offers individualised support, with one reference person for each youth who holistically counsels and addresses the youth towards the appropriate institutions and channels in order to address the various problematics in the form of interagency collaboration. This, it is hoped, will eliminate a revolving door effect, a term which describes a situation in which a person attends public services as an individual seeking help. This can stymy the reception of appropriate support if multiple challenges co-exist: a situation which usually requires a combined approach rather than a 'collection' of individual measures.

The eligibility criteria to access the measure is based on youth's intention and ability to complete an upper-secondary education, while facing multiple problematics that may put post-compulsory education at risk. Since the measure is voluntary and does not include financial incentives, a certain willingness to cooperate is crucial. However, youth (or their legal guardian) cannot self-announce themselves to the measure, but must be referred through an institution (such as lower-secondary education schools, public employment services, social services, psychological services, etc.) or through VET trainers, should a youth already be enrolled in an apprenticeship but is at risk of an interruption due to multiple problematics. As there is no preparatory phase to help youth access this measure, data collection and analysis for this research focuses on the programme itself, with a backward mapping strategy used to shed light on potential obstacles to the measure's accessibility.

The present contribution is structured as follows. The first chapter situates the work by broadly contextualising the research. First, the development of social policies will be briefly presented in order to understand how we arrived at the present context in terms of social policies. Second, the issue of youth unemployment will be discussed in general terms to identify its specificities, as well as with a particular attention paid to the Swiss context. Third, features of dual-VET systems will be outlined, first generally, then with a focus on the Swiss system, and eventually with a focus on accessibility to the system. Indeed, access to this system also defines the concept of a disadvantaged youth: the more difficulties a youth faces in accessing dual-VET, the more s/he is considered to be disadvantaged. However, the notion of disadvantaged youth is kept intentionally vague, in order to be able to adapt to local contingencies. The second chapter defines the conceptual framework, providing an overview of previous research on the Matthew effect. The third chapter describes the contribution and the methodological approach of this research. Thereafter, we move into the account of the empirical research performed. The fourth chapter presents in greater detail the target group, describing the challenges to integration into the dual-VET market from the perspective of a dozen disadvantaged youth. Throughout this chapter, the definition of disadvantaged youth is further detailed, adapted to the cases studies, and clarified from a situated perspective (the one of the young adults). In the fifth chapter, the results of the first (larger) case study are presented. In the sixth chapter, results of both case studies are presented and discussed together. The seventh chapter discusses the general findings, highlighting contradictions that have been identified during this study. In the conclusion, a few pragmatic policy solutions to reach out the most disadvantaged youth are proposed. Challenges and limitations of the present contribution are then highlighted. Some concluding remarks and suggestions for possible future research complete this work.

1. Contextualising the research

1.1. Evolution of social policies

Social policies have evolved significantly over the years. The role of the state in societies, and how it relates to the economy, is a long-standing and continuous argument. The changing economic situation and the prevailing macroeconomic paradigm in a society have a significant impact on framing these policies, shaping their role and content over the years. In other words, the social consensus regarding the role of the state in relation to the economy changes over time and space. In democratic countries, this consensus determines the frame within which political strategies are obliged to play out. Consequently, social policies are contingent arrangements that result from the translation of this consensus into political strategies. This contingency will affect the type as well as the design of measures, since their tolerability will be evaluated within the context of this more general framework. Knowledge of the context, therefore, is crucial to also understanding policy measures' designs and rationales.

The welfare state has been severely criticised since the mid-1970s. Its legitimacy is particularly thrown into doubt on the basis of arguments addressing excessive costs for public budgets and perverse effects, such as dependency traps, which would induce people to sustain themselves from public support rather than attempting to regain self-sufficiency through employment (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, pp. 7, 9). The aim of this section is to consider the development of the welfare state in Europe and in English-speaking countries from a historical perspective, in order to understand how the current situation developed, and to offer a general overview of the evolution and significant changes in welfare state arrangements. This overview is synthetized in Figure 1, at the end of this chapter (see p. 21).

To provide an extensive and detailed overview of the concept, including the numerous facets and foundations of the different arrangements, is far beyond the scope of this work. Moreover, since the present research does not adopt a comparative welfare state approach, a precise description of the various models or a deeper discussion of its definition is less crucial. What is required to contextualise this work, is to offer a general overview of the development and evolution of welfare states from a historical perspective, particularly with the objective of better understanding its current core components, how these differ from previous arrangements and through what principal processes they have been shaped. Against this backdrop, the aim is to clarify the specific concepts used in the present research, broadly define what is meant when referring to the welfare state or social policies (which will be used as interchangeable terms), and to trace their historical evolution in order to better understand the most recent developments which are of interest in this thesis. The focus will be on 'established welfare states', i.e. (western) European and English-speaking welfare states (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 14). Beginning with a general definition of the concept, this chapter will subsequently discuss the 'predecessor' of welfare states as well as welfare states' early iterations. Thereafter, the focus shifts to "the welfare state as we know it" (Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 1): its 'Golden Ages', centred on passive social policies; its hard times, during which retrenchment was high on political agendas; followed by the recent and current period, with its paradigmatic change, the introduction of an active social policies approach and the social investment strategy.

1.1.1. Definition

The worldwide diffusion of the term 'welfare state' is rooted in Britain during the early 1940s. In the social context of World War II, Britain was, at the time, battling Germany's 'war machine'. In 1941, under the wartime coalition government headed by Winston Churchill, Archbishop Temple coined the term 'welfare state' in an attempt to establish a contrast with the Nazi's 'Warfare State'. Following the 1942 publication of

the Beveridge Report,[3] the term was increasingly related to the definitions outlined in that text (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, pp. 18-19). Consequently, "launched to sustain morale and discipline during a period of wartime crisis, the term subsequently came to be more closely associated with the social benefits that democratic governments hoped to offer once the war was over" (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, p. 19).

When it comes to a broader definition of the concept, however, it is difficult to be as concise. Indeed, it is not an easy task to define what the welfare state is, as highlighted by the long-running, ongoing debate related to this question in social, political, economic and academic spheres (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 13). Within the academic sphere, the concept has been discussed in many different disciplines: "[e]conomists talk about utility, sociologists about wellbeing, and philosophers have focused on the good life", agreement upon a definition of the 'welfare state' has, so far, never been reached among scholars (Greve, 2019, p. 6). Moreover, welfare states are not fixed, but contingent institutional arrangements. Indeed, they vary considerably from one country to another, and went through various developmental stages in response to the changing contexts in which they were embedded, as well as to the various challenges with which they were confronted (Kuhlmann, 2019, pp. 15-16). In other words, conceptualisations of the welfare state are inevitably contingent upon their particular time and context, as well as of the way in which knowledge about welfare states is observed, accumulated and structured by scholars (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, as cited in Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 19). As both future empirical and theoretical developments are likely to further challenge our present conceptualisations, a definitive understanding of the welfare state is, therefore, neither realistic nor desirable (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 19). In a nutshell, the understanding of the concept varies along disciplinary, historical and geographical lines, problematizing the possibility of a generalizable definition (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 13).

Various scholars have, nevertheless, offered a general definition of the welfare state. In very broad terms, Deleeck has defined social policies as "government interventions aiming to maintain, create or change citizens' social conditions of existence and development in relation to general well-being" (Deleeck, 2003, p. 290, as cited in Cantillon, de Maesschlack, Rottiers, & Verbist, 2006, p. 1054, Note 1). A seminal definition is articulated by Briggs:

> "A 'welfare state' is a state in which organized power is deliberately used (through politics and administration) in an effort to modify the play of market forces in at least three directions – first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their work or their property; second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity by enabling individuals and families to meet certain "social contingencies" (for example, sickness, old age and unemployment) which lead otherwise to individual and family crises; and third, by ensuring that all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social services" (Briggs, 1961, p. 228, as cited in Kuhlmann, 2019, pp. 16-17).

King offers a narrower definition, referring to the welfare state in terms of welfare provision, i.e., the role the state plays in guaranteeing a minimum standard of material well-being and insuring the population against various life hazards, such as sickness, accidents, unemployment, and old age (King, 1983, p. 9). Wilensky states that the "essence of the welfare state is government-protected minimum standards of income, nutrition, health, housing, and education assured to every citizen as a political right, not as charity" (Wilensky, 1975, p. 7, as cited in King 1983, p. 12).

Esping-Andersen highlights that the general objective of welfare states has always been less about redistribution of revenues, and more about security and safety: in particular, that a person's social background

[3] Official title: Social insurance and allied services. A governmental report that laid the foundations for the post-war welfare state in the United Kingdom.

should not determine their life chances (Esping-Andersen, 2017, p. 20). Furthermore, Esping Anderson highlights two different ways the welfare state has been approached with: a narrow perspective, and a broad perspective. From a broader positioning, the welfare state is focused upon more general questions of political economy and the state's role in economic management and organisation. Thus issues such as employment, wages and macro-economic steering are considered as concerns of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990/2012, p. 2). Conversely, through a narrower lens, the focus is on social improvement, generally including issues such as income transfers and social services (Esping-Andersen, 1990/2012, p. 1). As Kuhlmann points out, according to this approach, the policy sectors considered as relevant to the welfare state's activities remain unclear and contested. While some policy areas, such as labour market policies, old-age pensions, health- and long-term care policies, social assistance, disability, family and housing policies, gather general consensus among scholars; others, such as education, are more debated (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 16).

Derived from the various definitions on offer, the terms 'welfare state' or 'social policies', as used in this research, denote state interventions aimed at offering all people a minimum living standard by ensuring provision of a certain amount of supplies and services necessary to live in dignity. These interventions can involve monetary distribution (e.g., direct monetary benefit, tax relief), but can also go beyond purely financial concerns (e.g., services, operating social insurances). In this broader definition, education does play a role, as human capital development is a stepping-stone towards ensuring that each individual possesses the cognitive tools necessary to thrive in society, both by increasing economic and social integration. This understanding of social policies also includes activities performed by other actors on behalf of a state, or the delegation of power (e.g., private or subnational entities, such as not-for-profit organisations, cantons or municipalities), as well as a state's possible intake of policies from supranational entities (such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—OECD—or the European Union—EU) (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 14).

1.1.2. From early welfare arrangements to the introduction of a social insurance system

While the origins of modern welfare states emerged in the late 19th century (see, e.g., Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, p. 22), some early welfare arrangements existed long before. In early times, welfare or poverty relief was often provided through families, the church or local communities (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 15; Kuhnle & Sander, 2010, p. 62). Until the Middle Ages, poverty was, therefore, primarily a matter of local concern (Kuhnle & Sander, 2010, pp. 61-63). It was only from the sixteenth century that the broader social ramifications of poverty began to be considered (Marsh, 1980, cited in Kuhnle & Sander, 2010, p.62). The Act for the Relief of the Poor, introduced in England in 1601 by Queen Elizabeth I, is considered an early predecessor of the modern welfare state. This 'Poor Law', administered by local parishes, established a national poor-relief system to support destitute children, and unemployed, 'work-shy', disabled or infirm persons (Kuhnle & Sander, 2010, p. 63).

The Act for the Relief of the poor marks the beginning of a period which is often referred to as 'pre-historic' welfare state, spanning from the 16th century until the 'liberal break' of the 19th century (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, p. 48). Flora and Heidenheimer highlight that "[…] the prehistory of the welfare state is also tied to the emergence of capitalism in sixteenth-century Europe—to a growing labour market, agrarian capitalism, rural unemployment and overpopulation" (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, p. 22). In the pre-historic welfare state period, characterised by the 'Poor Law', European welfare states developed in similar ways. With the development of national states and economies, relief for the poor was generally adopted as a national concern, yet its implementation was delegated to local authorities. The two main aspects of such poor assistance schemes where relief and punishment, with the latter being more important than the former (Flora & Alber, 1982, p. 48). All of this changed when industrialisation, urbanisation and capitalism introduced new, unprecedented social issues which required attention (Kuhnle & Sander, 2010, pp. 61-63).

With the formation of the modern nation state in the 19th century and the advent of industrialisation, significant social, political and economic changes swept through societies, beginning a process that would eventually lead to the development of different structural approaches to the national welfare state. Industrial revolutions transformed the socio-economic underpinnings of the world at an incredibly fast pace, leading to unprecedented levels of wealth and prosperity. However, with the consequent demographic growth and higher life expectancy came increased inequality, particularly stemming from the unequal distribution of this increased wealth. The resulting context is one of increased work-related risks, wealth and inequalities, but also the absence of any labour regulation, allowing child labour and gruelling work schedules. These conditions contributed to the gradual emergence of a range of social legislation at the beginning of the 19th century. Hence, after more than two centuries of the development of similar welfare states across Europe, the 'liberal break' of the 19th century motivated different states to adopt divergent approaches. Indeed, the new ideology of liberalism, wherein individualistic freedom, equality, and self-help were praised, collided with a status of dependence and protection promoted thus far. In general, the common trait of this period was the gradual introduction of a social insurance system that covered four different types of risks: industrial accidents (which often came first), sickness (and disability), old age (and disability, survivors), and unemployment (which often came last) (Flora & Alber, 1982, pp. 48-50).

Germany was a precursor in this respect. In the general context of political demands for changes in regime and social rights in the 1880s, under the leadership of the *Reich* Chancellor Bismark, Germany introduced a compulsory, state-subsidised social insurance scheme for all the workers, in order to calm the threat of an uprising (Kuhnle & Sander, 2010, p. 63). 'The Social Message', distributed to the Reichstag by Emperor Wilhelm I in 1881, established the foundations for what became a piece of innovative social security legislation. Yet, the underlying intentions were very different. Tellingly, "[…] the German Interior Ministry mounted an exhibition at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair under the title, "The German Worker Insurance as a Social Instrumentality" (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, p. 18). Indeed, such legislation was introduced with the aim of "shifting working class loyalties"; however, without success (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, p. 17). Yet, as early as 1889, "the entire structure of Bismarckian social insurance had been established" (King, 1983, p. 7). Similar reforms were introduced to Britain in 1908 and 1911 (King, 1983, p. 7), with the Liberal government's National Insurance Act, passed in 1911 and prepared by Churchill, Beveridge and George. In 1919, Germany once more became a pioneer, as social rights were cemented in the Weimar constitution. However, difficult times were on the horizon, and the mass unemployment of the 1930s arrested these developments to an and brought cutbacks in both Germany and Britain (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, pp. 18-19).

With the gradual introduction of social insurance mechanisms at the end of the 19th century, the outline of a welfare state gradually becomes visible. Yet, it was in the 20th century, with welfare turning into a social right, that governments took increasing responsibility for a broader range of social matters that "came to be a genuine function of governmental activity in Western countries" (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 15). According to Morel, Palier and Palme: "[t]he twentieth century may be called the century of the welfare state. It saw the emergence, expansion and maturation of the welfare state as we know it" (Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 1).

1.1.3. 1930s and the Great Depression: Emergence of Keynesian and productive social policy

In a 1930s Sweden shaped by the Great Depression and a serious fertility crisis, a new approach to social policies began to take shape as two prominent social democrats—Alva and Gunnar Myrdal—proposed a new vision termed 'productive social policy'. This approach conceptualised social policies as a method to efficiently organise production and reproduction, expanding beyond the concept of social policy as the mere provision of individual security and redistribution. To circumnavigate conservatives' discontent regarding the development of more ambitious social policy schemes, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal leveraged the demographic

argument both in terms of the quantity and quality of the population: only through a healthy, educated and reproducing population, could economic productivity be sustained. Indeed, they argued that fertility had already decreased due to various socio-economic struggles induced by industrialisation and rapid urbanisation. In their view, children were no longer perceived as supporting labour in farms, but as an additional cost to families which exacerbated overcrowded accommodation. However, rather than focusing on quantity, the emphasis of this argument lay on the quality of people. Arguing that education and socioeconomic factors, rather than biology, determine the 'quality' of children, public investment into the potential human capital of a population was deemed crucial. To achieve this, investments in "quality day care, education, health care, economic support to families and policies to support women's labour force participation" were viewed as necessary (Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 4). In addition, in order to maintain the population's high level of human capital, Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) and unemployment compensation were also considered crucial (Morel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 3-4).

A vision of social policies as an investment rather than a cost was therefore established in Sweden as early as in the 1930s. Nevertheless, it did not spill over to the rest of Europe at that time. Rather, it was a vision emerging from the United Kingdom (U.K.), defined by the British economist John Maynard Keynes, that inspired macroeconomic policies across industrialised countries and spilled over to shape social policies, particularly determining the primary approach to the welfare state at that time. Like the Swedish 'productive social policy', Keynesianism also emerged in the wake of the Great Depression, however, its impact was significant, inspiring most industrialised countries' macroeconomic policies from the 1930s–1940s, until the late 1970s. Indeed, "Keynesian economic theory offered a new understanding of the causes of slow growth and unemployment, linking them to problems of insufficient demand and of the natural tendency towards cyclical fluctuations of unfettered capitalism" (Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 5). In Keynes' view, governments' economic intervention through monetary and fiscal policies contributed to economic stability. Sustaining purchasing power, welfare spending could offer support, to balance the economies during recessions. Social policy, thus, had a positive economic role to play in that it could function in a countercyclical manner, by maintaining workers' wages in times of recession and, therefore, sustain demand and stimulate growth. Consequently, social policies developed according to a broadly Keynesian economic approach were primarily 'passive' in nature and focused on sustaining and promoting internal demand, particularly through social insurances operating through cash-transfer programmes (Morel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 5-6).

Keynes' approach was similar to the Myrdal's vision in many ways, particularly from the perspective of envisioning a mutually reinforcing relationship between social policy and economic growth, as well as between equality and efficiency. For instance, Keynes also argued that, in order to boost economic growth that would stimulate the expansion of social rights, it is essential to reduce income inequalities and to invest in health and education. Two significant differences between the two visions lie in the target population and in the time horizon they address. Regarding the former (target population), the progressive Swedish vision promoted female labour market participation, gender equality, and children's wellbeing and social rights. Keynesianism, on the other hand, was "as much progressive in design, based on organised labour support and class compromise, as it was conservative in intent" (Hemmerjick, 2012, p. 39). Indeed, this approach held the traditional family at its core. as well as the male breadwinner model, thus focusing on men's employment opportunities and social rights. Women and children, consequently, benefitted from social policies only through their relationships with a male breadwinner. Regarding the latter divergence (time horizon), while the Myrdal's approach offered a vision of social policies as an investment, with the consequent returns also in the future, Keynesianism is, rather, primarily concerned with returns in the present, focusing on stimulating internal demand and addressing issues such as inequality, inequity and other contemporary challenges with an immediate approach (Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 6).

Somewhat later, while World War II (WW-II) was still wreaking havoc across the world William Beveridge established the social security system subsequently often called 'from the cradle to the grave' in his report published in 1942. Here, the state would support citizens from birth to death. Beveridge directed his proposal towards the promotion of solidarity and towards "bringing institutions and individuals into partnership with the state, in a common condemnation of 'the scandal of physical want'" (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, p. 19). More generally, during the 1940s and 1950s, Britain expanded its welfare state significantly, as "intellectual conceptions formulated primarily by academic social scientists [such as T. H. Marshall and Richard Titmuss] had an important impact on the development of social policy institutions" (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1982, p. 20).

1.1.4. Post-WW-II–1970s: The 'Golden Age' of the welfare state

The period often called the *Trentes Glorieuses* coincides with what is also described as the 'Golden Age' of the welfare state. This period is characterised by strong economic growth, almost full employment and traditional 'passive' social policies that focused on the provision of individual security and redistribution. During this period, marked by equality of access to resources and revenue, the consumer society emerged. Due to the conditions of the Cold War and relatively closed economies, substantial economic growth, combined with the desire for peace and to defeat the Soviet welfare systems, enabled the expansion of welfare states (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 15). Social policies adopted a de-commodification role,[4] with the objective of securing a dignified and economically sufficient existence for those who did not benefit from the operations of the market. According to Bonvin and Dahmen, the proliferation of social insurance mechanisms after WWII is emblematic of this period (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 8). Indeed, the prime role of these traditional welfare states was to 'step in', offering monetary compensation should an individual be no longer able to provide for their family due to some sort of life contingency, such as job loss, sickness, disability, old age, or death (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 15).

During this period, the relationship between the economy and social policies was characterised by a division of tasks between market actors—who were supposed to generate economic prosperity—and social policy actors—charged with reducing the inevitable inequalities generated by economic competitiveness and maintaining consumption capacity (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 8). According to Jessop, the Keynesian welfare state of the *Trentes Glorieuses*, therefore, combined social legitimacy and economic function within social policies. On the social level, social policies' legitimacy is rooted in their role in decreasing the social inequalities caused by the market. On the economic level, their function was to reinforce the purchasing power of the beneficiaries (Jessop, 2002, as cited in Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 8). A virtuous circle between efficiency (economic growth) and social justice was therefore characteristic of social policies during the era of the *Trente Glorieuses* (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 8).

An exception to this picture of rather passive welfare states are Scandinavian countries, in particular Sweden and Denmark. The social-democratic governments who were in power in these two countries during the years following WWII were obliged to develop a social security system that addressed the demands of working-class movements, while also taking into account the exigencies of a competitive market economy. In line with Sweden's forerunner role in active social policies since the 1930s, by the end of the 1960s Scandinavian countries had already developed, beside ALMPs, an extensive childcare facility system aimed at allowing mothers to integrate into the labour market (Bonoli, 2017, p. 67).

[4] According to Esping-Andersen's seminal definition, "de-commodification occurs when a service is rendered as a matter of right, and when a person can maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market" (Esping-Andersen, 1990/2012, pp. 21-22).

1.1.5. Mid-1970s–mid-1990s: Uncertain times for the welfare state

The petrol chocks of the 1970s (1973 and 1979) unsettled the world order in many ways. The resulting inflation and growth in unemployment put an end to full employment as well as the link between unemployment and curbs on production. If the stable economic growth of the *Trentes Glorieuses* allowed for the development of a social insurance system, the economic slow-down after the petrol chocks arrested this development. The economic crisis placed de-commodifying social policies and Keynesianism's demand-sided approach under attack from advocates of neoliberal theory. Indeed, in a context wrought by stagflation (a combination of stagnation and inflation), Keynesian theory was not capable of responding to, nor explaining, the simultaneous rises in unemployment and inflation (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, pp. 8-9; Hemmerijck, 2012, pp. 39-40; Morel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 7-8). In addition, with the end of full employment, social protection no longer served as a temporary support with which to overcome a temporary life contingency, but became a possibly enduring situation. Social protection was also seen as the very cause of this endurance, as the generosity of public support was seen to be hampering individuals' motivation to seek revenue from the market to provide for their own economic sustainment, a phenomenon termed the dependency trap (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, pp. 8-9; Esping-Andersen, 2017, p. 19; Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 7).

As a response, neoliberals promoted a supply-sided economic paradigm, which characterised social policies as "a wasteful cost and as hampering economic growth" (Morel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 2). Within this paradigm, social policies were no longer perceived as a contribution to economic growth: instead of stimulating economic growth and promoting political and social stability, proponents of neoliberalism were suddenly depicting social policies a cost that negatively affects economic competitiveness (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 7; Morel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 2, 7). Hence, there was no longer room for the idea of a complementary relationship between economic efficiency and social justice, as the Keynesian paradigm envisioned (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 9).

The new macroeconomic paradigm emphasised budgetary rigour, wage restriction, monetarism and corporate competitiveness. For neoliberal supporters, inequality is inherent in markets and necessary to motivate economic actors. The Keynesian view—that there is no trade-off between social security and economic growth or between equality and efficiency—was, therefore, firmly refuted (Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 7). Furthermore, the relationship between the economic and social spheres was essentially inversed: it was no longer the economic system and free markets, producing inequality, who have to justify their existence with remedies brought by social policies, but, on the contrary, it became the welfare state who was obliged to justify its costs. Claiming that the welfare state entails excessive costs and encourages undesirable behaviour, neoliberal proponents began calling for its dismantlement in order to safeguard the states' financial durability (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, pp. 8-9).

Therefore, these new economic conditions sparked an attack on Keynesian theory by neoliberal proponents that induced a shift in the macroeconomic paradigm, from Keynesianism to monetarism (Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 7), leading to a new era of social policies. In addition, conventional welfare state arrangements were placed under increasing pressure by fundamental changes in the society. The transition to post-industrialism—including the significant change to labour markets that skewed towards a more highly skilled workforce—changing demographics and family structures, all induced significant changes. Indeed, these resulted in 'new social risks': new needs stemming from single parenthood, work and family life reconciliation, care for frail relatives, insufficient social security coverage primarily due to lack of continuous careers and more precarious forms of employment contracts and possessing low or obsolete skills (see Bonoli 2005; Bonoli, 2013, pp. 15-17). These new circumstances were no longer compatible with the post-war 'passive' social policies which were primarily based on the male breadwinner model. Consequently, this turmoil challenged the structure and content of established welfare arrangements (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 15).

In the context of such novel socio-economic conditions, the restructuring of welfare states was placed high on the governmental agendas of the time. Welfare state retrenchment and, more generally, cutbacks in the role of states perceived as too costly and inefficient, began to emerge more prominently in various discussions (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 15; Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 7). Defending against these attacks, supporters of the welfare state at that time adopted for a long time a defensive mindset, focusing on preserving previously acquired rights. Thus, the argumentation was not geared towards the defence of the economic legitimacy of welfare states but, rather, towards their necessary contribution to social justice and human rights. From this perspective, the focus is not on justifying social policies' costs in terms of economic profitability, but in terms of its contribution to a more just and equal society (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 9).

The neoliberal pressure to shift the focus towards the supply side of labour markets also gained ground in social policies. Instead of a simple cutback, a new role of social policies started to emerge on the horizon: from the passive role of safeguarding individuals' subsistence and purchasing capacity in case of a loss of income from the market economy, social policies turned into active tools to help individuals regain a foothold in the market. Moreover, their objective was to roll back the role of the state and place social responsibility on the shoulders of other actors, such as the market, the family or community associations (Morel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 7-8). In Morel, Palier and Palme's terms: "[w]hile social policies were not dismantled as such, a new orientation towards *activation* was given to social policy. Less emphasis was placed on providing income security and more focus was placed on providing incentives (in a more or less coercive fashion) to return to the labour market" (Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 8). Thus, with economic austerity, the end of full employment, and high-skill intensive labour markets on the economic side of the coin, and the emergence of new social risks and demographic, and familial changes on the social side of the coin, *active* social policies were introduced alongside the existing passive legislation. However, as Morel, Palier and Palme emphasise, the focus lay more on the 'active' rather than on the 'social' aspect of such policies: the focus was primarily to get people back into work, with less emphasis on quality of jobs or people's preferences.

Other than active social policies, there are many other labels attributed to this fundamental shift. For instance, derived from the U.S., the term 'workfare state'—a clear juxtaposition to the term 'welfare state'—indicates the fundamental connection between social benefits (welfare) and work which lies at the core of this new vision. In Peck's terms, "[t]he essence of workfarism […] involves the imposition of a range of compulsory programs and mandatory requirements for welfare recipients with a view to *enforcing work while residualizing welfare*" (original emphasis) (Peck, 2001, p. 10). Thus, the system's logic, structure, and dynamics are revised in order to maximise welfare recipients' participation or, ideally, reintegration into the workforce. This involves the renowned strategy of combining 'carrots and sticks': providing welfare beneficiaries with work, job-search programmes or similar programs, while simultaneously threatening them with benefit cuts should anyone not comply with the work-related requirements (Peck, 2001, p. 10). In general terms, the underlying social policy principles move, therefore, from the "needs-based entitlements and universality" of the welfare state, to the "market-based compulsion and selectivity" of the workfare state (Peck, 2001, p. 12). Other terms used for this fundamental shift in social policy are, for instance, 'welfare-to-work', 'work-first', 'work not welfare' or 'activation' policies or programmes. Beyond the different labels and names, these approaches can be traced back to a common purpose of policy reforms that "strengthened conditionality of benefit entitlements and increased work as well as activation obligations of benefit recipients" and broadened the target groups of such policies (Caswell, Kupka, Larsen, & van Berkel, 2017, p. 3).

Interestingly, as Brodkin highlights, while the rhetoric of workfare in the U.S. has an *enabling* character—"facilitating individual efforts to participate in the labour market and through that achieving social inclusion"—it conceals a "*regulatory* project, one that uses state policy to 'regulate the poor' and pressure them into bad, possibly exploitative jobs or worse" (Brodkin, 2017, p. 37). In other words, a somewhat socially disciplining mechanism seems central to such policies. This is particularly interesting from a historical perspective. Indeed,

Wyss highlights that the concept of workfare is nothing new, but can be understood as a new version of the mid-16th century British 'Work Houses' that expanded throughout the European continent around 1600. Such houses were introduced during the early days of industrialisation, encouraging the strengthening of capitalism by punishing 'insubordinate' people. These people, having been evicted from the land they had previously farmed to create space for the newly emerging textile industry, may have opted for vagrancy, poaching, or begging rather than offering their labour to the textile industry owners; these activities were punishable. Implementing the punishment, the 'insubordinate' in the work houses were subjected to hard labour and to a process of socially disciplining. However, even more interestingly, Wyss highlights that the work houses, as much as current workfare, were not only used to discipline and to punish the 'insubordinate' people inside the houses, but also to discipline, by the mean of deterrence, those outside the houses. With the threat of a work house looming large, citizens were therefore easier to obtain for the back-breaking work in the manufactory and, later, factory industries, or, alternatively, to control, particularly in case of mass unemployment. Hence, ultimately, it was also a method to enforce, in Weber's terms, the 'capitalism ghost' (Wyss, 2007/2020, pp. 10-11).

1.1.6. Mid-1990s–nowadays: The social investment approach

The neoliberal restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s in Europe resulted in a more market-oriented capitalism that helped to resolve the most pressing economic problems, such as unemployment, inflation and public deficit. However, this came at an exceptionally high price for society. Indeed, those decades witnessed a raise in income inequality, polarisation and poverty rates, including a particularly worrisome gradual increase in child and in-work poverty. The increasing problem and cost of social exclusion, partly due to the worsening of the conditions of the most disenfranchised, was also part of the picture (Bonoli, 2017, p. 68; Hemerijck, 2012, p. 45; Morel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 8-9). As a consequence, by the end of the 1990s, "political disenchantment with neoliberal policy measures began to generate electoral successes for the center-left" (Hemerijck, 2012, p. 46). Many newly elected European politicians strongly believed that the best option for most European welfare states was to transform the passive benefit systems into "activating, capacity building, social investment states" (Hemerijck, 2012, p. 46).

In the late 1990s, the role and shape of the welfare state, as well as its relationship to the economy, was therefore revisited once again. Indeed, various attempts were made to redefine the principles, goals and instruments of the welfare state, in order to be able to address the new socio-economic challenges stemming from the developing post-industrial economies (Morel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 8). However, while the attempt to redefine social policies matured out of a critique of neoliberal policies, its proponents partially relied on the neoliberal critique of the traditional welfare state. Thus, after a mainly defensive strategy adopted since the beginning of the attacks in the 1970s, the argument of the second half of the 1990s conceded to these same, neoliberal, criticisms. In a nutshell, it was proposed to reform welfare states in order to ensure that social policies ceased to be a cost to public finances and, instead, actively contribute to the economy, thus representing an investment for the state. In this way, the focus of the debate shifted from defending the role of the welfare state as contributing to a more equal society, to re-establishing the economic legitimacy of welfare states (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, pp. 9). Hence, approximately 60 years after the Myrdal's introduced the idea in Sweden, the end of the 1990s saw other academic and political communities embarking on the journey to adopt a vision of social policies as an investment rather than a cost. The Nordic model attracted interest particularly due to its promises to reconcile economic growth, social justice and demographic equilibrium (Bonoli, 2017, p. 68).

The Keynesian welfare state was therefore abandoned, as its effectiveness could no longer be guaranteed and social policies were required "to respond to a radically changed economic and social order" (Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 8). However, rather than simply dismantling the costly welfare state, as requested by neoliberals, another

form of social policies, whose positive contribution to the economy could be demonstrated even to neoliberal partisans, emerged. The proponents therefore attempt to take into account neoliberal criticisms of the welfare state by proposing a series of reforms. The objective is no longer to save the Keynesian welfare state, with its emphasis on passive social protection schemes—in this they ascribe validity to the neoliberal critique—but to propose a new model, one capable of reinstating the virtuous circle between economic efficiency and social justice, stressing the productive potential of social protection policies (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 10). Indeed, the proponents of this new approach refute the neoliberal idea that social equity and economic efficiency are necessarily bound through a trade-off. Instead, a vision emerged in which social policies were viewed as a productive factor, instead of a burden on the economy: "[s]ocial policy provisions are viewed as investments, potentially enhancing both social protection and productive potential" (Hemerijck, 2012, p. 46). The proposal, this time offered by welfare state supporters, was to turn the virtuous cycle away from demand—as was the case under Keynesianism—and towards an offer strategy. Central to this was the postulation that better trained people, whose access to the labour market is facilitated, will contribute to the growth of the economy and jobs (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, pp. 7-10, 12; Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 8). In a nutshell, the role of social policies shifted from functioning as a buffer into a productive factor.

Central to this reform is the shift from 'repairing' to 'preparing': instead of repairing difficulties or interruptions of employment that have already occurred, policies should prepare individuals for the possible challenges encountered on labour markets (Morel *et al.*, 2012). With this reinterpretation of the role of welfare state arrangements, the main function of social policies shifting from compensating old social risks that have already materialised, towards anticipating (and possibly preventing) the materialisation of old *and* new social risks, ensuring everyone's capacity to integrate into labour markets and participate to the productive effort. It is not about de-commodifying citizens anymore (providing the means of subsistence outside of the market), but about re-commodifying citizens (returning them to the market) by empowering them in a way to make them better equipped to satisfy their needs through the market (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 9; Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 18). This would allow social policies to better address the aforementioned 'new social risks'. At the same time, the attempt was made to adapt social policies according to the new economy that emerged during the transition to post-industrialism, which was substantially different from the post-war economy. Since post-industrial economies primarily require a highly skilled workforce, they are often referred to as 'knowledge economies'. As the name suggests, such an economy principally relies on knowledge, which is considered to drive productivity and economic growth, while, at the same time, inducing change and innovation. The workforce required by such an economy is highly skilled and educated, able to constantly adapt to the rapidly and constantly changing needs of the labour market, but also to lead innovation and, therefore, stimulate economic growth and employment creation (Morel *et al.*, 2012, pp. 6, 9).

To achieve these objectives, the social investment approach principally relies on three pillars. First, to invest in human capital development, with a particular focus on early childhood education and care, but also more generally on education and life-long learning. Second, to enable the efficient use of human capital, as the unequal distribution of opportunities may also result from the unequal distribution of cultural capital between families. It is therefore necessary to intervene prior to the school system, to be able to equalise as much as possible, children's cultural resources. Third, fostering greater social inclusion by reintegrating unemployed people, as well as facilitating access to the labour market for groups who have been traditionally excluded. Thus, possible tools could include supporting women's and lone parents' employment, ALMPs, specific labour market regulation forms and social protection institutions promoting flexible security (i.e., flexicurity) (Bonvin and Dahmen, 2017, pp. 125-127; Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 2). To sum up, the instruments of this 'new welfare state' stress investments in human capital development, highlight the role of social services over cash transfer and require a more active role on the part of welfare recipients (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 19). However, if most contemporary welfare states align on the necessity of activation, the specific strategies vary and not all respond to the exigencies of the social investment state (Bonoli, 2017).

As this discussion has so far shown, the primary goal of social policy shifted from the provision of social security through monetary redistribution to establishing equality of opportunity through human capital investments, allowing individuals to adapt more flexibly to the requirements of labour markets. Long term investments in education, training, family policies, women and, particularly, children (an exceptionally profitable target group) should generate productive citizens, while those who failed in the present (unemployed, poor and people possessing superfluous skills in the labour markets) are to be activated in order to increase their employability in the future (Nadai, 2017, p. 79). With a focus on activation instead of de-commodification, the social investment state therefore aims to transform citizens into robust actors in the market while emphasizing individuals' self-responsibility. The production of human capital becomes the central dimension orienting educational and social policies. According to this approach, maximising the use of the productive potential of citizens, economic growth, and the increased competition are macro-economic objectives. At the micro level, the aim is increasingly 'employability', i.e., the general inclusion of citizens in labour markets. Education, in the sense of acquisition of skills, is therefore functionalised to support this new orientation towards the promotion of employment. Thus, in this new approach, education is a clear social policy. Concerns regarding economic growth and securing future pension funds in aging societies are central. This leads to an economised perspective of the meaning and the purpose of educational qualifications (Otto, 2017, pp. 108-109). This new version of the welfare state, therefore, introduced a "strong responsibilisation of individuals, who are no longer simply passive beneficiaries of social policies, but actors fully mobilised for their employability promotion" (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 13).

This shift from passive to active social policies is not supported by a theoretical consensus. Indeed, it has been termed in various ways, such as the social developmental welfare state, new welfare state, active or social investment welfare state, the enabling state, inclusive liberalism, flexicurity, Third Way, or the LEGO™ paradigm (see e.g., Bonoli, 2013, p. 1; Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 10; Jenson, 2012, p. 63; Morel *et al.*, 2012, p. 1). Consequently, the social investment 'label' is often used to discuss different underpinnings and for different purposes (see e.g., Bonoli, 2013, pp. 11-21; Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 13; Jenson, 2012, pp. 81-82). Generally speaking, these different approaches are more oriented towards re-commodification (neoliberal values generating activation) or towards de-commodification (social democratic values providing protection). According to Jenson, it is a 'quasi-concept', whose imprecision allows building coalitions around the objective of its promotion (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 13). Indeed, "policy communities can appeal to one version or the other, or even combine the two, mixing and matching as needed" (Jenson, 2012, p. 82). However, beyond these varying facets, the underlying argument of this new understanding of social policies is the emphasis that social policies should place on employment (Bonoli, 2013, p. 1). In line with Morel, Palier and Palme's suggestion (2012, p. 14), the term social investment perspective, approach or strategy will be used in this research to refer to this new social policy approach that emerged in the late 1990s.

The economic and financial crisis that shook economies all over the planet in 2007/2008 constitutes an additional challenge, bringing along new pressures for national welfare states, as well as intensifying and accelerating existing structural problems. Increasing forced migration and other challenges may also have a decisive impact on the further development of welfare states (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 15). However, both retrenchment and social investment persisted throughout the crisis (Kuhlmann, 2019, p. 19). In addition, the current difficult economic situation that is emerging on the horizon, particularly as a consequence of the lockdown necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic, will induce new, important social and economic pressures that may impact welfare arrangements. Nevertheless, this significant historical page has yet to be written.

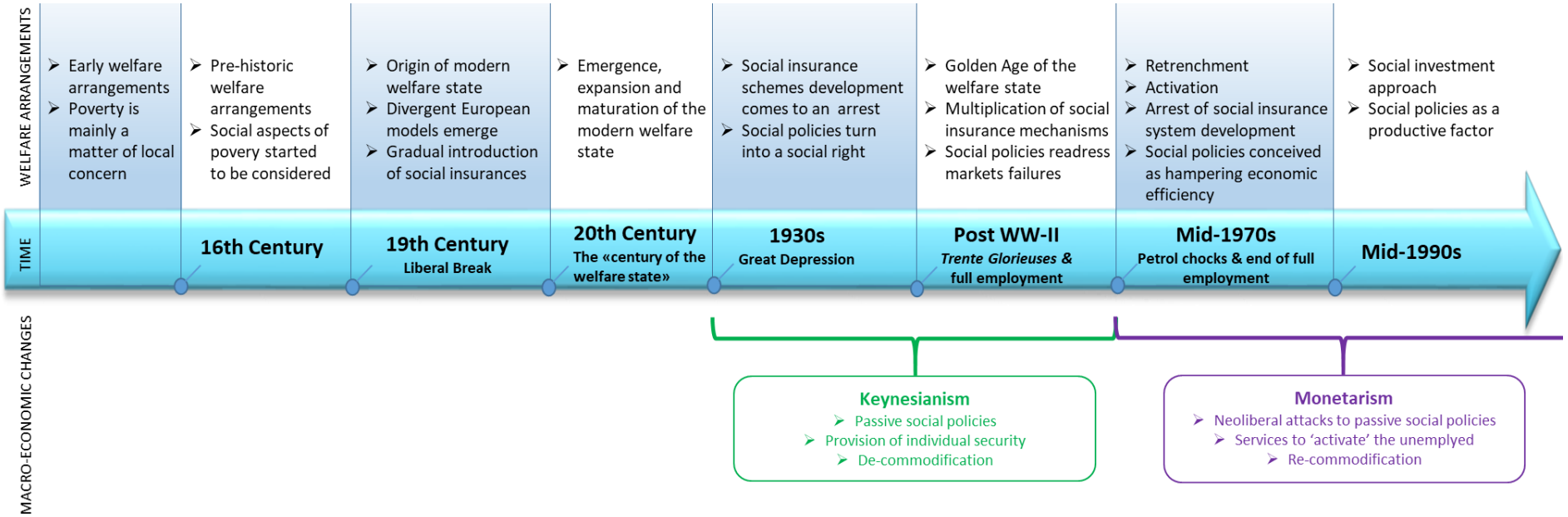


Figure 1: Development of social policies

Source: Author

1.2. Defining disadvantaged youth

Youth, or young adults, are here understood to be those in the age-span in which it is likely to be in the phase of transition I, and, consequently, those most commonly addressed by second chance policies, i.e., people aged between 14 and 25 years. The notion of disadvantage is certainly a more general and difficult term to define. According to the third edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2017), it may be defined as either an "absence or lack of advantage; the state or quality of being in an unfavourable position, esp. relative to another person or thing" (definition 2), or as "a condition, circumstance, etc., that reduces the likelihood of success or effectiveness; an unfavourable or detrimental feature; a handicap" (definition 3).

In line with the former definition, it is interesting to highlight that the Latin root of the prefix 'dis' in the word *dis*advantage, has a privative sense, meaning 'not': disadvantage indicates a state of a missing advantage or, more generally, of missing something. As Dean argues of the term 'social disadvantage', the condition most commonly associated with this notion is poverty. If disadvantage is equated with poverty, then it could be argued that it indicates a lack of wealth (Dean, 2016, p.3). However, in "*Disadvantage*", Wolff and de-Shalit argue that disadvantage, although often associated with poverty, is more multifaceted and "plural in nature", including, for instance, education or even social norms and values. Indeed, interestingly, aiming to provide policy makers with an egalitarian theory that can be applied to actual social policy, Wolff and de-Shalit propose a combination of both material and relational equality, hence including not only how governments treat their citizens in distributional terms, but also how citizens treat each other (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007, pp. 4-6).

What emerges more generally from both definitions in the OED is that disadvantage is a relative term: one is disadvantaged in comparison with "another person or thing" (definition 2), or relative to "the likelihood of success or effectiveness" (definition 3). Consequently, in a context where resources are limited, it seems plausible to state that there will always be someone that is relatively more disadvantaged than others. However, the intensity or degree of disadvantage may vary. The fairer a society, the more indiscernible and futile the degree of disadvantage between individuals. Concerning the relativity of disadvantage, Wolff and de-Shalit go one step further, claiming that by relating disadvantage to access to specific goods, people are placed in relation one with another and that the advantaged create or at least tolerate the disadvantage of the others. Additionally, they also assume that the situation of the disadvantaged is not "a natural outcome of some inevitable 'law of nature' […] but rather has to do with the social and political institutions in which they happen to live" (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007, p. 8). In other words, contextual factors play a crucial role in the definition and creation of disadvantage. It is, therefore, not only a relative term but also a contingent term, a social construct that varies depending on the setting in which it is analysed, such as, for instance, geographical, historical, or cultural contexts.

In the context of the present research, the focus is the multifaceted, relative, and contingent character of the notion. In general terms, it is best associated with the concept of opportunity: disadvantage indicates a condition in which a person is in an unfavourable position due to the lack of opportunities, which reduces their likelihood of success or effectiveness regarding a given objective. In an ideal world, in which disadvantage would not exist, everyone would have access to opportunities according to her or his situation, presupposing opportunities as infinite. However, since we do not live in an ideal world, and opportunities are in fact limited, the principles according to which these opportunities are distributed indicate who is more (i.e., fewer opportunities) and who is less (i.e., more opportunities) disadvantaged. The crucial point is, therefore, to understand what principles and factors influence the fact of being offered more or fewer opportunities. The relative and contingent character of the notion therefore returns to play: to understand the factors and principles that determine access to opportunities, it is necessary to clearly define the field of interest or the object of study, as well as its ultimate objective. The focus in this dissertation is on the Matthew effect in dual-VET programmes in Switzerland; in other words, the opportunity to access dual-VET programmes. Since the

objective of such programmes is to support youth to find an apprenticeship post, the notion of disadvantage must be understood relative to the likelihood of success, or the opportunity structure in terms of access to the dual-VET market. *Dis*advantage in this context is, therefore, related to the lack of training opportunities. Consequently, to define the notion of disadvantaged youth for the present work, it is necessary to shed light on how the dual-VET market functions and which criteria are perceived as positive and which are perceived as negative for this market (section 1.4.). Thereafter, it will be clearer who has more and who has fewer access to opportunities in this particular field of interest. However, in this research, the notion of disadvantaged youth is kept voluntarily somewhat lose, in order to allow for adaptation to local contingencies and the peculiarities that emerge inductively from the empirical study. Therefore, the overview of the functioning and selectivity of the dual-VET system presented in section 1.4. is not intended as a fixed definition, but as an indication of crucial factors that contribute to the determination of the multifaceted concept of disadvantaged youth in the present study. A final important aspect to highlight is that in this research the focus is on 'trainable' or 'employable' youth only. This, in turn, excludes those who are or should be the target group of disability insurance, as they are unavoidably excluded from the regular market.

1.3. Youth unemployment

To tame unemployment is a key task of governments, as it is essential to the general well-being of societies in many ways. Indeed, the impact of unemployment goes far beyond the more obvious economic sphere and negatively affects both the individual as well as society as a whole. On the societal level, for instance, rising unemployment appears to lower well-being more than rising inflation. From an individual perspective, other than lowering happiness and self-esteem, unemployment may have serious detrimental repercussions for people's mental and physical health (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, pp. 13-14). Moreover, increasing unemployment rates often accompany an increase in crime rates, potentially establishing a vicious cycle, as involvement in crime reduces employment prospects, which in turn increases the likelihood of committing crime (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, pp. 16-18).

Unemployment spells are particularly harmful, for both the individual and for the society, for young people (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, pp. 28-29). Youth (15-24-year-olds) unemployment has been a concern for governments of industrialised countries for many years. In many European countries, it soared to unprecedented heights in the mid-1970s and the 1980s (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, p. 2; Nilsson, 2010, p. 262). According to Furlong, this resulted in increasingly complex and protracted school-to-work transitions (Furlong, 2009, pp. 343-344). Another surge was experienced in the early and mid-1990s, even affecting countries that had managed to maintain a low rate for a long time, such as Denmark and Sweden (and Switzerland, as subsequently discussed). Ever since, youth unemployment figures have remained high, but have fluctuated (Nilsson, 2010, pp. 262-263).

Nonetheless, it is normal for youth unemployment to be somewhat higher than the overall unemployment rate (Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010, p. 11). The transition from education to work, usually occurring between 15 and 24 years, represents a delicate moment for youth, characterised by an accrued risk of unemployment (Weber, 2007). Indeed, youth lack the skills, work experience, job search competencies, and, potentially, financial resources to find employment (Verick, 2009, p. 3). Most youth move in and out of the labour market before finding a stable foothold in the market (Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010, p. 19).

The youth unemployment rate is also more sensitive to the economic situation compared to the general unemployment rate. Thus, during economic downturns, youth are particularly affected (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, pp. 17-19; Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010, pp. 11-14; Verick, 2009; Weber, 2007, p. 54). Indeed, since youth are overrepresented among workers holding temporary contracts or among employees of cyclically-sensitive industries, the risk of becoming unemployed increases during periods of economic difficulty (Scarpetta *et al.*,

2010, p. 14). Moreover, when the economy is not performing well, employers tend not to hire new employees, making it more difficult for youth to enter and gain a foothold in the labour market (Verick, 2009, p. 3). Thus, when work opportunities are scarce and competition among jobseekers is high, it is difficult for anyone to find a job, particularly newcomers or low-skilled youth, who are already more vulnerable to unemployment in general (Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010, pp. 4, 9).

However, while the stock of youth in unemployment is generally bigger compared to the general population, its flow is also stronger. Put differently, youth unemployment is generally higher compared to the general unemployment rate, but it is also a highly dynamic type of unemployment, as youth tend to remain unemployed for a shorter duration compared to the general population. When, however, this is not the case, consequences risk being particularly detrimental on both a micro and macro level. Indeed, extended periods of unemployment at young age are particularly detrimental, and extend well beyond merely temporary blemishes, leaving long-lasting scars called scarring-effects (see, e.g., Bell & Blanchflower, 2010; Bigos *et al*., 2013; Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010). Such scarring effects substantially decrease a person's future employability, the gains and quality of employment contracts, and increase the risk of enduring or recurrent dependence on public support. Such long-lasting effects are related to the loss of human capital (the deterioration of skills or loss of professional experience) or signalling effects (unemployment constituting a signal of low productivity). Moreover, such effects seem strongest for disadvantaged youth lacking basic education. The longer the unemployment spell lasts, the more the individual productivity will be affected; in addition, the lower the initial level of qualifications, the longer the scarring effects are likely to last (Scarpetta, *et al*., 2010, pp. 15-16). Some studies, however, have determined that, on average, early periods of youth unemployment have serious negative effects on future incomes, but affect the future risk of unemployment less strongly; what seems to persist are the impacts of lost work experience on wages (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, p. 15). Nevertheless, the negative effects of protracted unemployment spells while young often leave permanent scars, also negatively affecting other outcomes, such as happiness, job satisfaction and health, many years later (Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010, p. 4). It is therefore crucial, both from a societal as well as from an individual perspective, to minimise long-term youth unemployment, particularly for the most disadvantaged among them, who suffer the most from the long-term repercussions of early unemployment.

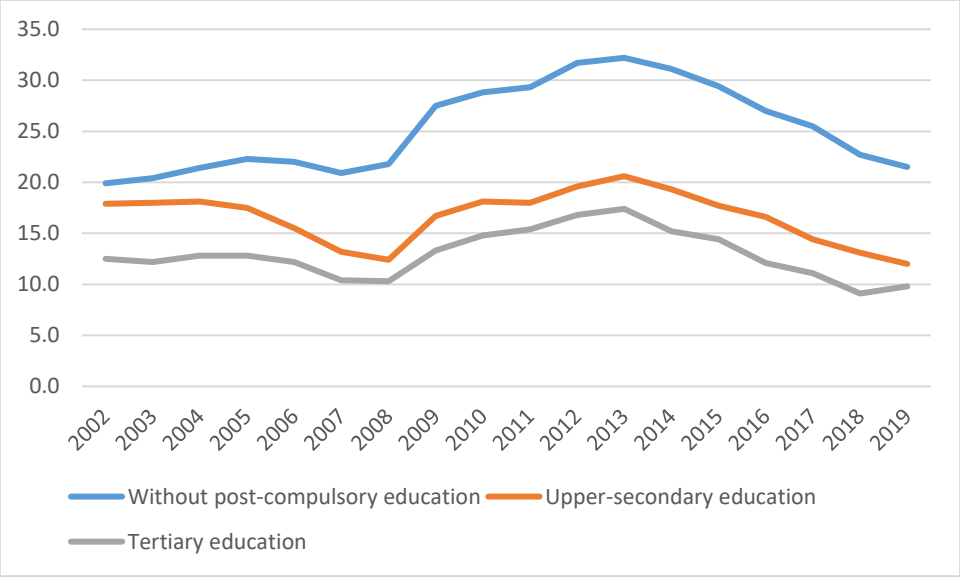
In addition to economic cycles, more general industrial changes have affected the prospects of young people on labour markets in post-industrial countries. Indeed, the changing structures of labour demand affects the amount and type of labour requested most frequently on the labour market (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, pp. 22-23; Perriard, 2005, pp. 10-12). Firstly, technological progress has strongly reduced the general need for human labour (particularly low skilled), as machines replaced several tasks previously performed manually. Secondly, the globalisation of markets has increased concurrence among enterprises and the pressure on them, pushing them to maximise rationalisation in terms of personnel. In order to remain competitive, many firms reduce the number of employees or transferred (part of) their production activities to emerging countries, where labour is cheaper (Bonoli, Pisoni, & Trein, 2017; Perriard, 2005, pp. 10-12; Sheldon, 2008, p. 12). These two mutations induced a third important change: the tertiarisation of labour markets (Perriard, 2005, pp. 12-13; Sheldon, 2002, 2008, p. 12).

According to some scholars, labour markets have become increasingly polarised. In fact, the most affected jobs are routine jobs as those involving non-routine and/or interactive tasks are more difficult to automate or to relocate elsewhere. Routine jobs correspond to jobs paying around the median wage. According to Bell and Blanchflower, this particularly affects youth, because young people are the most associated with jobs with relatively low median wages, entering the labour market through low paying occupations, i.e., where the decline in demand on the labour market has been more significant. Indeed, youth "may aspire to enhance their earnings by moving into better paying jobs. However, the route from lower-quality to better-quality jobs is becoming more difficult in the sense that employment is falling among those jobs paying around the median

wage. Hence the probability of transition to better quality jobs is reduced" (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, pp. 22-23). At the same time, most job-creation has been among high-skilled jobs (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, pp. 22-23; Bonoli *et al.*, 2017; Sheldon, 2002). Given, also, the growth in the service sector, which requires more qualifications compared to jobs in the secondary sector, the number of low-skilled positions has reduced considerably (Sheldon, 2002).

As most post-industrial economies have undergone these structural changes (tertiarisation, globalisation and technological evolution), labour markets are increasingly requiring a skilled workforce (Sheldon, 2002). If lacking education has always been a disadvantaging feature regarding integration into labour markets (Bonoli, 2005), in the modern knowledge societies resulting from these structural changes, education has become an even more crucial requirement for labour market integration. Indeed, the least educated face higher unemployment rates across countries and age groups (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, p. 5). Upper-secondary education has become "generally regarded as the minimum credential required for successful labour market entry and a basis for further participation in lifelong learning" (Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010, p. 16; see also OECD, 2019, p. 66).

Youth without post-compulsory education therefore face great difficulties in finding a job and are at a high risk of poverty (López Vilapana, 2013), risking lifelong or recurrent dependence on public support. Indeed, youth without upper-secondary education simultaneously belong to two vulnerable groups on the labour market: young and unqualified workers. Graph 1 illustrates the unemployment rate of 15-24 year olds by their educational attainment in Europe (EU-28). The graph highlights the generally greater unemployment risk of youth without post-compulsory education, as well as their relative increased vulnerability compared to their better-educated counterparts, since the difference with the other two categories has also increased during the recent period. Moreover, the sharp increase in the youth unemployment rate following the 2007-2008 crisis also shows that youth unemployment is particularly sensitive to cyclical changes.



Graph 1: 15–24-year-olds' unemployment rate by educational attainment, EU-28 (in percentage)

Data source: Eurostat LFS series (lfsq_urgaed)

As well as economic cycles and variations, institutions also play a crucial role in youth unemployment. As young adults occupy a crossroads between education and work, both the educational system and labour market arrangements seem to play a decisive role. From one perspective, educational systems are relevant in terms of the reliability and quality of the skills youth can be expected to master. On the other hand, labour market arrangements determine the permeability of labour markets. Richard Breen focuses on these institutional

features when addressing the large variation in youth unemployment among OECD countries. More precisely, he analyses the degree of labour market regulation—i.e., the possibility for employers to dismiss workers more or less easily—and the education system's degree of signalling power in terms of the clear information it conveys to employers about the qualities of a job seeker (Breen, 2005, pp. 125-126). To facilitate the transition between education and work, the degree to which an educational system conveys specific skills rather than general ones, and the connection between the educational system and employers appears to be significant features. In other terms, the more specific the skills and the closer the connection between education and employers, the easier the transition. In fact, this combination also sends clear signals regarding the potential productivity of a jobseeker, enabling employers to match the correct profile to a vacant position, as it is easier for them to determine *ex-ante* the suitability of an applicant to the available position. These two features are often connected, as countries with educational systems conveying specific skills often also have more defined institutional connections between jobseekers and employers (Breen, 2005, p. 126). Additionally, strict labour market regulation decreases employers' willingness to hire new workforce, due to the difficulty of dismissing workers. This is potentially detrimental for young people since many of them are seeking a first job and generally tend to have little work experience. Therefore, employers in highly regulated labour markets are particularly reluctant to hire young, less experienced workforce, due to the difficulty of dismissing them should the need arise (Breen 2005: 127).

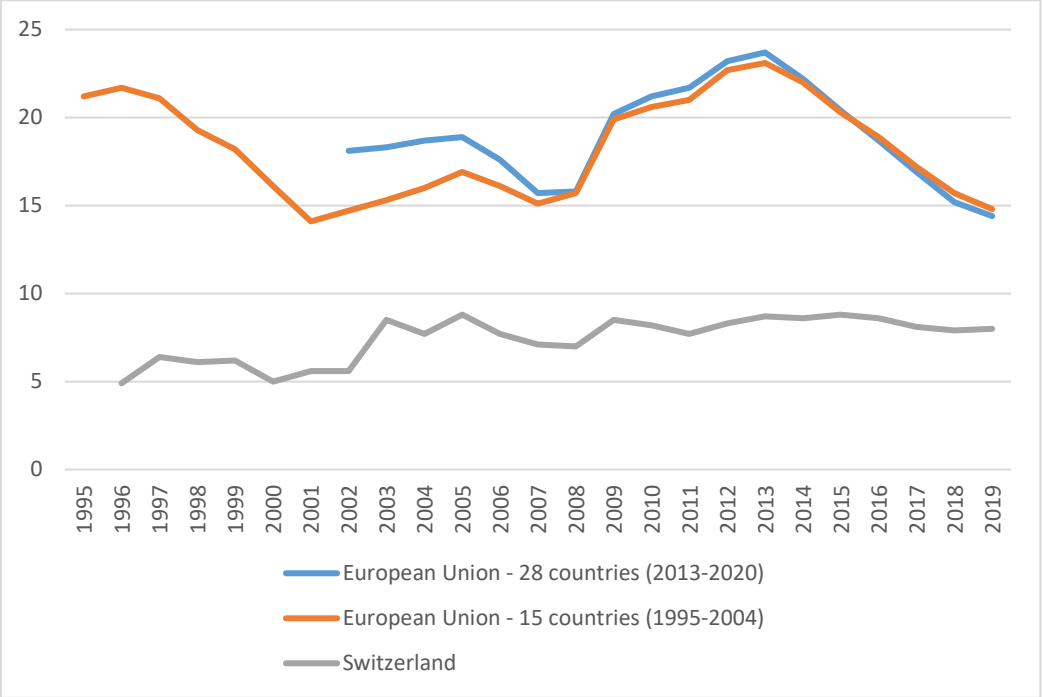
Nevertheless, Breen emphasises that the negative impact of highly regulated labour markets can be counteracted through the increased probability of hiring the right person due to the higher signalling power of certain educational systems (Breen, 2005, p. 127). Indeed, in regulated labour markets, to hire the right workforce becomes even more important as dismissing employees is more difficult. Thus, if the educational system allows employers to estimate the suitability of a young jobseeker more accurately, allowing for a high rate of inflow into jobs, a highly regulated labour market does not hinder the hiring of youth, while it also ensures high persistence in employment. In other words, strong educational signalling allows for a high inflow into jobs, while strong labour market regulation enables high employment persistence rates. In a similar vein, Scarpetta and colleagues argue that "a dual system is an important complement in a regulated labour market (e.g. in Germany, Austria, etc.) in order to secure a successful school-to-work transition for most youth" (Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010, p. 20). However, little regulated labour markets also present some smoothening potential of the school-to-work transition: according to the OECD, "the school-to-work transition is smoother in low-regulated labour markets where 'first jobs', even non-standard ones, act rapidly as a stepping stone to a career" (Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010, p. 20).

1.3.1. The situation of youth in Switzerland

Compared to the broader international context, Switzerland fares quite well both in terms of general and youth unemployment rates. While it registers one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in Europe, Switzerland is not totally immune from these difficulties. Indeed, in the 1990s, Switzerland also struggled with a rapid increase in youth unemployment, in combination with an apprenticeship crisis due to a severe shortage of dual-training positions. This marked the end of a long period of economic prosperity. At the beginning of the 2000s, the situation of youth deteriorated once again, fixing the issue of youth unemployment as a public concern (Weber, 2007, p. 52). Moreover, the tough economic situation of those years coincided with a demographic upsurge between 2003 and 2005, with larger cohorts of youth completing compulsory school compared to the previous years, and a consequent sharp increase in the competition for apprenticeship posts (Weber, 2007, p. 54). On the contrary, the economic and financial crisis that started in 2007/2008, and hit young adults particularly hard in many European countries, was less detrimental than expected for youth in Switzerland. Indeed, due to the reaction to the crisis and desire to prevent an apprenticeship crisis similar as in the 1990s, Swiss authorities introduced several measures targeted at youth that aimed to stabilise the offer of

apprenticeship places (Weber, 2010). However, ultimately, there was little demand for such crisis measures as youth were affected much less than expected.

Graph 2 illustrates the trend of the youth unemployment rate in Switzerland compared to the European Union from 1995–2019. It is evident that the situation in the labour market is more favourable to youth in Switzerland than in the European Union more generally. Moreover, this figure illustrates well that the 2007-2008 crisis has had a limited impact in Switzerland, while it produced a substantial increase in the youth unemployment rate across the EU. However, as the graph also shows, while the labour market situation for youth in Switzerland is generally better than in the EU, youth in the Swiss labour market still face a slow but steadily increasing struggle, whereas youth in Europe fare better than before. Therefore, while the general situation of youth in Switzerland is comparatively quite good and more stable, a general trend of an increased vulnerability of youth over the years seems to emerge in Switzerland.



Graph 2: 15–24-year-olds' unemployment rate, EU-28, EU-15 and Switzerland (in percentage)

Data source: Eurostat (yth_empl_090)

Like elsewhere, forms of atypical (and precarious) employment have increased in Switzerland over the previous decades as a more general trend across all age groups (see, e.g., Bühlmann, 2015). Regarding young jobseekers, some experts have discussed that the 'internship generation'[5] has become a reality in Switzerland, starting from mid-2000 (see Champion, Pisoni, & Bonoli, 2014, p. 21). Indeed, as shown in Table 1, the proportion of temporary employment among this age category is quite high, and has increased disproportionally over the years compared to the general workforce. Nevertheless, this high figure presumably captures the significant proportion of people in the 15-24 age category pursuing an apprenticeship. Indeed, contrary to other countries, youth in Switzerland in apprenticeship positions are registered as being in employment (Sheldon, 2009). Hence, the share of people in this age group holding a temporary contract increases. However, particularly on the backdrop of a generally stable situation for the general workforce, this substantial increase is puzzling. Whereas the hope remains that the increase is due to a boost in apprentices, it is likely that the previously mentioned phenomenon of the 'internship-generation' contributes to this

[5] Youth having to do one or more internships before to be offered a job.

increment. Regarding part-time employment, the increase was substantial for both categories, even more for the whole population than for youth. Underemployment, i.e., the share of workers wishing to work more than they actually do,[6] also increased slightly more for the general category of workers. However, tellingly, the underemployment rate of Swiss youth in 2019 is the highest recorded since 2004. Hence, not only the circumstances of people outside the labour market has deteriorated, but also that for the active workforce, likely increasing competition on the labour market and leaving the more disadvantaged worse off.

	Temporary employment			**Part-time employment**			**Underemployment**		
	1996	2019	≠	1998	2019	≠	2004	2019	≠
15-24 years	44%	51%	+7%	19.1%	27.1%	+8%	5.5%	6.8%	+1.3%
15-64 years	11.9%	12.6%	+0.7%	28.5%	38.1%	+9.6%	5.6%	7.1%	+1.5%

Table 1: Forms of atypical employment in Switzerland

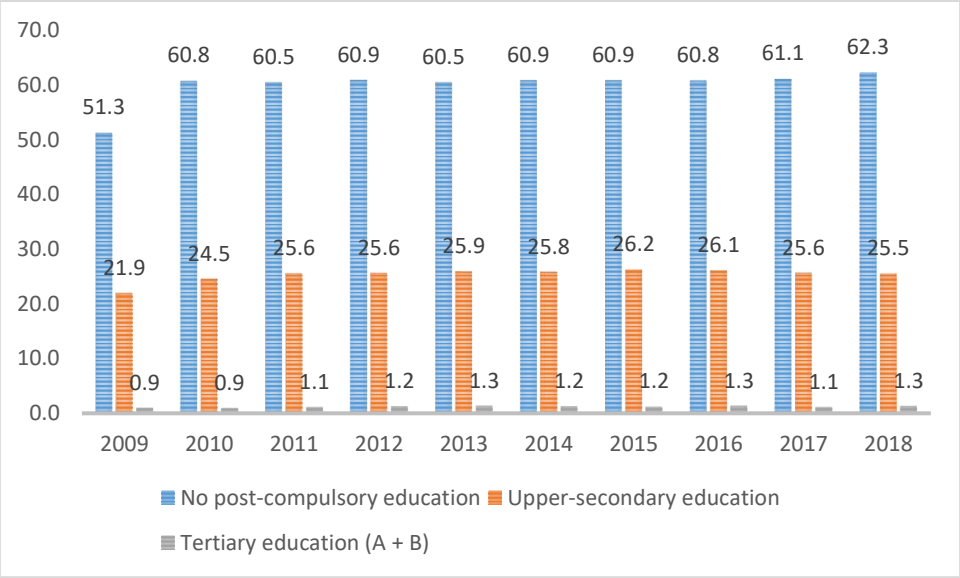
Sources: Eurostat data (temporary employment: lfsa_etgpan; part-time employment: lfsq_eppga); Swiss federal statistical office data (underemployment: Swiss Labour force survey 2004-2019)

The increasing vulnerability of youth in Switzerland is also underscored by the fact that young people claiming social assistance and disability insurance benefits due to psychological reasons has sharply increased (see OECD, 2014). In this respect, some experts have highlighted the role of the fourth revision of the unemployment law in 2011, a measure which substantially limited access to, and the duration of, unemployment benefits for young people. It is plausible that this had the effect of shifting some youth from the unemployment scheme towards the social assistance and invalidity schemes, as well as preventing other youth from registering in placement offices and, therefore, excluding them from unemployment statistics[7] and the services offered by Public Employment Services (PES) (Champion *et al.*, 2014, p. 22; on the reform, see also Tabin, 2017).

In addition, also in Switzerland, as the risk of needing to claim social assistance increases, educational attainment decreases. Persons lacking post-compulsory education are generally over-represented among social assistance beneficiaries, and they are particularly numerous in the 18–25-year age group, as shown in Graph 3. Thus, young adults without post-compulsory education also represent a highly vulnerable group in Switzerland.

[6] As underemployed are counted people who are working and (i) have a normal working time of less than 90% of the normal working time in companies, (ii) who wish to work more, and (iii) who are available to take on work involving a higher occupancy rate within three months (Swiss federal statistical office data, Swiss Labour force survey 2004-2019).

[7] In Switzerland, the unemployment statistics of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) only records unemployed people who are registered in a regional placement office. However, not all unemployed people do register in a placement office or stay registered once their right to unemployment benefits ceases. There is a particular high proportion of young unemployed who do not register (Weber, 2010).



Graph 3: 18–25-year-olds at the benefit of social assistance (in percentage)

Data: Swiss federal statistical office data

Consequently, while the rather low youth unemployment rate suggests a generally good situation for youth employment in Switzerland, job insecurity appears to be a concern for youth in Switzerland and there are signs that there is a minority of youth who significantly struggle to integrate into the labour market. Particularly in the context of the strong signalling power of the educational system (Breen, 2005, p. 131), youth lacking the 'right' signals seem to be at a high risk of becoming far removed from the labour market and, consequently, of remaining unemployed for long periods, thus experiencing the various negative consequences mentioned at the beginning of this section.

1.4. Dual-Vocational Education and Training system

Societies vary consistently in the ways they choose to impart professional skills to younger generations (Nilsson, 2010, p. 253). There exist many different models of vocational education and not all of them have a significant impact on youth unemployment and the school-to-work transition. While the specific terminology varies, a majority of scholars position the various systems on a continuum between market-led and school-based training systems (see e.g., Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Bonoli & Emmenegger, 2020; Nilsson, 2010; Shavit & Müller, 2000). In market-led systems (such as in the United States), training takes the form of non-institutionalised on-the-job training, becoming a tool to complement theoretical-focused educational systems (Nilsson, 2010, p. 253). This has two important consequences. Firstly, training is not formally organized, but depends upon the initiative of each individual. Secondly, this system does not require any obligation for training on the part of the firm. At the other end of the continuum, school-based educational systems aim to transfer vocational skills primarily through school-based VET (Nilsson, 2010, p. 253). However, this educational option is often geared towards students who do not perform well in school (Shavit & Müller, 2000, pp. 35-36). Between these two extremes lies dual-VET, or the apprenticeship system.[8]

The particularity of this educational system is that learning results from a combination of theoretical, in-school classes and practical, in-company training. This institutionalised and structured combination leads to certified and officially recognised qualifications. Another crucial aspect of such systems is the involvement of employers (and trade unions, in some cases). The more employers are involved in determining the curricula of vocational education, the more the conveyed skills will be relevant to the labour market. The high standardization of qualifications, coupled with employers' involvement, has the benefit of giving clear signals

[8] Dual-VET, dual-track VET and apprenticeship will be used as interchangeable terms.

to employers regarding the well-defined and occupational-related skills a person masters, as discussed in the previous section. Thus, employers can have confidence in vocational credentials as being indicative that a person holds specific skills—implying the requirement for less on-the-job training—and can base their hiring decisions on such credentials (Shavit & Müller, 2000, pp. 33-34, see also Breen, 2005).

Moreover, this form of VET transforms young people into 'insiders' rather than 'outsiders' of the labour market, facilitating their labour market access (Nilsson, 2010, p. 263). Indeed, VET, particularly in its dual-track form, has often been praised as a particularly suitable tool to combat youth unemployment and to facilitate school-to-work transitions (e.g., Nilsson, 2010; Salvisberg & Sacchi, 2014; Scarpetta *et al*., 2010; Shavit & Müller, 2000; Stalder, 2012). Among other strategies to counteract social exclusion, the EU has promoted education more generally, and VET in particular (Bonoli & Emmenegger, 2020; Nilsson, 2010, p. 260), particularly regarding its effects on school-to-work transition mechanisms and its ability to counteract the aforementioned detrimental effects on youth of the 2007/2008 crisis (Nilsson, 2010, p. 263).

However, sociologists of education are divided concerning the effect of secondary vocational education on occupational attainment. Some, drawing on human capital theory and in line with the arguments outlined thus far, argue that it is a safety net, enhancing the youth's chances to find gainful employment as skilled workers. Others, relying on theories of class reproduction and social exclusion, argue that it is a mechanism of social reproduction, diverting working-class pupils from higher education and professions (Shavit & Müller, 2000). Shavit and Müller, based on a comparative analysis of data from eleven countries,[9] found that the two effects often emerge simultaneously. Indeed, the safety net effect is strongest in countries where VET is specific and relevant to employers' requirements, and where employers are involved in determining the contents of training. As seen above, these are peculiarities of dual-VET systems. The diversion effect, on the other hand, is strongest in countries with highly stratified educational systems, where pupils are divided early on into different tracks which follow different curricula. This significantly affects access to academic post-compulsory education (Shavit & Müller, 2000, p. 34). As Esping-Andersen highlights, it is generally renowned that early selection in school triggers social selection, whereas integrated lower-secondary schooling systems diminish social origin effects at the transition into upper secondary education (Esping-Andersen, 2017, p. 29). Both Germany and Switzerland,[10] well known for their dual-VET systems, have a mainly stratified educational system.

1.4.1. A brief sketch of the Swiss dual-VET system

Basic vocational education and training is part of the upper-secondary educational options, i.e., it normally follows compulsory schooling (around 15 years of age). In dual-VET, the focus is practice, as the majority of the learning occurs while working in a host company in the chosen field (art. 6 VPETO). Most dual-VET programmes also include courses in industry training centres, to develop complementary practical skills and develop fundamental practical aptitudes related to the occupation (Höckel *et al.*, 2009, p. 11; SERI, 2014, p. 8). Regular dual-VET lasts between three and four years, leading to a federal VET diploma. The 2002 reform of the federal law regulating VET (VPETA), implemented since 2004, introduced a new two-year VET, which is cognitively less demanding and more oriented towards practice, leading to a federal VET certificate (art. 17 para. 3 VPETA). The system is based on a vast range of professions (over 200) and on a high degree of permeability, offering various possibilities after the completion of initial education (SERI, 2014, p. 3). With the reformed law of 2002, the principle of potential upward mobility from all parts of the VET system is actively promoted in order to avoid 'dead-ends', which may discourage many students (particularly the cognitively stronger) from following a VET educational track (Gonon, 2019, p. 48; Höckel *et al*., 2009, p. 19).

[9] Australia, Great Britain, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan and the United States.

[10] Regarding Switzerland, this depends on the canton.

The Swiss dual-VET system is organised through a tri-partite partnership between the federal state, the cantons and 'organisations of the world of work,'[11] who share responsibility for basic VET programmes, and each contribute to the system's financing. The federal level is primarily in charge of the overall strategic management and development of the system. It ensures the planning and strategic development of programmes, issues VET ordinances and is responsible for a quarter of the public expenditure (Höckel *et al*., 2009, p. 14; SERI, 2014, pp. 6-7). The centralised organisation of the system guarantees the maximum possible standardisation of qualifications and is desirable for the mobility of apprentices, both in geographic terms as well as between different enterprises (CSRE, 2010, p. 145). At the federal level, the main body responsible for vocational education is the Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), an office of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER).

While the federal state oversees the system as a whole, the cantons are responsible for the implementation of the federal law, the monitoring of the situation on their territories, and providing the majority of the system's public financing (SERI, 2020, p. 20). Vocational offices are the executive bodies of vocational education at the cantonal level, responsible for the actual provision of the service, implementing the regulations stated by the SERI and supervising the quality of the services provided in their territories (Pedró, Burns, Ananiadou, & de Navacelle, 2009, p. 8). Cantonal implementation guarantees alignment with local job markets and enables interaction with compulsory education, other types of upper-secondary education paths and social and job market services (CSRE, 2014, p. 122). The 26 cantonal offices of vocational education coordinate their activities at the Swiss Conference of the Cantonal Offices of Vocational Education.

Organisations of the world of work and professional organisations operate on a more practical level, mainly concerning curricula and apprenticeships: they organise VET courses, offer apprenticeship positions, and determine both the content of training as well as the national qualification procedures. They contribute to the financing of the system through their services, such as basic groundwork, promoting their professions and running specific training institutes (SERI, 2014, pp. 7, 18). The strong and institutionalised involvement and influence of professional organisations is a distinguishing feature of the Swiss VET system. Indeed, it is particularly strong by international comparison, even compared to countries with a similarly influential dual-track VET system. The support of the world of work is of key importance in order to guarantee that the content and methods of training correspond to the skills required on the labour market, and that the qualifications are accepted by potential employers (CSRE, 2010, pp. 145-146). In this way, the labour market is able to communicate signals regarding the qualitative aspects of a profession and potential need for changes, encouraging timely adaptation in training and keeping them up to date (CSRE, 2014, p. 118).

Another peculiarity of the Swiss educational system compared to most other industrialised countries is the popularity of the dual-VET (Berger, Lamamra, & Bonoli L., 2019, p. 19; CSRE, 2010, p. 112). Unlike in other countries, the dual-track VET system in Switzerland enjoys a good reputation and attracts many young people: it is the most prevalent form of upper-secondary education. Indeed, approximately 70% of youth choose this educational path following compulsory education, with the majority opting for the dual-track system[12] (CSRE, 2018, p. 104; Höckel *et al*., 2009, p. 29; Pedró *et al*., 2009, pp. 6-7; SERI, 2020). Many attribute to this system the fact that Switzerland holds one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in Europe (see e.g., Hoffmann & Schwartz, 2015; Meyer, 2019; Salvisberg & Sacchi, 2014; Strahm, 2010). It is, however, difficult to establish a direct causal link between the dual-VET system and the low youth unemployment rate (CSRE, 2018, p. 116).

[11] This regroups various actors, such as trade or branch associations, social partners, training providers or companies.

[12] The share of youth following vocational or school-based training highly differs along the borders of linguistic regions: in 2018 only 4% opted for a school-based VET in German speaking cantons, whereas in the French speaking cantons they were 23.6% to opt for this path and in the Italian speaking canton even 30.1% (SERI, 2020, p. 11).

However, from the very first steps towards the institutionalisation of the system at the end of the 19th century,[13] the system was created with two clear objectives: one economic and one social. Regarding economic considerations, the objective was to contribute to the competitiveness of Swiss firms by improving the technical skills of workers and artisans (Bonoli L., 2015). Indeed, in 19th century Switzerland, industrialisation and free trade revealed a lack of competitiveness, resulting in plummeting sales volumes (Gonon, 2005). Given the lack of natural resources, it was considered crucial to develop the quality of products in order to withstand competition and enable the Swiss economy to survive in an international context. A strategy to achieve this goal was to improve the skills of the workforce through the provision of training (Bonoli L., 2015; Gonon, 2005, 2019). Along with this economic objective, the Swiss dual-VET system historically also pursues a social purpose: to facilitate young adults' integration into the labour market and society (Bonoli L., 2015). Fundamental to the system, both of these objectives have endured throughout the years and are mentioned as objectives in the current federal law on VET (art. 3 VPETA) reformed in 2002 and implemented since 2004. Indeed, the law states the aim "to foster and develop a VPET system that enables individuals to develop on an occupational, professional and personal level, to become integrated into society, and particularly into the labour market […]" (art. 3a VPETA), as well as "to foster and develop a VPET system that enables companies to become more competitive" (art. 3b VPETA).

Yet, to achieve these goals, accessibility to apprenticeship posts is a central concern. However, since the 1990s, direct transitions into upper-secondary education (vocational and academic paths taken together) have been decreasing in Switzerland (CSRE, 2018, p. 105; Höckel *et al.*, 2009, p. 24). Consequently, several 'transition measures' have been introduced, which vary significantly from one canton to another (see Egger, Dreher & Partner, 2007).[14] Such measures are intended to support youth in their transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education, either in a more school-based setting, or in a more practical setting (Dif-Pradalier & Zarka, 2014, pp. 133-134). A substantial number of the youth who end compulsory schooling without an ensuing educational option, opt for one of these interim solutions. Yet, each year, a small fraction of youth (between three and five percent in 2007) fall between the cracks of the different educational and transitory offers, temporarily dropping out of the education system without being integrated into the labour market (Egger *et al*., 2007, pp. 5, 7, 35).

1.4.2. Accessing dual-VET markets

Dual-VET systems delivering occupation-specific skills and turning youth into 'insiders' of the labour market therefore seem to increase labour markets opportunities for their graduates. However, to unfold this benefit, for both society and individuals, youth wishing to undertake an apprenticeship must be able to access the dual-VET system; in other words, they must find an apprenticeship post. However, existing literature highlights that this process is far from straightforward. It is therefore important to gain better understanding of the mechanisms at play regarding accessibility of dual-VET systems.

As pointed out by Nilsson:

> "It is highly probable that the selection mechanisms for VET are different from those for secondary schooling of a more general theoretical nature. These mechanisms may to some extent reflect individual differences in 'ability', but to a larger degree reflect differences in social, economic and cultural background" (Nilsson, 2010, p. 265).

[13] See e.g., Gonon (2019) or Berner and Bonoli L. (2019) for an overview of the development of the dual-VET system in Switzerland.

[14] Another very recent solution to this problem is the obligation for youth to remain enrolled in education until 18 years of age, introduced in the canton of Geneva since the beginning of the school year of 2018 and currently in discussion in the canton of Ticino.

Two important aspects shimmer through this statement. Firstly, access to an apprenticeship may not be determined only by criteria relevant to the job, such as necessary basic skills or competencies, but also by individual factors that are not related to ability to acquire necessary skills, such as the socio-economic or cultural background. Secondly, the selection mechanism in dual-VET seems less pertinent to an educational system and more similar to mechanisms found on labour markets: in educational institutions, there are usually clearly defined and transparent access criteria, upon which access can be granted or denied. On the contrary, in (liberal) labour markets, selection is relatively unregulated and in the hands of the selecting party, who applies his or her own criteria without being obliged to make them transparent. Consequently, it is impossible to precisely define the criteria according to which a youth may find an apprenticeship post. However, the literature has highlighted collective and individual factors that are likely to influence the chances a youth has on the apprenticeship market. Collective factors influence the apprenticeship market as a whole, whereas individual factors focus on the characteristics of the single youth and how these influence the decision making of employers.

Van Buer and Fehring (2015) have highlighted the importance of adapting the concept of trainability to the range of learning requirements of various industries and occupations. Sager (2006) has also noted the crucial differences generated by the context relative to each sector, the linguistic region and the more general economic situation, while Häfeli and Schellenberg (2009) emphasised the determinant role played by the degree of urbanisation. In fact, within Switzerland, VET opportunities and realities do consistently vary, with substantial differences roughly following the lines of linguistic regions as well as the juxtapositions of urban and rural areas. For instance, while dual-VET is highly appreciated and a widespread choice for youth in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and in rural areas, this is much less the case in Latin Switzerland and in urban areas, where it is often seen more as a second-choice option, primarily for youth with low academic achievement or from a lower socio-economic background (Berger, Lamamra, & Bonoli L., 2019, p. 20; Berner & Bonoli L., 2019, p.59). This trend has also been corroborated by the TREE study.[15] The data stemming from this study show that youth enrolled in a dual-VET two years after ending compulsory schooling were 68% in the German part, 56% in the Italian part and 52% in the French part. Interestingly, the share of youth enrolled in a dual-VET path estimated to require high exigencies is nearly equal across linguistic regions (25% in the German and in the Italian part; 23% in the French part). The factor that changes is the share of youth enrolled in medium (18% German part, 14% Italian and French part) and particularly in low (19% German part, 11% Italian and French part) exigencies dual-VET paths. This is suggestive of significantly different opportunity structures across linguistic regions, in particular for the most disadvantaged youth, which could also explain the higher share of youth not accomplishing any post-compulsory education in the French part, compared to the German part (there is no indication regarding the Italian part).

The TREE data also suggest a similarly different opportunity structure according to the degree of urbanisation: youth enrolled in dual-VET two years after ending compulsory schooling represent 73% in rural areas and 58% in urban areas, with a more homogeneous distribution across exigency levels in rural areas (21% in low or medium, and 25% in high exigencies sectors) rather than in urban areas (15% in low, 14% in medium, and 24% in high exigencies sectors). On the contrary, youth enrolled in a general education path are overrepresented in urban areas (30%) compared to rural areas (18% – Meyer, 2019, pp. 137-138). Moreover, the sector a youth applies to may also impact their chances of obtaining an apprenticeship post, i.e., on the accessibility to the dual-VET market for less advantaged youth. For instance, Wilson, analysing employers' hiring preferences within the commercial occupation in Switzerland, highlighted that, compared to private

[15] 'Transitions from Education to Employment': a longitudinal study on school-to-work transitions in Switzerland, based on data of about 6000 youth who participated in the PISA survey in 2000. It is important to note that transition I for the cohort of youth analysed by TREE occurred in the early 2000s, a moment in which the demand for apprenticeships largely exceeded the offer, hence increasing competition and decreasing the chances to find an apprenticeship post, mainly so for the more disadvantaged youth (see Meyer, 2019, p. 139).

sector employers, public sector employers seem more open to youth from a lower socio-economic background or with a weaker academic record (relative to multi-check results and the compulsory-schooling track) (Wilson, 2019, p. 12). Another interesting finding of this study is that the individual values of recruiters have an influence on stated hiring preferences: recruiters with more egalitarian values attributed much less importance to academic skills (in terms of maths and first language grades, as well as schooling track—Wilson, 2019, p. 16).

However, general knowledge about characteristics influencing the accessibility to the dual-track VET system in Switzerland in order to appreciate the broader context. Therefore, the following overview of significant collective and individual features adopts the perspective of an 'unspecified training place provider' (van Buer & Fehring, 2015), relying mainly on literature about Switzerland, the country of interest, and Germany, which has a similar dual-VET system, as well as on the opportunities to access the apprenticeship market for more disadvantaged youth, the group at the core of this work. The following section focuses on collective factors, in order to offer a broad overview of the mechanisms of dual-VET systems that generally influence the offer of apprenticeships. Thereafter, individual factors are discussed, which are more closely related to the selection mechanisms of employers.

1.4.2.1. Collective factors

Compulsory schooling

As outlined above, the compulsory school system is crucial in determining access to the apprenticeship market. On the one hand, it is necessary that schools impart basic skills. In fact, employers require apprentices with an established level of skills and knowledge, particularly in literacy and numeracy, in order to maximise the time invested in training specific to the job. For the Swiss case, Perriard (2005) stresses that schools often face difficulties in achieving minimal educational standards for all pupils. This has serious negative impacts on their chances to access dual-VET. As a matter of fact, Switzerland scored slightly below the OECD average in reading in the 2018 PISA test, while it did better (above the average) in mathematics.[16] Moreover, Swiss results have generally worsened over the years, registering the lowest scores in 2018 in both reading (since 2000) and mathematics (since 2003—no data for 2000) (PISA data explorer, results for PISA 2018).

Another important feature of compulsory schooling is the existence of differentiated schooling paths,[17] where pupils are separated early on in their school career (tracking). This early curricular differentiation strongly influences accessibility to the different upper-secondary educational levels (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). The impact of schooling tracks on accessibility can be formalised. For instance, to access an academic upper-secondary school path, such as high school, a certain level of lower-secondary school track may be required. Yet, the different tracks also often impact accessibility in educational paths in which there are no formal prerequisites regarding lower-secondary schooling track. Indeed, as will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter four, schooling-tracks are an easy way for employers to filter candidates quickly, as students of low schooling tracks are often perceived as less trainable (particularly by larger enterprises).

In Switzerland, compulsory education is the responsibility of each canton (art. 62 Swiss federal constitution). As a result, there are significant differences in lower-secondary educational systems across cantons, and even within cantons, since some cantons allow municipalities to decide between different educational models (CSRE, 2018, p. 83). The majority of Swiss cantons have a differentiated system, although some pursue a more flexible version, allowing youth to switch between tracks. Pupils are separated after primary school based on

[16] Reading: OECD average = 487, CH = 484. Mathematics: OECD average = 489, CH = 515.

[17] Opposed to standardised or integrated systems, in differentiated schooling systems pupils are early tracked: in lower-secondary education they are put in differentiated classes, which pursue different curricula, academically more or less demanding.

an ‘overall assessment’ (CSRE, 2018, pp. 83-84). This means that the criteria are neither uniform nor solely based on cognitive skills. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that the division into different tracks is imprecise and the assessment tool varies substantially (Meyer, 2009). The assessment is influenced by the class and by the evaluating teacher, and is often correlated with the socio-economic and migration background of the pupil (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). For instance, Kronig highlighted that, controlling for performance, more than 80% of Swiss pupils from the middle and upper social classes were oriented to highly demanding lower-secondary tracks, while this was the case for only slightly more than 50% of foreign pupils from a lower social class (Kronig, 2007, as cited in Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). The most recent Swiss educational report highlights that, in cantons with a differentiated educational system, scholastic performance is more strongly correlated to the social origins of a student compared to cantons which do not enforce a strict separation (CSRE, 2018, p. 83). As Häfeli and Schellenberg (2009) highlight, this risks translating social inequalities into school tracks, with the consequent impact on an individuals’ chances on the labour market.

Economic and demographic evolution

Compared to other educational sectors, dual-track VET is much more dependent on exogenous factors. Since the system is strongly connected to the labour market, economic activity and development directly and significantly influence dual-VET, substantially shaping its framework conditions (Wettstein & Gonon, 2009; CSRE, 2010, p. 142). Economic cycles have, therefore, a direct impact on apprenticeship markets. The amount of trainings offered essentially corresponds with the state of the economy. If the economy is expanding, the supply of apprenticeship positions generally flourishes; in weak economic phases, companies tend to hire fewer apprentices, as to train apprentices ceases to be profitable at some point, when the volume of orders of the firm decrease (CSRE, 2010; Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Hence, economic downturns lead to increased competition in the apprenticeship market, disadvantaging the weakest pupils. Demographic evolutions have a similar impact: the larger the cohort of youth seeking an apprenticeship, the stronger the competition for each post, thus, again, the worse the opportunities for the least equipped on the market (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009; Perriard, 2005).

Structural changes

Apprenticeship markets are, therefore, significantly dependent on labour markets. Consequently, deeper changes in the latter, provoking a structural shift in the amount and type of labour demand, impact the former (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, pp. 22-23; Perriard, 2005, pp. 10-12). Indeed, the aforementioned mutations of the labour market resulting from the transition to a post-industrial society and inducing the tertiarisation of labour markets also affected the apprenticeship market more generally. Technological innovation and globalisation have led to a decrease in labour demand in general, with the most significant impact on the industrial and handicraft sectors, the cradle of dual-VET (see e.g., Gonon, 2019), in which traditionally most trainings are offered. The expanded tertiary sector was not able to replace all the lost apprenticeship places, as the service sector offers substantially fewer apprenticeship opportunities (Perriard, 2005, pp. 10-13), particularly for lower-skilled individuals (Sheldon, 2002). Moreover, while the majority of the Swiss economy has progressively shifted from the production to the service sector, the dual-VET system has failed to effectively replicate this shift. For these reasons, training for the service sector is more likely to occur in a fully school-based context, rather than dual-based training (see Sheldon, 2002, 2008).

The less well-equipped individual in the apprenticeship market suffers twofold from this evolution: on the one hand, due to the increased competition for each apprenticeship post resulting from the overall decrease in the number of offered posts, and, on the other hand, because there are fewer apprenticeship posts suited to low-skilled candidates. In fact, as will be further developed in chapter four, in a situation of increased competition for each post, employers have a wider and more varied pool of candidates from which to choose their apprentice. Therefore, in a situation of greater competition, weaker candidates will have even less chance to

be selected. Indeed, it is in periods of apprenticeship shortages that the significance of disadvantaging features presumably have an even stronger impact on the probability of finding an apprenticeship and, consequently, some applicants are even required to postpone their access (Hupka-Brunner *et al.*, 2012). In the case of Switzerland, this resulted in a general increase of the selection based on schooling performance. Therefore, youth with weak school performances face more of a struggle to find an apprenticeship post (Perriard, 2005, pp. 10-15).

1.4.2.2. Individual factors

Cognitive skills

A crucial set of individual characteristics are cognitive skills (mental and intellectual capabilities). Academic competencies, signalled through school grades, are an important signal to estimate a candidate's trainability (e.g., Di Stasio, 2014; Protsch & Solga, 2015). In particular, degrees of mathematics and of the first language are viewed as important (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Results of the TREE study have shown that youth with low literacy skills in the PISA exam are much more likely to be in a transitory measure, or not in training at all, two years after finishing compulsory schooling (Perriard, 2005). However, employers in Switzerland seem to increasingly doubt the validity of the abilities these degrees indicate. Indeed, many firms, particularly larger enterprises and some professional associations, have begun to use aptitude tests, such as multi-check or basic-check, to evaluate the competencies of interest. On the other hand, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) rather use short internships and personal interviews (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009; Imdorf, 2007). These allow the estimation of cognitive skills, while also observing candidates' suitability in terms of personality, which is particularly important for SMEs. Additionally, according to Imdorf, only very bad grades are perceived as problematic, as they are an indicator of potential difficulties in vocational school, while grades which are particularly high are perceived as indicating a potentially short-term engagement with the vocational path (as cited in Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). The introduction of entry exams by employers, however, also signals that the expectancies on apprentices have increased, both at the entry level as well as during the apprenticeship itself. This places particularly the most vulnerable youth in an even weaker position (Dif-Pradalier & Zarka, 2014, pp. 131-132).

Another crucial factor used to estimate cognitive skills, is the compulsory education school-track: in differentiated schooling systems, pupils are separated early on during compulsory schooling and placed in differentiated classes following curricula which are more or less cognitively demanding, according to the class. These schooling-tracks not only significantly influence access to upper-secondary education paths, but are also determinant with respect to the apprenticeship market. According to the TREE study, 79% of youth enrolled in a low-track during compulsory schooling will pursue dual-VET two years after completing compulsory schooling, the majority in low exigency sectors (35%, versus 10% in high exigency sectors), whereas only 4% will pursue a general post-compulsory educational path. On the contrary, 56% of youth enrolled in a high-track will pursue dual-VET, mainly in high exigency sectors (30%, versus 9% in low exigency sectors), and 35% will pursue a general post-compulsory educational path. This holds true irrespective of the pupils' PISA scores, indicating the higher weight of the track compared to academic achievement (Meyer, 2019, pp. 138-139). Indeed, school tracks are an easy way for employers to quickly filter candidates perceived as less trainable due to supposedly weaker cognitive skills. According to Hupka and Stalder (2004), the type of lower-secondary school is often perceived as an important indicator for acquired skills and has become a precondition for certain training. The effect of the school track seems to be even stronger than the effect of school performances (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Moser found that being called for an interview by big firms recruiting apprentices depends on the track followed in lower-secondary school (as cited in Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Consequently, youth completing compulsory education in lower tracks have lower chances of finding an apprenticeship post (particularly in more demanding professions) and are overrepresented in transitory measures compared to youth who finish compulsory education in academically

stronger classes (Perriard, 2005). The TREE study has also shown that, in Switzerland, youth who followed less demanding lower-secondary education tracks incur higher risks of remaining without upper-secondary education degree: six years after ending compulsory schooling, pupils who have followed less demanding tracks have left the education system twice as often as those who were in more demanding tracks (Meyer, 2009, 2019). It is necessary to mention that the division of pupils into the various tracks in Switzerland is imprecise and the assessment tools vary widely, as has been demonstrated by PISA (Meyer, 2009). Kronig highlights that this decision is largely dependent on the class and the evaluating teacher, as well as on characteristics unrelated to academic performance, such as the socio-economic and/or migration background of the pupil (as cited in Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Other authors have also generally highlighted that what young people achieve academically is, to a large extent, influenced by background characteristics, such as socio-economic and migration background (Coradi Vellacott & Wolter, 2005; Meyer, 2009).

Socio-economic background

Socio-economic background also influences chances of finding an apprenticeship post. Numerous studies have shown a clear correlation between social origin and vocational success in all stages (from access to VET, to success during VET and transitioning from VET into the labour market) (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). The TREE study also highlighted the extent to which parents' social position influences the educational success of their children: youth of the one third of the population from the lowest social background lack post-compulsory education almost four times more than those of the one third of population from the highest social positioning (Meyer, 2009). Moreover, youth from a lower socio-economic background who do pursue post-compulsory education, are enrolled in less demanding professional paths that offer a lower status, compared to their better off peers (Imdorf, 2019, p. 192). Regarding youth of the TREE cohort who have managed to find an apprenticeship post, those from the lowest socio-economic quartile are overrepresented in the low (27%) or medium (23%) exigencies sectors, whereas only 19% are enrolled in a high exigencies sector. Youth from the higher quartile are overrepresented in higher exigencies sectors (22%), with only 7% enrolled in lower or medium exigencies sectors (Meyer, 2019, pp. 138-139).

Migration background

Youth with a migration background represent another risk category. These youth are often overrepresented in vulnerable categories related to transition I: they are particularly vulnerable to be placed in lower-track classes (Hupka & Stalder, 2004) and they are overrepresented in transitory measures (CSRE, 2010; Perriard, 2005) as well as among youth without post-compulsory education (Liebig *et al.*, 2012; Meyer, 2019, p. 136 & 140). Again, the youth cohort of the TREE study shows that youth with a migration background are overrepresented among low exigency sectors, compared to Swiss youth (Meyer, 2019, pp. 138 & 140). Indeed, many SMEs fear a range of diverse challenges of foreign youth, in the firm and in vocational school. Thus, to avoid organisational problems, SMEs may refrain from hiring them (Imdorf, 2007, pp. 4-5, 2019, p. 189). Unsatisfactory scholastic achievements, due to linguistic difficulties for example, may be costly to a firm: it may be necessary to provide free time for the youth to fill lacunas or result into an apprenticeship interruption (Imdorf, 2019, p. 189). Some employers also avoid hiring foreign apprentices, due to the anticipation of possible reticence from customers towards foreigners (Imdorf, 2019, p. 189). Moreover, in order to obtain an apprenticeship post, youth with a migrant background are frequently obliged to lower their aspirations and desires concerning their professional ambitions, and are often counselled to select professions below their aspirations (and which are unattractive for native youth - Hupka & Stalder, 2004). People with a migration background are, of course, a very heterogeneous group. In general terms, their social inclusion is highly influenced by the cultural and linguistic distance between their countries of origin and the host country (Hupka & Stalder, 2004; Nilsson, 2010, p. 260). First generation migrants, who speak a different language at home than the one of their education (Häfeli & Schelleberg, 2009; Perriard, 2005), and those from a lower socio-economic background (Camilleri-Cassar, 2013; Hupka & Stalder, 2004) face the greatest difficulties.

However, Häfeli and Schellenberg (2009) have pointed out that, for youth with equal competencies, socio-economic status seems to be more influential than migration status in finding an apprenticeship in Switzerland.

Soft skills

However, employers are well aware that school competencies are not sufficient to ensure a satisfactory training period. Therefore, in addition to cognitive skills, firms also pay particular attention to soft skills when selecting candidates for a training position. For a firm, it is crucial that an apprentice is in possession of qualities traditionally associated with work, such as commitment, diligence, duty awareness, punctuality, order, tidiness, and care (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). In addition, skills such as communication, cooperation, or ability to be in contact with people, are highly valued by employers. Certain unfavourable starting conditions may even be compensated by personality traits, such as courtesy, openness and politeness (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). School reports and teachers' evaluations of students' behaviour in class allow estimation of the soft skills of a candidate, such as motivation, personality, perseveration, and discipline (Protsch & Solga, 2015). Moreover, ideally for a firm, the youth should be flexible and docile, accepting authority according to the hierarchy (Imdorf, 2019), and adhering to norms and values relatively close to those of the firm; otherwise, this could be source of problems, which SMEs, in particular, attempt to avoid (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). A study conducted in the French part of Switzerland also highlights that youth with little family support or family relationships often have greater difficulties satisfying employers' expectancies in terms of soft skills, because non-cognitive competencies are not systematically taught in school, but are typically learned within the domestic sphere (Goastelle & Ruiz, 2015, as cited in Imdorf, 2019, p. 193).

Informal networks

Informal networks (family, friends or colleagues of the youth or the parents) are also a crucial asset for accessing the apprenticeship market. Indeed, on the one hand, these can be useful for obtaining information and making informed decisions. On the other hand, relationships might allow direct access to apprenticeship or short internship opportunities (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009; Hupka & Stalder, 2004; Solga, 2015). Moreover, such networks can be particularly helpful in alleviating discrimination, as a network member could attest to the youth's skills despite negative signals (Solga, 2015). However, what might be most difficult to counteract for youth with a migration background, is exactly the absence of an informal network. Indeed, migrant parents may know few(er) (native) persons and may not be or feel to be in the position to ask colleagues to help their offspring (Hupka & Stalder, 2004).

Gender

Like elsewhere, gender remains an influential characteristic in Switzerland when it comes to vocations: many professions are still considered to be either masculine or feminine (CSRE, 2010; Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009; Imdorf, 2019). In general terms, dual-VET is viewed as a more masculine than feminine option: TREE data reveals that two years after the end of compulsory schooling, 75% of men were enrolled in dual-VET, compared to only 54% of women, who were overrepresented in the general track of upper-secondary education (32%, versus 20% for men – Meyer, 2019, p. 137). As mentioned previously, SMEs generally aim to preserve a harmonious working environment. Hence, similarly to attitudes towards foreign candidates, gender may become a disadvantaging feature if employers anticipate possible issues linked to gender in relation to the expectations of clients or a homogeneous group of co-workers. In addition, there is also the fear that a woman trained in a masculine job might leave the profession prematurely, possibly resulting in a loss of investment for the firm (Imdorf, 2019, pp. 190-191). Many of the studies analysed by Häfeli and Schellenberg (2009) reveal various inequalities faced by young women at different stages of the vocational path. Indeed, while there are no gender differences in terms of choice of a vocational path, gender represents a determinant feature when it comes to the search for an apprenticeship post. TREE, and other studies, have shown that, at

comparable academic qualifications, young women face more difficulties in finding an apprenticeship and are more numerous in transitory measures (CSRE, 2010; Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Moreover, they are also significantly more likely, controlling for academic qualifications, to follow vocational paths with a lower vocational status. Gender is a particularly marked disadvantaging feature when it is crossed with a lower demanding schooling path or a modest family context. In a nutshell, young men who followed demanding schooling tracks and are sons of Swiss fathers are the most likely to be selected for training (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009).

Additional factors

Additional crucial factors are self-esteem, coping strategies (e.g., ability to cope with refusals), self-image (in relation to vocational identity) and the accuracy of the professional project (in terms of the degree of definition and plausibility of its realisation). Motivation is fundamental to finding an apprenticeship post, since it constitutes the foundation of establishing a professional plan and attempting to achieve its goal. Häfeli and Schellenberg (2009) highlight that, in primary and secondary education, motivation and scholastic performances fundamentally depend on family processes, and that relative to the familial support youth receive, they begin their scholastic path with very different levels of knowledge, a discrepancy which generally endures throughout the entire scholastic pathway. Hence, familial support has a significant impact on both a youth's motivation, as well as on general knowledge about the system and application procedures (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009).

2. Conceptual framework: The Matthew effect

2.1. Early and general studies about the Matthew effect

In very general terms, the Matthew effect describes a situation in which people in a position of advantage are more capable of profiting from various resources, thus extending their advantage even further. More disadvantaged individuals, on the other hand, have less access to resources and, thus, tend to remain entrapped in their disadvantaged position. The somewhat peculiar name, the Matthew effect (or principle), refers to a sentence in the Gospel according to St. Matthew (25.29), in which it is said: "[f]or unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath". Bichot has pointed out that the effect could also have been named the Luke or Mark effect, since the same sentence also appears in the Gospel according to St. Mark (4.25) and even twice in the Gospel according to St. Luke (chapters 8 and 9) (Bichot, 2002, p. 575). The reason why it is called Matthew instead of Mark or Luke effect is rooted in the late 1960s, when the term was introduced into science by the American sociologist Robert K. Merton.

In his article, Merton explored the functioning of science as a social institution through the lens of the Matthew effect. In particular, Merton analysed the psychosocial processes affecting the system of allocating rewards to scientists for their contributions, and its effect on more general scientific advancements (Merton, 1968). Merton highlighted that well-known researchers tend to receive more credit, compared to lesser-known researchers, for similar work. This boosts the well-known scientists' career faster than the one of the less prominent researchers, bestowing further advantages to the former compared to the latter. From this starting point, Merton expands his analysis further, to illustrate how this effect significantly affects the more general development of science. He highlights that, in order for science to advance, it is not enough to *perform* research, it is also crucial to effectively communicate results to the research community. Following the Matthew principle, it can be presumed that the communication of prominent scientists will attract more attention and access more easily communication networks, thus enabling the contribution of already well-known scientists to ride on the crest of the wave in the flow of ideas and thus steering the development of science. Put differently, scientific advances are substantially determined by more prominent researchers, given that the research community's reaction increases according to the standing of the person who makes a given contribution. Thus, the resonance of research is relative to the scientific prestige a researcher already possesses. To conclude, Merton highlights that this phenomenon is also evident on an institutional level: renowned research centres can attract more funding and better researchers, increasing even further the chance to produce remarkable contributions, while strengthening the effect and making it more difficult to develop new centres of scientific excellence. In general terms, under the label Matthew effect, Merton showed that already privileged individuals access further resources more easily, a process which, on the other hand, induces a strong cumulative effect.

Following Merton's seminal article, the notion of a Matthew effect has been discussed in various diverse fields, such as sports, literature, music, art, business, education, and the fiscal system (van Lancker, 2014, p. 2). Herman Deleeck, a Belgian economist, was the first to introduce the concept to social policy research in 1975 (article published in Dutch). In an article of 1979, Deleeck delineates all the mechanisms by which upper social classes profit relatively more than lower social classes from social policy can be regrouped under the term 'Matthew effect'. Indeed, Deleeck highlights, redistribution is no longer a linear process; rather the distribution of costs and advantages tends to profit to certain social categories more than other (Deleeck, 1979, p. 375). In this work, the presence of a Matthew effect is illustrated in various fields, such as social security, health, education, social housing, the environment, and taxes. Furthermore, Deleeck highlights social and political determinants that contribute to Matthew effects. On one hand, he defines social policy as the expression of a dominant culture. This can be observed in the social, economic, and organisational aspects of the conception and implementation of social policy measures. In general, social policies appear (often unconsciously) as the

political translation of how dominant social groups perceive social evolution. Indeed, Western social security systems are conceptualised according to the lifestyle, culture and values of the middle-classes. Thus, the middle classes profit more from the resultant system. In Deleeck's terms, this provokes 'silent discriminations' (Deleeck, 1979, p. 381). Moreover, the reference point of these policies is also the lifestyle and living standards of the middle classes: social policies include collective resources, such as recreational areas, tertiary education and scholarships, which are of significant interest to middle-classes, who consequently profit most from them. Finally, social policy utilizes language and forms typical of the middle-classes, such as its legal structure and the administrative functioning. Thus, more disadvantaged people often fear or do not know how to make use of social policies (Deleeck, 1979, pp. 380-381).

As an explanatory model, Deleeck proposes the 'social competition market': social goods and services are contended between social groups. Moreover, social revenue is allocated according to needs, which are recognised as such through social mechanisms and political channels. The better organised social groups will be more capable of to putting forth their needs and attracting political attention. Given that revenue became an important factor in determining the formation of interest groups, wealthier social groups are more likely capable organizing and achieving recognition for their needs (Deleeck, 1979, p. 381). Moreover, political power, as well as taxable resources, are primarily concentrated in the hands of middle-classes. This leads transfers to go out of this group, and back in again, also, Deleeck highlights, because such transfers make sense economically, i.e., they are a rational investment of resources. The author questions whether the existing social goods and social services should be re-conceptualised in order to be made current according to actual needs and accounting for social changes. Indeed, he states, "[t]he Matthew effect is the inherent consequence of an incremental social policy (i.e. the successive addition of small components) in which the large number of general or quasi-general measures has resulted in the diffusion of benefits to the entire population; this policy has also made it almost impossible to concentrate resources on the groups to be favoured as a matter of priority" (Deleeck, 1979, p. 382).

In the late 1990s, the Israeli–Australian scholar of social policy and social work, John Gal, investigated a similar line of thought and concluded that the welfare states' tendency "to cater to the needs and desires of the middle classes reflects" these classes' influence on both policymaking and policy implementation processes. Moreover, even when middle classes are not the primary intended beneficiaries of social policies, "the more mobile, more articulated and better informed members of this group are able to get much more out of welfare state systems than more disadvantaged citizens" (Gal, 1998, p. 44).

Regarding the middle classes' influence on the policymaking process, Gal discusses six possible influence channels. The first is the electoral channel: not only do the middle classes represent a significant share of the electorate, constituting a crucial bloc to gain a majority in elections, but they also often sit as members of political parties and parliaments. Secondly, interest groups or organisations representing middle classes play an important role in the decision-making process in welfare states. Thirdly, middle classes are assumed to have specific knowledge that enables them to influence policy-making. Moreover, the increased use of social scientists' knowledge and analysis in decision-making has been perceived as a mechanic by which the middle classes could be placed in a position to influence policy-makers and public opinion. In a similar vein, the fourth channel posits that mass media are a vector of middle class interests, since media professionals, who direct news selection, are themselves part of this class and, therefore, rely heavily on information stemming from interest groups, bureaucrats and government officials, all part of the middle class and therefore lobbying for their interests. Fifth, the middle classes have more room for manoeuvre in terms of withdrawing from public offers when they are dissatisfied (for instance, by relying on private instead of public schools). Policy-makers may react to the middle classes' 'exit' option by pandering to their desires. Finally, the sixth channel highlights the advantageous position of high civil servants— an integral part of the middle class—in bureaucracies, which allows them to influence crucial steps of the policy-formulating process (Gal, 1998, pp. 46-48).

In addition to the various channels of influence the middle classes can utilise to influence decision-making regarding social policies, the middle classes are also supposed to be able to influence policies' implementation. This is both the case for universal schemes and policies targeted at a disadvantaged group. In this context, the crucial interaction is between civil servants and clients with queries regarding information, cash benefits or services. With more resources at their disposal, the middle classes are able to influence bureaucrats, maximising their benefit while minimising their costs. Relevant resources can include better information about the functioning of the system, about what benefits and services are offered, and about how to obtain them. Moreover, the middle classes have financial resources that enable them to obtain information or representation if needed. Financial resources also allow the middle classes to be more mobile, facilitating access to social services. Furthermore, they are more likely to have personal networks among the ranks of bureaucracy, who stem from the same class. Additionally, in cases in which civil servants have decision-making power, they tend to rely on subjective criteria of the worthiness of the client or the appropriateness of the demand. This facilitates middle class members, as they are more articulated, active, and capable to connect easier with middle class peers, compared to members of a lower socio-economic class (Gal, 1998, pp. 48-49). Another mechanism leading to a Matthew effect that Gal highlighted is that, in order to achieve professional or organisational goals, civil servants may 'cream' clients, i.e. favour middle class members believing that this will enable them to achieve professional or organisational goals (Gal, 1998, p. 49).

Gal also highlights that the early debate over the Matthew effect in social policies (from the end of 1970s to the beginning of 1980s) coincided with the 'uncertain times' of the welfare state (see chapter 1.1.5 – Gal, 1998, p. 45). The supporters of the welfare state had, thus, also to respond to this somewhat peculiar critique of social policies. They did so by demonstrating that some social policies, particularly certain income maintenance programmes and personal social services, do profit the poorer sections of societies more than others. This induced a shift in the debate over the Matthew effect: moving away from a "harder" version (that the middle classes are the primary beneficiaries of the welfare state), towards a "softer" version of the Matthew principle, which highlighted the specific areas of social policies from which middle classes profit more than others. Proponents of this softer version proposed considering not only social programmes directly administered by the state, but also fiscal (i.e., tax expenditures, such as education outlays) and occupational welfare (e.g. private pension schemes or health plans). Even though some specific programmes tended to cater more to the less well off, considering all the aspects of welfare state activity, including public welfare services and occupational and fiscal welfare systems, a bias towards middle-classes remains evident. Moreover, proponents of the soft version of the Matthew effect also emphasise that middle classes also benefit from the welfare state in terms of income and professional power, as employees in the administration of social policies (Gal, 1998, pp. 45-46). As we will see, the more recent literature is reflective of the popularisation of a soft version of a Matthew effect, exploring the greater access to social policies of the less disadvantaged sections of society more generally, while often focusing on specific areas of social policies.

In the vein of the soft version of the Matthew effect, French economist Jacques Bichot illustrates various areas in which the French social security system ultimately provides less to the more disenfranchised members of society. For instance, Bichot recalls the contribution of Lagarde, Launay and Lenormand, which highlighted the existence of a Matthew effect in the pension system due to a difference in longevity according to a person's previous profession. Inducing different lifestyles and different standards of living, a person's profession also causes longevity differences, benefitting, once again, the wealthier. In the context of pensions, this means that a senior manager has a much higher likelihood of profiting from pension schemes for a longer time, with this probability decreasing according to professional hierarchy (Bichot, 2002, p. 576).

Leveraging Stoleru's work (1974), Bichot also highlights the vicious cycle stemming from the category-based social security provision system. Such category-based provisions often have the effect that the most deprived are left without provisions, or receive only very modest provisions, because, as a consequence of their

misfortune, they have been excluded from the categories that bestow the right to a benefit (Bichot, 2002, p. 576). Bichot also highlights that an implicit tax rate[18] affects the less well-off particularly stringently, inducing poverty or inactivity traps. Essentially, when an unemployed person or a member of the working-poor obtains a (slightly better paid) job, he or she is likely to be left with a similar or even reduced disposable revenue, because the new job caused the loss of a large share of the social benefits to which the person was previously entitled. More prosperous workers, on the other hand, are not subject to the same amount of implicit tax rates in proportional terms, hence, leading to a Matthew effect. Bichot highlights that the Matthew effect in this case is particularly detrimental, as it could transform life events into durable or even permanent marginalisation (Bichot, 2002, pp. 577-578).

2.2. The Matthew effect in education

A field in which several authors have emphasised a Matthew effect is education. In general terms, educational expenditures, particularly higher education outlays, mainly profit the offspring of the wealthy—who remain in school longer—rather than those of less wealthy families (Bichot, 2002, pp. 580-581; Gal, 1998, p. 45). More precisely, Deleeck highlights that both the costs of education (who participates in what type of education and to whom the related costs have to be charged) and benefits (how education contributes to the development of one's life chances) are unequally distributed. To summarise, Bichot argues that less wealthy members of society contribute, in an aggregate view, significantly to the educational system, while few profit from it by pursuing their studies. On the other hand, the wealthy, whose offspring often pursue their studies, profit more from the educational system relative to the amount of their contribution. From another perspective, this also means that wealthier families will profit more from family allowances for children in education (Deleeck, 1979, pp. 376-378). This latter consideration was further explored by Deleeck, together with Huybrechs and Cantillon, based on data from 1970s Belgium. In that work, the authors show that the universal child benefit system in Belgium, supposed to compensate child-rearing costs for families, profited middle and higher-income families more than lower-income families, partly due to differences in educational choices. Indeed, child benefits were normally allocated until a child's 18th birthday and extended until the 25th birthday should the child pursue further studies. This led to a Matthew effect because the number of eligible children increased with income, and, in addition, children from high-income families were more likely to pursue their studies compared to low-income families, i.e., they were overrepresented in higher education (Deleeck, Huybrechs, & Cantillon, 1983, as cited in van Lancker, 2014, p. 4).

2.3. The Matthew effect in childcare policies

As a significant area of the social investment strategy, many recent studies have examined childcare services. In general, a Matthew effect seems prevalent in this policy field. In almost all the countries of the European Union (van Lancker, 2014, p. 153) and of the OECD (OECD, 2011, p. 15) childcare coverage is stratified according to social class, with low-income families profiting less from formal childcare.

Several studies have focused on the Swiss context, either in general terms (Schlanser, 2011) or regarding the canton of Vaud (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015; Bonoli & Champion, 2015; Bonoli & Vuille, 2013). Based on the 2008 Swiss labour force survey, Schlanser has shown that the socialising and pedagogical benefits of Swiss childcare services seem to predominantly profit children who need it the least (Schlanser, 2011, p. 124). More precisely, Schlanser identified a Matthew effect in childcare services in Switzerland operating on three levels. Firstly, the higher the parents' education, the higher the likelihood for children to be placed in a childcare facility.[19] Secondly, some specific immigrant populations, who are generally considered to face integration

[18] The implicit tax rate represents the share of a person's increased revenue that goes to the profit of the community instead of the worker.
[19] The mother's educational degree has a particularly strong effect.

difficulties (citizens from the United States, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and ex-Yugoslavia), have particularly low chances of accessing childcare facilities. The positive impact of socialising and language acquisition a childcare utilisation could offer, is therefore lost. Thirdly, intensive use of childcare, which some research has determined to be suboptimal for child development, is higher for first generation immigrants compared to parents of Swiss origin (Schlanser, 2011, p. 124).

Regarding the local studies, Bonoli and Vuille (2013) rely on a survey carried out in 2012 addressed to families living in the canton of Vaud with children aged 0-12 years resulting in a sample of 1929 children. The survey asked families using childcare regarding their use of childcare services, their needs and the families' characteristics. The results show that most children in childcare facilities in the canton of Vaud are from upper-middle-class families. Additionally, the likelihood of being in childcare is higher for children (i) whose parents have a higher educational level, (ii) come from a Northern or Western European country, and (iii) live in urban areas[20] (Bonoli & Vuille, 2013, pp. 29-30).

Bonoli and Champion (2015) further investigated the factors which contribute to the underrepresentation of certain nationalities in childcare centres in the canton of Vaud. They identified three explanatory factors. Firstly, cost is an important consideration. Quantitative analysis shows that low-income families use more childcare services in networks where the out-of-pocket parental fee is lower. Interviews with mothers with a migration background confirmed this factor. A majority of interviewees mentioned elevated costs as a reason for not relying on childcare facilities, whereas the minority utilising childcare mentioned an under-usage due to costs. Secondly, the excessive demand and personnel's significant room for manoeuvre means that the criteria for the allocation of places, and their application, are not very transparent. This could lead to favouring people who know the local administrative system better and who are able to demonstrate their need. This latter aspect may disadvantage families with a migration background, perhaps due to a lower command of the local language and less knowledge of social rules. This argument, therefore, supports Deleeck's claim that social policy is often based on language and mechanisms better known to citizens of the middle classes, adding a migration perspective. Thirdly, the studied population was overrepresented among atypical jobs with irregular working hours. This is less compatible with childcare services, which require regular use. This argument is suggestive of the work formulated by Deleeck and Gal, i.e., that social policies are often the expression of a dominant culture (the middle classes'), do not necessarily correspond to the realities of more disadvantaged individuals, and, hence, do not benefit them. An additional interesting aspect highlighted by the study is that families with a migration background do not appear to avoid childcare services due to cultural reasons (Bonoli & Champion, 2015, pp. 5-6, 38-45).

Abrassart and Bonoli (2015) rely on a data set with two levels: to appreciate trends on a micro-level, they use the survey used in Bonoli and Vuille (2013), whereas to consider the macro level, they rely on data generated from simulations of the cost of childcare services for hypothetical family models in 23 different childcare networks[21] of the canton (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015, p. 792). Once again, results highlight that income significantly affects the probability of childcare use, with high-income families being more than twice as likely to rely on childcare compared to low-income families. Although mothers' employment status is "a strong determinant in explaining access to childcare" (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015, p. 801), the 'pro-high-income bias' remains significant, even after controlling for maternal employment and nationality (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015, p. 803). In a similar vein, the results indicate that the substantial differences in parental fees and, even more significantly, whether a fee structure across childcare networks is progressive, have a significant impact on

[20] Where the fee structure is often more favourable to low-income families compared to rural areas.

[21] A cantonal law of 2007 encourages municipalities in Vaud to constitute childcare networks. Since this is a prerequisite to receive public subsidies, over 95% of municipalities followed the suggestion, resulting in a total of 26 different networks. While it generated expansion in the childcare service offer, it also lead to a great variation in terms of parental fees (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015, p. 792).

childcare use for low-income families. According to the childcare network a family approaches, a five-fold difference in parental out-of-pocket fees has been identified (fees range from 4% to 21% of gross earnings - Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015, p. 795). The lower the parental fees, the higher the probability that low-income families will rely on childcare services (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015, p. 804). Regarding the progressivity of the fees structure (in terms of percentage of gross annual income), some networks utilise a progressive structure, others charge proportionally to earnings, while others even employ a regressive fee structure, meaning that, proportional to earnings, low-income families incur higher out-of-pocket fees relative to high-income families (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015, p. 796). Consequently, the more progressive is a network's fee structure, the higher the likelihood of low-income families to make use of childcare services (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015, pp. 801, 804). On the other hand, availability and competition for childcare places seem to be less significant: coverage rate and competition have a similar impact for all income groups, thus, not affecting disadvantaged families more than well-off families (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015, p. 802).

Among international scholarship, the study of van Lancker and Ghysels (2012) is of particular interest. The authors explore the distributional impact of subsidised childcare for children under 3 years, comparing the Flemish region of Belgium, and Sweden. With a sophisticated research design, they show that, despite the fact that the childcare scheme has a pro-poor design in Flanders,[22] only the Swedish outlays benefit mostly the neediest; in Flanders, they are actually biased against the less wealthy. Particularly interesting is that, if only direct service subsidies (public financial outlays to service providers) and out-of-pocket parental fees are taken into consideration, the Flemish scheme does appear to favour mainly the poorer sections of society (i.e., in both systems lower income-families tend to pay less for the use of childcare). However, once the authors incorporate the actual use of subsidised childcare, and tax deductions relative to childcare expenses, which function as indirect childcare subsidies as they replace a portion of the fees paid by parents with public money. Indeed, the crucial factor contributing to a Matthew effect in this study lies in a combination of the different uses of childcare by income groups (largely determined by accessibility) and, chiefly, tax deductions.

Whereas, broadly speaking, the fee system in both cases is set according to income and intensity of use,[23] access to public childcare services and the taxation system differ significantly. In Sweden, there are no tax deductions for childcare expenses, and access to a public childcare place must be guaranteed to anyone within 'reasonable time' (about 3-4 months). This means, on the one hand, that access to the labour market is not hindered by a lack of childcare options and that only those who wish to do so rely on private childcare services. Indeed, the data show that many parents do make use of and rely on public childcare services and that there is no significant difference in its use according to different income groups. In Flanders, there is no guarantee of access, and the supply of public childcare does not correspond with the demand. Thus, some households are forced to bear the high costs of a private childcare service, or to reduce their labour market participation (or even opt out of it). The data show that lower-income families rely less on childcare than their wealthier counterparts, and that there is a much higher share of workless households among low-income families within Flanders as well as compared to the same quintile in Sweden.[24]

Moreover, in Flanders, the taxation system includes the possibility of deducting childcare expenses for both subsidised and non-subsidised childcare providers. Considering that high-income families rely more on childcare and pay higher out-of-pocket contributions, the tax deductions related to childcare use and the tariffs paid are much higher for these households than lower-income families. Therefore, "the combination of greater care use and the system of tax deductions (which also applies to childcare offered by non-subsidised care

[22] Subsidised childcare services must give priority to disadvantaged families (e.g. low-income and single parents).
[23] For Sweden, the study draws on data preceding major reforms that took place at the beginning of the 2000s and that, among other things, uniformed the tariff system. Before the reforms, the out-of-pocket fees paid by parents varied substantially, however most Municipalities set the fees according to income and use intensity.
[24] Belgium holds one of the highest employment gaps between high and low-skilled mothers across European countries.

providers) undoes the pro-poor design of the tariff structure" (van Lancker & Ghysels, 2012, pp. 137-138). Consequently, even within the framework of a policy designed to benefit the poor, there are mechanisms that can lead to outcomes benefitting the less disadvantaged, in other words, to a Matthew effect.

2.4. The Matthew effect in active labour market policies

Addressing the field of ALMPs, Bonoli (2014) performed a literature review designed to explore the impact of certain activation policies (training, job search assistance, and employment subsidies) on the likelihood of people with few qualifications regaining employment (i.e., the short-term effectiveness of these ALMPs in facilitating employment access). The reviewed studies, Bonoli notes, reveal that many interventions aimed at disadvantaged groups, actually benefit the least disadvantaged individuals among the target group. This is particularly the case for training programmes, for which basic cognitive and non-cognitive skills appear to be indispensable to take advantage of the offer. Hence, low skilled individuals, often lacking such prerequisites, are likely to profit less from such programmes. Other mechanisms possibly leading to Matthew effects are creaming and parking practices, particularly in the field of job search assistance and job subsidies. Bonoli mentions that, as long as the primary goal of such tools is to place people (back) into regular, unsubsidised jobs, some creaming is inevitable in order to anticipate the selection process that takes place in the labour market. He concludes by stating that "[p]rogrammes that are truly effective in helping the most disadvantaged should be decoupled from the logic of selection that shapes the functioning of the labour market" (Bonoli, 2014, p. 12).

In a recent contribution, Bonoli and Liechti also focus on the Matthew effect in ALMPs, while concentrating on two specific groups considered to be particularly disadvantaged among unemployed people: low-skilled individuals and people with a migration background (Bonoli & Liechti, 2018). Covering 14 different countries over a period of 15 years (1998-2013), the study is based on a systematic review of 87 evaluations of three types of activation programmes: training (any type of training—from classroom to practical training), wage subsidies and job creation programmes. The results regarding training programmes are mixed, as positive as well as negative access biases were detected for both populations. However, the negative biases, indicative of a Matthew effect, are more numerous. Regarding job creation programmes, no Matthew effect has been detected for the low-skilled unemployed, while it seems to exist for migrants. A Matthew effect appears, on the other hand, confirmed regarding wage subsidies programmes, as a strong negative access bias was detected for both the groups under study. Therefore, results show that low-skilled individuals face a negative access bias, mostly in the case of job subsidies and also in the case of training, although to a lesser extent. Conversely, people with a migration background are underrepresented in all three of the ALMP programmes included in the study. Interestingly, the results change according to the contextual setting, i.e., the type of welfare state in which a programme operates. Indeed, whereas both target groups are likely to benefit from positive access biases in social democratic welfare states, the situation is reversed in conservative welfare states.[25] This is primarily true for training programmes, in which the effect is the strongest. Essentially, the results highlight the presence of a Matthew effect only in some programmes in some conservative welfare states, whereas no Matthew effect was detected in the programmes run in the social democratic welfare states.

Following this analysis, the authors investigate the relationship between the Matthew effect and the effectiveness of a programme, questioning whether a correlation exists between a programme's accessibility to disadvantaged groups and its effectiveness.[26] Due to the generally small number of studies in the sample, the results are not robust. However, they still offer some interesting considerations regarding a Matthew effect.

[25] Southern and liberal welfare states were not taken into account in the assessing of the frequency of the access bias by type of welfare regime, due to too small number of observations.

[26] For this part of the study, job search assistance schemes were included, whereas they were excluded before due to the little number of studies that were found.

Generally, training and job subsidies appear to be more effective than job search assistance and job creation programmes. However, a greater likelihood of negative access bias was also detected in the more effective programmes, suggesting that the more effective a programme is, the more it is likely to find a Matthew effect. In other words, the more disadvantaged individuals seem to be participating in less effective programmes. This, once again, is likely to further exacerbate their initial disadvantage.

Another interesting contribution that focused on unequal access to training and employment programmes biased against disadvantaged individuals is the work of Nicaise and Bollens (1998)—and its more synthesized version—based on the examples of Flanders and the European Union (EU-15) (Nicaise, 2000). Nicasie and Bollens highlight legal, administrative and institutional barriers; creaming practices by programme organisers; and lack of motivation on the part of participants as potential obstacles for the most disadvantaged to access such programmes. Regarding the legal, administrative, and institutional barriers, Nicaise and Bollens highlight that labour market status is often crucial to access many labour market programmes. Indeed, it is often only people registered as unemployed, in some cases even only those with the right to unemployment benefits, who qualify to participate in employment programmes. Consequently, in the same vein as Bichot, Nicaise and Bollens emphasise that the most disadvantaged individuals are often not even eligible for certain benefits (Nicaise & Bollens, 1998, p. 128).

Nicaise and Bollens also mention the possibility of creaming practices performed by individuals managing and/or organising the programmes. On one hand, these people, wishing to maximise their credibility in the eyes of employers who select the stronger candidates anyway, might apply the same selective criteria as they anticipate will be applied on the labour market, a practice also mentioned by Bonoli (2014). On the other hand, the authors highlight that governments are increasingly emphasising effectiveness, often assessing programmes according to the placement rates of programme participants, results which are seen as "a yardstick of quality or even as a basis for funding" (Nicaise & Bollens, 1998, p. 128). Indeed, certain economists claim that, for the sake of efficiency, gearing training programmes towards the less disadvantaged would make little sense. The authors, however, query the conceptual basis of the widespread belief that returns to vocational training programmes are greater when they only serve the 'stronger', instead of 'weaker', job seekers. Nicaise and Bollens highlight that the added value of training programmes cannot be measured only by placement rates. Indeed, such placement rates, as well as the possible results of the training, also implicitly measure the impact of all the features of an individual that pre-existed the programme, such as previous education and training, work experience, and so forth (Nicaise & Bollens, 1998, p. 128). Moreover, some of the stronger participants might have found a position even without participating in the training programme (Nicaise and Bollens, 1998, p. 131). In that case, the public money invested for their training would essentially represent a dead weight loss. Several evaluative studies that assessed the impact of participating in a training programme on subsequent labour market status showed that net benefits from training programmes are higher for more disadvantaged participants (Nicaise & Bollens, 1998, pp. 138, 148).

What Nicaise and Bollens categorise under the heading of lack of motivation by participants, includes elements such as material, financial and psychological reasons. Firstly, participation can bear direct or indirect costs (e.g., transport, childcare, material used in the training, diminished time for job search, etc.), without offering any certainty regarding the possible benefits. Secondly, psychological reasons might become relevant: for example, previous negative experiences at school, a negative self-image, or fear of failure. Thirdly, particularly for vocational training, participation depends on the qualification level previously attained, which can be an entry criterion, yet a potential rejection might lead the individual to lose motivation. Fourthly, some of the most disadvantaged individuals, such as the elder, unskilled or long-term unemployed, might not prioritise training. Lastly, some might have already participated in similar programmes without being able to find a job, thus becoming disenchanted with the process (Nicaise & Bollens, 1998, pp. 129-130). In a subsequent work, Nicaise (2000) adds a possible pedagogical cause: a programme might not be adapted to the needs of highly

disadvantaged individuals, or may be too short to fill the lacunas of the most disadvantaged, who often lack basic cognitive skills (language and/or mathematics) or non-cognitive skills (e.g., work attitude).

Another particularly interesting study regarding Matthew effects in the field of activation measures is that of Gomel, Issehnane and Legendre (2013). The authors investigate the consequences on labour market integration of an intensification in a job search assistance programme for young adults. Implemented by local job centres for youth, with substantial experience in assisting youth marginalised from the labour market, the programme offers job search assistance to 16–25-year-olds with little or no qualifications, and who face difficulties finding a job. They established panel data generated from administrative data used to track the trajectories of attendees at local job centres for youth. The authors "found a positive, clear and robust impact of the intensification of job search support for young people on their degree of integration into the labour market" (Gomel, Issehnane, & Legendre, 2013, p. 5). In other words, the more intensive the assistance, the better the chances on the labour market.

Other than being encouraging, what is particularly interesting about this finding is that it was initially the reverse. Indeed, a simple correlation between the intensity of the assistance provided to a youth and the subsequent professional insertion led to the opposite result: the more intensive the assistance, the lower the chances of labour market integration. What was determinant in reversing the result was the fact that the authors took the heterogeneity of participants into account. Indeed, the participants did not start the programme with the same chances in the labour market or, in other words, from the same distance from the labour market. As Nicaise and Bollens (1998) previously highlighted, to assess the net benefit of a programme for an individual, it is crucial to holistically consider the advantages and disadvantages one starts with. The first result, leading to a negative correlation between the intensity of assistance and the labour market integration, was, indeed, a consequence of the fact that caseworkers would dedicate more time (i.e., assistance) to the youth who were the most distanced from the labour market, i.e., the most disadvantaged. However, the authors confirm the argument made by Nicaise and Bollens (1998): since the distance of a person from the labour market is not directly observable, to appreciate the nature of such heterogeneity is far from being an easy task. Gomel, Issehnane and Legendre do so by estimating an autoregressive model to control for the non-observable inter-individual heterogeneity in order to establish youth's distance from the labour market (see article for the technical details).

Moreover, the authors propose distinguishing between two types of Matthew effect: a Matthew effect type I, corresponding to the one discussed here thus far, and a Matthew effect type II, corresponding to the opposite effect—when the most disadvantaged individuals receive more access to resources compared to the less disadvantaged ones. A Matthew effect type I was found at the programme entrance. Caseworkers have the power to choose the youth participating in the programme; consequently, they select the youth who will participate. In this selection, a Matthew effect (type I) is present, as caseworkers argue that several youth are not capable of meeting the programme's requirements, i.e., caseworkers cream skim candidates. However, once enrolled in the programme, a Matthew effect type II was detected. In fact, the programme offers two versions. A reinforced version addresses youth with weaker school qualifications, thus channelling more resources to highly disadvantaged youth (Gomel *et al.*, 2013, pp. 6-7). In addition, caseworkers concentrate their support on youth cumulating numerous disadvantages and who face the most significant insertion difficulties, i.e., to the more disadvantaged (Gomel *et al.*, 2013, p. 12).

Bridging social investment and ALMPs studies, another very interesting work examines social investment in the context of the activation of unemployed people in Switzerland. Investigating to what extent activation practices can genuinely be considered to be following an investment logic, and what effects such practices have (with a focus on low skilled women), Nadai (2017) highlights both a conventional and a 'reversed' Matthew effect. This research is based on ethnographic case studies of a Swiss regional public employment

service and an urban social security office, both of which decide what 'client' benefits from which measure, and four integration programmes for unemployed individuals, which implement the prescribed activation measures.

Nadai detected a conventional Matthew effect resulting from a double selection process. The first is caused by institutional rules determining the person in whom to invest and the type of prescribed measure. The second is caused by the implicit practical know-how of frontline workers who categorise 'clients' according to their employability. This leads to an increased investment in individuals who are already closer to the labour market (presenting better employability prospects), because they possess more human capital, are available in a more flexible way and are free of cultural 'otherness' (i.e., no migration background). Hence, those who present the biggest deficits and challenges to integrate into the labour market receive less support: "equal opportunities are not achieved by compensating for starting disadvantages, but rather social inequality along the dimensions of gender, class, migration background and age are reproduced" (Nadai, 2017, p. 84).

However, Nadai also discovered a 'reversed' Matthew effect: individuals with more complex needs may receive more support of a different kind, of a type that is difficult to grasp or to measure, one that goes deeper into their personality and develops more fundamental abilities that will enable them to achieve further key competences (Nadai, 2017, pp. 85-86). In such an approach, the more disadvantaged individuals are not seen as mere economic actors and carriers of human capital, as is the case for those who are closer to the labour market from the outset and who are led relatively directly towards employment. The more distant individuals, on the other hand, are offered a detour through more fundamental personal development and explore different professional options. On the other hand, they receive less concrete investment in professional basic or advanced training courses. "Against this background it is questionable, whether the investments are sufficient to catch up the massive initial disadvantage in terms of cultural and social capital (Nadai, 2017, pp. 87-88).

2.5. The Matthew effect in the social investment strategy

In another particularly interesting contribution, Cantillon (2011) highlights that, within the more general framework of a social investment welfare state, the redistributive capacity of social policies has declined, i.e., social redistribution has become less beneficial to the poor. Cantillon investigates poverty trends, focusing on the relationship between financial poverty, employment and social protection in the European Union (EU-27) during the decade preceding the economic and financial crisis that began in 2007/2008. The starting puzzle is that, during the period under study, European countries benefitted from a significant rise in employment rates, increasing average incomes, and consistently high social spending. However, despite this promising context and "while the fight against poverty was prominent on the political agendas of regional, national and international bodies", most countries failed to improve (relative) income poverty rates, particularly among the working-age population (Cantillon, 2011, p. 437). Based on Eurostat work-intensity data, Cantillon illustrates that rising employment between 2004 and 2008 has primarily benefitted the more work-intensive households, while benefitting the workless households only marginally. Consequently, while the number of jobless households has remained largely unvaried, the number of job-rich households has increased. Moreover, the data related to the at-risk-of-poverty rate, by work intensity, show that poverty risk increased substantially among work-poor households. Similarly, poverty risks for unemployed individuals also increased significantly. Thus, social protection for those who remained outside the labour force seems less adequate, indicating, more generally, a decline in the redistributive capacity of welfare states, since public social spending remained high in almost all countries. In other words, social policies have apparently channelled more resources to already work-intensive (i.e. wealthier) households than to workless ones (Cantillon, 2011, p. 439).

While public social spending remained high, what did change was the structure of the social outlays: in line with the turn towards active welfare states, the ratio of 'old' methods of transfer have experienced significant relative losses compared to the ratio of 'new' social spending. It therefore seems that such new forms of policy budget allocations favour the higher income groups more, particularly compared to traditional cash transfer policies. Firstly, Cantillon notes, because these policies are work-related (thus excluding the population outside of the labour market—as previously discussed), and secondly, because they transform welfare states into more service-related providers, which are considered to be less redistributive than cash transfers (Cantillon, 2011, p. 440). Thus, since job growth does not benefit work-poor households, work-related social spending was likely channelled towards middle and higher income groups. It seems, therefore, that European welfare states managed to crack the 'trilemma of the social service economy',[27] by lowering the social protection geared towards individuals outside the labour market (Cantillon, 2011, p. 445), i.e., further disadvantaging people in an already weak position.

However, Cantillon points out, "[t]his mechanism needs not to be regarded as a trade-off between redistribution and investment though: an appropriate policy design may no doubt help reduce or even neutralise such adverse effects. However, this will require both an adequate policy focus and sufficient insight into the direct and indirect pro-poorness of new policy measures" (Cantillon, 2011, p. 442). Furthermore, Cantillon argues, "the old redistributive agenda" should be adapted and returned to the centre of social policies: "prioritizing adequate minimum income protection and the reinforcing of the redistributive capacity of social programmes" (Cantillon, 2011, p. 445). In particular, welfare states should better recognise the social stratification with respect to social risks. Indeed, individuals that are more vulnerable face greater hurdles when navigating towards the labour market. This implies that they are less able to profit from in-work, utilisation-based benefits. Consequently, new social spending, based on an activation principle, is mainly profiting already stronger socio-economic groups (Cantillon, 2011, p. 445).

Finally, Bonoli, Cantillon and van Lancker (2017) investigated the Matthew effect in human capital policies (childcare and higher education) and ALMPs. Based on data for Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and the EU-27 (Eurostat SILC data), they show that full-time equivalent use of formal childcare for children under 3 years of age is socially stratified in the majority of countries,[28] and that there exist substantial differences in inequality across countries (Bonoli, Cantillon, & van Lancker, 2017, pp. 69-70). Based on OECD data, they show that Matthew effects also persist in higher education systems. Indeed, as previously mentioned, 20-34 year olds with highly educated parents have a much higher chance of participating in higher education, compared to their counterparts with parents with lower levels of education (Bonoli, *et al.*, 2017, pp. 71-72). Regarding AMLPs, the research draws similar conclusions to those presented in the previously mentioned study of Bonoli and Liechti (2018): in ALMPs, both positive and negative access biases can be detected. This indicates the frequent political targeting of disadvantaged individuals through ALMPs (positive access bias), but also the obstacles faced by the most disadvantaged individuals among the target groups, such as requirements of pre-existing abilities to participate in the programmes (negative access bias or Matthew effect) (Bonoli, *et al.*, 2017, pp. 73-74). This contribution, therefore, supports the claim that social investment policies seem so far unable to overcome and readdress pre-existing inequalities due to social stratification.

[27] According to Iversen and Wren (1998, as cited in Cantillon, 2011, p.444), as a consequence of the transition from a manufacturing to a service dominated economy, modern welfare states are no longer able to successfully enhance both employment and equality within the framework of a tight public budget.

[28] Only Denmark, Portugal and Norway show both a high use of formal childcare and a nearly equal use between the highest and the lowest income quintiles.

2.6. Summarising

Various authors have shed light on the Matthew effect from various perspectives. The concept that social benefits and collective goods benefit the higher income groups of society more than the lower has, of course, also been discussed by other authors and beyond the label of the Matthew effect. For instance, in a similar vein to the argument of Deleeck and Gal, Nozick (1974) has also highlighted that the middle classes profit more than the needy from redistribution programmes due to their more significant negotiation power, better capacity to form interest groups and superior political influence (Nozick, 1974, as cited in Bichot, 2002, p. 576). Goodin and Le Grand also shed light on the ways in which the welfare state serves 'not only the poor' (1987). Moreover, different terminology for this effect has been employed, such as regressive redistribution or, in French, '*redistribution à contresens*' (respectively, Palme, 2001; and Dupeyroux, 1984, as cited in Bichot, 2002, p. 576). Therefore, this chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the literature that addresses how wealthier individuals profit more from social policies, but an overview of reasons and mechanisms highlighted by authors who have investigated the Matthew effect.

Summing up the reviewed literature, various general causal factors for a Matthew effect can be identified. Deleeck and Gal highlighted that social policies are shaped by middle classes' influence on both policy-making and policy implementation processes. Proponents of the softer version of the Matthew effect suggested that such mechanisms are also evident in fiscal and occupational welfare (Gal, 1998), a contention proven empirically by van Lancker and Ghysels (2012). It has also been highlighted that social policy is often based on language and forms typical to the middle-classes, such as its legal structure and the functioning of administration (Bonoli and Champion, 2015; Deleeck, 1979; Nicaise & Bollens, 1998). Both Gal and Nicaise and Bollens highlighted that middle classes are more mobile, articulated, better informed, and have better connections to civil servants, enabling them to profit more from welfare state systems. A mechanism detected by various authors is cream-skimming (Bonoli, 2014; Gal, 1998; Gomel *et al*., 2013; Nadai, 2017; Nicaise & Bollens, 1998). Moreover, active social policies are more service related, which are less redistributive and focus upon in-work benefits (Cantillon, 2011). Several authors have also highlighted that more vulnerable individuals are penalised by the category-based provision systems[29] of social security (Bichot, 2002; Cantillon, 2011; Nicaise & Bollens, 1998). Higher education offers more benefits to higher income groups in two ways: firstly, through tax expenditures, since less well-off families contribute substantially to the system in aggregate terms, while benefitting only little from it as their offspring tend to pursue their studies less compared to the offspring of wealthier families (Bichot, 2002; Deleeck, 1979; Gal, 1998). Secondly, benefits for children in education predominantly benefit wealthier families with children in education proportionally longer than poorer families (Deleeck, 1979; Deleeck *et al.,* 1983, as cited in van Lancker, 2014). Other mechanisms detected include institutional barriers, lack of motivation by participants, which may be rooted in material, financial and/or psychological causes (Nicaise & Bollens, 1998), and pedagogical reasons, i.e., the non-adaptation of a programme content or length to very disadvantaged individuals (Nicaise, 2000). Bichot (2002) clearly illustrates how the Matthew effect has a strong cumulative effect, highlighting that this culminates in sickness and death due to differences in access to health services and in life expectancy.

Regarding the well investigated field of childcare services, many mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect have been discussed. A family's income and parents' (particularly mothers') educational attainment are correlated with childcare use (the higher the income/education, the higher the usage) (Abrassart and Bonoli, 2015; Bonoli & Vuille, 2013; Schlanser, 2011). Cost is an explanatory factor (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015; Bonoli & Champion, 2015), consequently, parental fees and the progressive nature of a fee structure also have an impact (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015). Certain foreign groups seem to rely less on childcare services (Bonoli & Vuille, 2013; Schlanser, 2011), as well as parents living in rural areas (Bonoli & Vuille, 2013). In addition to this, the

[29] Benefits that are category or work related.

taxation system and accessibility may also introduce a bias against poorer families among childcare service providers (van Lancker & Ghysels, 2012). Finally, the type and structure of a particular welfare state might generate Matthew effects. On the one hand, the welfare state regime has been found to influence access to some social policies (Bonoli & Liechti, 2018). While, on the other hand, the social investment approach of modern welfare states also seems to have induced such an effect (Bonoli *et. al.*, 2017; Cantillon, 2011).

2.7. Research gap

Although there is a varied and growing literature on the Matthew effect in social policy, the majority of studies adopt a macro perspective. Most research analyses whether an effect can be detected or not, often focusing on its monetary impact, or the more general or structural causes that determine it. What is missing, therefore, is a micro approach that investigates deeper, more hidden, and perhaps also unexpected mechanisms, as well as reasons leading to a Matthew effect. Through an in-depth analysis of two cases, with this dissertation I set out to fill this lacuna, and to contribute to the literature a mainly inductive and empirical study that offers a more detailed perspective on the Matthew effect, analysing not only the micro mechanisms that induce it, but also the fundamental reasons and justifications that constitute its foundations. Indeed, in order to address this undesirable phenomenon in social policies, I believe that it is essential to examine the core of the 'support structure' lying at the basis of the effect, in order to truly understand and address it. Although, in the sense of inductive research, the primary focus has been clarified through the empirical research, this contribution sheds light on a particularly under-investigated field: the intermingling of administrative and political forces and principles. Indeed, the intersection of these two fields offers a particularly interesting and novel perspective on the Matthew effect that has not been highlighted in previous research.

3. Contribution of the study and methodological approach

As Wim van Lancker highlighted in his dissertation, the Matthew effect is a social construct, which implies that it can be changed "by changing the rules of the game" (van Lancker, 2014, p. 3). The aim of this thesis is indeed to offer a better understanding of how and why less disadvantaged individuals receive greater access to social policies, in order to contribute to both theoretical as well as practical knowledge, with the hope of contributing to the formulation of more effective social policies. The focus is, therefore, to detect and explain the gearwheels channelling resources of a social programme from the neediest. To achieve this, the Matthew effect is investigated in non-monetary terms, focusing on the hidden mechanisms at work in specific social policy programmes. Indeed, a Matthew effect may be hidden and not necessarily detectable by focusing on analysing a policy through its formal design. A Matthew effect may be the result of the intersection of various levels of a policy measure, such as its many components, various actors and/or its contextual setting(s).

As already mentioned in the introduction, I decided to focus on the policy field of vocational education and training programmes for disadvantaged youth. It is true that training programmes, in general, have not been very successful among ALMPs thus far: Kluve (2010) asserted that training programmes, the most commonly used type of ALMPs in European countries, show only modestly positive effects, particularly for youth. However, 'training programmes' is a very broad definition. Under its heading are grouped programmes offering a range of diverse activities (e.g., language or computer courses) which yield considerably diverse impacts (see, e.g., Kluve, 2010; Nicaise & Bollens, 1998, pp. 134-138). However, my focus is on dual-VET programmes, which are very specific training opportunities that combine in-work practice with school-based theory. Such programmes are quite rare among ALMPs. Given dual-VET's strength in facilitating school-to-work transitions, it can be presumed that they offer a greater potential for youth's labour market integration than programmes grouped under the more general heading of 'training programmes'.

This narrow policy field has been chosen for two main reasons. First, because it seems a particularly promising area to investigate hidden Matthew effects. Indeed, the salience of the policy field (as described in the introduction) suggests that policy makers should be particularly eager to avoid Matthew effects in such programmes. However, preliminary insights in the first case study indicated that a Matthew effect was most likely in existence. A second reason for choosing this policy field is of a more practical nature. Indeed, with my thesis the aim is not only to make a theoretical contribution to the knowledge on mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect, but the aim is also to contribute to avoiding Matthew effects in such crucial programmes in practical terms. In other words, by offering insight into the deeper mechanisms which create Matthew effects, I hope to contribute to better-suited policy designs that will enable highly disadvantaged youth to profit from life-changing opportunities.

To achieve these objectives, the research has been carried out with an abductive and critical approach, based on two in-depth qualitative case studies. The abductive approach occupies a space between the inductive approach, which proceeds from empirical data to theoretical abstraction and inference, and the deductive approach, which deduces hypotheses from theoretical material and attempts to apply them to empirical data. An abductive approach adopts both processes: on occasion, it is the theory that informs the empirical strategy, and on others, it is the empirical data that directs the selection of relevant theoretical material. In my research, I began with the theoretical concept of a Matthew effect, and then proceeded to empirical observation. Following the initial empirical insights, I returned to theory to select the appropriate theoretical framework, which then was applied to further empirical observations, and so forth. More synthetically, the research was carried out following an iterative approach, moving back and forth between theory and empirical data collection.

Despite elaborating on a pre-existing theoretical concept, the methodological approach (i.e. the way to think about and study social reality—Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 3), embraces grounded theory's quest for collecting empirical data with an open mind and anchoring a more abstract understanding of the reality in the empirical data. This approach proposes a way of thinking about data and the world by encouraging researchers "to question, to be able to easily move from what they see and hear and to raise that to the level of abstract, and then to turn around again and move back to the data level" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 8). Eventually, "[g]rounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12), which is the ultimate objective of the present contribution. Indeed, being driven by a desire to profoundly understand the reasons and mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect, the grounded theory approach is an effective tool to develop "[…] an awareness of the interrelationships among conditions (structure), action (process), and consequences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 10). However, starting from an existing theoretical concept, rather than developing new theory as preconized by grounded theory, the aim of this thesis is to contribute new (grounded) knowledge to this concept. Thus, to elaborate and expand existing theory, instead of discovering new theory from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12).

Grounded theory relies on a constant comparative method (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-115) that is informed through theoretically sampled comparison groups and limited by theoretical saturation (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 45-77). The purpose is to reach the ultimate goal of theory generation or, as in this case, theory elaboration, by comparing incidents collected empirically, feed them into the different categories and, by so doing, demarcating the theory. When deemed necessary, the pool of observed incidents should be enlarged by returning to empirical data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 112). The choice of where to observe the relevant incidents necessary to complete the analysis is informed on a theoretical basis (i.e., theoretical sampling): previously collected, coded and analysed data informs the researcher about where to find new relevant data to further develop the theory. In the authors' words:

> "The basic question in theoretical sampling […] is: what groups or subgroups does one turn to next in data collection? And for what theoretical purpose? In short, how does the sociologist select multiple comparison groups? The possibilities of multiple comparisons groups are infinite, and so groups must be chosen according to theoretical criteria" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 47).

It is theoretical relevance that determines sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 49). The criterion which indicates that the constant comparative method can come to an end (e.g., the researcher can move to the last step of writing the theory) is theoretical saturation. When empirical observation does not contribute any new relevant data, but only adds to the already identified properties, the well-established and nourished categories can be considered saturated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61).

Furthermore, the theoretical framework should stem from the data and not steer initial decisions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). This also implies that there should be no pre-determined plan guiding data collection from the outset, rather, data collection should be continuously adapted and informed based on what emerges from the empirical data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 47). This flexibility serves to best adapt the research process to the results emerging directly from empirical observation, in order to develop, or elaborate, a theory that accommodates reality, while also working as a tool to explain the studied phenomenon and to formulate predictions. Thus, according to Glaser and Strauss, this flexible approach enables researchers to pursue its main purpose: "[…] to generate theory, not to establish verifications with the 'facts'" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 48). In the following paragraph, the research process is described in more detail and related to the present work, highlighting "how grounded theory methodology was used to produce results and findings" (Gephart, 2004, p. 459).

With a general quest for practical relevance, this research is problem driven: it starts with the identification of a problem—the Matthew effect—as evinced from the literature. The problem was selected because it is highly undesirable both from a public as well as a private perspective. Subsequently, a particularly interesting area in which to investigate the reasons and mechanisms leading to this effect was identified: VET programmes for disadvantaged youth. Following this brief and general sketch of the research object and area, I abandoned the theoretical shore to dive deep into the empirical data collection of the first case study, mainly selected due to the high probability of identifying a Matthew effect in operation (as explained later). Following the collection of what seemed to be interesting and informative data, I returned to the theoretical ground in order to make sense of the bulk of the collected information.

At that point, the theoretical framework began to emerge from the initial empirical insights: frontline workers seemed to induce a Matthew effect by trying to respond to pressures, the majority of which originated from the organisational and contextual framework. It was therefore necessary to better understand the conditions created by these frameworks, and the reasons the responsible actors established such conditions. A combination of the strategic analysis of organisations (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977/2014) and street-level bureaucracy theory (Lipsky, 1980/2010) therefore seemed to offer a particularly relevant analytic framework to obtain more profound knowledge of the mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect. With this new lens in my pocket, I returned to continue the empirical data collection pertaining to the first case study.

When it became clear that all the interviews were confirming my suspicions without contributing much new and relevant information (theoretical saturation), I returned to the data analysis. The preliminary conclusions based on this analysis led to the selection of the second case study (theoretical sampling). The specific measure was selected due to its similar structure and objective to the first measure, in order to have a similar programme to analyse, but with interesting variations to achieve a new perspective on the research object. With a much better furnished backpack compared to the one at the beginning of the first case study, I began the empirical data collection of the second case study. In order to be able to explore and appreciate all the possible reasons for this effect in the new case study, a significant challenge was to maintain an open mind to be able to observe other aspects possibly leading to a Matthew effect. I attempted to resolve this challenge by fully immerging myself into the new programme, understanding its specificities and current challenges, the role and weight of the key actors, as well as the peculiarities of the context. During the interviews, I kept the results from the first case study in the back of my mind, but without restraining myself to simply confirming whether a similar dynamic was at work (indeed, it was not). Once the most crucial group of actors were interviewed and no additional information was emerging, it was time to again analyse the data for the second case study. Thereafter, the time was ripe to consider the results of both studied programmes and draw more general conclusions. Eventually, equipped with these conclusions, I returned to the specific literature, which validated and enabled the addition of a more theoretical perspective and critical consideration of the results.

Regarding the critical approach of this thesis, the aim is to understand a social phenomenon embedded in its historical context and interpret results with a critical stance. In Gephart's words:

> "Critical research describes the historical emergence of social structures and the contemporary contexts in which these structures form contradictions with implications for social action and human freedom. […] Contradictions are conceived to be basic to the exploitation that emerges when hegemonic worldviews conceal contradictions, leaving people unaware of tacit forms of domination and subjugation that are present" (Gephart, 2004, p. 457).

Critical research is, therefore, geared towards challenging dominant and subjugating dynamics and to induce social actors to become "reflexively aware" of their own role in the reproduction of the inequities unmasked

and give space to silenced voices (Gephart, 2004, pp. 456-457). A critical approach "understands and interprets existing behaviour and actions in terms of how ethical the behaviour is and how responsible the actions are" (Jun, 2006, p. 51). Within this approach, the researcher is not neutral but adopts a position, with the final objective of changing reality in a way that is perceived as more desirable, transcending taken-for-granted truths and transforming the social order to allow for "emancipation from unwanted structures of domination" (Gephart, 2004, p. 457). In Jun's words, "the critical theory perspective incorporates the value-oriented and socially grounded aspects of social reality by critically examining the objective, value-neutral, and rational aspects of institutions, power, and authority" (Jun, 2006, p. 46).

Therefore, the underlying assumption of this research approach is the coexistence of multiple worldviews, that realities are value laden, and that they contain contradictions. Ontologically, critical research is based on historical realist assumptions: reality is socially constructed, shaped by social, political and economic values. These values become crystallised and reified over time. Consequently, the experience of such a *constructed* reality feels as solid as it were *unconstructed* reality (as assumed by positivists). Consequently, members of society are unaware of the facts regarding power relations highlighted through critical research (Gephart, 2004, p. 457; Schmid, 2017).

Within this context, the aim of the present work is to develop structural insights in order to shed light on the fundamental contradictions that stem from the overlapping of social, political and economic values that have been reinforced over the years and through historical changes and challenges. Through this approach, the hope is to contribute to emancipation by enabling relevant actors to realise the deeper implications of given actions. This objective was pursued both on a general level, through publications of the research findings aiming to reach a broader audience, as well as on a more localised scale geared towards the actors interviewed during the studied cases through member checking sessions (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 282-285, 332). In these sessions, the interviewed individuals were invited to attend a presentation and an associated discussion of the research findings. The purpose was both to disseminate the findings to the very actors of the studied measures, as well as to ensure that my analysis did not misrepresent their experiences. Hence, it served both to spread the results and to validate the analysis.

It is important to highlight, however, that, through this work, it is in no way my objective to criticise the two studied measures or to disregard their tenacity and commitment to reach out to disadvantaged youth. Their actions are perfectly rational considering the context with which they have to deal. This is also the reason why I chose not to name the measures, in order to divert the focus from single measures and set it on the mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect, based on two cases taken as examples. This contribution is intended to illustrate the outcome of the interaction between a given context and the resulting possible options for social policy makers through the Matthew effect lens, not to criticise specific actors' decisions and actions.

3.1. Case selection

The first case, implemented in the French-speaking canton, has been selected on the basis of a presumed Matthew effect from the outset. In fact, the enrolled youth achieve a global success rate of around 65%. Considering only the success rate at the final exam, it normally exceeds 80%, which is close to the overall cantonal rate. Bearing in mind the general complexity of the target group, this is a significant achievement. However, despite a strong political emphasis on and support of the programme, only approximately 10-15% of potential candidates gain access the programme[30]. Comparing this restrained access rate with the measure's satisfactory success rate, it was presumable from the outset that it is mainly the less disadvantaged youth among

[30] Figures based on own calculations based on programme data, and on information from an interview to a cantonal-level politico-administrative actor.

the target group who were able to access the programme. This made it an excellent case to explore the dynamics leading to a Matthew effect.

The second case was selected after the first had concluded. It was selected due to its comparable objective in comparison to the first case study (to support disadvantaged youth to find and to accomplish an apprenticeship), and due to its different framework conditions related to dual-VET. Indeed, while the first case is implemented in a big French-speaking canton, the second is located in a small, highly prosperous Swiss-German canton. Dual-VET is more entrenched in the German part of Switzerland compared to Latin Switzerland (Berger, Lamamra, & Bonoli L., 2019, p. 20; Berner & Bonoli L., 2019, p.59; Höckel *et al.*, 2009, p. 13; Meyer, 2019). Moreover, dual-VET markets strongly depend on labour markets: if the latter prosper, the former are also more dynamic, as employers are more willing to offer apprenticeships when the economic cycle is positive (CSRE, 2010, p. 142; Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Consequently, economic participation in the dual-VET system was presumed to be stronger in the context of the second case study, both for cultural and economic reasons. Thus, the greater offer of apprenticeships in this canton might ease competition and potentially lower the threshold for the most disadvantaged youth.

Hence, the two programmes pursue a similar goal and were implemented in approximatively the same years, while at the same time being embedded in rather different contexts and presenting rather different operational structures, such as the collaboration between public and private actors. This combination of similarities and differences makes them a particularly interesting combination of cases to study, in order to detect the different possible mechanisms and reasons leading to a Matthew effect, particularly highlighting the influence of political and administrative contexts which lead to two very different incentive structures. However, too many variations impede a systematic comparison between the two cases. Consequently, it is not possible to disentangle specific factors and observe their impact on the Matthew effect in two very different contexts. Indeed, the objective through the two case studies has never been replication to demonstrate preconceived propositions (see Yin, 2009, pp. 54-57), but an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon through two different cases, in order to further nourish the generated knowledge of the Matthew effect. In other words, the intent of this study is not to measure the Matthew effect or its intensity with respect to specific factors, but to detect and describe underlying mechanisms and possible reasons for its existence. Hence, each case study has been performed individually, according to an in-depth analysis, and comparison took place at a more general level, once the two individual case studies were concluded. Consequently, a limitation of this study is that it cannot demonstrate the impact of the disentangled mechanisms and reasons in terms of Matthew effect's intensity. In other words, the selected cases shed light on different mechanisms and reasons leading to a Matthew effect, but do not measure their impact in terms of the intensity of the Matthew effect.

4. Article 1. Getting to the front of the queue: the complex struggle of disadvantaged youth on the Swiss dual-VET market

Abstract

While post-compulsory education is crucial for integration into modern knowledge economies, many youth struggle to access it. In the framework of a social investment strategy, to increase the youth's future chances in the labour market, several programmes were introduced with the objective of supporting youth struggling during their transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education. The aim of this paper is to take the perspective of disadvantaged youth following support measures in Switzerland, to understand their situation, their difficulties in finding an apprenticeship post, and the way they apprise the received support. Based on twelve interviews with youth following three different measures supporting them to access the apprenticeship market, it is highlighted how the interviewed young adults collect several disadvantaging features highlighted by previous research, and thus face a complex situation during the transition phase. Furthermore, the paper sheds light on the limits of the social investment strategy when it comes to highly disadvantaged individuals. In terms of support, on one hand, it seems crucial for the youth to receive holistic and suitable support, i.e., not only centred on the apprenticeship search, but also enough basic amenities and personnel to follow each participant in a personal way. On the other, the interviewees appreciated being counselled, while remaining entitled to take their own decisions.

Unsubmitted article.

Getting to the front of the queue: the complex struggle of disadvantaged youth on the Swiss dual-VET market

Delia Pisoni

Abstract

While post-compulsory education is crucial for integration into modern knowledge economies, many youth struggle to access it. In the framework of a social investment strategy, to increase the youth's future chances in the labour market, several programmes were introduced with the objective of supporting youth struggling during their transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education. The aim of this paper is to take the perspective of disadvantaged youth following support measures in Switzerland, to understand their situation, their difficulties in finding an apprenticeship post, and the way they apprise the received support. Based on twelve interviews with youth following three different measures supporting them to access the apprenticeship market, it is highlighted how the interviewed young adults collect several disadvantaging features highlighted by previous research, and thus face a complex situation during the transition phase. Furthermore, the paper sheds light on the limits of the social investment strategy when it comes to highly disadvantaged individuals. In terms of support, on one hand, it seems crucial for the youth to receive holistic and suitable support, i.e., not only centred on the apprenticeship search, but also enough basic amenities and personnel to follow each participant in a personal way. On the other, the interviewees appreciated being counselled, while remaining entitled to take their own decisions.

Key words

disadvantaged youth, second chance programmes, transition I, apprenticeship, dual-VET, social investment

Introduction

In modern knowledge societies, education is crucial for integration into labour markets. Post-compulsory education serves as a stepping-stone for labour market integration and for further and life-long education. People lacking this basic education are overrepresented among social benefits recipients, indicating their difficulties to integrate and remain in the labour market. For instance, in 2017, people without post-compulsory education in Switzerland were 17.1% of the resident population but represented 46.7% of social benefit recipients.[1] In a particularly weak position are young people without post-compulsory education who, lacking not only education but also work experience, face a hard time gaining a foothold in the labour market. Therefore, from a social investment perspective (e.g., Morel *et al.*, 2012), many governments invest in youth's human capital to improve their chances in the labour market in the future. Consequently, several 'second chance programmes', offering support to young

[1] https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/securite-sociale/aide-sociale/beneficiaires-aide-sociale/aide-sociale-economique.html, last retrieved 17th December 2019.

people who did not manage or risk failing in transition I (from compulsory to post-compulsory education), have been introduced.

In Switzerland, from an international perspective, youth unemployment is quite low. Although it is difficult to establish a direct causal link (CSRE, 2018), the apprenticeship system is often described as facilitating the school-to-work transition, and therefore associated with the relatively low youth unemployment rate (e.g., Hoffmann & Schwartz, 2015; Meyer, 2019; Salvisberg & Sacchi, 2014; Strahm, 2010). Indeed, apprenticeship certificates are well perceived in the Swiss labour market, and differently than in other countries, in Switzerland, Vocational Education and Training (VET), particularly in its dual form of combining in-firm practical training with school-based theoretical education (dual-VET or apprenticeship),[2] is the most popular post-compulsory educational path.[3] However, accessibility to the apprenticeship market has become harder, with direct transitions from lower- to upper-secondary education decreasing since the 1990s (CSRE, 2018, p105; Höckel, Field, & Norton Grubb, 2009).

Indeed, the situation of young adults in Switzerland has deteriorated over the years. In the 1990s, youth unemployment rapidly increased in the context of an economic downturn, followed by an apprenticeship crisis.[4] In the early 2000s the situation worsened again, fixing youth unemployment as an issue of public concern. In those years, a bad economic situation coincided with particularly numerous cohorts of youth ending compulsory education in 2003 and 2005, with a consequent sharp increased competition in the apprenticeship market (Weber, 2007). As a result, more disadvantaged youth face even greater access difficulties (Bonvin, Dif-Pradalier, & Rosenstein, 2013). To avoid these youth's exclusion from post-compulsory education, considering the big handicap this represents in the labour market of a knowledge economy, it is crucial to channel the necessary and appropriate support to these youth.

As Bonoli and Wilson highlight, in the rather liberal Swiss apprenticeship system, in which firms are free whether and whom to train, the favoured solution is that "the state intervenes through measures external to the dual system to support youth in their search for an apprenticeship position, and there are low expectations on firms to be involved in inclusiveness measures" (Bonoli & Wilson, 2019). Indeed, several 'transition measures' have been introduced, substantially varying from one canton to the other (see Egger, Dreher & Partner, 2007). Generally, these are supposed to support youth in their transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education, either in a more school-based setting, or in a more practical setting (Dif-Pradalier & Zarka, 2014). Concerning the most disadvantaged youth, generally in a situation of complex difficulties, this is a compound task requiring the appropriate responsiveness and allocation of resources. Yet, it is crucial to invest substantially and as early as possible in the most disadvantaged youth's chances to access post-compulsory education in order to prevent lifelong difficulties to get a stable foothold in the labour market. In other terms, it seems particularly important that social investment policies reach out particularly to the very disadvantaged individuals, since they face the greatest risk to remain permanently excluded from the markets.

To design appropriate measures and to invest enough resources in policies capable of addressing, specifically, highly complex situations is important not only for the individual, but also for society, in terms of greater social cohesion and reduced public spending in the future. Hence, to allow for better informed social investment policies that are truly in the position to also support the most disadvantaged

[2] These terms will be used interchangeably.
[3] Currently, about 70% of youth pursue VET after compulsory education, with a majority opting for an apprenticeship (see e.g., SERI 2020).
[4] Indeed, the dual-VET market is highly dependent on the general economic situation, as in economic downturns firms tend to hire less apprentices.

individuals, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of the situation of these individuals. Additionally, with a focus on transitory measures accompanying youth during transition I, it is crucial to understand these youth's situations in the context of the dual-VET market.

The present study focuses on three measures of this type in two cantons in Switzerland and, particularly, on the experiences of some enrolled youth. Indeed, to improve the effectiveness of a measure, it is also crucial to understand what type of support is better received by the very participants. Based on interviews with twelve youth, this study offers an 'inside perspective' on these measures and on the difficulty of integrating into the apprenticeship market in Switzerland, highlighting the limits of the social investment strategy when it comes to highly disadvantaged youth trying to access a highly selective market.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this contribution is (i) to connect the literature on accessibility to the dual-VET system with the practical experience of youth enrolled in a second chance programme in Switzerland, (ii) to shed light on the youth's perception of the received support, and (iii) to explore the difficulty of integrating into the apprenticeship market from their perspective. What are the main struggles for these youth to integrate into the dual-VET market, how do they live this experience, and what type of support do they value most? With these guiding research questions, the aim is to contribute to the existing literature by highlighting disadvantaged youth's struggles to integrate into a highly competitive market, and how social investment policy measures intersect with individual realities. Consequently, the present contribution allows to gain better understanding of the situation 'at the margin' of the social investment strategy.

The paper is structured in the following manner. It will start by contextualising the general framework: to better understand the difficulties of accessing the apprenticeship market experienced by these young adults, it is necessary to start with an overview of the functioning of the apprenticeship market, particularly shedding light on what is known about employers' recruitment behaviour and preferences, to get an idea of the features that facilitate or hamper access to an apprenticeship post. The second section will present the methodological approach. In the third section, the empirical findings based on interviews with youth enrolled in second chance measures will be presented and discussed against the backdrop of the literature regarding the accessibility to the dual-VET market. The conclusion follows.

1. Background: the apprenticeship market

In order to better understand the difficulties of youth struggling during transition I, it is useful to delineate the context in which they operate: how does the apprenticeship system work; particularly, how does the selection process work, and what criteria has previous research identified as hampering access to the apprenticeship market? In the first part of this section, the aim is to describe the general functioning of the apprenticeship market. In the second part, the focus will be set on individual factors that have been identified as influencing accessibility to the dual-VET market.

1.1. General functioning of the apprenticeship market

In apprenticeship or dual-VET systems, youth are generally trained in a firm, complementing the practical firm-based training with a few days per week of school-based theoretical education. Consequently, to be enrolled in dual-VET, youth need to be hired by employers. In Switzerland, the system takes the form of a partnership between the federal state, the cantons and the economy. The federal state has a strategic function, controlling for quality and development on a general level. A federal law regulates dual-VET, hence the system is nationally uniform. The implementation and control of the proper application of the federal law are the responsibility of the regional administrative units,

i.e., the cantons. Firms are in charge of providing the apprenticeships. The tendentially liberal state–market relationship defining the Swiss political economy tradition is true also for the dual-VET market, which is managed in a rather liberal way regarding the offer of apprenticeship positions that are the responsibility of firms (Bonoli & Wilson, 2019). Indeed, the system relies upon the voluntary participation of employers who are completely free to choose *whether* and *whom* to train. Consequently, as Sager (2006) highlights, the Swiss apprenticeship market is a supply-driven market.

More generally, Heike Solga (2015) has pointed out that apprenticeship markets, as labour markets, are matching markets: matching candidates to open apprenticeship positions. Moreover, particularly for the more popular professions, employers usually receive numerous applications for a single position and thus have to choose among several applicants for a single position. This implies that a mechanism of competition comes into play (Solga, 2015). In very general terms, since employers need to comply with market principles, they try to select the most easy to train candidate, to contain costs of training as much as possible (Di Stasio, 2014). However, as in the labour market, the apprenticeship market is also characterised by an asymmetry of information: during recruitment, employers do not have access to all the information they would like to have in order to take the best decision. This may induce them to rely on indicators believed to give information about the characteristic they would like to know. Such indicators are called signals, based on the seminal article of Michael Spence (1973). Insights of signalling and queuing theory are therefore useful to understand how employers proceed with this selection, coping with information asymmetry and the too large pool of applications.

As mentioned, according to signalling theory, since not all desired information (e.g., honesty or commitment) is directly available, employers frequently rely on signals to assess a candidates' suitability. These are observable characteristics considered as indicators of the lacking information (Bonoli & Liechti, 2014; Protsch & Solga, 2015). According to queuing theory, during a recruitment process applicants are set in a hypothetical queue based on the desirability of their profiles, which are classified through signals which indicate their cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Protsch & Solga, 2015). The probability to be recruited is proportional to the distance between the ideal profile the company is looking for and the candidate's profile. This theory helps us to understand what signals employers consider and value most while screening the profiles of candidates. Protsch and Solga's (2015) research has shown evidence that employers apply a mixed decision-making pattern at the early stage of the recruitment process. This pattern combines an additive rule with a minimal requirements rule: in the former, signals about cognitive and non-cognitive skills are considered as interchangeably important, while the latter considers necessary minimal requirements. Hence, to be more cost-effective when narrowing down the applications pool at the early stage of the recruitment process, employers define thresholds for the different signals: if a candidate does not satisfy a necessary requirement, she or he will be excluded from the process, regardless of the remaining characteristics. Candidates' positions in the queue would, thus, depend on whether they meet both criteria, none, only one of the two, and which one. According to the authors' suggestion and empirical results, non-cognitive skills are more important than cognitive ones. Other authors also highlight the pivotal role of non-cognitive skills (see, e.g., Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009; Imdorf, 2019; Salvisberg & Sacchi, 2014).

Besides the matching argument, Solga (2015) points out that another way to reduce the pool of applications in a situation of asymmetry of information is to turn towards statistical discrimination. The objective of this strategy is again to estimate the candidate's trainability. However, this time, signals are not based on individual characteristics, but on signals referring to characteristics of a group to which the candidate pertains, hence implying a statistical reasoning. When assessing a candidate on the basis of such reasoning, employers judge the candidate's trainability believing that she or he shares working features of the group to which she or he pertains. Bonoli and Liechti (2014) illustrate this mechanism

through the example of nationality: "[…] an employer who believes that members of a certain ethnic group are, on average, less productive than nationals, may decide to avoid all of them".

Thus, applicants are situated in a hypothetical queue relative to an employer's estimation of signals considered as informative of a candidate's trainability and, thus, the potential costs of training. Consequently, the success or failure in receiving an apprenticeship post offer is determined by a combination of factors unique to the single case, as well as by employers' evaluation. According to Kronig (as cited in Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009), success in vocational education and training is determined by a 'systematic randomness': a product of effort, privileges and hazard. A final, but crucial, aspect to highlight is that disadvantaging features have a cumulative, mutually reinforcing effect (Coradi Vellacott & Wolter, 2005; Rankin & Regan, 2004).

1.2. Access to the apprenticeship market

In terms of accessibility, the mechanisms at work in an apprenticeship market more closely resemble, therefore, those found in labour markets rather than those in general educational institutions. Indeed, whereas access conditions in general educational institutions are usually transparent and clearly defined, in (liberal) labour markets, selection is, rather, unregulated and dependent upon the selecting party, who is free to apply her or his own criteria without having to make them transparent. Consequently, it is impossible to precisely identify the criteria that allow a youth to find an apprenticeship post. However, the literature has highlighted many features that seem to influence accessibility to apprenticeship markets. These can be split into two groups: collective and individual factors. Collective factors—such as the economic, demographic, or labour market situation—have an influence on the overall apprenticeship market in terms of the size of supply and demand. They are therefore important to understanding the more general degree of competition among apprenticeship seekers. This is crucial to understand the chances of disadvantaged youth in a specific market at a given time: the higher the degree of competition, the larger the pool of candidates from which to select (i.e., the longer the queue), and, therefore, the more difficult it is for disadvantaged youth to be selected. Yet, the focus of this article is on individual characteristics, since its core interest is the interviewed youth's individual experiences in accessing the apprenticeship market at a given point in time, without comparing their experiences across different apprenticeship markets, or over time.

Moreover, in addition to changing over time and adapting to factors on a more macro level, it is important to point out that accessibility to the apprenticeship market is also influenced by regional or local realities, such as the linguistic region (Sager, 2006), the degree of urbanisation (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009), or by the specificities of the sector (van Bauer & Fehring, 2015; Sager, 2006; Wilson, 2019). This is particularly the case in Switzerland, which is quite a varied country, presenting important differences in terms of dual-VET perception and opportunity structures. For instance, dual-VET is much more wide-spread in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and in rural areas compared to Latin Switzerland and urban areas, where it is more often seen as a second-choice option, mainly for youth with low academic achievements or from a lower socio-economic background (Berger, Lamamra, & Bonoli L., 2019; Berner & Bonoli L., 2019; Höckel et al. 2009; Meyer, 2019). Particularly interesting is that the opportunity structure seems to follow the same lines, with apparently better dual-VET opportunities for disadvantaged youth in the German-speaking part and in rural areas. Indeed, the distribution across youth enrolled in high, medium or low exigencies apprenticeships is much more balanced in the German-speaking part and rural areas when compared to Latin Switzerland and urban areas, where youth are mainly enrolled in high exigencies dual-VET options (Meyer, 2019, pp. 137-138).

However, to account for the various contingencies of dual-VET realities is beyond the scope of the present article. Therefore, the attempt in the following section is to offer a general overview of individual characteristics influencing accessibility to the apprenticeship market in Switzerland, taking the perspective of an 'unspecified training place provider' (van Buer & Fehring, 2015). Moreover, the overview relies mainly on literature about Switzerland, the country of interest, and Germany, which has a similar dual-VET system, as well as regarding disadvantaged youth.

1.2.1. Individual factors influencing dual-VET accessibility

Extensive literature has highlighted the importance of cognitive skills (i.e., mental and intellectual capabilities) in affecting the chances to find an apprenticeship. Academic competencies, signalled through school grades, are an important signal to estimate the candidate's trainability (e.g., Di Stasio, 2014; Protsch & Solga, 2015). Particularly important are degrees of mathematics and of the first language (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Results of the TREE[5] study have shown that youth scoring low in literacy in the PISA exam are much more likely to be in a transitory measure, or not in training at all, two years after finishing compulsory schooling (Perriard, 2005). Moreover, in Switzerland, particularly big enterprises and some professional associations often turn towards aptitude tests (e.g., multi-check or basic-check) to evaluate the competencies of interest. This is less the case in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which rather turn towards short internships and personal interviews that allow both the estimation of cognitive skills and to observe candidates' suitability in terms of personality, which is particularly important in SMEs (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009; Imdorf, 2007).

Another signal used to estimate cognitive skills is the school-track followed during compulsory education.[6] It has been demonstrated that youth accomplishing compulsory education in less demanding lower-secondary education tracks in Switzerland have smaller chances of finding an apprenticeship post (particularly in more demanding professions), are overrepresented in transitory measures compared to youth who finish compulsory education in academically stronger tracks (Perriard, 2005), and incur higher risks of staying without upper-secondary education degree (Meyer, 2009, 2019). Indeed, these tracks are often perceived as an important indicator for the acquired skills and thus represent an easy way for employers to quickly filter candidates perceived as less trainable due to supposedly weaker cognitive skills. Specific tracks seem to have become even a precondition for certain trainings (Hupka & Stalder, 2004). This confirms the minimal requirements rule highlighted by Protsch and Solga (2015), according to which there are minimal requirements for candidates to satisfy in order to be taken into consideration. The effect of school tracks seems to be even stronger than the effect of academic achievements (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Indeed, Meyer (2019) highlighted that the impact of the tracks remains, irrespective of the pupils' PISA scores. Yet, it is necessary to mention that the allocation of pupils into the different tracks is very imprecise in Switzerland, with consistently varying assessment tools (Meyer, 2009). Kronig (as cited in Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009) highlights that this decision largely depends on the class context, on the evaluating teacher, as well as on characteristics independent of performance, such as the pupil's socio-economic and migration background.

More generally, it has been highlighted that what young people achieve academically is, to a large extent, influenced by background characteristics, such as socio-economic and migration background (Coradi Vellacott & Wolter, 2005; Meyer, 2009). Indeed, numerous studies have detected a clear correlation between a youth's social origin and her or his success in all phases of the vocational path (access to and

[5] 'Transitions from Education to Employment': a longitudinal study on school-to-work transitions in Switzerland, based on data of about 6000 youth who participated in the PISA survey in 2000. It is important to note that transition I for the cohort of youth analysed by TREE happened in the early 2000s, a moment in which the demand for apprenticeships largely exceeded the offer, hence increasing competition and decreasing chances of finding an apprenticeship post, mainly so for the more disadvantaged youth (see Meyer, 2019).

[6] In differentiated schooling systems, pupils are separated early on during compulsory schooling and put in differentiated classes following cognitively more or less demanding curricula.

success during VET, and transitioning from VET into the labour market) (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). For instance, the TREE study highlighted greater difficulty in accessing post-compulsory education for youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Meyer, 2009), and that those who do manage to access dual-VET are overrepresented in low or medium exigencies sectors (Meyer, 2019; see also Imdorf, 2019 in this regard).

A migration background represents another risk factor. Indeed, youth from a migration background are often overrepresented in vulnerable categories: they are particularly vulnerable to being put in lower-track classes (Hupka & Stalder, 2004) and they are overrepresented in transitory measures (CSRE, 2010; Perriard, 2005) as well as among youth without post-compulsory education (Liebig *et al.*, 2012; Meyer, 2019). Moreover, the TREE study shows that these youth are also overrepresented among low exigency sectors compared to Swiss youth (Meyer, 2019). Indeed, youth with a migrant background often have to consistently cut back their aspirations to get an apprenticeship post, and are often counselled to opt for professions below their aspirations—and unattractive for native youth (Hupka & Stalder, 2004). Regarding SMEs, one explanation is that employers may refrain from hiring foreign youth so as to avoid organisational problems, as many SMEs fear diffused difficulties both in the firm as well as in vocational schools (Imdorf, 2007, 2019). Some employers also refrain from hiring foreign apprentices due to anticipating possible reticence from customers towards foreigners (Imdorf, 2019). Within this heterogeneous group, the cultural and linguistic distance between the countries of origin and the host country is determinant relative to the degree of social inclusion (Hupka & Stalder, 2004; Nilsson, 2010). First generation migrants, who, at home, speak a different language than the one of education (Häfeli & Schelleberg, 2009; Perriard, 2005), and those from a lower socio-economic background (Camilleri-Cassar, 2013; Hupka & Stalder, 2004) struggle the most. Häfeli and Schellenberg (2009) also pointed out that, for youth with the same competencies, socio-economic status seems to be more influential than a migration status in finding an apprenticeship in Switzerland.

Well aware that school competencies are not sufficient to ensure a satisfactory training period, firms also pay particular attention to soft skills in addition to cognitive skills when selecting candidates. Classical work-related qualities (e.g., commitment, diligence, duty awareness, punctuality, order, tidiness, and care) but also skills such as communication, cooperation, or ability to be in contact with people, are highly valued by employers. Moreover, qualities such as courtesy, openness and politeness might even compensate for certain unfavourable starting conditions (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Additionally, the youth should ideally be flexible and docile, accept authority according to the hierarchy (Imdorf, 2019), and adhere to norms and values relatively close to those of the firm (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Soft skills such as motivation, personality, perseveration and discipline are often evaluated based on school reports and teachers' evaluations of students' behaviour in class (Protsch & Solga, 2015). Interestingly, a study conducted in French-speaking Switzerland highlights that youth with little family support or family relationships often have greater difficulties satisfying employers' soft skills expectancies, since non-cognitive competencies are not systematically taught in schools but are typically learned within the family sphere (Goastelle & Ruiz, 2015 as cited in Imdorf, 2019).

Another important asset for accessing dual-VET are informal networks (e.g., family, friends, colleagues of the youth or the parents). These may help to get information and take informed decisions, or even create apprenticeship or internship opportunities (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009; Hupka & Stalder, 2004; Solga, 2015). Moreover, if a network member guarantees for the youth's skills despite negative signals, it may also prove particularly helpful to alleviate discrimination (Solga, 2015). Yet, for youth with a migration background it might be particularly difficult to compensate for the lack of an informal network. Indeed, their parents may know few(er) (native) persons and may not be or feel to be in the position to ask colleagues to help their offspring (Hupka & Stalder, 2004).

In Switzerland, vocations are still strongly gender-biased. Generally, dual-VET is more a masculine than a feminine prerogative (Meyer, 2019). Moreover, many professions are considered rather masculine or feminine (CSRE, 2010; Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009; Imdorf, 2019). While there are no gender differences in terms of choice of a vocational path, gender has an impact on the search for an apprenticeship post: at comparable academic qualifications, young women face more difficulties in finding an apprenticeship and are more numerous in transitory measures (CSRE, 2010; Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Moreover, they also are significantly more numerous, controlling for academic qualifications, to follow vocational paths with a lower vocational status (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). Relative to SMEs, similarly as with foreign candidates, gender may become a disadvantaging feature if employers anticipate possible gender-issues in relation to the expectations of clients or to a homogeneous group of co-workers. Additionally, some also fear that a woman trained in a masculine job may leave the profession prematurely, possibly inducing an investment loss for the firm (Imdorf, 2019). Gender is a particularly disadvantaging feature when crossed with a lower school-track or a modest family context. In a nutshell, young men who followed demanding school-tracks and are of Swiss fathers have the highest probabilities to get selected for training (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009).

Additional crucial factors are self-esteem, coping strategies (e.g. to cope with refusals), self-image (in relation to the vocational identity) and the accuracy of the professional project (degree of definition and plausibility). Motivation is, of course, also fundamental to finding an apprenticeship, crucial, for instance, in setting up a professional plan or persisting to achieve the vocational goal. The importance of familial support has once more to be highlighted: motivation and scholastic performances in primary and secondary education seem to essentially depend on family processes, affecting a pupil's level of knowledge, which generally lasts throughout the whole scholastic pathway (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009).

1.2.2. Alternative recruitment practices

Certainly, there are firms that act differently in their recruitment procedure. Many firms do have 'a social fiber'[7] and also give training opportunities to somewhat disadvantaged youth. This may happen in a more institutionalised way, for instance, from a corporate social responsibility perspective, or in terms of firms financing private initiatives supporting disadvantaged youth, as described by Bonoli and Wilson (2019). Of course, it may also happen *ad hoc*, in terms of a firm not offering a training position to the best matching candidate for numerous reasons.

Another avenue that has been highlighted to circumnavigate employers' selectivity based on social attributes (e.g., gender, ethnicity, or age) are training networks. In this configuration, several firms collaborate to train an apprenticeship on a rotation basis.[8] Hence, an apprentice stays in a firm for a limited time and then moves to another firm to pursue her or his apprenticeship. The apprentice is not taken under contract by the firms themselves, but by an interenterprise organisation, which is also in charge of the recruitment and support (scholastic, administrative, etc.) of the apprentices. This option is particularly suited to SMEs, who may not be in the position to train individually either, because they are highly specialised and could not offer a holistic training, or because they lack the resources to organise and implement an apprenticeship (Leemann, Da Rin, & Imdorf, 2016). Therefore, this peculiar arrangement of vocational training may increase the number of offered apprenticeship posts, but it may also offer more opportunities to disadvantaged youth (Imdorf & Leemann, 2012; Leemann, Da Rin, & Imdorf, 2016).

[7] As mentioned by an interviewee working for another low threshold measure accompanying youth.
[8] For details regarding training networks, see, e.g., Imdorf & Leemann, 2012 or Leemann, Da Rin, & Imdorf, 2016.

Under certain conditions, it may also enhance fairer hiring practices, as hypothesised by Imdorf and Leemann (2012). Particularly so when a network is financially supported by the state or not-for-profit organisations (e.g., municipalities or NGOs) with a declared social objective to support disadvantaged youth to find an apprenticeship, as was the case described by Imdorf and Leemann (2012; see also Leemann, Da Rin, & Imdorf, 2016). Indeed, in such cases, the lead organisation has a clear mandate to give opportunities to disadvantaged youth. In the case described by Imdorf and Leemann, the firms would not have access to any background information regarding the youth proposed for an apprenticeship, whom they meet for a one-day on-the-job trial. Consequently, the youth is assessed by the firms based only on the firms' appreciation of the short traineeship. Interestingly, the firms demonstrated to be much less risk adverse in terms of selecting an apprenticeship because, on the one hand, they trust the lead organisation to do a good preselection, and, on the other hand, because the apprentice is going to stay with them for a limited time-period anyway (Imdorf & Leemann, 2012). In this way, the lead organisation is able to propose youth to the firms who, on paper, present possible 'negative signals', such as non-linear transitional pathways (e.g., an apprenticeship interruption, transitory measures) or an ethnic origin or gender that a firm would tend to avoid, yet who seem promising apprentices.

Nevertheless, the lead organisation has to satisfy not only the social objective of the municipality, but also some basic expectations of the training firms, in order not to lose their participation to the network. Consequently, in the case studied by Imdorf and Leemann, the first step of the recruitment process is based on the analysis of the compulsory school track and grades. Therefore, academically weak pupils remain excluded from the opportunity of a network-based training. Moreover, also in a network with a social mandate, the school-track remains a motive for exclusion. Socio-economic and migration background remain, therefore, part of the selection, since the orientation of pupils towards specific school tracks intermingles academic achievement with social features such as the socio-economic and migration background of pupils. Moreover, Wilson (2019), analysing employers' hiring preferences in the commercial occupation in a French speaking canton of Switzerland, did not find any association in terms of a firm's affiliation to a training network and its greater willingness to hire disadvantaged candidates.

2. Methodological approach

The data used in this paper stems from 12 interviews with youth enrolled in three different measures targeted at young adults who failed or are struggling during transition I. Two of these measures (measures A and B) are implemented in a larger French-speaking canton, financed through the cantonal social assistance scheme. These measures' aim is to accompany disadvantaged young adults (18–25-year-olds without post-compulsory education) in receipt of social assistance in their search for a post-compulsory education solution, particularly focusing on apprenticeships. Once the youth find an apprenticeship position, they have the opportunity to integrate a programme in which they will be coached throughout the apprenticeship. The studied measures are part of a bunch of different measures supporting youth to find an apprenticeship, and therefore to get access to the aforementioned programme, which was launched in 2006. This programme, the studied measures, and, more generally, the focus on this age category among social assistance beneficiaries, is the consequence of a steady increase in young adults claiming social assistance in the canton since the early 2000s. Given that about 70% of them had not accomplished post-compulsory education, and considering the importance of education in a knowledge economy, their lack of education was considered a determinant factor hampering their labour market access. Consequently, in order to improve the youth's chances on the labour market, cantonal authorities decided to support them to access and accomplish a post-compulsory education, with a specific focus on apprenticeships.

To help the youth to get access to the selective apprenticeship market, the canton contracted various, mainly not-for-profit, organisations active in the field of supporting people to (re)gain access to the apprenticeship or the labour market. These organisations offer different measures that may focus, more or less strictly, on access to the market. Some are more 'high threshold', mainly focusing on cognitive skills and apprenticeship post applications, selecting the youth who get access to the measure. Others are more 'low threshold', and, although the final objective remains that the youth find an apprenticeship post, they also take into account and work on more general framework conditions such as the need to regain a 'work-day rhythm' and develop soft skills and self-confidence. The two measures that have been selected for the youth interviews are both 'low threshold measures', as this implies that they are also accessible to more disadvantaged youth. Both measures welcome youth in a group setting (13-15 youth per group) and support them, among other things, to define their professional plans, strengthen their academic weaknesses and counsel them in their search for internships and an apprenticeship post. Measure A is set in an urban area, whereas measure B is set in a rural area. The two are similar in terms of the number of accompanied youth, of personnel, and of working strategies, with the difference that measure B is in direct contact with some local firms.

The third measure, measure C, accompanies youth (15–24-year-olds) at risk of failing transition I due to multiple difficulties. The enrolled youth are coached on an individual basis throughout the whole transition as well as throughout the accomplishment of upper-secondary education once they have found a position. This cantonal measure is set in the urban area of a small German-speaking canton, covering the urban as well as the rural area given the small size of the canton. The measure was initially launched by the federal government in 2006, with the aim of increasing the number of youth achieving an upper-secondary education degree. Implementation was voluntary and of cantonal responsibility. The federal government set broad guidelines that the cantons had to follow and financed the initial phase (2008-2015). Since 2015, the measure has been financed by the cantonal economics department and became a permanent cantonal offer. The cantonal VET department entrusted the measure's implementation to a private association already working in the field of supporting disadvantaged youth in relation to VET and well connected with the local economic context. The collaboration between the canton and the organisation took the form of a public–private partnership, which is negotiated on a yearly basis, defining the number of youth supported by the measure and financed by the cantonal department. Youth in difficulty during transition I and who want to accomplish upper-secondary education are the target group of this measure. Yet, they cannot access the measure directly but must be referred through an institution (e.g., compulsory school, social assistance, public employment service, etc.).

The interviewed youth, 4 young women and 8 young men, were aged between 17 and 25 years; most ended compulsory schooling in the lowest track and all but two have a migration background. All young adults were interviewed at the location of the respective measure in which they were enrolled. Five youth each were enrolled in measure A and B. The youth in measure A decided on the spot whether to participate in the interview after a short presentation of the study by the author at the measure's premises. The youth in measure B were selected, upon their agreement, by a socio-professional counsellor who was the author's reference person in the measure. Only two youth enrolled in measure C could be interviewed. They were selected by their coach, who was the author's person of reference while studying this measure. One of them was already enrolled in a regular dual-VET programme, while the other, not finding anything over a few years, eventually decided to enrol in a school-based apprenticeship programme.

The interviews lasted between about 15 minutes and a little more than one hour and were held between December 12th 2016 and December 21st 2017. The interviews of the two youth of measure C were recorded and fully transcribed by the author. The interviews of the youth in measures A and B, who

were in a somewhat more fragile situation (since they had not yet found a VET position), were not recorded with the aim of not inhibiting them and enhancing their mood to talk freely as much as possible. Notes were taken during these interviews and interview reports were made straight after the interviews. Despite relying on a semi-structured interview grid, the interview questions were kept rather open, asking generally about their professional plans, their path so far, their difficulties in finding an apprenticeship post and their experience in the measures. In measure A, an adapted version of lifeline drawing (see e.g., Heaton, Noyes, Sloper, & Shah, 2005; Nourkova & Brown, 2015; Schroots, 2003) was proposed to the interviewees in order to engage the discussion. In a nutshell, the youth were asked to draw on a Cartesian axis their experience during transition I, starting from the end of compulsory education until the current moment and showing how they felt in the different situations. Axis X represented the time and axis Y how they felt at the given moment. However, only a few interviewees wanted to engage in this exercise, whereas all were very open in answering the questions. Therefore, this method was dropped for the subsequent interviews and the drawings were excluded from the analysis. Table 1 gives an overview of the youth and the respective measure.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age[9]	Compulsory-school track	Migration background	Followed measure
Mila	Female	21	Lowest school track	Yes	*Measure A* Group setting, support to 18—25-year-old social assistance beneficiaries to find an apprenticeship post. Low threshold measure that, in addition to training cognitive skills and support in apprenticeship applications, works also on more framework conditions (e.g., develop soft skills and self-confidence). Set in an urban area of a big francophone canton (same canton as in measure B).
Laurie	Female	24	Middle school track	Yes	
Deion	Male	22	Did not accomplish compulsory schooling in Switzerland	Yes	
Amin	Male	21	End of compulsory schooling attestation	Yes	
Larissa	Female	19	Lowest school track	Yes	
Jenny	Female	25	Lowest school track	No	*Measure B* Group setting, support to 18—25-year-old social assistance beneficiaries to find an apprenticeship post. Low threshold measure (cf. description of Measure A). Set in a rural area of a big francophone canton (same canton as in measure A).
Emrah	Male	~ 21	Lowest school track	Yes	
Nedim	Male	20	Lowest school track	Yes	
Farai	Male	~ 23	No end of compulsory schooling attestation	Yes	

[9] When an interviewee did not state her or his age, it was reconstructed based on the available information. In those cases, the indicated age is preceded by the symbol '~', to indicate that the age is an approximation based on the author's reconstruction.

Andrej	Male	17	No indication	Yes	
Sven	Male	21	No indication	No	*Measure C* 15–24-year-olds at risk of failing transition I due to multiple difficulties but motivated to pursue education, receive an individual coaching from the end of lower-secondary to the end of upper-secondary education. Set in the urban area of a small German-speaking canton but also covering the canton's rural area.
Sunan	Male	~ 22	Lowest school track	Yes	

Table 1: Interviewees according to the followed measure

For the analysis of the data, run with the computer assisted data analysis software MaxQDA, thematic analysis (TA), as developed by Braun and Clarke (2013), was applied. According to Braun and Clarke, there are two core steps in TA. After becoming familiarised with the data, the first step is an initial coding across the entire dataset. There are two main approaches to this initial coding. In the first approach (complete coding), the whole dataset is coded according to the relevance to the research question. The aim is to identify and code anything that might be of interest or relevance to the research question. Selection will be made later in the analytical process. The second approach, selective coding, as the name indicates, is more selective from the outset. Aiming to reduce data, this type of coding process identifies a corpus of relevant instances relative to the object of study and codes the dataset in relation to these instances, ending up with "a collection of data of a certain *type*" (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Generally, codes can be data-derived or researcher-derived, with the former remaining closer to the content of the data, whereas the latter looks for meaning that is more implicit. In the second core step, analysis gets deeper: themes have to be identified from codes and coded data. As a sort of patterned meaning, themes are broader than codes, capturing something meaningful within the data in relation to the research question. In other words, themes should not simply cluster together many different codes, but describe a feature of the data, being "built around a central organizing concept" (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

For the present article, a complete coding of the entire dataset was run in a first step. Whereas codes were mainly data-driven, themes have been developed with a mixed approach: some more theoretically driven, "to explore particular theoretical ideas" (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and others still data-driven. Additionally, some themes remain more descriptive in nature (e.g., "appreciation of support received in measures" or "approaching the dual-VET market"), others are more of a critical nature, i.e., identifying characteristics that may impact the youth's chances on the apprenticeship market based on the theoretical knowledge previously presented (e.g., "a rather disadvantaged population" or "difficult framework situation").

3. Empirical findings

Transition I is a difficult and delicate moment in life for many youth. The empirical findings of this research highlight the great difficulty of this transition for youth cumulating several disadvantaging features. Indeed, not only do they cumulate negative signals, but the life situation of many of them is, or was, rather shaky, further adding complexity to their path. In addition to characteristics highlighted by the literature, additional factors were mentioned by the youth that might also affect the apprenticeship

search in various ways. Particularly, health, legal, financial, and housing issues were mentioned by the youth. This section will start by outlining the personal characteristics of the interviewed youth. In light of the findings of previous research, as described in the Background section, it will rapidly appear that they are a rather disadvantaged group in terms of access to the apprenticeship market (section 3.1). Section 3.2 will then set the focus on the framework situation of these youth, showing the complex difficulties and unstable life situations they were facing at the moment of the interview, adding to the difficulty of managing transition I and integrating into the apprenticeship market. In the last two sections, the aim is to give voice to the youth, in terms of understanding how they feel about approaching the dual-VET market (section 3.3) and in terms of their perception regarding the usefulness of the support they received in the various measures (section 3.4).

3.1. A rather disadvantaged group

As is evident from the empirical findings, the twelve interviewed youth all share the fact that they present a compound collection of disadvantaging features. Indeed, they mirror several of the characteristics hampering the access to the dual-VET market highlighted by the literature presented in section 1.2. Particularly, most of them have a migration background and have achieved weak academic competences in terms of school grades and/or tracks. Both of these issues have been highlighted by substantial literature as highly disadvantaging factors in terms of the chances to find an apprenticeship post.

Migration background

The first thing that leaps out from the data is that nearly all interviewed youth have a migration background. Except two youth of Swiss origin (Jenny and Sven), all the youth's family roots where set in countries generally considered rather distant (see Hupka & Stalder, 2004). Yet, the stories of their arrival varied substantially, making, of course, a significant difference in terms of integration and chances on the dual-VET market. Some of them have grown up with one or both parents in Switzerland. Others joined family already settled in Switzerland, escaped their home countries in war times or left due to a difficult economic situation. One was adopted during infancy. Some received Swiss nationality, however not (yet) all of them. Notwithstanding these fundamental differences, the fact that youth with a migration background are highly overrepresented in this group is striking.

As shown by Imdorf (2007, 2019), the migration background might result in a negative signal, particularly regarding SMEs who may refrain to hire youth with a foreign background to avoid organisational problems as well as relational problems, possibly anticipating reticence from customers or issues with other employees. Additionally, this may also be an effect of statistical discrimination: employers refraining to hire youth of a certain ethnic group, believing that on average this ethnic group is less trainable for some reason or another.

Cognitive skills

Another strikingly homogeneous feature among the various youth are school difficulties. No one accomplished compulsory schooling in the strongest track and only one accomplished it in the middle track. Six (half of them) have ended compulsory schooling in the lowest track, while one only with the attestation of the end of compulsory schooling and another even without this attestation.[10] One youth migrated to Switzerland after compulsory schooling age, while two did not give information about their school track.

[10] The attestation is given to attest that a youth has studied the entire curricula, in case the pupil has not reached the necessary grades to receive the compulsory-education certificate.

There are two interesting aspects to highlight here. First, neither the origin nor the time of immigration seems determinant in terms of school outcome. Indeed, one of the two youth of Swiss origin also ended compulsory schooling in the lowest track, whereas the other did not mention the track, yet, from his account, it seems likely that he also finished in the lowest track. Moreover, the youth who finished compulsory schooling without receiving the attestation had completed the entire schooling in Switzerland, as did the one who finished compulsory schooling in the middle track. Another youth, who arrived in Switzerland just at the end of compulsory schooling, set everything in motion in order to be placed in regular schooling. The significant effort this required is well illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

> When I came back to Switzerland[11] they put me in a development class.[12] I was 14 years old, and then I made anything to switch to normal schooling, I 'harassed' my [step]father so that he would ask whether I could go to normal schooling if I had a good behavior, he did talk to the teachers who said that yes, effectively if I behaved well I could switch. So I worked hard on it, I asked plenty of questions, as much as my peers got annoyed at me and would say "just shut up!". I was class representative, I managed all that… so when I was 15 they put me in a training period in the lowest schooling track [of regular schooling], and finally there was a teacher who liked me, asked me if I really wanted to integrate that class, and supported me. So, eventually, I could access the low school-track class [of normal schooling] in the last year. But in the last year they actually revise all the schooling material of the past years, because there are exams, so for me it was super difficult because I missed all the past years. But I had lots of help around me: there were my friends, my [step]father, my teacher of the development class who let me follow his class for two hours a week. So, eventually, I managed to get the lowest school track certificate.
>
> Larissa

The second important thing to highlight is also well illustrated by the previous citation. Whereas the lowest school track is often perceived on the apprenticeship market as a signal of weak cognitive abilities and, perhaps, also a bit tainted with the prejudice that these pupils tend to be lazy students, for some of these youth, ending in this track is the result of an enormous effort. Indeed, what this signal fails to capture is the starting point from which these youth manage to achieve that result, which may be very distant. Considering that some have integrated into the Swiss schooling system at a later stage because they immigrated during schooling age, to finish compulsory education managing the exams, even in a lower or in the lowest track, is still an achievement. Indeed, while other pupils can focus on teaching content, they may also have to learn the local language (in which the content is taught), as well as the norms and culture of the new country.

As previous research has highlighted, the compulsory schooling track and grades have a significant impact on the chances of finding an apprenticeship post. In terms of signalling theory, weak academic competencies, in particular the school-track, are often perceived by employers as a signal of potential difficulties at the vocational school, putting the apprenticeship at risk, and, more generally, of weaker trainability.

[11] Her mother settled down in Switzerland several years before, and Larissa had already lived with her for a few years when she was a child.

[12] Development classes are smaller classes of primary or secondary education that provide an individualised programme and education to youth who are considered not to be able to profit from regular education.

Socio-economic background and gender

It is not possible to make statements on the socio-economic background of the interviewed youth because the interviews did not allow the opportunity to collect enough data on this issue. However, based on the information provided by the youth who spoke about their parents' professional background, it seems that most of them are from more modest socio-economic backgrounds. One feature that is not reflected among the interviewees is the gender bias at the expense of young women: according to former research, young women are more numerous in transitory measures. Yet, this is not the case among the interviewees (four women and eight men). This, however, could also be due to a self-selection bias by the youth themselves (measure A) or by the contact person (measures B & C).

3.2. A Difficult context

The immutable characteristics highlighted in the previous section intersect with the more general situation in which the interviewees where living at the moment of the interview. The stories of the interviewed youth are, of course, all unique and very different, one from the other. Yet, there are some common traits. Probably the primary common trait among the various accounts of the interviewed youth is that their life paths up to the moment of the interview had been full of difficulties and challenges, with multiple problems cumulating and intersecting with each other. These problems ranged from difficult family and housing situations, to health issues, to the difficulty in determining a clear or an adequate professional plan, to financial or legal problems.

Family situation

Regarding the family situation, many lack the precious support of their family, which reduces crucial resources such as the opportunity to rely on an informal network, knowledge about the system and simply support when navigating the transition period (moral support, support writing applications, getting prepared for an interview, etc.). Indeed, for many of these youth, their parents where not much of a resource on which they could rely while they were struggling through the transition period. Some problematics were more of a general nature, such as parents who divorced or intergenerational issues, which sometimes ended up in a break-up of the relationship with direct consequences on housing. However, sometimes parents were also unable to support their offspring because, due to their migration background, they did not speak the local language and/or were not familiar with the Swiss post-compulsory education system. Consequently, they could not support their children in defining a professional plan, writing motivation letters, calling employers or professionals to gather crucial information, or rely on acquaintances to obtain, for their child, an opportunity for an internship or even an apprenticeship. Sometimes, however, a difficult family situation jeopardised the transition more actively, either by pushing their children towards a profession they did not like or for which higher school tracks or grades than those achieved represented a determinant bottleneck; or by not supporting the youth in finding a new apprenticeship as a punishment for having interrupted the previous one.

A doubly difficult family situation was the one experienced by Larissa, who became a mother at the age of 18 years old, without having accomplished post-compulsory education. Not only had she a baby to care for, but also her parents, who were against the pregnancy, decided to end their support around the fifth or sixth month of her pregnancy. Consequently, she was obliged to sign up for social assistance and look for a place to live with her partner. Despite the complex situation, she was highly motivated and even looked for a post during pregnancy, despite the fact that she was not required to by social assistance rules until the baby was four months old. However, she could not find anything "because

employers don't hire you when you are pregnant, so I lost the drive to do the job searches" (Larissa). At the moment of the interview, she was, however, once again highly motivated to find an apprenticeship post. Yet, her case is an example of the accumulation of many disadvantaging features: a migration background (although naturalised), an older age, a baby to care for and the lowest compulsory schooling track.

Additionally, because family problematics were too overwhelming, some of the interviewed youth even refrained from looking for an apprenticeship post at all, or from starting a pre-apprenticeship after having found one. Amin's experience is a point in case here. For him, the professional plan had been clear for a long time (already during compulsory schooling) and he had been highly motivated to work in the sector for a long time. He said he imagined finding an apprenticeship post earlier, but the family situation towards the end of compulsory schooling was too complicated and delayed the whole process. This shows that an excessively complex personal situation can temporarily lead to blank out the professional plan, although the plan itself is clear and the youth motivated to get training. Consequently, in general terms, with little or no familial support, an important resource in terms of network, guidance, and support was lacking for these youth. Additionally, the lack of a serene domestic environment also contributed to making some youth's attempts to find their way particularly arduous.

Housing issues

Housing is, of course, a crucial issue in general terms. If this aspect is unstable, much energy goes into trying to fix this, possibly temporarily putting to the background the search for an apprenticeship position. Among eleven of the interviewed youth (one did not discuss his housing situation), four had a rather stable situation, with only one still living with both parents and the other three living with the mother only—in two cases because the father had died and in the other because the father never came to Switzerland. Seven of the other youth have had a housing issue at a certain point but were in a temporarily stable situation at the moment of the interview. They had found different solutions: two benefited from sheltered housing, supported through social assistance or a foundation, which, however, are limited in time and thus a temporary solution. Two found shelter in a sort of student home, one moved in with the brother, another with the father after she had broken her relationship with the mother, and the young mum, Larissa, shares a small studio with her boyfriend and her baby.

Housing issues, of course, do not ease the search for an apprenticeship post and may cause several difficulties: lacking an address an employer can send letters to, having a calm place from which to work on a professional project (getting information on various occupations, searching for apprenticeship posts, writing application letters, etc.), or cause financial repercussions possibly leading to debt. Moreover, as mentioned, housing problematics are sometimes so predominant and urgent that youth may put the apprenticeship search on hold.

Financial, legal, and health issues

Three youth recounted having had financial issues. In one case, debts even led to imprisonment, which had an impact on the psychological wellbeing of the youth, Nedim. He suffered from social anxiety after coming out of prison, and would get extremely anxious during any type of contact with authorities, even if it were just in form of a letter:

> Actually, I have a difficult past Madame, I just got out of prison... and prison has changed me! I'm not the same person I was before going to prison anymore. I wasn't ready for that! And it changed me.
> *Int. : Changed in what way ?*

> For the better, but it had also negative effects… After prison I remained at home for a long time, I wasn't seeing anyone, I was afraid to go out, I thought they would put me in jail again. Today, I am still afraid they will put me back in, this time for nothing. I paid my debts! But I still have the impression that for them, I have not paid them. So, anything which has to do with (…) any letter which comes from that prosecution thing, which comes from the canton or other, it scares me. Everything related to the state makes me anxious… Now it's going better, seeing people again [through the measure] increases my self-confidence.
>
> Nedim

Both the anxiety towards formal issues as well as towards moving in the public sphere is, of course, an obstacle to finding an apprenticeship post. In addition to that, a criminal record may turn out to be a hampering signal, increasing the difficulties of finding an apprenticeship post. Another youth also faced legal issues, without explaining the reason. Legal issues are a sensitive issue, as some firms do ask for a criminal record check. Regardless, from the concrete incident, having a criminal record might signal unreliability or lack of trustworthiness, discouraging employers from giving the youth a chance. Financial problems may induce difficulties in quite basic aspects, such as proper dressing, travelling, phone calls or printing documents (during the time this is not covered through a measure), but may also, for instance, spill over to housing problematics.

Other youth also dealt with health issues, mainly of a psychological nature. Two suffered from anxiety in relation to the scholastic sphere generally, or towards mathematics specifically. Another was taking antidepressants and seemed to suffer from social anxiety, stating that for a long time he spent much of his free time playing video games, also because, due to his migration background, his weak knowledge of the local language limited his social skills and made him shy away from social interactions. Both fear of scholastic matters or of social contacts might heavily impact their opportunities on the dual-VET market. Regarding fear of scholastic matters, this is likely to hinder the youth to fill any gaps in this crucial dimension in terms of success on the dual-VET market. Moreover, as highlighted by previous literature, many (big) firms resort to aptitude tests to assess the youth's cognitive skills. If a youth shies away from such tests, s/he is unlikely to have the chance to find an apprenticeship post in a firm relying on this tool during the recruitment process. Social anxiety represents another obstacle in terms of accessing the dual-VET market, particularly for disadvantaged youth. Indeed, the literature has highlighted how crucial social skills are in terms of finding an apprenticeship post. For instance, communication, openness, and the ability to be in contact with people have been highlighted by Häfeli and Schellenberger (2009) as highly valued soft skills by employers. Additionally, as will be discussed in the following section, an important strategy to counterbalance their imperfect dossier, highlighted by several interviewees, is to get into direct contact with employers in order to show their value and motivation.

3.3. Approaching the apprenticeship market

Let us now turn to the interviewees' experiences in trying to access the apprenticeship market. In this and in the following section, the attempt is to dig deeper into the personal experiences of the interviewed youth and to gain an 'inside perspective' of what it means to try to find an apprenticeship post starting from a disadvantaged position.

School grades and tracks

In terms of youth's perception, what seems to be the most prominent difficulty are schooling grades and tracks. Indeed, the harsh competition, often with academically stronger pupils, was often highlighted by the interviewed youth with respect to their major difficulties to find an apprenticeship post. As emphasised by many previous studies, school tracks and grades are frequently used as a signal to filter out youth who may be potentially less trainable due to weak cognitive skills or learning aptitudes. This has been directly experienced by some of the interviewed youth. In two cases the access to an apprenticeship post of a given profession failed because employers were filtering by school track or grades. The experience of Sunan is a case in point: he even completed the best exam during a short internship, but he was not considered for an apprenticeship as the procedure of the big multinational firm was to run a first selection by school achievements, which he did not satisfy. This confirms the minimal requirements rule, as highlighted by Protsch and Solga (2015), and supports what has been presented by Hupka and Stalder (2004): the compulsory-schooling track can be used as a precondition for certain training in some companies.

Another interviewed youth, Amin, found a strategy to partially readdress the signal given by his weak school achievements, which were strongly affected by a difficult family situation during the end of compulsory schooling, rather than by his cognitive abilities. The strategy consisted in complementing his application dossier for an apprenticeship with a completed basic check and reports of previous internships, in order to show his capabilities. At the moment of the interview, he has had two apprenticeship offers and, since he had already accepted the first one, the recruiter of the second position even told him to get back to them should there be any problem with his chosen apprenticeship post.

Residency permit

The residency permit plays a crucial role when seeking for an apprenticeship post for youth with a migration background: two youth claimed that before obtaining the Swiss nationality, what they perceived as the most difficult thing in terms of finding an apprenticeship post was the residency permit. One even claimed this had hampered the access to short internships:

> *Int.: What was the most difficult thing for you to find an apprenticeship post?*
> In the beginning, it was the permit, because I had an F permit for refugees, and it was complicated to even find internship positions, because they imagine that you don't speak the language, etc.
>
> Mila

Direct contact with employers

Some of the interviewed youth recognised the importance of direct contact with employers or trainers in order to 'compensate' for their imperfect dossier. Yet, several also mentioned the difficulty to get in contact with employers. In some situations, this was because of being intimidated by employers. Yet, being fully aware that their future was at stake, they also said they did not to shy away from trying to get in direct contact. On the other hand, many also mentioned that it is difficult for them to actually reach the employer or the person in charge of training, because they were not being put through by a lower administrative employee, such as a secretary. Consequently, a close relationships with employers of one of the measures (measure B) was particularly appreciated and valued by the enrolled youth because of the facilitation of this contact.

Lacking maturity to face dual-VET

Some youth mentioned that they were not ready to face the apprenticeship market after compulsory schooling. One mentioned regretting not having been better prepared by the school itself, in terms of getting the pupils to understand what it means to write application letters, have job interviews, etc. Another, who had found an apprenticeship directly after compulsory schooling, became stressed about the fact that she was totally unprepared to integrate the world of work, which eventually lead her to interrupt the apprenticeship:

> After compulsory schooling, I completed an internship and found an apprenticeship post in sales. But I was not at all prepared for that: to follow working hours and rhythms, to what an apprenticeship and the world of work entailed. […] I came out of school when I was 15 years old, I was young and didn't know at all what it meant, I had to get used to the rhythm, the schedules, etc. Young people should be taught more about this crucial choice, which is the choice of professions. I had just accepted the apprenticeship post that was offered to me, because I didn't want to stay home without doing anything, but I wasn't really interested in the profession. When I terminated the apprenticeship contract, I had three months to find another position while continuing to go to vocational school. But then again, I had no support from anywhere: neither from the vocational school nor from my family, who said that it was my choice to terminate the contract so I had to manage all by myself. So, in the end I didn't find anything.
>
> Laurie

In a similar vein, Sven, who also interrupted his first internship and found a new one around the age of 20, mentioned that he was approaching the second apprenticeship with much more maturity than directly following compulsory schooling, dedicating much more effort, particularly into the theoretical school-based education (his weakness). In total, five youth had experienced an apprenticeship interruption, two of them even twice. A previous apprenticeship interruption has also been identified as a negative signal for employers. Indeed, Sven mentioned that during the selection process of his second apprenticeship post, he was tested much more strictly than the firm's usual practice:

> I went for a first brief internship [*Schnupperlehre*] in January at that company, and then again in March and straight after the second one I could continue with a longer internship [*Praktikum*] until summer. Because it wasn't sufficient for them to see during *two*[13] brief internships whether I was appropriate for the company, because I had already interrupted an apprenticeship, so they wanted to get a further confirmation, by observing me working during a longer internship. Since I also proved myself in this longer internship, I was offered the apprenticeship post. […] It is generally more difficult to get an apprenticeship post, when you come from an interrupted one. Because the employer, as is understandable, gets worried and asks himself [what could have been the reason for the previous interruption]. My apprenticeship peer, who started right after compulsory schooling, […] made two brief internships and got the position offer, whereas this did not suffice with me, I also had to prove myself during a long internship.
>
> Sven

Additional aspects

[13] The stars indicate a vocal emphasis on the word(s) by the interviewee.

Interestingly, two youth mentioned that they noticed an increment in the difficulty to access the market. Particularly, both mentioned that for a simple internship it used to be enough to call the firm and ask whether there were any opportunities, whereas nowadays the request often has to be completed in the form of a written application with a motivation letter. Another youth mentioned that an employer even required a personal interview for an internship.

In terms of motivation, which is crucial to maintaining the search for, and eventually finding an apprenticeship, several interviewees mentioned that it is hard to remain motivated when employers do not provide any feedback, even if only negative. This not only keeps them hoping, but also requires the expenditure of resources by contacting the firms to enquire regarding the stage of the procedure. On the other hand, another youth mentioned that, being in a measure where people around her continued to find an apprenticeship post, had a positive impact on her motivation.

3.4. Perception of the received support

Several youth had already experienced other insertion and/or transition measures. It was particularly interesting to hear about how they perceived the different types of support they had received. In general terms, regardless of the group or individual setting, what seems the most appreciated by interviewees, is personal support, adapted to individual needs but also in a broader sense (not directly linked to the apprenticeship search process). More particularly, the youth mentioned appreciating being understood and listened to, as well as counselled, yet without being forced or nudged in a particular direction:

> We are well supported here, also for administrative matters, beyond the apprenticeship search. Here they really work on everything that is around, before focusing on the apprenticeship. […] There is nothing missing in the measure, they are really available for any type of problem. […] And what I like a lot here is that they give much advice, but always leave the final choice up to us, they don't push towards one direction. […] There is really a holistic support, it is not focused on the apprenticeship only, actually there are plenty of things around that obstruct the training search, and they take care of all the things around *before* even getting started on focusing on the apprenticeship.
>
> Mila

More particularly, a youth who, at a certain point, felt completely overwhelmed by his personal situation, recounted how beneficial it was for him that someone took charge of some of the issues he was required to manage, giving him temporary relief and the opportunity to focus on the core issues, with responsibility gradually regained:

> Taking some responsibility from the young adult, you lift from him a big burden. And giving back responsibilities piece by piece, in a proper process, is a big relief. This is also the fundamental objective of a measure like this: not to overstress someone, but to (...) the smartest thing is to take the burden away from the person, because when a burden is gone, everything gets easier. And then, give back the responsibility piece by piece, until the whole load is again tolerable for the person and isn't perceived as a burden anymore, but as a normal thing.
>
> Sven

Additionally, the general framework of the measures was also mentioned as helpful. On the one hand, the more structured framework when searching for a position, was highlighted: to be at the measures' premises for the apprenticeship research, without the distractions one might have at home; having professionals available to ask questions when necessary; and to have a rhythm throughout the day which can prepare for the world of work. On the other hand, several youth also appreciated simply having the infrastructure to enable them to properly perform research and applications, such as a computer, a printer, free phone calls and internet connection. Finally, another important aspect mentioned by two youth who were suffering from anxiety during social interactions is that attending the measure helped them to regain self-confidence and to develop their social skills: crucial features to find and complete an apprenticeship.

Some interviewees highlighted that the personalised support was made possible by a small number of participants. Indeed, this was a major difference compared with previous measures with which they were not satisfied: in some of these other measures, the participants were too numerous, preventing the personnel from counselling each one on an individual basis, and the infrastructure was not adapted to the large number of participants (e.g., there were not enough computers to carry out the apprenticeship post research). Moreover, in some measures, including direct work experience, the time dedicated to performing the actual apprenticeship post searches was judged insufficient, as youth were required to work in practical workshops for the majority of their time. Thus, the support was insufficient, and a significant amount of time was lost simply waiting for a computer or working in professions that sometimes they did not even like, which was perceived as pointless and a waste of time.

Conclusion

As long as firms are free to hire their apprentices without any state requirement in terms of whom to hire, it is implausible that the most disadvantaged youth will be hired without any extra support. Of course, there are firms that, without any state obligation or pressure, do take initiative and also offer training opportunities to somewhat more disadvantaged youth, whether it be in the form of a training network, of corporate social responsibility, or of individual initiative. However, notwithstanding these firms' engagement and good will, it is unlikely that such initiatives reach the most disadvantaged youth, as these represent a risk too high for a firm that must comply with market principles to remain competitive in a liberal market. In other words, as far as the apprenticeship market remains a liberal market, selectivity will remain part of the process, and trainability a determinant feature to be selected.

This study highlights the complex situation of highly disadvantaged youth and their difficulty integrating into the very selective dual-VET market. In addition to personal characteristics, which already varyingly reduce these youth's opportunities on the apprenticeship market, the more general framework conditions of the interviewed youth further enhance the complexity of their situations and reinforce their difficulties. For these youth, to be selected on the basis of their dossiers, having to compete with several other—often academically stronger—candidates, is not easy. Indeed, for several interviewees the measure in which they were enrolled during the interview was not the first. These experiences also reflect the difficulty faced by transitory measures to truly support the youth with the tools they have at their disposal, since the final decision is in the hands of firms.

Moreover, the practical experience of some youth has shown how strong certain signals function, and how this substantially limits these youth's chances. The experience of Sunan is a point in case. Indeed, although the youth distinguished himself by writing the best exam during an internship at the company itself, he was filtered-out in the very beginning of the recruitment process, as, due to the high number of applications, the company's procedure is to filter out the applications of youth who finished

compulsory schooling in the lowest track. This is highly frustrating, particularly as schooling tracks and grades are static snapshots which provide superficial and imperfect information regarding a person's genuine cognitive competences. Firstly, it has been demonstrated that pupils are assigned to schooling tracks in unsystematic ways which vary according to the class and teacher, as well as to the pupil's non-scholastic background (see, e.g., Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009). On the other hand, it does not provide any indication about the process: it does not reflect the pupil's effort to reach that point, i.e., whether the starting point was rather close or distant from that achievement, or if there were reasons other than weak academic skills or laziness that led to that result (e.g., family problematics, as in Amin's case). Nor do schooling tracks reflect what the youth has achieved in the meantime. The case of Larissa is particularly thought-provoking with respect to this consideration: although she finished compulsory schooling in the lowest track, this represents a significant achievement in her eyes and considering her situation, as without her substantial personal effort, she would not have ended compulsory schooling in the regular schooling system. Yet, on the basis of the literature and practical experiences such as Sunan's, it is very likely that this same track could become an impediment to finding an apprenticeship post, regardless of the effort that was required for its achievement. To view the object one hardly fought for become an obstacle, being considered a mere signal while neglecting the individual path and the huge personal dedication, is likely to have on the long term a negative impact on the youth's motivation and self-confidence, which are crucial to search and keep searching for an apprenticeship post.

To curtail the obstacle represented by their dossier, several youth attempt to develop contacts with employers or the firm by presenting themselves in person, or by calling them to talk to the person responsible for training. Another interesting strategy developed by a youth is to improve an imperfect dossier by adding internship references and a completed multi-check test, which helps to highlight the progress made since the completion of compulsory schooling, and the motivation to work in the branch. Indeed, this youth received even two apprenticeship offers during the transitory measure. This example shows that negative signals can be compensated through motivation and positive signals (e.g., enhanced and satisfactory academic skills or soft skills proved during internships and through internship reports). On an individual basis, this presupposes resources such as high motivation and ingenuity from the youth, which not all youth struggling with a complex life situation may be able to mobilise. Thus, frontline workers could encourage to do so in cases similar to Amin's, i.e., when the youth's situation has significantly improved since the completion of compulsory schooling, with the improvement being difficult to illustrate through the dossier and may be obscured by negative signals.

To sum up, the interviewed youth face various challenges and difficulties, exacerbating the tough transition period. Comparing their accounts with previous research, it seems that they face the serious risk of being excluded from the apprenticeship market, regardless of their substantial engagement, motivation, and skills. This is likely to considerably affect their future chances on the labour market. Consequently, extra strong support is required in order to overcome this risk and gain better chances to integrate, first into the apprenticeship and then into the labour market. It is, therefore, crucial that transitory measures are well equipped to reach out to these highly disadvantaged youth in particular, who are rather distant from the apprenticeship market in terms of signalling and queuing theory, yet who do possess plenty of resources and abilities that are promising in terms of mastering various occupations if they were to be offered the opportunity of training. A training opportunity can, therefore, also be seen as a crucial break between promoting these youth's professional, but also social and perhaps civic integration, while their marginalisation may turn them into recipients of social benefits despite of their significant efforts to integrate. It is, therefore, essential that social investment measures that aim to support youth who struggle during transition I manage to reach out to the most disadvantaged youth in particular, in order to get them closer to the front of the hiring queues.

From the interviewed youth's accounts, it is possible to distinguish a number of definitive features support measures should possess. Firstly, the support needs to be holistic and appropriate. In other words, it should not merely focus on the apprenticeship search but also help to address more profound challenges which may block access to the apprenticeship market. Secondly, resources should allow for individualised support and sufficient facilities (e.g., computers) to enable everyone to perform the search for an apprenticeship post. Thirdly, since it is difficult, yet crucial, for these youth to get in direct contact with employers, a measure's cultivation of good relations with a network of firms is of significant benefit. Lastly, the counselling should not take the form of an imposition but of advice the young *adult* is encouraged to consider, without being nudged in any one direction. In other terms, the youth appreciate advises, but want to remain free to decide. Additionally, although requiring further study, a group setting seems to be beneficial for youth with social anxiety.

From the insights proposed by this study, it is possible to deduce a few general suggestions for transitory measures. Firstly, it is important that they are well-resourced. Facilities must allow for the individual accompaniment of each youth and for sufficient amenities to satisfy their needs. Thus, in a group setting, small groups with well-trained and dedicated personnel seem more appropriate than larger groups with few personnel. Secondly, in terms of the type of support, a collaboration with the youth, adapted to their interests and needs, should be privileged over a predetermined and standardised work setting, with which the young adult is required to comply. In-firm internships are also most likely to be more effective and valuable in terms of 'door openers', compared to practical work periods organised by a measure with a limited number of occupations. Thirdly, a measure should attempt to cultivate good relationships with firms that are open to providing training opportunities to the youth they support. In addition, there should be sufficient resources available for this time-consuming activity. Lastly, for the most disadvantaged youth it is difficult to get selected on the basis of a standard dossier. Moreover, the fact that many have previously been enrolled in other transitory measures indicates that it is difficult for such measures to reach out to these youth. Instead of limiting the support simply to defining the professional project and using standard application procedures, measures should, therefore, also develop alternative strategies specifically for the more disadvantaged, otherwise the measure risks being effective only for a small minority and primarily for those already closer to the front of the queue. One strategy could be, as already mentioned, to establish a network of supportive firms in which the youth could accumulate work experience and, ideally positive internship reports. Another good strategy seems the one developed by Amin: if the situation has improved following the completion of compulsory schooling, this should be highlighted by adding positive signals to the dossier that could compensate the negative, yet somewhat outdated, signals.

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5. Article 2. Activating the most disadvantaged youth in Switzerland: Administratively too risky, politically too costly?

Abstract

To increase the chances of integrating youth into labour markets in contemporary European knowledge societies, many policy schemes are geared towards investing in youth's human capital. Since apprenticeship systems are assumed to ease school-to-work transitions, this seems a particularly promising avenue. However, research highlights that social policies often do not reach the most disadvantaged members of society. The aim of this article is to shed light on the reasons and mechanisms causing this phenomenon, called the Matthew effect, through a single, embedded case study of a vocational education and training programme for disadvantaged youth in Switzerland. The findings highlight cream-skimming practices as a coping strategy enabling frontline workers to satisfy strict assessment criteria. A budgetary allocation driven politico-administrative logic promotes such practices as a means to generate solid results, so
as to safeguard political – and thus financial – support.

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Activating the most disadvantaged youth in Switzerland: Administratively too risky, politically too costly?

Delia Pisoni

University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Abstract To increase the chances of integrating youth into labour markets in contemporary European knowledge societies, many policy schemes are geared towards investing in youth's human capital. Since apprenticeship systems are assumed to ease school-to-work transitions, this seems a particularly promising avenue. However, research highlights that social policies often do not reach the most disadvantaged members of society. The aim of this article is to shed light on the reasons and mechanisms causing this phenomenon, called the Matthew effect, through a single, embedded case study of a vocational education and training programme for disadvantaged youth in Switzerland. The findings highlight cream-skimming practices as a coping strategy enabling frontline workers to satisfy strict assessment criteria. A budgetary allocation driven politico-administrative logic

Address for correspondence: Delia Pisoni, Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration (IDHEAP), University of Lausanne, Rue de la Mouline 28, 1022 Chavannes-près-Renens, Switzerland; email: delia.pisoni@unil.ch.

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promotes such practices as a means to generate solid results, so as to safeguard political – and thus financial – support.

Keywords social policy, youth, vulnerable groups, apprentice, employability, Switzerland

Introduction

Throughout Europe, and beyond, youth unemployment and young adults' difficult access to labour markets present governments with a challenge of long standing. The economic and financial crises in 2007–08 further exacerbated this issue. In many European countries, policy attempts at mitigating the problem are increasingly focused on Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems (Nilsson, 2010, p. 263). Indeed, post-compulsory education has become a crucial asset for labour market integration in knowledge societies: structural changes such as tertiarisation, technological evolution and globalization have skewed post-industrial economies towards an increasingly skilled workforce (Bonoli, 2013; Sheldon, 2002). In particular, dual-track VET is often praised for facilitating the school-to-work transition (e.g. Salvisberg and Sacchi, 2014; Stalder, 2012).[1] Thus, it presents a promising political avenue for facilitating the integration of disadvantaged individuals into the labour market.

It is crucial, however, that political efforts reach the most disadvantaged youth who face the biggest obstacles to labour market insertion. Yet, since the mid-1970s, research in social policy has shown that less disadvantaged individuals benefit more from social policy schemes compared to more disadvantaged individuals who are part of the same target group; a phenomenon known as the Matthew effect (Deleeck, 1979; Gal, 1998). Recent research has highlighted the existence of a Matthew Effect in many interventions aimed at facilitating labour market participation. Most studies concentrate on access bias in childcare services (e.g. Bonoli and Champion, 2015; Schlanser, 2011; van Lancker and Ghysels, 2012). Others suggest that similar biases exist in Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) (Bonoli, 2014), or result from the broader functioning of modern welfare states and particularly from the social investment paradigm (Bonoli, Cantillon and van Lancker, 2017; Cantillon, 2011). Needless to say, a Matthew effect can have massive impacts on the life chances of the most vulnerable individuals. Moreover, it affects public finances, contributing to higher social expenditures and forgone

1. Dual-track VET combines practical in-firm training and theoretical school-based education. Hereafter, this article refers to dual-track VET, dual-VET, and apprenticeship interchangeably.

revenue. Therefore, it is in the interest of policy-makers to contain the Matthew effect as much as possible, reaching out to the most vulnerable individuals to enhance the probability and quality of their labour market integration.

The aim of this article is to shed light on the mechanisms and reasons engendering a Matthew effect in a VET programme for disadvantaged Swiss youth. This research is guided by questions of why and how a Matthew effect occurs in training programmes for disadvantaged youth. A Matthew effect in this policy field might have particularly detrimental and long-term repercussions on welfare states and on individual wellbeing. Indeed, youth without post-compulsory education face great difficulties in finding a job, are at high risk of poverty (López Vilapana, 2013) and may face lifelong or recurrent dependence on public support. Additionally, long unemployment spells at young ages can leave long-lasting scarring effects, which substantially decrease future employability, earnings, and quality of employment contracts (Bell and Blanchflower, 2010; Bigos et al., 2013). Eventually, returns on investments in education seem to rapidly decrease with age (Heckman, 2006). Given dual-VET's strength in facilitating school-to-work transitions, such programmes ostensibly represent a large opportunity for youth labour market integration. Thus, policy-makers should be particularly eager to reach youth who are the most disadvantaged, enhancing their work prospects through access to post-compulsory education generally, and through dual-VET in particular.

The article is structured as follows: the next section presents some background information as well as the research approach to the studied programme, followed by the presentation of the theoretical lens. Against this backdrop, the mechanisms leading to the Matthew effect identified in the studied programme are supported by empirical findings. This is followed by the conclusion.

Background and research approach

The aim of this article is to study the mechanisms and reasons engendering a Matthew effect in a holistic manner. The article employs an in-depth, empirical approach drawing on a single, embedded qualitative case study (Yin 2013, p. 50). As Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 235) states "[t]he advantage of the case study is that it can 'close in' on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice". Within the single case study (the programme), the focus is placed on multiple units of analysis: the different groups of key actors, with a particular focus on frontline workers. Through a "backward mapping" approach, light is shed on the process that leads to a Matthew effect, by closely looking at the behaviour of key actors against the backdrop of the incentives derived from their work contexts. As the core issue is the location of a Matthew effect, the focus of this research is placed on the moment just prior to access to the studied programme.

Background

Switzerland is a federalist state composed of cantons and whose constitution guarantees citizens a right to social assistance. This is, however, of cantonal competence, so implementation varies accordingly (Bundesrat, 2015; Tabin and Perriard, 2016, p. 3). The high degree of decentralization and local discretion leads to differences in cantonal social assistance schemes and programmes (such as the studied programme). Young adults (aged 18–25) and low-skilled individuals (lacking post-compulsory education) are particularly overrepresented among social assistance beneficiaries (Bundesrat, 2015, p. 5). Young adults without post-compulsory education are therefore particularly at risk. In Switzerland, youth labour market insertion difficulties can be traced to the 1990s. By the 2000s, "youth in difficulty" became a specific category of concern (Reynaud and Acklin, 2013, pp. 27–28), although youth unemployment remains low in comparative terms.

Comparatively low youth unemployment rates are often related to the VET system. VET certificates are widely recognized and valued by employers in Switzerland, and represent a valuable asset for integration into the Swiss labour market. Unlike in other countries, VET is not a second rank educational option, but it is very popular in Switzerland: annually, two-thirds of youth choose this educational pathway, with most opting for the dual-track VET (SBFI, 2018, p. 4). However accessibility to the apprenticeship market may pose a problem, as the availability of apprenticeships is dependent on the economy: employers are free to decide to train whom they wish (Häfeli and Schellenberg, 2009; Sager, 2006). Since employers select apprentices freely, the access to the apprenticeship market involves competition. Thus, an inherent selection logic, largely based on market principles, underlies access to dual-VET.

Case description

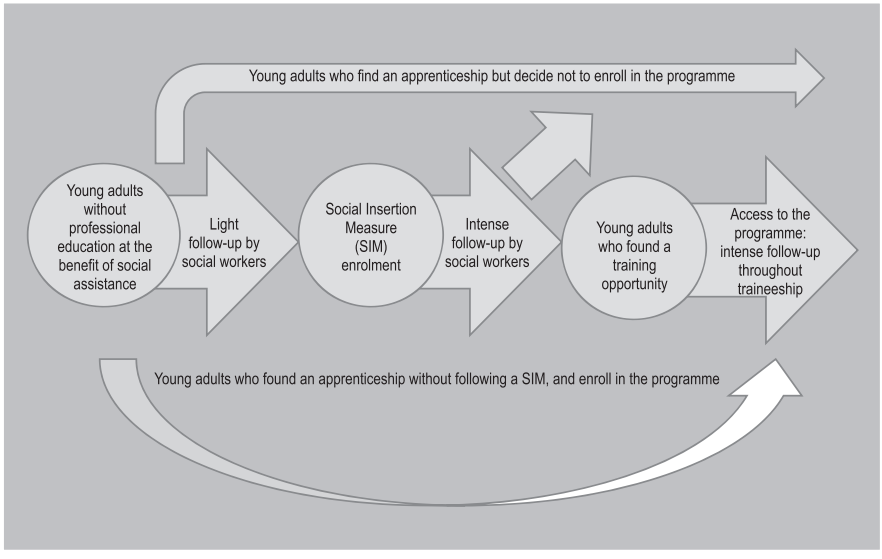
The studied canton has registered a steady increase of young adults (aged 18–25) filing for social assistance since the early 2000s. As nearly 70 per cent of applicants had not completed post-compulsory education, the canton launched the studied programme as a means of counteracting the problem. The programme targets those aged 18–25 who benefit from social assistance without having accomplished post-compulsory education. It aims to enhance their labour market opportunities by supporting their attainment of a VET certificate. Figure 1 illustrates the possible access pathways to the measure for youth.

To support youth throughout VET, the programme offers individualized, flexible coaching, and a scholarship covering training and living expenses. In

order to gain access to the programme, youth need to have found a training opportunity. As a means of support, the cantonal social affairs department is contracted with several external organizations offering social insertion measures (SIMs). In this way, social workers managing high workloads can refer youth to qualified professionals. This increases the probabilities of youth finding an apprenticeship and becoming eligible for the programme. SIMs are mainly private non-profit organizations that offer support in (re)gaining access to an apprenticeship or the labour market. These organizations vary in their focus: "high threshold" organizations focus on cognitive skills and job applications, while "low threshold" organizations additionally emphasize the need to acquire a "work-day rhythm", develop soft-skills and self-confidence. However, these organizations all must respond to the same contractual conditions that demand the achievement of an annual success rate. Only a few SIMs, financially independent from the cantonal department, are not subject to such requirements.

The access criteria for the studied programme is predicated on having found a training opportunity. Accessing the selective dual-VET market is therefore a clear bottleneck to accessing the programme. Consequently, the notion of disadvantage considered in this article is relative to the apprenticeship market, and generally refers to the distance of youth from the apprenticeship market. The literature has highlighted several factors that contribute to influence the chances to access dual-VET systems. From an individual perspective, salient

Figure 1. *Programme access pathways*



Source: Author.

features are cognitive and soft-skills, compulsory education class-track,[2] socio-economic and migration background, nationality, informal networks, working virtues and gender (Camilleri-Cassar, 2013; Di Stasio, 2014; Häfeli and Schellenberg, 2009; Hupka and Stalder, 2004; Liebig, Kohls and Krause, 2012; Meyer, 2009; Perriard, 2005; Protsch and Solga, 2015; Solga, 2015). The notion of disadvantage, however, remains intentionally loose, to better adapt it to the local and empirical realities.

Case selection and data

The case has been selected for two main reasons. First, given that it targets many of the canton's most disadvantaged youth, the impact of the programme for successful candidates (those achieving a VET certificate) is presumed to be rather high. Politically, the programme is highly salient. The second reason stems from a presumed Matthew effect: despite a strong political emphasis on the programme, only about 15–20 per cent of eligible candidates gain access. Nonetheless, those youth who are enrolled achieve a global success rate of around 65 per cent,[3] and about 80 per cent succeed in the final exam (close to the overall cantonal rate). Comparing the programme access rate with its success rate, and keeping in mind the general complexity of the target group, it was initially presumed that the less disadvantaged youth among the target group would primarily access the programme. This makes it an excellent case with which to explore the dynamics which lead to a Matthew effect.

The main data source is a corpus of 39 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 40 people, lasting approximately 30 to 90 minutes, and fully transcribed by the author. The analysis of the interview transcripts was performed using MAXQDA software, and draws on grounded theory in order to stay close to the empirical data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The interviewees represent a group of key actors, selected for their ability to influence the likelihood of youth accessing the programme. As in Table 1, they are clustered into three groups. The first group is composed of politico-administrative actors: at the cantonal level (top civil servants close to political powers, responsible for the policy design and steering) and at the municipal level (those responsible for the local management). The second group is composed of actors involved with the policy implementation, i.e. street-level bureaucrats such as social workers and contracted SIM workers. The potential policy recipients (i.e. target group youth

2. In differentiated education systems, pupils are divided into different tracks during lower-secondary education, with an impact on upper-secondary education options.
3. Youth who successfully complete the apprenticeship, going from one year to the next and ultimately receiving the certificate.

Table 1. *Interviewees by group of actors*

Group of actors	Interviewees (Citation code)	Number of interviews; Number of interviewees
Politico-administrative actors	Cantonal level (POLADMIN-CANT-I & II); Municipal level (POLADMIN-MUN-I & II)	3; 2 3; 2
Street-level bureaucrats	Social Workers (SLB-SW-I to X) SIM workers (SLB-SIM-I to XIV)	10 11; 14
Potential policy recipients	Target group youth enrolled in a SIM (YOUTH-I to X)	10 (including a 17 year old, ineligible for social assistance due to age requirements)
Others	Employee of the organization accompanying the youth enrolled in the programme (ADD-I) Municipal specialized insertion unit employee (ADD-II)	1 1
Total		39; 40

Source: Author.

enrolled in a SIM) compose the third group. Two additional interviewee accounts served as validation of the other interviewees' accounts. As a complement to the interviews, there was consultation of primary and secondary sources such as legal prescriptions, official reports and presentations on the programme, and previous studies concerning the programme.

Policies, actors and systems

According to Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory (Lipsky, 2010), the manner in which public policy reaches the population, affecting people's lives, is strongly influenced by how frontline workers transform policies into practice. To understand frontline practices, Lipsky's analytic framework emphasizes structural constraints and challenges stemming from frontline workers' working conditions (Brodkin, 2012, pp. 941–942). Consequently, to understand how public policies reach their target groups, it is crucial to focus on frontline worker job conditions, and imposed incentive structures. To better comprehend frontline practices in delivering activation policies, van Berkel et al. (2017) suggest taking into account the broader context in which frontline workers are embedded. They individuate four crucial contextual dimensions: policy, governance, organization, and occupation. The combination of Street Level Bureaucracy Theory with a focus on the broader contexts of activation policy delivery offers a particularly relevant theoretical lens for comprehending the occurrence of a Matthew effect in the studied programme.

Street-Level Bureaucrats (SLBs) are public workers characterized by working conditions that place them in direct and regular interaction with citizens, while enjoying a certain discretion in exercising authority and executing their job (Lipsky, 2010, p. 3). Despite working for private, non-profit organizations, SIM workers can also be considered SLBs, since they are contracted to perform activities on behalf of government agencies (Smith and Lipsky, 1993, p. 13). A major dilemma in public services is the perpetual scarcity of resources, since supply drives demand and not vice versa (Lipsky, 2010, p. 33–35) – a work structure that prevents SLBs from performing the job in its ideal conception. In order to translate this demand and supply impasse into a manageable workload, SLBs develop coping strategies and working regularities. One strategy is to re-categorize and differentiate "clients" in function of the likelihood of their administrative success, i.e. "cream-skimming" (Lipsky, 2010, p. 107).

The broader contexts in which frontline workers are embedded substantially affects the incentive structures they are subject to. The politico-administrative framework of the studied case seems generally affected by a context of budgetary constraints. Relative to the policy context, the scrutinized programme is an activation policy falling under the social investment category. Swiss activation policies, after having been expanded and reinforced in unemployment insurance policy in 1997 (Gerfing and Lechner, 2002, p. 854), have breached into social assistance policy more recently (Tabin and Perriard, 2016, p. 3). Thus, in Switzerland as elsewhere, activation policy reforms broadened the target groups to increasingly include persons facing "far more serious problems (in terms of health, social circumstances, debts, employability, etcetera) than the groups activation was traditionally aimed at" (Caswell et al., 2017, p. 185). Given that post-compulsory education is a valuable asset for the integration into modern knowledge economies, activation policies often emphasize human capital investment. Particularly, the social investment strategy emphasizes education and training as key instruments for labour market integration (Bonoli, 2013, pp. 17–19). In this vein, the studied programme aims to improve young social assistance beneficiaries' chances on the labour market, through education and training investments.

With regard to governance, another driving contextual factor in this case study is the New Public Management (NPM) approach to public management. This approach pursues objectives such as improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector, reducing public expenditures, and improving managerial accountability (Christensen and Laegreid, 2013, p. 1). Moreover, it emphasizes accountability for results, rather than process accountability, preferences contracting-out over in-house provision, multi-source over single-source suppliers, and fixed-term, over unlimited labour contracts. It also shifts towards "shorter-term and much more tightly specified contracts" (Boston, 2013, pp. 20–21).

Specific to Switzerland, this approach is thought of as outcome-oriented public management, as it "values the attainment of outcomes over and above the technical provision of outputs" (Schedler and Pröller, 2010, p. xiv). Outcome-focused management implies performance management, meaning "[o]utcome orientation must be reflected in the incentive system for staff" (Schedler and Pröller, 2010, p. 60). In the case of supervisors' sovereignty, "outcome orientation frequently mutates into an excessively bureaucratic check on costs and outputs" (Schedler and Pröller, 2010, p. 231). The studied programme reflects characteristics of both approaches. Crucial activities are attributed to various contracted organizations, whose relationship to the public authorities is based on fixed, rather short-term contracts, and dependent on performance indicators. Moreover, many frontline workers mentioned the increased burden of time-consuming reporting. In the following, the more commonly known term, NPM will refer to this described governance context.

The influence of organizational and occupational factors are considered together in this analysis. Among the contracted organizations, "low-threshold" SIMs are accessible to the most-disadvantaged youth. In contrast, "high-threshold" SIMs are focused on the employability/trainability of "clients", and thus clients are selected. Put differently, "low-threshold" SIMs seem intrinsically concerned with helping youth in difficulty. For two important reasons, it is on this group that this study's interviews focused mainly. First, because the most-disadvantaged youth were not excluded by their selection criteria. Second, because their organizational goal (helping disadvantaged persons) presumably compels them to reach out to the most-disadvantaged "clients". The occupational identity of those employed by such organizations ostensibly reflects these organizational goals.

Unveiling the Matthew effect

SIM workers immediately appeared to be crucial gatekeepers in terms of access to the studied programme. They work intensively with youth over a meaningful period of time (generally three to six months). The incentive structures for these frontline workers, affecting frontline practices, are particularly determined by the contextual elements of policy and governance. First, policy design presents challenges, as SIMs must insert somewhat disadvantaged youth into a selective apprenticeship market, while lacking the instruments to influence employers' choices. Second, strict performance evaluation within a rather brief timeframe is demanding: contracts with public authorities are renewed annually, and are contingent on the fulfilment of a predetermined success rate. Success is clearly defined, and follows the lines of activation principles. Youth who have found a training opportunity (preferably), or another mid- to long-term solution (e.g. a long-lasting internship or job) are considered a success. Thus, in line with NPM,

SIMs are held accountable for clearly-defined results, regardless of the process leading to the success. Since most SIMs rely heavily or exclusively on this source of income, failing to renew the contract by not respecting these conditions would mean risking organizational survival. Additionally, the structural constraints of the selective dual-VET market remain unaffected by policy design, while the youth they accompany are rather distant from it. Thus, the more disadvantaged a young person is, the more difficult it is to be inserted into this market, and the higher the risk for SIMs to fail to achieve the required success rate. This results in an incentive structure compelling SIM workers to engage in cream-skimming practices, causing, in turn, a Matthew effect.

Cream-skimming of candidates is a coping strategy for frontline workers dealing with a chronic scarcity of resources (Lipsky, 2010, p. 107). It induces caseworkers to invest more resources in easier-to-place candidates, already closer to the market: the "cream". Other studies analysing the implementation of ALMPs also highlighted cream-skimming practices (e.g. van Berkel, 2017; Bredgaard and Larsen, 2007; Koning and Heinrich, 2013). To comprehend this frontline practice against the backdrop of the incentive structure, the following sections discuss the different mechanisms in greater detail, supported by a selection of relevant citations from the empirical results.

Untreated structural challenges

Though eligibility to the programme relies on access to the dual-VET system, the policy design does not address the issue of market selectivity. Indeed, frontline workers do not receive any instrument capable of affecting employers' candidate choices. Thus, the focus rests on adapting the demand for apprenticeship to its offer. Yet, the target group youth are generally rather removed from the apprenticeship market. Many of the obstacles to access dual-VET highlighted in the literature, such as lacking familial support (lack of network), migration background, low school-track, and weak academic and soft skills, were also mentioned by interviewees describing the accompanied youth. In addition to these features, many interviewees also stressed the necessity of a certain stability in order for youth to be able to engage in an apprenticeship. Yet, most youth face complex and unstable life situations, such as housing instability, debt, health issues, and addictions. Sometimes the complexity is so high as to temporarily cause vocational/occupational projects to become a secondary issue. The structural obstacles imposed by the dual-VET system make it therefore particularly challenging for many target group youth to get selected, particularly for those who are most disadvantaged. This is aptly illustrated by the following citations:

> The objective is really that a youth is as ready as possible to start an apprenticeship. And of course it is also necessary to find the apprenticeship placement! And this is not easy huh, to get this place, it's really not easy! So it's really the best dossiers which get selected, and to become a good dossier, often there is a lot of work to be done …. So [the objective is] to turn such a dossier into a more attractive one – or, I would say, into a *normally* (speaker's emphasis) attractive one to an employer who may engage an apprentice, you see... (SLB-SW-II)

> We would like to be able to place a maximum of youths, and then there is reality: we cannot put everyone. There are youths who start from so low, who face so many difficulties, that if possible it will be way later, maybe two-three years later it will be possible to imagine … Because that youth will be in hell, it may be necessary to solve health issues, there might also be youths who maybe won't do an apprenticeship, … a certified traineeship is clearly reserved, we cannot dream that everyone can access it. (POLADMIN-MUN-II)

> According to me, we have rather few youths who are sufficiently ready to enter an apprenticeship. Ehm, there are substance abuse problems, psychological problems too, which means that some really take a long time to enter VET. (SLB-SW-IV)

Since employers generally try to select more trainable youth (Di Stasio, 2014), the chances of a target group member on the apprenticeship market are generally somewhat scant. Access criterion to the studied programme requires having already found a training opportunity. Thus, less-disadvantaged youth gain more access to the VET market, and to the programme as well. Put differently, structural challenges imposed by the selective apprenticeship system, which are not addressed in the policy design, lead to increased programme access for the less-disadvantaged youth.

Activating the most-disadvantaged: Administratively too risky

To improve youth chances on the apprenticeship market, the cantonal welfare department has contracted several organizations (SIMs) to work intensively with the youth to better equip them to access the dual-VET market. However, the conditions of contract renewal for these contracted organizations incentivizes cream-skimming practices. Cream-skimming is not in line with the organizational objectives of these non-profit organizations dedicated to support youth (re)integration into the apprenticeship market. Yet, the financial dependence on cantonal payments of most SIMs influences their behaviour. This

leads to subordinate the organizational mission to organizational survival goals. Smith and Lipsky (1993, p. 12) offer perspective on this organizational bind: "[w]hen public funds play so vital a role in private agency budgets, it is disingenuous to think that the non-profit sector would not be in danger of losing its separate identity". Particularly interesting in this respect is the following citation from one of the few SIMs financially independent from the welfare department and, thus, not subject to its assessment criteria:

> what might also be interesting is that in our measure, we will not be … how to say, measured on results with a percentage of success, so, eeehm, we have pretty low-threshold youths: we do not select the good risks ... (SLB-SIM-XIV)

To ensure contract renewal, SIMs must meet a certain annual success rate, an assessment method that leads to cream-skimming for two main reasons. First, the timeframe is relatively tight. Access to the apprenticeship market is not readily available for most of these youth, and as Gomel, Issehnane and Legendre (2013) demonstrate, youth most removed from the market need a more intense follow-up in order to access it. Yet, in the present case, the individual distance to the market is not acknowledged by assessment criteria. Indeed, both low- and high-threshold SIMs are assessed in the same way. Consequently, SLBs do not dispose of the resources necessary to address those with the greatest needs. Given that SIM workers' means of altering the structural challenges are extremely limited, their actions are mostly confined to work on the candidate profiles. Given the complexity of each individual's situation, enabling access to the apprenticeship market is frequently a time-consuming process (e.g. life situation stabilization, catch-up lacunas, regaining motivation and self-esteem). To empower the most disadvantaged youth, one year is often a tight timeframe, as confirmed by an interviewed social worker:

> This takes time, yes it takes time. Whereas in the programme it should go fast so that they leave social assistance. But I have rarely seen that it goes fast actually, for one reason or another, it is rare that it goes quickly, because if it would go fast, they wouldn't be on social assistance. … so, ehm, by definition, according to me, it won't go fast. (SLB-SW-V)

The second reason that yearly assessment leads to cream-skimming is that success rates are evaluated in terms of activation. Considering the general distance of these youths from the apprenticeship market, more focus on those closer to the market is a safer bet for SIMs concerned with success rates. Tellingly, an increase of the demanded success rate from 20 per cent to 50 per cent accentuated cream-skimming practices, as highlighted by a SIM worker:

> However, there is also cream-skimming. We… hmmmmm… it is difficult to say… we try to avoid it on a day-to-day basis, but it is clear that for instance today we will more rapidly say "currently it is not yet possible [to insert this youth], this leads nowhere". Whereas actually before, when we were still at 20 per cent [success rate] we could take more time to accompany the youth to see if there was still a change that could be made and so on. But here we are now, *constrained* (speaker's emphasis), yes, it is clear, actually we say more quickly "well, there, pfff, it… it won't happen". (SLB-SIM-XI)

To counteract the lack of formal instruments available to influence employer decisions, some SIMs manage to have good relationships with firms mainly concerning internships. Such relationships are a precious tool, as internships can lead to an offer of an apprenticeship. At the same time, they are extremely resource intensive for SIMs to develop and maintain. Thus, SIMs are highly concerned with preserving them, and tend to avoid referring youth who may represent a potential "threat" to these relationships. The most disadvantaged will therefore receive less access to this resource:

> We support the youths because we understand their problems, but [when they undertake an internship] it is their job also to perform well, to prove to be trustworthy and then … it is important, they don't allow themselves to be absent just like that … an employer expects the youth to be active and motivated! – Int.: So for you it is important, in order to keep employers' trust or collaboration, that the youths are trustworthy... – Exactly! By the way, we just lost a … this is what is difficult for us, it's that sometimes the youths didn't go or there were issues, and so we lost the link [to the employer], yes. Recently it happened to us and it is quite difficult already to get this link and then all the sudden hopp! So sometimes we have to choose, according to the type of firm, which youth we place, well, choose … is a big word, but to pay attention in order to preserve our contact. (SLB-SIM X)

> Int.: I imagine it is also important for you to maintain a good relationship with the firms, so as to propose the "right" youths to them? – Of course, we do part of the recruiting job for them, by filtering these youths! (SLB-SIM-VI)

It appears therefore that cream-skimming incentives for SIM workers are varied and strong. For the majority of these organizations, public financing is vital, so reaching out to the most disadvantaged target group youth is too risky. Instead, by focusing on the least disadvantaged, the probability of attaining the required success rate within the strict timeframe is increased. Cream-skimming

is therefore a coping strategy for SIM workers, allowing them to ensure organizational survival. However, this leads to a Matthew effect.

Activating the most-disadvantaged: Politically too costly

The interaction between the contexts of policy and governance results in an incentive structure that compels SIMs to cream-skim candidates, inducing a Matthew effect. During a research presentation on the programme,[4] a key politico-administrative actor openly stated that cream-skimming of potential programme participants is an endorsed objective. In another interview, an actor in the same field stated:

> The preparatory measures [SIMs] are evaluated according to results. Not according to how the job is done, but according to the results achieved, and this for me is very important. Because I want there to be a filter. I prefer that the youth are reoriented towards more adequate measures, instead of staying here and failing time after time. This isn't good. (POLADMIN-CANT-I)

According to Lipsky (2010, p. 37–38), prioritization of service quality would entail such high costs as to be politically not feasible, with cost-benefit ratios being regarded as unacceptable. Plausibly, to reach out to the most disadvantaged in the given politico-governance and cost-containment context would also entail politically unacceptable costs, as it would presumably lower the success rate. Indeed, good results are not only desirable for the political returns of the policy proponents of this highly politicized flagship policy, they are also necessary to ensure the essential political consensus. This broad political consensus, which allowed for considerable financial means to be allocated to the development of the programme over the years, is strictly relative to its good results. The initial support was gained through sound results in a pilot project:

> The political context was favourable thanks to the obtained results, because at the beginning it wasn't so favourable, it was like a bet at the beginning, because it was thought that these 3–4 per cent of youth who represented the share of this cohort of youths, aged 18–25 receiving social assistance, were either very marginalized or youth who profited from public help to pay for their holidays. ... [Stereotypes] really well anchored, to the Right as well as to the Left in my opinion. Then, *thanks to these successes* [of the pilot project], *the Right as well as the Left applauded the results of this programme* and since then there has been a high degree of

4. The presentation took place at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, on 2 February 2017.

> uniformity concerning how the results and the success of this programme are interpreted, which then didn't pose any further problems at the political level. *It appeared really as an investment*. (emphasis added) (POLADMIN-CANT-I)

Positive results are therefore key for political support, and this support is fundamental for budgetary allocation. If results decline, political and, thus, financial support would most likely collapse. Conforming to the policy context, results are evaluated through activation and, particularly, through the lens of social investment. The youth who manage training are the ones who contribute to the increased success rates. The most disadvantaged among the target group face a higher risk of apprenticeship interruption. This would trigger lower success rates, disrupt the political consensus, and translate into budgetary cuts. Therefore, by filtering the strongest candidates at the entrance to the programme, this increases the probability of attaining the necessary good results. The following citations illustrate this well:

> I think that the force of this programme is that we don't enrol someone who we know will fail. (POLADMIN-MUN-II)

> … I think that [the criteria to access the programme] is really for all those who are capable to follow and have the potential. This is why we often say that it is a bit like the cream of our clients who we send to the programme. Well, it is for all those for whom the problems are not an obstacle to enter it or to continue with it. (POLADMIN-MUN-I)

Against the backdrop of the requirements stemming from the policy and governance contexts, it is therefore crucial for politico-administrative actors that the allocated means appear as investments. Reaching out to the most disadvantaged among the target group would lead to less certain results, in terms of candidates successfully managing the apprenticeship. These fuzzier returns on investments would plausibly undermine and eventually collapse the broad political support. Consequently, reaching out to the most disadvantaged might seem politically too costly for the relevant actors.

Conclusion

In this article, the aim has been to understand the mechanisms and reasons leading to a Matthew effect through a single embedded case study of a training programme for disadvantaged youth in Switzerland. To understand why the most-disadvantaged youth face substantial difficulties in accessing the programme, the focus was placed on frontline workers (Lipsky, 2010). To better understand

these frontline practices, the broader setting has been taken into account (van Berkel et al., 2017). The cost containment-driven policy and governance context is particularly relevant for the present study: these two contextual dimensions significantly shape the incentive structure, which compels caseworkers to practice cream-skimming, eventually triggering a Matthew effect.

In terms of policy, eligibility criteria and politically untreated structural challenges of the selective apprenticeship market pose a primary obstacle to programme access for the most-disadvantaged youth. In terms of governance, stringent performance management within a challenging timeframe further pushes frontline workers towards cream-skimming practices. In these scenarios, it seems that activation of the most disadvantaged youth is administratively too risky, and politically too costly. Indeed, for frontline workers obligated to comply with performance exigencies in a relatively short timeframe, it is too risky to reach out to the most disadvantaged youth, those most removed from the selective apprenticeship market. These individuals lower the probability of reaching the demanded success rate necessary for contract renewal, which places the survival of the organization at risk. Thus, SIMs cope with their working conditions by cream-skimming candidates, placing organizational survival over organizational goals. Similarly, politico-administrative actors must comply with efficiency and discipline in resource use to minimize the risk of losing the programme-sustaining political consensus. This makes it too costly to reach out to the most disadvantaged, who might not deliver the politically necessary clear-cut and solid success rate within a short timeframe.

In this case study, a Matthew effect finds its sources in structural obstacles, as well as in an incentive structure that drives SLBs to cream-skim candidates. This incentive structure is a political strategy that safeguards the political consensus necessary for the programme budget allocations. Indeed, this case study shows that a politico-administrative framework combining activation policies with a NPM approach, without confronting structural obstacles, leads to a restrictive politico-administrative logic, making it particularly hard to reach out to the most disadvantaged. While activation policies focus on the activation of target groups, NPM stresses efficient resource use and accountability for results, relying on performance management. As long as the structure remains selective, this combination seemingly incentivizes frontline workers to focus more on easier-to-place individuals among a target group, engendering a Matthew effect. In other words, when working with disadvantaged individuals to access selective markets, the focus on quick and solid results does not allow frontline workers to reach out to the most disadvantaged. Ultimately, the Matthew effect appears to result from a political compromise: to invest in a highly disadvantaged group despite a cost-containment context, yet sacrificing the most disadvantaged among them in order to keep costs politically acceptable. This

research shows that in-depth case studies are valuable to gain a deeper understanding of street-level behaviour and highlight relevant mechanisms and consequences. Therefore, such studies offer a significant contribution to inform policy-makers in their decision taking procedures.

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6. Article 3. Between Idealism and Pragmatism: Social Policies and Matthew Effect in Vocational Education and Training for Disadvantaged Youth in Switzerland

Abstract

Since the mid-1970s, research shows that less-disadvantaged individuals more frequently access social policy schemes when compared to their more-disadvantaged counterparts, a phenomenon called the Matthew effect. Through two in depth case studies, based on 60 semi-directive interviews, and document analysis, this study aims to more fully understand the mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect in Swiss Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes for disadvantaged youth. Indeed, education is key to post-industrial labour markets access, and VET appears to facilitate school-to-work transitions. A Matthew effect in this policy field might thus lead to particularly detrimental repercussions, and public authorities should be especially eager to contain it. Nevertheless, findings show that, under certain conditions, decision-makers push frontline-workers into cream-skimming practices, causing a Matthew effect. Additionally, structural challenges also lead to a Matthew effect, highlighting the general difficulty of the very mandate: (re)-inserting highly disadvantaged individuals into selective markets. Indeed, in contexts of tight public budgets, service oriented modern Welfare States tread a fine line between empowering and prioritising beneficiaries. Dealing with complex target groups, it seems crucial whether the rationale driving public authorities is more oriented towards credit-claiming or problem-solving: the former increasing and the latter decreasing the incidence of Matthew effects.

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Article

Between Idealism and Pragmatism: Social Policies and Matthew Effect in Vocational Education and Training for Disadvantaged Youth in Switzerland

Delia Pisoni

Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration (IDHEAP), University of Lausanne, 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland;
E-Mail: delia.pisoni@unil.ch

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Abstract
Since the mid-1970s, research shows that less-disadvantaged individuals more frequently access social policy schemes when compared to their more-disadvantaged counterparts, a phenomenon called the Matthew effect. Through two in-depth case studies, based on 60 semi-directive interviews, and document analysis, this study aims to more fully understand the mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect in Swiss Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes for disadvantaged youth. Indeed, education is key to post-industrial labour markets access, and VET appears to facilitate school-to-work transitions. A Matthew effect in this policy field might thus lead to particularly detrimental repercussions, and public authorities should be especially eager to contain it. Nevertheless, findings show that, under certain conditions, decision-makers push frontline-workers into cream-skimming practices, causing a Matthew effect. Additionally, structural challenges also lead to a Matthew effect, highlighting the general difficulty of the very mandate: (re-)inserting highly disadvantaged individuals into selective markets. Indeed, in contexts of tight public budgets, service oriented modern Welfare States tread a fine line between empowering and prioritising beneficiaries. Dealing with complex target groups, it seems crucial whether the rationale driving public authorities is more oriented towards credit-claiming or problem-solving: the former increasing and the latter decreasing the incidence of Matthew effects.

Keywords
disadvantaged youth; education; Matthew effect; social policy; Switzerland; Vocational Education and Training; welfare

Issue
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1. Introduction

More than four decades have lapsed since 1975 when Herman Deleeck introduced the notion of a Matthew effect in social policy research. This concept describes a situation in which the least-disadvantaged individuals among a targeted group are more able to benefit from social policy schemes than their more-disadvantaged counterparts. Thus, it allows for a depiction of the various means in which social policy particularly favours upper social-classes (Deleeck, 1979) or, more generally, less-disadvantaged individuals among a target group. As within-country disparities have increased over the last years, this principle remains an interesting object of study. Recent research in social policy also highlighted the existence of a Matthew effect in interventions aimed at facilitating labour market participation, particularly focusing on access to childcare services (e.g., Bonoli & Champion, 2015; van Lancker & Ghysels, 2012), or on the broader functioning of the social investment approach (Bonoli, Cantillon, & van Lancker, 2017; Cantillon, 2011). Needless to say, a Matthew effect can significantly impact the life-chances of the most vulnerable individuals, while affecting public finances due to higher social expenditures and forgone public revenue. Therefore, it is in the interest of public policy to contain it as much as possible.

As education has become a crucial asset for labour market integration in modern knowledge societies, it is particularly important to limit a Matthew effect in this policy field. Indeed, structural changes such as tertiari-

sation, technological evolution and globalisation have driven post-industrial economies towards an increasingly skilled workforce (e.g., Bonoli, 2013). Young adults lacking post-compulsory education are a particularly vulnerable group, facing great employment difficulties and a high risk of poverty (López Vilapana, 2013). Moreover, long unemployment spells at a young age can leave long-lasting scarring effects (e.g., Bell & Blanchflower, 2010). Consequently, rapid youth integration into labour markets is crucial, and post-compulsory education seems a promising avenue for increased chances on the labour market. Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems, in particular dual-VET, which combines in-school theoretical education with on-the-job practical training (apprenticeships and dual-VET are used interchangeably), are often praised for facilitating school-to-work transitions (e.g., Salvisberg & Sacchi, 2014; Stalder, 2012). Political efforts to support VET integration are therefore an important tool to increase disadvantaged youth's chances on the labour market. Yet, it is crucial that they manage to reach out to the most-disadvantaged youth, as dual-VET access is generally challenging, and the more-disadvantaged face greater access difficulties (e.g., Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009).

A Matthew effect in dual-VET programmes for disadvantaged youth might therefore be particularly detrimental, leading to long-term repercussions on individual well-being and on welfare states, further marginalising already highly vulnerable persons. Previous studies focused e.g., on a French social integration programme for disadvantaged youth (Gomel, Issehnane, & Legendre, 2013), on VET programmes in Belgium (Nicaise, 2000), or on training and employment programmes for disadvantaged individuals (Nicaise & Bollens, 1998). The present research differs from those studies by focusing on a Matthew effect in dual-VET programmes for disadvantaged youth. The rather narrow focus pursued in this study is due to its presumed integration potential and consequent political salience. Given dual-VET's strength in facilitating school-to-work transitions, such programmes presumably result in more opportunities for youth labour market integration—while training is a broad term, inclusive of diverse activities (e.g., language or computer courses) and yielding highly diverse impacts, dual-VET programmes are highly specific and fairly rare among activation policies. Moreover, given the risk of substantial repercussions on public finances through failed youth labour market integration, Matthew effect containment in this policy field should be particularly relevant to policy makers. Yet, difficult dual-VET accessibility for disadvantaged youth implies that some degree of a Matthew effect is likely present. Against this backdrop, this article is guided by questions of why and how a Matthew effect occurs in training programmes for disadvantaged youth. This research aims to contribute to the understanding of the Matthew effect through a holistic investigation of the contributing mechanisms in two Swiss dual-VET programmes.

The article is structured as follows. First, background information and research approach are introduced (Section 2). Second, the analytic lens is presented, highlighting key actors and crucial systems affecting access to the studied measures (Section 3). Third, a synthesis of results is explained, then illustrated through relevant excerpts from the empirical data (Section 4). This section is divided according to the two detected mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect in the studied cases: as a consequence of the political mandate (Section 4.2.1), and due to cream-skimming incentive structures for frontline workers (Section 4.2.2). Discussion and conclusion follow.

2. Background and Research Approach

Switzerland offers interesting research opportunities for investigating the different mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect in youth VET programmes. The federal structure and a generally high degree of local discretion lead to a variety of programmes embedded in cantonal contexts, while the general reference to the VET system, of federal competence, is nationally uniform. Dual-VET is quite popular in Switzerland: annually, two-thirds of youth opt for a VET upper-secondary education, with a majority opting for dual-VET (Staatssekretariat für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation [SBFI], 2018, p. 10). The proximity of dual-VET to labour market requirements, in terms of skills and workforce, is often associated with the comparatively low youth unemployment rate in Switzerland (SBFI, 2018, p. 4). Indeed, the nationally recognised VET certificates represent a valuable asset for integration within the Swiss labour market.

To holistically explore the mechanisms and reasons engendering a Matthew effect, I rely on two in-depth, embedded case studies (Yin, 2009/2013, p. 50). Each case study represents a Swiss cantonal (regional) measure aimed at increasing disadvantaged youth's chances on the labour market by supporting their achievement of a VET certificate. For each case, the different groups of key actors represent the units of analysis. Selected relative to their influence on the odds of youth access to the measures, these are politico–administrative actors (designing, steering and managing the policies), frontline workers (implementing the programmes), the targeted youth (defining the degree of integration difficulty), and other crucial actors relative to each case. The main data source is a corpus of 60 semi-structured face-to-face interviews, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes, with 63 key actors. For the first case 39 interviews with 40 persons were conducted, and for the second (smaller) case, 21 interviews with 23 persons were conducted. Table 1 offers an interview overview, clustered by key actor group. Analysis of the fully self-transcribed interviews was performed using MAXQDA, and draws on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Aiming at fully understanding a phenomenon, grounded theory seems particularly appropriate for the present study. In order to se-

Table 1. Interviews clustered by group of actors.

Group Of Actors	Function (Citation Code)	No. Interviews; No. Interviewees	Function (Citation Code)	No. Interviews; No. Interviewees
	Case 1-Large Francophone Canton		Case 2-Small Germanophone Canton	
Politico-Administrative Actors	Cantonal level: Design and steering (POLADMIN1-CANT-I & II);	3; 2	High civil servant: Design and steering (POLADMIN2-I)	1
	Municipal level: Local implementation management (POLADMIN-MUN1-I & II)	3; 2	Support-group members: Various actors involved in designing the measure, now consultative function (POLADMIN2-II to VII)	6
Street-Level Bureaucrats	Social workers: Providing social support to the youth before accessing the programme (SLB-SW1-I to X)	10	Professionals working for the contracted organisation, participating to design and steering (SLB2-I to IV)	4
	SIM workers: Socio-professional (re)integration experts, contracted to support youth to find a solution (SLB-SIM1-I to XIV)	11; 14		
(Potential) Policy Recipients	18-25-year-olds at the benefit of social assistance, without accomplished post-compulsory education, enrolled in a SIM (YOUTH1-I to X)	10*	15–24-year-olds risking to fail post-compulsory education transition due to multiple problematics, enrolled in the measure (YOUTH2-I & II)	2
Others	Member of the organisation accompanying the youth enrolled in the programme (ADD1-I) Employee of a municipal specialised insertion unit (ADD1-II)	2	Professionals of institutions entitled to announce youth (ADD2-I to VIII)	8; 10
Total		39; 40		21; 23

Note: * Including a 17-year-old, thus ineligible for social assistance.

lect the data useful to holistically understand the phenomenon, different analytical rounds aim to progressively lead the analysis to a higher theoretical abstraction from the empirical data: in a first round of coding (open coding), relevant segments of data are labelled; in a second one (axial coding), the codes are placed in relationship with one another; in the last round (selective coding), code categories are identified on the basis of clustered codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 211, 214). Desk research of primary and secondary sources complements the interviews.

Generally, the aim was to reconstruct the mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect through a 'backward mapping' approach: first identifying where a Matthew effect occurs, then reconstructing the rationale underlying the Matthew-effect-inducing strategies. Questions varied between group and stage of the research. Interviews investigated, for instance, the policy design definition and rationale (politico–administrative actors), working strategies and challenges (frontline workers) and the difficulties of finding an apprenticeship post (youth). To identify a Matthew effect, criteria determining restricted programme access, as derived from interviews and document analysis, were compared to the notion of disadvantage. If the information was corresponding, a Matthew effect was identified. Since the focus of the study is to

identify the underlying mechanisms to, and not whether there is a Matthew effect, a precise measure of the effect, barely possible, is not crucial. The concept of disadvantage employed in this research is relative to dual-VET access, since this is determinant to access both programmes. This draws on both relevant literature (see Section 3) and interviewee accounts, in order to address local peculiarities.

The first case, implemented in a large French-speaking canton, targets young adults (18–25-year-olds) benefiting from social assistance, who have not completed upper-secondary education (for a more in-depth analysis of this case see Pisoni, in press). This is a unique programme resulting from local discretion, as social assistance is a cantonal competence in Switzerland. To enhance labour market (re-)integration, the programme offers individualised support throughout apprenticeship, and a scholarship covering training and living expenses. To be eligible, youth from the target group need to have found a training opportunity. Several Social Insertion Measures (SIMs) have been contracted to support them in this search. SIMs are mainly non-profit organisations mandated to help these youth to find a mid- to long-term solution, with preference for an apprenticeship.

The second case is a federally initiated programme intended to enhance the number of youth completing upper-secondary education. The central government issued broad guidelines, and financed the initial phase, followed by a regressive financing model with cantons eventually assuming the financial burden. Since implementation was cantonal and voluntary, cantonal programmes developed in different directions. The selected measure, implemented in a small, affluent Swiss-German canton, aims to support youth (15–24-year-olds) at risk of failing the post-compulsory-school transition due to multiple difficulties. It offers an individualised support throughout this transition and throughout VET. To avoid a revolving-door effect—that is, a fragmented treatment according to agencies' tasks instead of appropriate holistic support—a reference person refers youth to existing support options in order to treat the multiple problematics as a combination of measures, rather than treating problems separately. Eligibility is based on youth's intention, and capability of pursuing VET. Youth need to get announced through an institution (e.g., schools, unemployment office, social assistance). Implementation is delegated to a private association, framed as a public-private-partnership.

Selection of the first case was based on the assumption of a Matthew effect through comparison of low access rates (ca. 20%) to the high success rate (65%[1]). It was presumed that the less-disadvantaged youth among the target group primarily access the programme. This made it an excellent case to explore the dynamics which lead to a Matthew effect. The second case was selected due to its similar objective, yet different cantonal context: different management arrangements, and a more dynamic apprenticeship market,[2] potentially lowering the access threshold for the most-disadvantaged youth. With access rates around 78% (2009–2017), and success rates around 47%[3] (2010–2017), tendency towards a Matthew effect is less apparent.

3. Accompanying Disadvantaged Youth to Integrate a Selective Market

The organisational field and Street-Level Bureaucracy emerged as a useful theoretical framework, as empirical insights quickly highlighted the importance of actors' behaviours, substantially shaped by pressures originating from the organisational and broader contextual framework. Combining strategic analysis of organisations (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977/2014), and Street-Level Bureaucracy theory (Lipsky, 1980/2010) offers a particularly relevant analytic lens for the present study, as both theories aim at exploring and highlighting the role and diversity of informal norms and practices in public organisations (Buffat, 2016, p. 159), approaching the issue from different angles. While strategic analysis of organisations focuses on the interaction between the relevant groups of key actors as well as between actors and the system(s) steering their actions, Street-Level Bureaucracy zooms in on frontline workers, emphasising structural constraints and challenges stemming from their working conditions (Brodkin, 2012, pp. 941–942).

According to strategic analysis of organisations, in a collective action context, actors' strategies are mainly constrained by two factors: first, the behaviour of other actors participating in the collective action, and second, the systems delimiting actors' behavioural options. Rationality, indeed, might not be evident nor necessarily conscious or intentional, but always makes sense in context and in function of other actors' 'moves' (Amblard, Bernoux, Herreros, & Livian, 1996/2005, p. 23). Relative to the studied cases, interviewee groups denote groups of key actors. In terms of systems, actors' behaviour in both cases seem shaped by dual-VET and by the politico-administrative framework. Relative to the former, the apprenticeship offer in Switzerland relies on the economy (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009): employers are free to choose *whether* and *whom* to train. Since employers must comply with market principles, they generally try to contain training costs by selecting most trainable youth (Di Stasio, 2014). The allocation of apprenticeships, therefore, relies substantially on market principles comprehending inherent competition and selection logics. Consequently, integration into dual-VET markets is challenging for many youth,

[1] Youth succeeding throughout apprenticeship. Success rate at the final exam is similar to the overall cantonal rate (80%).
[2] Dual-VET is more entrenched in German-speaking than Latin Switzerland. Moreover, it strongly depends on labour markets, thus, in economically strong contexts, dual-VET is also more dynamic.
[3] 42% accomplished VET; 5% of cases were ended prematurely because support was no longer needed.

more so for disadvantaged ones. The literature highlights several factors influencing apprenticeship market opportunities. On the individual level, crucial features include cognitive and soft-skills; compulsory-school class-track;[4] socio-economic and migration background; nationality; informal networks; working virtues and gender (Camilleri-Cassar, 2013; Di Stasio, 2014; Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009; Hupka & Stalder, 2004; Liebig, Kohls, & Krause, 2012; Meyer, 2009; Perriard, 2005; Protsch & Solga, 2015; Solga, 2015). Meeting apprenticeship market requirements when struggling with compound problematics might be particularly challenging. Indeed, people in 'complex needs' situations face multiple interlocking problematics, spanning from health to social issues. This term addresses both breadth and depth of needs, i.e., variety and severity of needs (Rankin & Regan, 2004, pp. 7–8). The way the studied programmes address youth's complex needs in order to help them integrate into the dual-VET market is a determinant of a Matthew effect incidence.

The politico–administrative framework is generally shaped by a context of 'permanent austerity' (Bonoli, 2013, p. 3), inducing cost-containment attempts. It comprehends two components: activation policies and public management. From an administrative perspective, the first case adheres to New Public Management (NPM) principles, while the second, post-NPM. NPM generally aims to improve public sector effectiveness and efficiency, reducing public expenditures and improving managerial accountability (Christensen & Laegreid, 2011/2013, p. 1). Performance management and output are key elements (Jun, 2009, p. 162). It also promotes contractualism, emphasizing well-defined, short, fixed-term contracts, with monetary incentives (Boston, 2011/2013, pp. 20–21). The first case contains several NPM features: governance is highly verticalised, with substantial distance between the principal—politico-administrative powers defining the policy design—and agents—lower administrative levels in charge of implementing (aspects of) the policy. Moreover, public authorities contracted several SIMs for the delivery of well-specified outputs. Accountability and assessment are result-based: contracts are annually renegotiated on the basis of a predetermined success rate.

Post-NPM pursues a more holistic strategy, relying on insights also from other social sciences, instead of a pure economic vision. It pursues better usage of scarce resources by creating synergies "bringing together different stakeholders in a particular policy area and to offer citizens seamless rather than fragmented access to services" (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007/2009, p. 10). Instead of quasi-market forces, it emphasises network-based self-regulation (Dent, 2005, p. 632), coordination, cooperation, clearly-defined role relationships and public-private-partnerships (Jun, 2009, p. 163). The second case follows post-NPM principles: implementation is delegated to a single organisation, already active in supporting disadvantaged youth during apprenticeship, in the form of a public-private-partnership. A support group composed of key actors from municipal schools and cantonal offices involved with youth was appositely created to buttress the organisation. Accountability and assessment are process-based, relying on the number of enrolled youth. The annually negotiated partnership determines how many youth will be financed by the cantonal department in the following year.

From a political perspective, both programmes are activation policies with a social investment approach: to activate youth on the labour market by investing in their education and training. Indeed, modern welfare states increasingly focus on activating beneficiaries, along with the more traditional task of securing income, aiming to (re-)insert benefit claimants into the labour market through various strategies. To meet increasing skill requirements of knowledge economies, social investment strategy aims to invest in people's human capital. A more individualised service resulting from activation policies sounds promising for responding to the challenge of supporting persons with complex needs. However, the focus on activating beneficiaries comes with an emphasis on their responsibility. In exchange for benefits, beneficiaries must satisfy certain activation principles. This can have an empowering effect, but it also "makes access to welfare benefits more constraining and selective" (Dif-Pradalier, Rosenstein, & Bonvin, 2012, p. 1). The increased selectivity and emphasis on self-responsibility may make it particularly hard for persons struggling with complex needs to comply with activation expectations.

As social policy is increasingly service orientated, the quality of the accompaniment beneficiaries receive highly depends on frontline practices. In Lipsky's terms, the way public policy reaches the population, affecting people's lives, is strongly influenced by how frontline workers transform policies into practice. Thus, Lipsky's analytic framework leads to a more precise understanding of the implications of a particularly crucial group of actors on a Matthew effect. In constant contact with citizens, and working in situations requiring responses to human dimensions, Street-Level Bureaucrats (SLBs) enjoy a certain discretion in executing their jobs (Lipsky, 1980/2010, pp. 3, 15). Accompanying youth with complex needs to (re-)integrate into a selective apprenticeship market is an intricate task. The target group is highly heterogeneous, each individual carrying a unique set of challenges linked to personal situation and context. It is therefore crucial that frontline workers are capable of adapting their working strategies to each individual situation. Yet, a major dilemma in public services is perpetual resource scarcity (Lipsky, 1980/2010, pp. 33–39). Consequently, the work structure does not allow frontline workers to perform the job in its ideal conception (Lipsky, 1980/2010, pp. xi–xii, xvii, 3). To deal with this incapa-

[4] In differentiated education systems, pupils are divided into different tracks during lower-secondary education, affecting upper-secondary education options.

bility of best treating each individual case, SLBs, relying on their discretionary power, may develop coping strategies and working regularities. A strategy for attaining a manageable workload is to re-categorise and differentiate 'clients' in function of the likelihood of their administrative success, i.e., cream-skimming (Lipsky, 1980/2010, p. 107). To address the complexity of each individual situation in a context of scarce resources becomes particularly challenging. The degree to which SLBs can extend the quality and individualisation of their support greatly depends on their working conditions. These conditions are largely determined by politico–administrative actors through the general design of the policy. Particularly important are the access conditions to a measure, and frontline worker assessment criteria. The former determines the difficulty for the target group to access a programme, and the latter shapes the incentive structure addressed to frontline workers and contributes to determining the degree of frontline worker discretion.

4. Further Marginalising the Most-Disadvantaged?

In the following sections, the two mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect are presented: in both cases, a Matthew effect stems from the political mandate (Section 4.1); only in the first case do the politico-administrative rationale and the resulting policy design again trigger this effect (Section 4.2).

4.1. The Political Mandate

A first Matthew effect is driven by the very mandates of the two programmes: integrating highly disadvantaged youth into a selective apprenticeship market. Access to this market is central in both policies' eligibility criteria: having found a training opportunity (first case) or being motivated and capable of following VET (second case). Yet, while targeting disadvantaged youth, neither policy addresses the market's selective nature. Empirical findings highlight how the youth under consideration are generally rather distant from that market. According to several interviewees' accounts (across different groups), many youth cumulate several features highlighted by the literature as hampering VET integration, e.g., migration background, low class-track, and weak cognitive- and soft-skills. Additionally, their complex needs may absorb them to the point of (temporarily) blank out longer-term plans such as education, as their compound struggles often result in unstable life situations. Housing problematics are emblematic to illustrate this: when housing problematics are present, they become central, making it particularly difficult to focus on education or training. Interviewees often cited housing issues in conjunction with family problematics, which are crucial in both cases. Even when housing is guaranteed, lack of familial backing generally leaves youth without support throughout the delicate transition phase. Another major and increasing problematic in both cases are health issues: drug use and, particularly, psychological issues. The lack of a supportive home increases the struggle of addressing such problematics. This succinctly illustrates the interconnection between different problematics and that, in situations of complex needs, "the total represents more than the sum of the component parts" (Rankin & Regan, 2004, p. 7).

Relative to the first case, the following citations illustrate how youth's complex needs hamper their apprenticeship market integration, the precondition for programme access:

> There are youth who start from so low, who face so many difficulties, that if possible it will be way later, maybe two, three years later it will be possible to imagine [their integration]. Because that youth will be in hell. (POLADMIN-MUN1-II)

> *We have rather few youth who are sufficiently ready to enter an apprenticeship*….There are substance abuse, psychological problems too, which makes some really take a long time to enter VET. (SLB-SW1-IV; emphasis added by the author)

The literature further highlighted that people with complex needs "may be 'defined out' of the remit of services because they are assessed as being 'too complex' or 'too challenging' for the service" (Rosengard, Laing, Ridley, & Hunter, 2007, p. 44; see also Nicaise, 2000). Indeed, in the second case, eligibility criteria based on will and capacity of following VET excludes the most-disadvantaged youth from the target group. The following citations illustrate this well:

> *There are some who are not accepted* [to the programme] *because the chances of success are practically zero*…because you cannot suppose that with a good support they will manage to accomplish an apprenticeship. (POLADMIN2-V; emphasis added by the author)

> They take on the cases where they see that it's fine, they can do something, whereas *the very difficult ones, which are highly complex from the beginning, those they maybe have to leave aside for the moment*, because they actually have the mandate—the measure is relative to VET, not to the general social context…so it's necessary to delimit it a bit, and that's also in the arrangement [with the cantonal department], that it has to be clearly VET oriented, and that this delimitation needs to take place. (POLADMIN2-I; emphasis added by the author)

Consequently, the structural difficulty of integration into the apprenticeship market for the most-disadvantaged youth leads to better access for less-disadvantaged youth not only to the apprenticeship market, but also to the programmes. In both cases, the combination of the mandate and politically unaddressed structural chal-

lenges (selectivity of the VET market) induces, therefore, a Matthew effect.

4.2. Between Credit-Claiming and Problem-Solving

To understand the way frontline workers address individual's complex needs, frontline practices must be analysed in the light of working conditions. It is particularly necessary to comprehend the incentive structure steering their actions. These are largely shaped by the politico-administrative framework and by the political salience of the respective policies, defining the rationale underlying policy design choices. High political salience and a governance close to political powers in the first case, led to an incentive structure predominantly driven by politico–administrative framework, emphasising activation and NPM. The underlying rationale in this scenario tends towards a credit-claiming approach (Section 4.2.1). With low political salience and governance oriented towards the operative level in the second case, individual challenges of integrating within the VET system were also highlighted. The underlying rationale in this scenario tends towards problem-solving (Section 4.2.2). Credit-claiming rationale resulted in a more restrictive incentive structure focused on clear-cut results, triggering a Matthew effect. A problem-solving approach allowed for more levy to SLBs to address individual difficulties, avoiding a Matthew effect. The following sections illustrate the case-specific mechanisms for understanding whether a Matthew-effect-inducing incentive structure is present.

4.2.1. Case 1: Credit-Claiming Orientation

The first programme in this article, a flagship policy, was highly politicised from inception. Broad political support was crucial to ensure parliament continued to allocate the necessary, substantial resources. This led to a cream-skimming-inducing policy design for frontline workers tasked with helping youth find an apprenticeship (SIM workers).[5] Cream-skimming candidates at the entrance of the measure increases probability of successful results, ensuring political support.

Annual SIM contracts with the cantonal department are renewed based on the achievement of a requested success rate. Such conditions make it difficult to properly address youth's complex needs, as the tendency towards measuring public service outputs "may have detrimental impact on service willingness to work with clients with multiple and/or complex needs" (Rosengard et al., 2007, p. 23). Since for most SIMs the contract with the cantonal authority is financially vital, they need to comply with the assessment criteria, even at the expense of their organisational goal, i.e., to support struggling youth. Thus, to ensure organisational survival by preserving the contract, SIM workers cream-skim candidates, i.e., invest more resources in the youth already closer to the market. Consequently, a Matthew effect is induced.

In a context driven by an activation focused social investment approach and NPM principles, clear-cut successful results portraying the allocated budget as an investment into participants' activation is key to achieving the necessary political support. In the following citation, a high-ranking civil servant explains how political support was initially garnered via a successful pilot project:

> The political context was favourable thanks to the results obtained [from the pilot project], because at the beginning it wasn't so favourable, it was like a bet at the beginning….Then, *thanks to these successes, the right as well as the left has applauded the results of this programme* and since then there is a big uniformity concerning the way of interpreting its results and success, it then didn't pose problems anymore at the political level. *It really appeared as an investment*. (POLADMIN-CANT1-I; emphasis added by the author)

To ensure the image of efficient resource use in terms of activation (measured by the number of enrolled youth succeeding throughout VET) and thus to secure political support, one strategy is to select the good risks at the entrance of the measure, as the following citations underline:

> I think that the force of this programme is that we don't enrol someone who we know will fail. (POLADMIN-MUN1-II)

> I think that [the criteria to access the programme] is really all those who are capable to follow and have the potential. This is why we often say that *it is a bit the cream of our clients who we send to the programme*. Well, it is for all those for whom the problems are not an obstacle to enter it or to follow it. (POLADMIN-MUN1-I; emphasis added by the author)

To satisfy the necessity of filtering for low risk candidates, the policy design embedded an incentive structure inducing frontline workers to cream-skim candidates. The following citation of a high-ranking civil servant shows the calculation behind this incentive structure:

> The preparatory measures are evaluated according to results. Not according to how they do the job, but according to the results they achieve, and this for me is very important. Because I want them to filter: I prefer that the youth are reoriented towards more adequate measures, instead of staying here and have one failure after another. (POLADMIN-CANT1-I)

Several elements of the incentive structure drive cream-skimming practices. First, the contract is renewed on the

[5] Contracted to perform activities on behalf of government agencies, SIM workers can be considered SLBs despite working for private organisations (see Smith & Lipsky, 1993, p. 13).

basis of the satisfaction of a success rate of 50%. Given the general distance of the youth from the VET market, it is much easier to achieve this success rate by focusing on the youth already closer to the market. Tellingly, an increase of the requested success rate from 20% to 50% also increased cream-skimming practices as a SIM worker states in the following citation:

> However, there is also a creaming which is done. We…hm…it is difficult to say…we try to avoid it on a day-to-day basis, but it is clear that for instance today we will faster say, 'currently it is not yet possible [to insert this youth], this leads nowhere'. Whereas actually before, when we were still at 20% [of success rate] we could take more time to accompany the youth to see if there still is a change which can be done and so on. But now, we are anyhow *constraint*, yes it is clear, actually we say more quickly, 'well, there, pfff, it…it won't happen'. (SLB-SIM1-XI; emphasis stressed by the speaker)

Particularly relevant in this respect is the following citation from one of the few SIMs financially independent from the welfare department and, therefore, not subject to its assessment criteria:

> What might also be interesting is that in our measure, we will not be…how to say, measured on results with a percentage of success, so, eeehm, *we have quite low-threshold youth: we do not select the good risks*. (SLB-SIM1-XIV; emphasis added by the author)

Second, the contract is renewed annually. However, the complexity of the situations for most of these youth are often not resolved quickly. For a youth to become 'trainable', more urgent problems may need to be initially addressed. Thus, this time-frame can be restrictive for readying the most-disadvantaged to (re-)integrate into the apprenticeship market:

> It takes time. Whereas in the programme it should go fast so that they quit social assistance. But I have rarely seen that it goes fast actually…because if it would go fast, they wouldn't be at social assistance. (SLB-SW1-V)

Third, some SIMs have direct relationships with employers. This allows them to better support the youth in obtaining an internship or, ideally, an apprenticeship. For these youth, selection on the basis of their dossier is difficult. Internships represent a valuable tool for proving suitability and trainability to employers. Through these direct relationships, SIMs also play the role of the youth's guarantors, encouraging employers to give them a chance despite less-than-ideal dossiers. However, these relationships are extremely resource-intensive for SIMs to build and maintain. Consequently, for preservation of these essential contacts, SIMs carefully select candidates to send to these firms. The most-disadvantaged youth represent a potential threat to the relationship, and subsequently benefit less from this resource:

> This is what is difficult for us, that sometimes the youth didn't show-up or there were issues, so we lost the link [to the employer]. Recently it happened to us and it is quite difficult already to get this link and then all the sudden, hopp! So sometimes we have to choose according to the type of firm whom we place, well, choose…is a big word, but to pay attention in order to preserve our contact. (SLB-SIM1-X)

Therefore, the necessity of ensuring political consensus, in an activation driven social investment and NPM framework, seems to induce goal displacement: emphasis on supporting youth in overcoming their obstacles to activation, shifts towards credit-claiming based on youth activation results. This results in a Matthew effect-inducing incentive structure.

4.2.2. Case 2: Problem-Solving Orientation

The second programme was practically non-politicised because the appeal for the measure and its initial financing came through the federal government. When the canton assumed control of its financing, the programme had already proven itself and was fully running; substantial initial investments were not necessary. Indeed, despite coinciding with a difficult moment in terms of cantonal finances, the programme was not debated in parliament, but simply taken over, (though with a restricted budget due to generalised financial cuts). The minor political salience allowed actors to ignore credit-claiming ploys, and to retain focus on the core addressed problem: supporting youth with complex problematics throughout their transition. The cantonal administration, the support group, and the contracted organisation conjointly defined the policy design. This allowed to keep the contracted organisation's goal (to support disadvantaged youth throughout transition) central during this key phase and to integrate frontline challenges into the policy design. Therefore, while activation remains a central goal, work structures allow the core issue to be better addressed.

The relationship between the organisation and the cantonal department is based on an annually negotiated agreement between the two parties, determining the number of youth financed by the canton. The contract is determined by process-based assessment: instead of clear-cut activation-based results, the number of enrolled youth is most relevant. If these numbers are less than agreed upon, the cantonal financial contribution would be revised accordingly, but the partnership is not interrupted. Given the process assessment, though the contract is renewed annually, the support offered to youth is not bound to this time-frame. These working conditions leave frontline workers much more leeway in addressing the individual compound difficulties.

In the following citation a high-ranking civil servant illustrates the measure's low political salience, and how this enables focus on the core problematic rather than providing clear-cut outputs which are difficult to measure:

> I'm convinced that we don't have an inexpensive but a good measure….I simply consider the context and evaluate the general cantonal situation and I have to say that it works, and the measure contributes to this—although I cannot prove *how much* the measure contributes to the general good situation, but it certainly is an important contribution….Of course it would be difficult if a political questioning would come: we have to tell the exact output, how would the situation be if we hadn't the measure, what would we lack….Those are difficult questions, but they don't come! (POLADMIN2-I; emphasis stressed by the speaker)

The following two citations illustrate, respectively, frontline workers' operational discretion (without performance pressures) and their focus on the individual situation instead of results:

> [The cantonal department] does not prescribe us what we have to do. We are really free. The department finances us, but we are really free.
>
> Int.: And you don't have success expectations or such prescriptions? Nor pressure in this sense?
>
> No, not at all. (SLB2-II)
>
> I am currently following a young woman…who has been with us for about 7 years. And...a lot has already happened there: beginnings, interruptions, beginnings....Now she is in her third apprenticeship year but it doesn't really look 100% good. Simply because of her....She has a child, she has very bad educational records, and then also her personality, and…simply all factors…I think she wouldn't have come that far if she hadn't had a reference person supporting her.
>
> Int.: So, this shows that it is really the case, the individual result that is targeted?
>
> Yes, you mean that we are client-oriented? We are only client-oriented. (SLB2-III)

Consequently, in this programme no Matthew-effect-inducing incentive-structure was identified.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on two in-depth embedded case studies of VET programmes for disadvantaged youth in Switzerland, the aim of this article was to offer deep insight into mechanisms in this policy field which lead to a Matthew effect, and to contribute to the general understanding of this phenomenon in social policies. Discerning key actors' strategies against the backdrop of systems framing their possibilities for behaviour, two Matthew-effect-inducing mechanisms were identified. First, in both cases, a Matthew effect is induced through the mandate of activating highly disadvantaged youth in selective markets, with eligibility criteria focusing on activation. While both policies are intended to support youth with complex needs throughout VET, none addresses the selective nature of the market. The centrality of activation on a selective market does not allow for the very disadvantaged to be reached: the most-disadvantaged are either excluded from the target group (Case 2) or strict eligibility criteria filters them out at the entrance to the programme because of their low chances to succeed (Case 1). Second, a cream-skimming-inducing incentive structure leading to a Matthew effect was identified in the first case. Even though it seems crucial for politico-administrative actors to contain a Matthew effect in in this policy field, the incentive structure driving frontline workers to cream-skim was deliberately embedded in the policy design by politico-administrative actors. This enabled attainment of politically satisfying results, safeguarding political and thus financial support for the measure. As both programmes represent last resort measures for disadvantaged youth, such Matthew effects lead to particularly detrimental consequences, hampering educational access and outcomes for the individuals in greatest need.

In both cases, a Matthew effect generally seems the result of a political compromise: to invest in highly disadvantaged youth despite a cost-containment context yet sacrificing the most-disadvantaged among them as apparently too cost-intensive. As noted by Bonoli (2017, p. 70), in times where political debates on the role of the state are dominated by budgetary restrictions induced by demographic aging, the credibility of the social investment strategy depends on its ability to demonstrate that the invested money produces returns. Indeed, as highlighted by Nadai, from an economic perspective, investment means the allocation of financial resources to realise monetary gain. Investments are therefore always *selective*, with disposable resources being directed to where biggest returns are foreseen (Nadai, 2017, pp. 80–81). To understand how the resources are channelled, it is crucial to know how returns are assessed, which is largely affected by the rationale underlying the social investment approach. Indeed, this concept is contended between different ideologies and interests. In terms of human capital investments, central to the social investment approach and to the present study, the underlying rationale can be of more economistic or of more social nature, inspired by the works of two highly different economists. First, a more economistic rationale, emphasizes the need of human capital investments for economic growth by increasing people's production possibilities. Highly influenced

by economist James Heckman, who highlights the economic returns on investments in education (e.g., Heckman, 2006), this approach to social investment promotes human capital investments with the aim of increasing individuals' 'employability'. This notion emphasizes the individual's responsibility to become 'employable', while it neglects the importance of the socio-economic context into which individuals should integrate. Second, emphasising social returns from social investments, economist Amartya Sen takes a broader approach to human capital. Highlighting the multifaceted contribution of education to a person's life, he moves beyond economic growth as an end in itself, and emphasises the increased freedom to shape one's life which results from more education. This approach to social investment goes beyond the individual-centred notion of 'employability', highlights the importance of the socio-economic contextual framing, and seeks a stronger role of the state to shape the macroeconomic context to best accommodate the workforce (Morel & Palme, 2017, pp. 150–153).

Both studied cases lean towards the first, economistic social investment approach: the focus is on converting the youth into more attractive apprenticeship-seekers, without interfering with the contextual framework of a selective market. This focus on employability implies that returns on investments are expected in activation terms. Consequently, the most-disadvantaged youth, far removed from the market, will not be considered as individuals worth investing in, due to low chances of returns on investment. If the emphasising were on social returns from human capital investments, returns would be assessed in terms of employability skills as a competence, in order to integrate on the long-term the demanding labour market of the knowledge society (Nadai, 2017, p. 80). The focus of the intervention would then be re-centred on the youth in difficulty and, thus, allow complex needs to be addressed. This would allow for value not only direct activation results, but also the necessary intermediary steps, potentially leading to the final activation objective, while improving the individuals' capacity to shape their own life. If returns on investment were assessed more generally, on the problems solved through the given service, while improving the inclusivity of the contextual framework, incidences of a Matthew effect would likely decrease. However, although it has been shown that net efficacy of education and training investments are higher for the most-disadvantaged individuals (Card, 1999, as cited in Esping-Andersen, 2017; Nicaise, 2000), in mature welfare states it seems that, to deal with permanent austerity, key actors move from the idealism of reaching out to the most-disadvantaged individuals, to the pragmatic, more cost-effective solution of focusing on those who are easier to reinsert into the market. Consequently, the most vulnerable individuals are subject to a vicious, further-marginalising cycle. Instead of correcting for previous inequalities these youth may have suffered (e.g., in school; Coradi Vellacott & Wolter, 2005), such policies risk increasing them.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Delia Pisoni is finishing her PhD at the unit of social policies of the Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration (IDHEAP) in Lausanne, Switzerland. In her dissertation she focuses on the Matthew effect in vocational education and training programmes, and wishes to contribute to the general understanding of this effect in social policies. Her broader research interests include labour market access for disadvantaged individuals, vocational education and training access for disadvantaged youth, social work, and frontline practices.

7. Discussion

The aim of this dissertation is to shed light on the reasons and mechanisms that lead to a Matthew effect in public dual-VET programmes for disadvantaged youth. In order to achieve this, two policy programmes in two different Swiss cantons have been analysed in-depth. The primary data source for this research was 60 interviews with 63 relevant actors, such as politico-administrative actors, street-level bureaucrats or youth participating in the measures. Previous research on the Matthew effect in social policies has highlighted several reasons and mechanisms which can cause this phenomenon. For instance, the middle classes' influence on policymaking and policy-implementation processes; the middle classes' closer connections to relevant actors in the spheres of public administration, politics and media; the middle classes' better understanding of the language and functioning of social policies; the category or activation-based nature of many schemes; or cream-skimming practices.

However, previous research focused primarily on macro level analysis, investigating general or structural mechanisms or the actual presence of the Matthew effect, often in monetary terms. What was lacking in this existing research was a more profound analysis of mechanisms that work 'underneath the surface' and extend beyond the mere presence or absence of the effect, or its monetary or quantitative dimensions. In order to contribute to fill this gap, the present study concentrated on mechanisms at a more micro level, understanding the organisational and professional challenges of the involved actors, in order to also comprehend the more latent forces at work, as well as the reasons that contribute to the existence of such an effect. Particularly, this study highlights how frictions between different components of policy measures, namely, the intermingling of administrative and political principles, each presenting different challenges and objectives, create specific incentive structures that may cause a Matthew effect. Therefore, this study contributes to filling the research gap by providing a more detailed analysis of micro mechanisms, organisational reasons and contextual factors that may explain the undesirable presence of a Matthew effect in social policies.

More precisely, in the present research, two general mechanisms leading to a Matthew effect in the studied measures have been identified: the most disadvantaged are either defined-out (formally excluded through the definition of the target group—second case study) or creamed-off (*de facto* exclusion through the restrictive incentive structure of a policy design, leading frontline workers to implement cream-skimming practices—first case study). Through an in-depth analysis, this study also attempted to achieve a more profound understanding of these mechanisms and, particularly, the reasons leading to such an effect. Moreover, adopting a critical research approach, an additional aim of this work is to highlight fundamental contradictions that influence social action and human freedom, proposing possible options that may lead to "emancipation from unwanted structures of domination" (Gephart, 2004, p. 457). In the following, the results of this work will be discussed in the form of two major contradictions that emerge from the detailed results of the in-depth analysis.

7.1. Selective resource allocations: the Matthew effect as a triggered effect instead of a political by-product

The first contradiction is that the Matthew effect detected in the present study is not an unintended side effect of policy action—as characterised, for instance, by van Lancker (2014, p. 5)—but a strategy voluntarily triggered by politico-administrative actors, and which frontline workers subsequently accept and execute. Beginning with the former group: according to the premises articulated at the beginning of this work, policy makers should be eager to reach out to the most disadvantaged individuals, particularly youth, in order to improve their chances on the labour market in the long term and keeping them independent of public support. However, in both studied cases, the Matthew effect emerges as the result of a strategy of politico-administrative actors. Regarding the first case study, the creaming inducing incentive structure, which eventually leads to a Matthew effect, is a strategy to achieve satisfactory results that enable to ensure political acceptability,

necessary to safeguard financial allocation. In the second case study, defining out the most disadvantaged individuals is a strategy to improve the likelihood of reaching a specific goal with a given amount of resources. Concerning the latter group, while the frontline workers I interviewed pursue the organisational goal of supporting disadvantaged youth to find a post-compulsory education solution, they implicitly accept the Matthew effect by adhering to established rules. Indeed, if frontline workers were to refrain from implementing this strategy, they would most likely lose the mandate conferred upon them by the public administration, thus endangering the survival of the whole organisation for most of them. In a nutshell, the Matthew effect is a strategy to maintain the respective measures in existence—be it the policy measure or the private, not-for-profit measure.

These strategies must be contextualised to better understand their rationale. Indeed, crucial actors' acceptance to sacrifice the most disadvantaged among a group of disadvantaged youth is determined by an implicit political compromise shaped by a context of social investment and public *management*. Theorisations of social investment policies have garnered significant attention since the late 1990s across western welfare states, particularly in Europe. These emerged from a particularly tense period for the welfare state, during which retrenchment and dismantling were high on political agendas across Europe. The new approach was geared towards investing in people in order to enhance their chances in the labour markets of the knowledge economy, instead of relying on passive welfare state provisions (see e.g., Bonoli, 2013; Morel, *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, both the policy measures studied here invest resources in the development of human capital of young adults, in order to improve their chances in the labour market across the long term. However, as Nadai highlights, the expectation of returns on investments triggers selectivity in the allocation of resources: "the means at disposal are not being distributed equally, but they are directed to where the biggest gain is foreseen" (Nadai, 2017, p. 81). Indeed, with the shift to social investment, social policy became a productivity-enhancing instrument. As a consequence, it inherently justifies selective investments: the very notion of an investment implies the expectation of returns. Additionally, it should be considered that in the field of social policies, the situation of insufficient means and resources at disposal is a nearly chronic situation due to the elasticity of the demand,[31] as Lipsky (1980/2010) highlighted many years ago (on this point, see also Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 129). It is therefore crucial to understand how 'gains' or 'returns' are conceptualised, in order to shed light on the rationale motivating the selective allocation of scarce public finances.

In terms of public management, managerial and entrepreneurial logics were first introduced in Anglo-Saxon countries in the 1980s with the New Public Management approach. As the name suggests, with the shift from public administration to public management, public agents are no longer expected to administer the public sector, but to manage it, implying an economic, managerial twist to their work. Accountability, effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector are highly cherished objectives within this managerial approach to the public sector (see e.g., Christensen & Laegreid, 2013; Giauque & Emery 2016). Regarding the cases studied here, both pursue widely accepted principles of 'good governance', particularly the efficient use of public funds and accountability. Interestingly, whereas efficient use of public resources always seems to be important, the importance of accountability seems to increase along with an increased politicisation of a policy measure. Indeed, politicisation is low in the second measure and the focus is mainly on an efficient use of the available public funds to reach the given objective. On the other hand, politicisation is very high in the first case. To demonstrate efficient use of the invested money, politico-administrative actors leverage on their accountability by portraying promising success rates. Put differently, by portraying a solid success rate, politico-administrative actors demonstrate to be accountable when managing the invested resources.

[31] The elasticity of the demand is an economic term that describes the measure of responsiveness of the demanded quantity of a given good in relation to a change in its supply (see e.g., Mankiw & Taylor, 2006, pp. 87-108).

Consequently, the resulting political compromise previously mentioned can be expressed in the following manner: resources are invested in disadvantaged individuals, yet, the invested resources are expected yield returns in terms of activation. Regarding the first case study, the entire programme was established based on an investment argumentation. The necessary political support to ensure the programme's financing and survival was directly dependent on the returns the proponents were able to highlight. Hence, the room for manoeuvre for the politico-administrative actors to reach out to the most disadvantaged youth was extremely restricted. The underlying hope is that the most disadvantaged youth would also eventually manage through the bottleneck of accessing dual-VET market by repeating several preparatory measures. Hence, following the investment rationale, with returns conceptualised in terms of youth finding and managing an apprenticeship, a Matthew effect is produced through creaming practices, since the most disadvantaged youth constitute too risky an investment. SIM workers perform such practices to ensure organisational survival, as their room for manoeuvre is even smaller. Their coping strategy is not to park the most disadvantage youth, i.e., they continue working with them, although more resources remain channelled towards those already closer to the apprenticeship market in order to achieve the requested success rate.

Regarding the second case study, the focus was set on the objective of increasing the number of youth holding an upper-secondary degree.[32] Consequently, in this measure, youth's (immediate) human capital development capacity represents a salient factor, also determining accessibility to the programme. Indeed, the capacity or 'readiness' to follow VET is a prerequisite to participate to the programme. Yet, the criteria used to define this capacity are not exclusively related to the very ability to complete VET (e.g., minimal cognitive skills), but are substantially related to temporary and contextual factors. For instance, a youth provisionally not focused on an apprenticeship plan due to trouble at home would be excluded as considered to be not in a position to follow VET at that very moment. This blocks the access to the measure for the youth most in need, who, however, possess the cognitive ability to follow dual-VET. The rationality behind this design, similar to the first case study, is that accomplishment of an apprenticeship is the purpose of the invested resources. Hence, 'gain' is conceptualised as being the number of youth who accomplished or who are likely to accomplish upper-secondary education.

Summing up, in the two studied cases, a Matthew effect is induced by politico-administrative actors and produced by frontline workers, in order to be able to maintain the measures' existence in the current politico-administrative context. Indeed, to support a complex target group to integrate into a selective market is a difficult task. Considering the need to show efficient use of public funds, primarily assessed in terms of activation, the Matthew effect serves as a vent valve with which to keep the measure politically acceptable and, thus, in operation.

7.2. Labour market pre-eminence: the Matthew effect as a consequence of labour markets' inherent selectivity

The second contradiction is that, in a context of restricted public finances, resources are invested into adapting the workforce to the labour market, barely interfering with the market's structure or functioning, if at all. This leads to a vicious cycle, in which the need to invest in this type of integration measure is never ending and will constitute a continuous 'burden' on scarce public finances. With the paradigmatic shift from Keynesian de-commodifying social policies to neoliberal re-commodifying social policies, the focus shifted from the market to the individual. Whereas, under Keynesian theory, social policies would compensate for the dysfunctions of the market, protecting people from markets' shortcomings, by aligning (at least to some extent) with neoliberal theory, social policies no longer function as a counterweight to the economy but become a productive factor

[32] Indeed, this measure was initially implemented to achieve the federal objective of attaining 95% of youth holding an upper-secondary education certificate.

themselves. Hence, the market is no longer seen as the potential producer of social problems but as the (only) solution (see e.g. Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, pp. 7-13). Consequently, since the shift towards activation in social policies, individuals' responsibility in terms of labour market integration has increased substantially.

However, as long as access to labour markets is limited (i.e., as long as there is no full employment), integration measures that remain external to the labour market will change individual opportunities, but some individuals will be, inevitably, left out. In terms of queuing theory (see chap. 4), the effect is to change individual's position in the queue, but not to shorten the queue (see e.g., Gomel *et al.*, 2013; Nicaise & Bollens, 1998). With such premises, it is unrealistic to believe that everyone will be integrated, and the most disadvantaged are likely to be excluded due to the selectivity inherent in competitive labour markets. In other words, Matthew effects are unavoidable in external integration measures since they must also attend to the selectivity of labour markets.

It is a very delicate matter to intervene in the fragile equilibrium of the governance of dual-VET. As Bonoli and Emmenegger (2020) highlight, employers retain a structural power that does not allow the significant introduction of inclusiveness enhancing measures into the system. Consequently, as shown by Bonoli and Wilson (2019), in Switzerland such measures mostly operate outside of the apprenticeship market, mainly with the aim of adapting individuals to markets' requirements. This is also the case in both the studied measures: their focus is to support and help youth to find a post-compulsory education solution by preparing them to meet the markets' requests. In both cases, measure's direct contact with employers is considered as a precious resource that facilitates the placement of youth despite their imperfect profiles. Employers' structural power is very evident in these relationships, as frontline workers do everything possible to avoid 'upsetting' the collaborating employers. Indeed, what emerges is a very fragile relationship, in which the employer has an easy exit option, since there is little concrete gain for a participating firm. Consequently, employers have a loose engagement, despite a likely personal 'social fibre' driving her or him to engage in the relationship in the first place.

Therefore, the measures studied, which remain external to the apprenticeship market, face a double challenge. On the one hand, they are obliged to co-operate with a selective market that, in general, seeks trainable youth and in which competition is high. On the other hand, they work with youth that are in a rather complex situation. While they can influence the latter, they have virtually no influence on the former. As Bonvin, Dif-Pradalier and Rosenstein highlight, this places insertion professionals in a highly contradictory position: starting from an individual's characteristics and preferences, they must ultimately respond to predetermined needs of the market. In such conditions, the objective of coaching becomes reduced to adapting youth to the offers on the apprenticeship market, without interfering with the underlying rules that determine the functioning of, and the practices within, that market (Bonvin, Dif-Pradalier, & Rosenstein, 2013a, pp. 20, 25). Moreover, on the one hand, the resolution of complex issues is likely to require a long time and substantial amounts of resources, and, on the other hand, the inflow of new (stronger) candidates on the apprenticeship market is continuous. With these premises, it seems unlikely that external measures will be able to integrate everyone, particularly the most disadvantaged youth. In other terms, the finite nature of the apprenticeship market, and the significant number of youth attempting to gain entry, the selection process in external integration measures is likely to mirror the one on the market, i.e., excluding the most disadvantaged youth. Hence, the Matthew effect seems an unavoidable consequence of the unchallenged structural power of firms in the apprenticeship market.

Conclusions

In this final chapter, I will first propose a few options for policy action to address the contradictions mentioned in the previous chapter. Subsequently, the challenges and limitations of this work are discussed. Finally, concluding remarks and suggestions for future research avenues will close this work.

Policy implications

Addressing creaming practices

One method to avoid pressures which induce cream-skimming is to focus on processes instead of results, as evident in the second case study of this research. Indeed, in this case study, the financing varies according to the number of youth participating in the measure each year. As there is no expectation in terms of a quantitative result to achieve, this set-up allows caseworkers to adapt their support to the needs of the youth, rather than channelling resources to youth that are more likely to be successful from the outset. However, particularly in cases where a programme is highly politicised, concrete outputs are often expected, as is the case in the first case study. Indeed, in this measure, it is essential to show positive concrete results in order to maintain financial support. As discussed, an incentive structure that induces cream skimming is a tool used to ensure the ability to provide such concrete and positive examples.

As long as returns on investments are assessed in terms of apprenticeship or labour market entry, and programmes are assessed in the same way, creaming practices will be difficult to avoid in a context of restricted resources. In cases where concrete outputs are expected, the dilemma is, therefore, to illustrate a programme's achievements without inducing creaming practices. One possible option to achieve this could be to consider intermediary achievements that are necessary in order to reach the desired activation result, adapted to each individual situation. This practice would allow the acknowledgement of the complexity of the target group and recognition of the individual distance from the (apprenticeship) market. As Bonvin and Dif-Pradalier's highlight:

> "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" (Bonvin & Dif-Pradalier, 2011, p. 2).

A concrete example, based on the first case study, might help to clarify this point. For the youth in the investigated SIMs, a major problem that sometimes even blocking the mere project of accessing dual-VET, is their unstable life conditions. In this regard, constellations varied, but they often included elements such as housing, financial, legal, self-confidence (and fear of failure), motivational, care duties, family, health and psychological issues. These difficulties constitute the basis of the pyramid illustrated in Figure 2. On the next level of the pyramid, there are issues more directly linked to the dual-VET market. Some of these are unchangeable, such as migration background, compulsory school grades or tracks. Yet, others are changeable, such as cognitive skills, soft skills, little knowledge about the Swiss dual-VET system, no network connecting to the dual-VET system, lack of job search skills, or the lack of a clear and/or realistic apprenticeship project. At the top of the pyramid remains the unchanged ultimate objective of the measure: finding and accomplishing an apprenticeship. Currently, only the achievement of this final objective is used to show the measure's achievement, whereas many (often resource-intensive) steps are required to arrive at this goal.

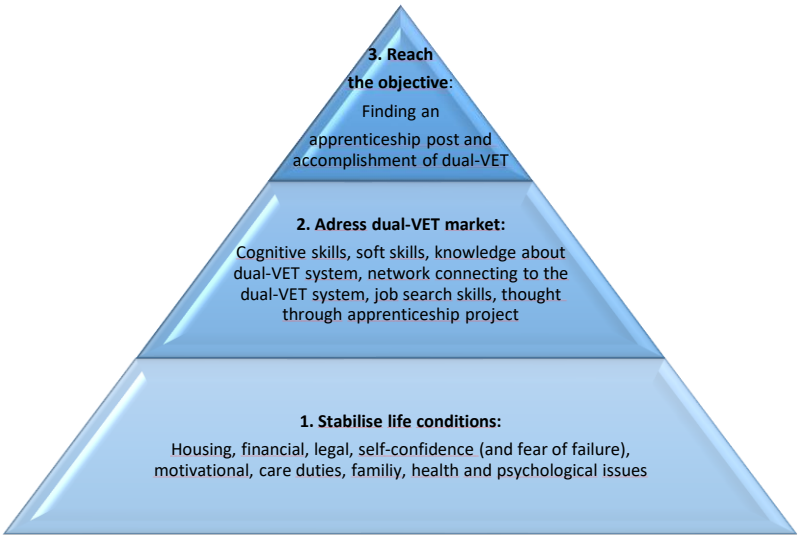

Figure 2: Holistic and individualised approach to returns on investments

Whereas the main focus becomes the person and her needs (instead of the apprenticeship market and its requirements), the objective remains the accomplishment of dual-VET. The hierarchical representation in Figure 2 is not intended to suggest a stepwise approach (to approach the second step only when all the issues of the first are resolved). Rather, a holistic approach is better suited, since complex needs are self-reinforcing and more than the mere sum of their components (Rankin & Regan, 2004, p. 7). Instead, this figure should indicate that if issues at the bottom of the pyramid remain unresolved, it is likely that the conquest of the final objective, if reached, will be built upon rather unstable fundaments, i.e., the investment might be lost in the long term. To sum up, if returns on investments are defined to include smaller, yet unavoidable, steps rather than considering only the very final objective, the pressure towards creaming would decrease, while still offering evidence of the measure's achievements in order to reach political acceptability. This would allow taking into account also the needs of the most disadvantaged individuals, i.e., not triggering a Matthew effect through cream skimming practices.

As Gomel *et al.* (2013) have shown, when a target group is considered as a homogeneous group of people, facing a similar type and intensity of difficulties in accessing labour or apprenticeship markets, this leads to an inaccurate appreciation of frontline workers' job. As Nicaise states: "it is important to revise the evaluation criteria generally used to assess training programmes. A better informed approach will 'automatically' lead to a reorientation of resources in favour of disadvantaged groups" (Nicaise, 2000). Individually compiling, at the beginning of a measure, all difficulties with which a youth struggles, would reveal the complexity of each individual situation and could inform the various crucial issues necessary to resolve before reaching the final objective. These intermediary results could also be used to politically defend the measure's achievements, without creating an incentive structure that induces creaming practices. Hence, if smaller steps towards integration were taken into account in the political sphere, resources could be also channelled to the more disadvantaged, enhancing equality of opportunities and at least diminishing the risk of a Matthew effect.

Possible drawbacks of this approach could be that it requires frontline workers to invest additional resources in monitoring activities rather than actually working with the youth to improve their concrete situations, an issue that is already contested by SLB. Moreover, any unexpected event—for instance, an unforeseen housing issue—could interfere with the initial plans and induce a misjudgement of the actual achievement, should this unexpected issue not be properly and timely communicated to the hierarchy (which, in the case of an urgent matter, could constitute a nuisance). From another perspective, gaining the support of a political majority could be more difficult if the focus is not set on returns on investment in strict activation terms.

Approach the market

In a context of tight public budgets, new social risks and an altered economy, social investment was shaped in order to transform social policies from a burden on, to a support for the economy. This new approach to social policies also induced a more fundamental shift in the conceptualisation of social policies, which has had significant consequences. One consequence is increased individual responsibility for integration, as discussed in section 7.2, which generates the second contradiction. With this increased individual responsibility, the 'blame' also falls on individuals who are able to work if they are unable to integrate into the market, and not on a market that is unable to integrate all work-able individuals. In this focus, befitting neoliberal values, labour markets (and, partially, work seekers' preferences) remain unquestioned. The reason for unemployment is individuals' incompatibility with modern labour markets, instead of a highly competitive and limited labour market offering significantly fewer opportunities. This vision is well illustrated by the following description of the OECD's and EU's approach to social investment: "unemployment is linked to a lack of adequate skills to fill today's jobs, and this lack of adequate skills and education is also expected to stymie future economic growth and employment creation, unless the necessary investments are made to foster human development" (Morel, *et al.*, 2012, p. 9).

On the one hand, this approach does not take into consideration variation in people's educational desire and willingness (see e.g., Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 131). On the other hand, in the context of no longer full employment, unemployment has become a structural problem. Thus, to approach this as a pure individual issue leads to a tension whose burden falls exclusively on the unemployed, particularly those struggling the most to integrate into limited labour markets. As highlighted by Kaufmann, this leads to a de-solidarization, whereas it has, in fact, become particularly important to re-strengthen solidarity in social policies (Kaufmann, 2017, p. 123). Additionally, to allow the unemployed carry all the responsibility induces stress for these individuals, which might hamper their employability even more (e.g., due to a loss of self-confidence), or could lead to serious psychological issues permanently affecting their (full) employability. In Bonvin, Dif-Pradalier and Rosenstein's terms, making individuals fully responsible for their successes and failures risks psychologically draining individuals who are, by default, already considered responsible for personal resources that they must mobilise for a socially valorised objective, i.e., market integration (Bonvin, Dif-Pradalier, & Rosenstein, 2013a, p. 14). In the case of a Matthew effect, in addition to suffering from unequal access to resources, the most disadvantaged have, thus, to carry double the blame for not being able (i) to find a job, nor (ii) to take advantage of the (theoretically) available public investments to improve one's employability. In other words, the cumulative effect of disadvantage plays out even on a psychological level.

Additionally, the individualisation of responsibility does not only affect individuals who are directly concerned, but may also impact frontline workers.[33] If they are evaluated exclusively on placement success, they must coalesce consideration of individuals' complex struggles, and also fulfil (rapid) placement requirements. If they fail to do so, frontline workers appear to have not performed their job effectively, regardless of the complexity of an individual case or the resources allocated to support each person. This is well illustrated in the first case, in which SIM workers, although keen to improve disadvantaged youth's life chances, feel obliged to stop working with the most disadvantaged among them, as a way to maintain the resources being allocated to their measure and to be able to help this target group in the future. In an interesting study on the implementation of welfare-to-work policies through a private non-profit organization in the U.S.A., Cooney also highlighted this concern:

[33] Since this was not the focus of the present research, it was not actively investigated. However, this aspect periodically emerged during interviews with SLB and site visits of the measures.

> "The stress of reconciling the legitimacy of the program model with the realities of welfare clients' lives falls heavily on the social service staff. Although much sympathy for the clients' actual situations is expressed, their job performance is still bound up in successfully placing clients in jobs. The pressure to meet program targets for serving and placing clients can become overwhelming. […] The pressure to successfully mobilize clients according to the welfare reform guidelines, based on assumptions that staff may personally find problematic, can lead to pragmatic acceptance and even burnout" (Cooney, 2007, p. 708-709).

More generally, the pre-eminence of the labour market within the broader social investment strategy leads to question the alignment of social policies with neoliberal principles. Bonvin and Dahmen mention different questions in this regard, such as whether the economic rationality that underlies the social investment approach is genuinely appropriate when it comes to measuring the impact of a social policy; or, whether a 'good' social policy is always profitable (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, pp. 132-133). Indeed, this leads to the placement of individuals' professional integration at the core of the political strategy, with only policies that have an effect on the employability of people in general being valued, as well as the most promising policies in terms of financial returns more specifically (Tabin, 2017, pp. 100-104). Within this context, the question of whether the "unilateral adaptability to the expectations of a selective labour market is an adequate normative model" (Bonvin, Dif-Pradalier, & Rosenstein, 2013b, pp. 72-73) sounds more than reasonable.

To address this issue, it would be desirable to return some responsibility to the markets, in order to both increase job opportunities and decrease the psychological pressure on unemployed people and the frontline workers supporting them. Despite the structural power of employers in the apprenticeship market (see Bonoli & Emmenegger, 2020), there is some room for manoeuvre in order to improve the system in terms of increasing opportunities for disadvantaged youth without interfering with employers' unrestricted decision-making power regarding apprenticeships. One option is to offer voluntary support to employers (for instance, for administrative or scholastic related issues). This would be particularly useful to smaller firms who often have fewer resources at the disposal for training apprentices. Another option is to make employers aware of the consequences of their recruiting techniques (that might be unintentional). As previously discussed, youth enter the apprenticeship market with some immutable characteristics or which necessarily represent an obstacle to accomplish an apprenticeship, such as migration background, low compulsory-schooling grades or tracks.[34] However, these characteristics often hamper access to dual-VET because they are seen by employers as signals of low trainability for various reasons, such as low cognitive skills, laziness, limited linguistic skills or due to statistical discrimination. While such features cannot be changed, their perception and the attached signals could be altered. Drawing employers' attention to these issues, encouraging them to question and place such signals into perspective, could allow the sensible adaptation of selection practices, without interfering more fundamentally in their decision-making power regarding dual-VET. In fact, in Switzerland every year there are apprenticeship positions that remain vacant, as many employers prefer not to take on apprentices, rather than lower their expectations of trainees.[35] This becomes problematic for both the employer as well as the trainee, particularly if such expectations rely on signals that convey an inaccurate message.

Hence, one method of increasing equality of opportunities along with efficiency objectives and address the second contradiction would be to ensure the apprenticeship and labour markets are more open to a more diverse workforce. A holistic approach to supporting disadvantaged individuals to (re)integrate into markets also involves, therefore, strategies concerning employers and markets. In ideal terms, job seekers would receive

[34] Another highly beneficial path would be to eliminate schooling tracks and rely on an inclusive compulsory school model, since early (and unregulated) selection has been demonstrated to reinforce inequalities. However, discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this work.

[35] Highlighted by an interviewed professional active in the field of vocational advice and orientation.

appropriate support (through public authorities) and appropriate opportunities (through labour markets). As Bonoli suggests:

> "The reinsertion strategy has to rely on three fundamental pillars: pro-work incentives, address the emotional and psychological issues (self-confidence, motivation) and 'destigmatisation'. Long term unemployment, health issues or immigrant status are factors of discrimination on the labour market. A good reinsertion policy should address also such kind of obstacles to employment" (Bonoli, 2017, p. 69).

The apprenticeship market should be approached in a similar way.

A more holistic approach to social investment and human capital

A final, more general, policy suggestion is to consider a more holistic approach to the social investment strategy, as well as to human capital. In ideal terms, "the social investment paradigm aims at a comprehensive inclusion and the most possible extensive exploitation of citizens' productive potential" (Nadai, 2017, p. 85). However, the social investment strategy relies on a delicate equilibrium. To maintain this equilibrium, it is crucial to consider both facets of social investment equally: the social and the investment side, the former aiming at equality and the latter at productivity. Yet, given the lack of a theoretical consensus and the 'quasi concept' character of social investment, as highlighted by Jenson (2012), there is significant potential in this approach to mobilise political support by only highlighting the productivity argument. As Bonoli highlights: "[i]n an era in which budgetary restrictions induced by demographic ageing dominate the political debate on the role of the state, the credibility of the social investment strategy relies on its capacity to demonstrate that the invested money produce returns (Bonoli, 2017, p. 70). However, if considerations of equality are neglected, there is a significant risk of creating "reductive conceptions [of social investment], where social policy is put at the service of the economy, but no longer fulfils in the same way its social objectives" (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 138).

Hence, whereas the social investment approach is composed of two equivalent objectives (equality and efficiency), its malleable theoretical nature allows the prioritisation of one over the other. To leverage the efficiency argument is a safer path to obtaining political approval, since equality of opportunity is highly cost intensive, requires substantial initial financial investments, yields returns only much later and often with a less crisp link between the invested money and the returns. Thus, equality of opportunity contradicts legal frameworks aimed at maintaining an equilibrium in public finances in the short term. For instance, in Switzerland, the debt brake is cemented in the federal constitution (art. 126), whereas the European Union pursues a stability and growth pact. Hence, on the economic level, there are legal limits to an ambitious social investment strategy and many countries are hesitant to engage in it or do so only partially (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, pp. 127-128). Consequently, although many experts might prefer a bolder version of the social investment approach, stressing also social equality enhancing tools, "it has been only partially pursued by concrete social policies" (Bonoli, 2017, p. 73). To enable bolder and more balanced social policies to thrive, the legal framework should consider these issues and also accept investments that require a longer time period to yield.

Considering that knowledge economies require a high-skilled workforce, a cornerstone of the social investment approach is investment into the human capital development of individuals. However, human capital development can draw on different approaches, either leaning more towards a utilitarian or a capability rationale. Approaching a utilitarian rationale, investments in human capital development are viewed according to labour market utility, thus, monetary returns on investments are targeted (see e.g., Heckman, 2006). These more conventional human capital theories assume a natural link between macroeconomic welfare and individual wellbeing, suggesting a conception of well-being exclusively linked to the labour market and

economic productivity. It can be argued that, within the utilitarian approach, human capital development becomes a tool at the service of economic growth, neglecting personal fulfilment and development (see Otto, 2017). On the other hand, personal fulfilment and development are at the core of the capability approach, as first proposed by Amartya Sen in the 1980s (see Clark, 2006 for an overview). As defined by this perspective, human capital development constitutes enabling individuals to make the best use of their capabilities in order to choose the life they desire. Thus, the link between human capital development and economic productivity is less direct. Nevertheless, both approaches argue for the selective allocation of resources. According to the capability view, resources must be allocated according to the type and amount a person needs, taking into account the different preconditions of each individual "to reach the same amount of realisation opportunities. Selective social investments would be problematic if they were not motivated through different individual necessities and adapted to these" (Nadai, 2017, p. 81). Indeed, from the utilitarian point of view, the decision to allocate resources is not adapted to individual needs, but made with the objective of enhancing employability in order to best serve the economy. This induces an instrumental approach to human capital development: instead of a tool for increasing both employability as well as equality of opportunities, the focus lies only on employability.

Moving from a utilitarian to a capability approach to human capital development would also allow to address the issue of defining out the most disadvantaged youth, as identified in the second case study. If human capital investments were based on a more holistic evaluation, aiming to enable youth to make full use of their capabilities to thrive in life (including their professional life), it would not make sense excluding youth based on the arguments articulated by the measure proponents. More generally, a shift towards a capability approach to human capital would also allow the achievement of truly long lasting rewards for social investments into human capital. Indeed, social investment "is about fostering employability *skills* as a competence, in order to reintegrate on the long term the demanding labour market of the knowledge society. The indicator of quickly finding any type of job, no matter how precarious, is particularly shortcoming if one considers human potential not limited to human capital, but in terms of *realization opportunities*" (Nadai, 2017, p. 80). Rather than superficially fixing the employability problem, through direct participation (of any kind) in the labour market, a capability approach to human capital development approaches employability on a deeper and more holistic level, allowing the person to acquire the tools with which to manage the challenges of a rapidly changing labour market. Hence, if the focus shifts away from quick insertion to insertion skills, the investment is more likely to last and to give each person the fundamental tools to make her way into and throughout the labour market. Weakening the focus on quick activation would also most likely enable consideration of the first contradiction, since gains would be conceptualised differently, and pressure to cream candidates would diminish.

Challenges and limitations

As with any research project, this study has encountered many limitations and challenges. In the following, I will present the most significant of these, without pretending this discussion to be exhaustive: I am sure that the list could be much longer and that every reader, with her and his own perspective, could include many more. To start with the challenges, there are two that I particularly wish to highlight. A first challenge that accompanied me throughout this research from the very beginning to the very end, is the great difficulty of finding the right balance between my role as a researcher—a figure who must be critical and at times even nagging—with the respect I hold for policy measures that I, personally, truly value. This is particularly difficult with respect to the people working in and for them, since I recognise the huge effort necessary to balance the roles they have to perform on a daily basis in order to be able to continue to offer a measure which is, despite its weaknesses, a valuable contribution to society. For this reason, I attempted to emphasise the rationality of behaviours that stemmed from organisational and the contextual factors, although the ultimate impact of such behaviours may eventually have caused a Matthew effect, which is fundamentally undesirable from the perspective of a social policy. Another solution I found in order to feel able to criticise the measure regarding

the research object, was to make a concerted effort to maintain the anonymity of the analysed measures in order to offer them, as best as I could, as neutral examples for scientific purposes. Thus, these cases offer an opportunity from which to learn on a more aggregate level departing from these individual cases, rather than criticising the respective measures for neither their actions nor outcomes.

The second significant challenge I faced was during the data collection phase and also concerned the role of the researcher. Indeed, several of the youth I interviewed were either in very complex situations at the moment of the interview, or, despite their young age, already had a very difficult past, or both. Consequently, some interviews were quite draining on an emotional level, at times leading me to perceive the researcher role as considerably frustrating, due to not being in the position to intervene more concretely to alleviate at least some of their worries, while profiting from their willingness to share their stories with me. My personal solution to address this challenge was to offer a supportive, comprehensive and non-judgemental attitude during the interviews, and, occasionally, when suitable and possible, offering pieces of advice and information. The ultimate purpose of this strategy was, if not on a concrete level, to at least offer some alleviation through conversation and the discussion of their situation, and avoid any further distress by sharing their story with a stranger by any means possible.

Regarding the limitations of this study, a first limitation is the limited timeframe available for the data collection, which offers a rather 'snapshot' view of the measures. Indeed, a longitudinal study would have been very interesting, also allowing the inclusion and consideration of the measures' evolution over time, particularly in terms of contextual variation—such as the political composition and orientation—but also the changing situation on the dual-VET market. This is an important limitation particularly regarding the first case study, in which a valuable opportunity to account for an important reform in 2017 was lost, which would have been highly informative for the research object but was, of course, not foreseeable at the beginning of the study. Having planned to also analyse a second case study, I had to continue my research due to time constraints.

Similarly, a second limitation is that, in order to keep the measures' identities protected, and hence infer results on a more aggregate level, it was not possible to deepen the understanding and impact of highly contingent factors and local realities. Particularly in the context of the Swiss dual-VET system, where local realities and perceptions of the system vary significantly, it would have been interesting to consider the influence of these discrepancies. Indeed, since it is likely that SLB anticipate employers' preferences and hiring behaviour, their operating strategies are likely to differ from one place to another, adapting to local perceptions and contexts of the apprenticeship system. Alternatively, it could also have been interesting to depart from very local realities and grasp whether the Matthew effect may also be partly intrinsic: some youth, aware that they have very low chances of finding an apprenticeship post (e.g., because they finished compulsory schooling with very bad grades and in the lowest track, have a migration or a low socio-economic background with a very weak informal network) may be less vigorous during their search for an apprenticeship post. Creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, this might not only affect accessibility to the dual-VET market, but also to the support measures that may help to alleviate the difficult starting position. Moreover, the very definition of disadvantaged youth could also have been refined if more deeply rooted in the measures' local contexts.

A third limitation also concerns the definition of the notion of disadvantaged youth. For this definition, I decided to combine a deductive and an inductive approach. On the one hand, I relied on the literature on employers' preferences and recruiting behaviour in order to obtain an initial, more general idea regarding what may constitute an advantage and what a disadvantage on the Swiss dual-VET market. On the other hand, I refined this deductive definition inductively, based on the information collected primarily through interviews with frontline workers and youth. It would have been interesting, and certainly enriching, to also interview employers in order to directly access their own perspective regarding recruiting rationales and preferences. Although fascinating and valuable, this would have required its own chapter, a feat that was impossible to achieve due to time constraints.

Concluding remarks

As Bonoli highlights, "[a]n effective re-insertion policy must target the groups furthest from the labour market [...]. Indeed, without aid, these people would have virtually no chance of re-entering the labour market" (Bonoli, 2017, p. 69). However, with the persistent presence of the Matthew effect in social policies, this goal remains an ideal to reach. This research shows that, whereas policy makers should strive to engage the most disadvantaged individuals through human capital developing measures, Matthew effects might be produced not as involuntary side effects, but as voluntarily effects triggered by key actors. Indeed, a Matthew effect can play the role of a vent valve in a cost-containing and activation-geared context, allowing the successful negotiation of certain policy programmes when leveraging economic rationales. Additionally, this contribution also sheds light on the unlikelihood of integrating the most disadvantaged individuals through measures that remain external to the relevant market. Indeed, such measures have virtually no influence on employers' selections and are thus limited to adapting a candidate's profile to ensure it meets, as far as possible, employers' requests.

Moreover, following the implementation of a social investment approach, social policy has drifted away from equality of outcomes and social security through monetary redistribution, and is intended to enhance equality of opportunities, partly by investing in individual's human capital development and enabling them to better and more flexibly adapt to the requirements of labour markets (Cantillon, 2011, p. 439; Nadai, 2017, p. 79). However, in the light of the presence of Matthew effects in programmes targeting human capital development, equality of opportunities is not achieved, rather, the contrary is evident: pre-existing disadvantages are further entrenched through a focus on short-term employability. As Deleeck highlights: "[t]he consistency of the Matthew effect is rooted in its cumulative and socio-systematic nature" (Deleeck, 1979, p. 381). Indeed, if low threshold or last resort policy measures are unable to cater for the needs of the most disadvantaged among a disadvantaged group, their need will further increase in complexity and become more costly to solve. Considered within the context of budgetary restrictions and the pre-eminent activation discourses, this locks them into a vicious cycle, further worsening their disadvantages, and potentially leading to social and professional exclusion.

Additionally, not only is financial availability central to the allocation of resources, but also the fundamental norms and values upon which arguments are based during the political negotiation process. In Béland's terms: "how policy entrepreneurs depict the idea they seek to promote is extremely important. In other words, the discursive strategies of key actors can help promote certain ideas over others, which is why the agency and political astuteness of such actors can matter a great deal" (Béland, 2018, p. 284). Bonvin and Dahmen also claim that the social investment approach demands "abundant financial resources and a capacity to deconstruct dominant norms, to bend them in the expected direction. In the current context, the social investment state does not reach, or only partially, its objectives and reveals itself very often as a reinforcing factor of social inequalities" (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 137). Hence, dominant norms and values play a crucial role in determining the allocation of resources. The distribution of power has, therefore, a fundamental impact on policy outcomes. The statement of Obinger and colleagues about Switzerland, though nearly a decade old, still holds true: "[p]arties of the right are dominant in government and parliament, whereas the employers' strength is superior to that of trade unions. The typical policy solutions we can therefore observe in Switzerland are based on a compromise that usually favours employers' as well as right parties' interests" (Obinger *et al.*, 2011, p. 193). In social investment terms, this translates into an approach geared more towards productivity and the activation of jobless people rather than towards equal opportunities through long lasting investments adapted to a person's needs.

Hence, for financial or (politico-)cultural reasons, Switzerland "prefers a prudent approach, which does not allow for very ambitious realisations [of the social investment approach] due to the difficulty to mobilise the

necessary resources and remains marked by the influence of liberal and familial ideas. In general, equality of opportunities is promoted where economic efficiency allows it. Such 'light' approach of activation is found in most of continental Europe" (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 137). Within such 'light' and low ambition approaches, Matthew effects are difficult to tackle. This must be alarming, because the consequences may reach far and also cause prolonged repercussions on the level of social solidarity. Indeed, as Wolff and de-Shavit highlight "Western societies are becoming apathetic" as "[r]edistributional policies which do not adequately reach the very worst off are likely to have destructive effects on social attitudes" (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007, p. 8).

In the present work, the Matthew effect is the product of the selective allocation of resources, triggered by productivity and activation goals. In particular, these goals were either to secure the allocation of funds (first case) or to secure the achievement of a given goal (increase the number of youth holding a post-compulsory certificate—second case). However, as highlighted by Nolan, "speaking the language of neoliberals, in order to gain their favour, has an exorbitant cost: that of accepting their conceptual tools and the evaluation standards they imply, without putting them to the test of alternative logics" (Nolan, 2013, as cited in Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 133). Within such an approach, "it is a specific knowledge, presented as expert knowledge, that of orthodox economists, which risks becoming the main source of inspiration for social policies" (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 134). This implicit obedience to a neoliberal framework indeed led both studied cases, although investing in disadvantaged youth's human capital development, to focus on trainability in the short term, thus inducing Matthew effects.

However, it is important to mention that, in the Swiss context, the emphasis on education and human capital development is deemed too weak for disadvantaged youth, with low qualified jobs generally being considered as legitimate options (Bonvin & Dahmen, 2017, p. 128). Hence, the two studied measures are considered progressive examples in the Swiss context, since they do invest in disadvantaged youth's education and training. In particular, the first studied case, which through a cantonal initiative intervenes in favour of a highly disadvantaged (and stigmatised) group that would have been unlikely to benefit from the significant resource allocation and valuable support, to access and accomplish dual-VET, were it not for this initiative. However, in light of the presence of Matthew effects, these two measures also contribute to the reproduction and, potentially, to further deepening pre-existing inequalities, particularly given the cumulative effect of disadvantages.[36]

Future research avenues

As is usual during research, many interesting aspects emerged during the course of this study that could not be covered satisfactorily by a single research project. Therefore, I wish to conclude by highlighting a few interesting avenues for future research. Firstly, it would be interesting to delve more into the impact of policy salience in terms of Matthew effects in social policies. As mentioned in section 7.1. the two case studies offered here seem to suggest that the political salience affects political expectations and, therefore, the pressure in terms of concrete results. Consequently, higher political salience seems to lead to a Matthew effect, constituting a method for administrative actors to be able to satisfy political expectations and requirements. However, the research design was not intended for replication through different case studies in order to test specific propositions. Therefore, it is not possible to confirm or disprove this hunch though this research. However, it would be of great interest to consider this specific aspect in more detail in future research, perhaps also with a comparative design: is it correct to assume that the higher the political salience, the more significant the Matthew effect?

[36] As mentioned in the third chapter, it is in no way my intention to discredit these two measures and the involved actors' work, but to show the outcome in terms of a Matthew effect and highlight the reasons that led to this outcome.

Secondly, another interesting research avenue would be to investigate further the influence of dominant norms and values on Matthew effects in social policies. The interesting perspective on workfare proposed by Brodkin (2017) and Wyss (2007/2020), discussed at the end of section 1.1.5., highlights that, whereas some policy measures may be officially portrayed and justified with a given rhetoric, the policies' roots may have a much greater reach and may actually emerge from very different origins or have somewhat hidden ultimate objectives. Regarding Switzerland, it would be particularly interesting to understand whether the finding that the Independent Expert Commission (IEC) on Administrative Detention[37] has been able to tangle out is still valid nowadays and, should that be the case, whether it constitutes the foundations of Matthew effects in Swiss social policies. Indeed, the IEC highlighted a fundamental rejection of people at the fringe of society who did not correspond to what was considered the 'norm', thus leading to the marginalisation of these individuals even further and even through institutional mechanics. It would, therefore, be of interest to understand whether Matthew effects are (also) triggered by prevailing societal norms and values that tacitly prevent engagement with the most disadvantaged individuals, as they are considered to not conform to society or labour markets, and are thus unworthy of significant investments of public resources. Does a fundamentally normative approach lie hidden behind the discourse of the affordability of reaching out to these individuals?

Thirdly, it would be valuable to pursue an additional in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and reasons leading to a Matthew effect in social policies, this time with a longitudinal, single, in-depth, case study research design. Indeed, as highlighted in the challenges and limitations section of this chapter, this could allow greater consideration of changing contexts and possibly also the impact of important reforms of a measure. This would allow a before and after comparison, maintaining the focus on a single measure, which would allow, in my opinion, for very interesting and persuasive insights into the factors that impact a Matthew effect, how they impact it, and to what extent different factors have an impact; while, at the same time, being able to better control for and take into account contextual factors.

A final interesting research avenue that emerged through this study departs from its core research object, i.e., the Matthew effect. However, during the data collection phase, particularly through the interviews with frontline workers and various visits to the transition measures, it was quite alarming to witness the mounting pressure taking its toll on frontline workers in a rather brief time frame. This was especially the case in the first case study, which saw a constant increase in the political expectations that were weighing on SIM workers. Particularly towards the end of the data collection, when the measure was on the eve of a major reform that was about to create increasing pressure on them. Thus, future research should further contribute to the growing and highly salient literature (e.g., Cooney, 2007, as mentioned previously in this chapter) on the effect of the increasing pressure on SLB due to continually increasing expectations in terms of quantitative results in increasingly tighter time frames. Meanwhile, their obligation to focus on always more disadvantaged individuals without having instruments to influence the problematics of highly competitive and limited markets, and the ever-growing discrepancy between their own vision of their profession and the actual professional duties and targets they have to fulfil.

[37] The Independent Expert Commission (IEC) on Administrative Detention was appointed by the federal council in 2014 to investigate and document the use of administrative detention in Switzerland up to 1981. The commission concluded its work in 2019. Urs Germann and Lorraine Odier discussed the mentioned finding during an online presentation of the commission's results to members of the National Research Programme 76—welfare and coercion, on June 12th, 2020.

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